

THE HAND OF ETHELBERTA

BY THOMAS HARDY

ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE BY DAVID FOULGER

CHARACTERS

Lady Petherwin, Ethelberta's mother-in-law

Ethelberta Petherwin

Milkman

Hostler

Christopher Julian, a musician

Mrs Menlove, a servant

Faith Julian, Christopher's sister

Bookseller

Postmaster

Picotee Chickerel, Ethelberta's sister

Neigh, a gentleman

Ladywell, an artist

Sportsman

Waterman

Coachman

Servant

Doncastle

Chickerel, Ethelberta's father

Writer

Mrs Napper

Woman One

Mrs Doncastle

Footman

Countryman

Sol, Ethelberta's brother

Dan, Ethelberta's brother

Joey, Ethelberta's brother

Mrs Chickereel, Ethelberta's mother

Cornelia, Gwendoline, Georgina and Myrtle, Ethelberta's sisters

Man One

Man Two

Local Man

Mr Belmaine

Mrs Belmaine

Lord Mountclere

Tipman, Lord Mountclere's valet

Madame Moulin

Crew Member

Lord Mountclere's brother

Parish Clerk

Another Servant

First Man

Second Man

Woman Two

Voice 1

Voice 2

Another Man

## **Act 1**

### **Scene 1.1 A Street in Anglebury**

*Enter Ethelberta, looking forlorn, and her mother, Lady Petherwin and on other side of stage a milkman and a hostler*

LADY PETHERWIN (taking Ethelberta's hand) Ethelberta, now you have finished at the boarding-school in Bonn, we shall live here in England and you shall be my daughter and companion. Nobody must know the truth concerning your

relations and if you see any of them, except Picotee, you must not acknowledge them.

ETHELBERTA Quite, Lady Petherwin.

MILKMAN (to Hostler) Dang me, Hostler, isn't she a pretty piece! A man could make a meal between them eyes and chin.

HOSTLER (sweeping) Michael, an old man like yourself ought to think of other things, not be looking two ways at your time of life. Pouncing upon young flesh like a carrion crow - 'tis a vile thing in an old man.

MILKMAN 'Tis and yet 'tis not, for 'tis a natural taste (looking at Ethelberta, who was looking down the river). Now, if a poor needy feller like myself could only catch her alone when she's dressed up to the nines for some grand party, and carry her off to some lonely place - sakes what a pot of jewels and gold things I warrant he'd find about her!

HOSTLER I don't dispute the picture but 'tis sly and untimely to think such roguery. Though I've had similar thoughts, I have to admit. Lord forgive me.

MILKMAN I hear she is a widow.

*Exit Ethelberta and Lady Petherwin.*

HOSTLER Yes. And a lady and only about twenty-one although she looked about twenty-three last night when she arrived from her carriage moaning about the country. And yet this morning after a good night's sleep she looked only nineteen. So that makes her twenty-one in my book.

MILKMAN And what's her name, Hostler?

HOSTLER Well, on her luggage was the name Lady Petherwin, a widow of a city gentleman. I think that is the old woman's name.

*Enter Mr. Julian slowly following Ethelberta and Lady Petherwin and eventually exiting.*

MILKMAN And what's his name, Hostler?

HOSTLER Well I'll be blowed. His father used to be a top man in Sandbourne Corporation. He had loads of money. The young man stayed here overnight and nowadays the upper class has taken to walking rather than riding in carriages.

MILKMAN You're obviously not going to tell me his name. Hostler, what was the young widow's maiden name?

HOSTLER (Sweeping) Faith, I don't know and yet I should as

she called me John. But I don't remember ever seeing her before. (*Continues sweeping*) Goodnight Michael.

MILKMAN I must go now Hostler. Goodnight.

*Exit Milkman. Hostler sweeps a while longer and then exits.*

Scene 1.2 A Heath near Anglebury

*Enter Ethelberta, who is running looking at the sky following a hawk, which is attacking a duck. Ethelberta has run a long way and is breathing heavily. She looks into the distance and sees Julian approaching her.*

*Enter Julian.*

ETHELBERTA Can you tell me, sir, if this is the right way back to Anglebury?

JULIAN It is one way but the shortest route is along there (*pointing in another direction*).

*Ethelberta looks a little shocked and has to compose herself.*

ETHELBERTA Mr. Julian!

JULIAN Ah! Mrs Petherwin! Yes, I am Mr Julian though that matters little to us after all these years with so much water having passed under the bridge.

*Ethelberta does not respond.*

JULIAN Shall I show you the way? In fact I am going along that path myself.

ETHELBERTA If you please.

*They walk in silence for a while, she just behind him.*

*They stop and he turns towards her.*

JULIAN We must go our separate ways. (*Pointing*) That is the way to Anglebury - just where you see those lights. The path down there is the one you must follow; it leads round the hill yonder and directly into the town.

*Julian keeps his eyes fixed on Ethelberta.*

ETHELBERTA Thank you

*They both move slowly to go on their separate ways.*

JULIAN Goodnight

ETHELBERTA Goodbye .. if you are going to say no more

JULIAN What can I say? You are nothing to me..I could forgive a woman doing anything for spite, except marrying for spite.

ETHELBERTA I assume you are talking about yourself ..this certainly does not apply to me.

JULIAN I am not married. You are.

ETHELBERTA Christopher - this is how it is: you knew too much of me to respect me and too little to pity me. A half knowledge of another's life mostly does injustice to the life half known.

JULIAN Then since I can hardly get to know you more, I must do my best to get to know you less.

ETHELBERTA I think bitterness has more to do with those words than judgment. You never knew half about me; you only knew me as a governess; you little think what my beginnings were.

JULIAN I think I have guessed correctly. Your early life was superior to your position, when I knew you. You see, Ethelberta, I recognise a lady by birth when I see her even under reverses of an extreme kind.

*Ethelberta smiles a smile of many meanings.*

JULIAN Let's waste no more words. It is best if we part as if we are strangers, who have just met. Let us part friends. Goodnight, Mrs Petherwin and good luck to you. I hope we will meet again some day.

ETHELBERTA Goodnight.

*They touch hands and they both exit in opposite directions.*

Scene 1.3 Inside the hotel, where Ethelberta and her mother-in-law are staying

*Enter Ethelberta and her mother-in-law's maid, Menlove.*

ETHELBERTA Menlove, did you see if any gentleman saw me and followed me when I went for my walk just now?

MENLOVE (putting her hand to her forehead) You once told me, ma'am, that once you were dressed I was not to look out of the window after you, when you were going for a walk.

ETHELBERTA So I did.

MENLOVE So I didn't see any gentleman just now.

ETHELBERTA But did you hear if any gentleman arrived on the late train last night?

MENLOVE (knowing that she had spent a half hour with one of the waiters after going off-duty) No ma'am, how could I?

*Menlove exits. Ethelberta moves into another room, where her mother-in-law sits.*

ETHELBERTA Mamma, here I am at last.

LADY PETHERWIN (writing a letter and not concentrating on anything else) What?

*Lady Petherwin completes her letter and now speaks to Ethelberta*

LADY PETHERWIN Why, how late you are, Ethelberta, and how hot you look!

ETHELBERTA I have been following a cruel bird following a helpless duck. I ran after them to see the outcome of the flight and got hopelessly lost.

LADY PETHERWIN Mercy! You could have run into a swamp and sunk in up to your knees. What a tomboy you are! How did you find your way home?

ETHELBERTA O, a man showed me the way.

LADY PETHERWIN You look so hot it looks as if you have been running all the way.

ETHELBERTA It is a warm evening. I have been thinking about how certain events change people's lives. Do you remember when I was at school in Bonn a family's life was much disturbed when the father died.

LADY PETHERWIN Do you mean the Julians?

ETHELBERTA Yes. That was the name.

LADY PETHERWIN But, of course, you knew that. Young Julian was rather keen on you one summer if I remember correctly. About the same time you came to us and met my poor boy.

ETHELBERTA Yes, I recollect it now. I think he had a sister. I wonder what happened to them after the family collapsed.

LADY PETHERWIN (losing interest) (takes up another piece of writing paper) I don't know. I seem to recall the son became a music teacher in some country town - music was always his hobby.

*Lady Petherwin starts to write another letter.*

*Ethelberta leaves this room and enters her own one. Menlove enters.*

ETHELBERTA (to Menlove) Menlove, will you go downstairs and discover if any gentleman by the name of Julian has been staying in this house? There is no need to ask outright but I know you have your ways of finding out these things. If George were here now, he would help.

MENLOVE George was nothing to me, ma'am.

ETHELBERTA James, then.

MENLOVE I only knew James for a week or ten days. as soon as I found out he was married, I lost interest in him.

ETHELBERTA I thought you were very angry when you lost him. Still, please go and make your enquiries, Menlove.

*Menlove departs. Ethelberta wanders around the room in deep thought. Soon, Menlove returns.*

MENLOVE A gentleman by that name did stay here last night and left this afternoon.

ETHELBERTA Will you find out his address?

MENLOVE I've already done that. It is Upper Street, Sandbourne.

ETHELBERTA Thank you. That will do.

*Menlove exits. Ethelberta continues to wander about her room deep in thought.*

Scene 1.4 Christopher Julian's  
House in Sandbourne

*Enter Julian carrying a package, which contains a book.*

JULIAN (to himself) (with curiosity) Metres by E.

*Julian looks at it briefly, lays it on a table and exits to do his day's work.*

*That evening he returns, sits down and begins to read the book.*

JULIAN (calling to someone in another room) Faith, can you come in here for a moment?

*Enter Faith, his sister.*

JULIAN Faith, I want your opinion. But, stop, read this first.

*He places his finger on a page of the book and gives the book to Faith, who puts on her spectacles, looking around the room to check nobody else is present. She begins to read the book.*

FAITH It is very touching.

JULIAN What do you think I suspect about it - that the poem is addressed to me. Do you remember when we were at Solentsea there was a Sir Ralph Petherwin and his wife with their two children and a governess?

FAITH I never saw them but I do remember you mentioning them.

JULIAN Well, the governess was a very attractive woman and somehow or other I got more interested in her than I ought have done and we used to meet in romantic places and that kind of thing. However she ended up jilting me and marrying the son.

FAITH You were anxious to get away from Solentsea.

JULIAN Was I? Then that was probably the reason. Anyway I decided to forget about her and that came about what with all the troubles we were experiencing shortly afterwards. Anyway you remember last year I came to Anglebury on my annual walking tour and stayed there for a couple of days to see if it would be suitable if we ever had to leave here. As I was walking on the heath I met this very woman. We chatted a bit and parted as coolly as we had met. Now I receive this strange book and I am convinced it is from her. The poem resembles the scene of our meeting.

FAITH She seems to be a warm-hearted, impulsive woman to judge from these tender verses.

JULIAN Yes, but people who write warm-hearted words can sometimes have very cold manners. I wonder if she did write these verses and then sent them to me!

FAITH It seems rather a strange thing for a married woman to do but then poets have their own morals and manners. I am sure I would not have sent this book to a man for the world!

JULIAN I see no harm in sending them to me. Perhaps she thinks as our relationship is over we might as well die friends.

FAITH If I were her husband I should have doubts about the dying and other people might not be so sure of 'it's all over' as you are.

JULIAN Perhaps not. However, she probably does not know of my downfall since father's death. Had she known I doubt if

she would have sent them. I am of course assuming Ethelberta, Mrs Petherwin, sent them. Remember when she knew me I was a gentleman of ease and thought I would never have to earn my living.

FAITH Kit, you have made two mistakes on your thoughts of that lady. Even though I don't know her, I am sure of this. First, you seem to think a married lady would send you this book without a thought about its propriety. Second, having heard of our misfortunes she would have given up any idea of sending it to you. I know because I am a woman.

*Julian remains silent and turns over the pages.*

Scene 1.5 The next morning at the bookseller's and postmaster's

*The bookseller is already in his shop. Julian enters.*

JULIAN Good morning. I received this book yesterday and notice it was posted in Sandbourne.

BOOKSELLER I certainly did not sell it, sir. In fact I have never heard of it and probably never shall.

JULIAN Surely you don't live by the shop?

BOOKSELLER (placing his hand on Julian's coat) Sir, I starve by it. Country bookselling is a miserable, impoverishing, exasperating thing these days.

JULIAN I can forgive a starving man anything.

BOOKSELLER (looking at a sheet of paper) Wait a minute! The work you allude to was published only last week. Though, mind you, even if it had been published last century I probably would not have sold any copies.

JULIAN I think I will go and have a word with the postmaster.

*Julian exits. The bookseller's quickly becomes the postmaster's.*

JULIAN Ah, postmaster, do you recall a young lady coming in here to post a parcel to me.

POSTMASTER Yes a young lady brought it in to get it stamped two days ago.

JULIAN Do you know her?

POSTMASTER I see her every morning. I think she comes into town from two or three miles out and returns about four or five o'clock in the afternoon.

JULIAN What does she wear?

POSTMASTER A white wool jacket.

*Julian exits.*

Scene 1.6 On Sandbourne Moor

*Enter Julian looking out along the moor.*

JULIAN (to himself) There is a young lady coming towards me in a white wool jacket but it is not Ethelberta Petherwin.

*Enter Picotee. She walks slowly, not too near Julian, who is enraptured by her, and then exits. A week later they are both on Sandbourne Moor. Julian has remained on stage. Enter Picotee. He lifts his hat to her.*

JULIAN Have I the pleasure of addressing the author of a book of very melodious poems that was sent me the other day?

PICOTEE No, sir.

JULIAN The sender, then?

PICOTEE Yes.

JULIAN Are you disposed to tell me that writer's name?

PICOTEE I am not disposed to tell the writer's name.

*Picotee walks on and exits.*

*Julian and Picotee meet three more times on the moor after this. Julian is on stage and Picotee enters, walks by him and then exits. No words are spoken. They then pass each other again a few times. Each time Julian is reading a book. No words are spoken but after they have passed each other Picotee makes a gasping sigh out of Julian's hearing. Their final meeting takes place as Julian has finished his engagement to teach music to a pupil, whom he has been teaching. Julian enters carrying a bunch of flowers, intended for Faith. Picotee enters some distance from Julian.*

JULIAN (to himself) Sweet simple girl, I'll endeavour to make peace with her by means of these flowers before we part for good.

*Picotee walks close to Julian.*

JULIAN Will you allow me to present you with these?

*Picotee hesitates for a moment but then accepts with a smile but no words.*

JULIAN Good afternoon.

*Picotee exits. Julian exits on opposite side of stage.*

Scene 1.7 Inside the Weir House, which is on Sandbourne Moor

*Two gentlemen, Ladywell and Neigh, have had a day's shooting. They stand looking out of the window with a Sportsman. Enter Picotee walking along the moor. It is a wet, unpleasant day.*

NEIGH Ah, someone is actually out walking in this weather. (Pause) So far as I can see it is a young lady. I think she has an appointment. What a day and place for an appointment with a woman.

LADYWELL What's an appointment?

SPORTSMAN Look out here and you'll see. As an accomplished artist, Ladywell, you should rush out with your sketch-book and dash off the scene. I wonder how long she will wait for him.

*Enter a Waterman, who joins the three men.*

WATERMAN She passes here every day on her way home from the school where she is a pupil-teacher. Two to one against her staying a quarter of an hour. Go home, I say, he is not worth it. (Pause) Now it looks as if she is willing to wait half an hour and then she will go home with a broken heart.

NEIGH She is grieving now as he has not come. What a brute he must be. Don't open the door until she has gone, Ladywell, it will only disturb her.

*A clock strikes the hour and Picotee departs sadly.*

NEIGH Now then, for Wyndway House, a change of clothes and dinner.

Scene 1.8 Sandbourne Pier

*Enter Julian looking out to sea. He hears someone in the distance and turns round. After a few seconds Faith enters.*

FAITH Oh Christopher, I knew you would be here. A servant from Wyndway House is asking if you could go there immediately to play a little dance they have resolved upon this evening - quite suddenly it seems. If you can go you must also bring with you an assistant.

JULIAN Wyndway House: why should the people send for me above all the other musicians in the town?

FAITH I don't know. If you do decide to go you might take me as your assistant. I should answer the purpose, should I not, Kit? since it is only a dance or two they want.

JULIAN You mean with your harp? Yes, I suppose you can come too. It cannot be a regular ball - they would have hired the quadrille band for anything like that. Let's go, Faith. But first of all we will see the man to check on the particulars.

*They exit.*

Scene 1.9 In wagonette on the way to Wyndway House

*Julian and Faith are sitting in a wagonette. A Coachman is at the front, driving the horse. Faith's harp is in the cart.*

JULIAN I have hurriedly put a new string or two into your harp, Faith, so it should be fine tonight. (To coachman) Is it a large party?

COACHMAN No sir, it is what we call a dance. That is like a ball but on a smaller scale. A ball without the planning. It was decided upon at dinner. Some of the young people wanted a jig but didn't want to play themselves. You know, sir, young ladies are an idle class of society at the best of times. We've a house full of sleeping company, most of 'em being the mistresses relations.

JULIAN They probably found it a little dull.

COACHMAN Well yes - it is a little dull for them being Christmas-time and all. As soon as it was proposed they were wild for sending post-haste for somebody or other to play for them.

JULIAN Did they name me particularly?

COACHMAN Yes. Mr Christopher Julian, says she. The gent who's turned music-man I said. Yes, says she, that's him.

JULIAN There were music-men who live nearer the House than I.

COACHMAN Yes, indeed, sir. But it was Mr Christopher Julian who was named specifically. A young lady, who is staying with us, said the Julians have had a downfall and the son has taken to music. Oh, well let's have him then, they all said.

JULIAN Was the young lady, who first inquired for my family the same one who said 'let's have him by all means?'

COACHMAN Oh, no. But as I understand it from Joyce, the butler, once he had suggested your name all the others agreed.

JULIAN Do you know the lady's name ?

COACHMAN Mrs Petherwin.

JULIAN Ah!

COACHMAN Cold, sir?

JULIAN O no.

Scene 1.10 Ballroom at Wyndway

House

*The dancing has just finished. Julian and Faith are relaxing before going home.*

JULIAN That was very enjoyable, Faith. Do you think so, too?

FAITH Indeed, Christopher, very enjoyable.

JULIAN The best part of the evening was that she was here.

FAITH Who?

JULIAN Ethelberta.

FAITH Which one was she?

JULIAN The one who had the skirts of her dress looped up with convolvulus flowers - the one with her hair fastened in a sort of Venus knot behind. She was dancing with that perfumed piece of a man they call Mr Ladywell. The one with the high eyebrows shaped like a girl's. I cannot for my life see anybody answering to the character of husband to her, for every man takes notice of her.

FAITH Kit, I noticed you appeared to be looking at the way the flowers were fastened to the leaves. You cannot think how you were staring at them.

JULIAN I was looking through them -certainly not at them. I have a feeling of being moved about like a puppet in the hands of a person who legally can be nothing to me.

FAITH That charming woman with the shining bunch of hair and convulvuluses?

JULIAN Yes. It is through her that we are brought here, and through her writing that poem 'Cancelled Words' that the book was sent me, and through the accidental meeting between us on Anglebury Heath, that she wrote the poem. Just now I was thinking of the little teacher, whom

Ethelberta must have asked to send the book to me. Why was that girl chosen to do it?

FAITH There may have been a hundred reasons, Kit. I never saw Ethelberta look towards you.

JULIAN Ah, it was a very subtle look. When she saw I had noticed, she became very confused and turned to talk to a neighbour. It was only a look but what a look it was. Something has gone out of me which had gone out of me once before. But Faith, you are very tired. Such a heavy night's work has been almost too much for you.

FAITH Oh, I don't mind that. But I could not have played so long by myself.

JULIAN We filled up one another's gaps; and there were plenty of them towards the morning. But, luckily, people don't notice those things when the small hours draw on.

FAITH What troubles me most is not that I have worked, but that you should need such miserable assistance as mine. We are poor are we not, Kit?

JULIAN Yes, we know a little about poverty.

FAITH I believe there is one of the dancers now. I would have thought all the dancers would have gone to bed for several days. It is your own particular one. Yes, I see the blue flowers under the edge of her cloak.

JULIAN And I see her squirrel-coloured hair.

*They both stare out of the window.*

FAITH Without doubt she is already a lady of many romantic experiences.

JULIAN And on the way to many more.

*A servant enters and approaches them.*

SERVANT This is for you, I believe, sir. Two guineas. (*He places the money in Julian's hand.*) I believe some breakfast will be ready for you both soon if you would like some. Would you like it in here or in the steward's room?

JULIAN Yes, we would like some. We will come to the room. (Pause) Can you tell me the address of the lady on the lawn? Oh, she has disappeared.

FAITH She wore a dress with blue flowers.

SERVANT And remarkable bright in her manner? O, that's the young widow, Mrs...what's her name.. I forget for the moment.

JULIAN (surprised) Widow? (*He now begins to understand the situation.*) The lady I mean is a girlish sort of woman.

SERVANT Yes, yes so she is - that's the one. Coachman says she must have been born a widow, for there is not time for her ever to have been made one. However, she's not quite such a chicken as all that. Mrs Petherwin, that's her name.

JULIAN Does she live here?

SERVANT No, she is staying in this house for just a few days with her mother-in-law. They stay in London but I don't know the address.

JULIAN Is she a poetess?

SERVANT That I can't say. She is very, very clever at verses but she doesn't do the usual odd things poets do and she goes to church regularly on Sundays so I don't think she is the real thing. She's also very good at telling stories. She takes some time to be persuaded to start but once she is in full flow she is a delight to hear. However it will soon be dull again as they are both leaving tomorrow for Rookington, where I believe they are to spend New Year.

JULIAN Where do you say they are going?

SERVANT To Rookington Park, about three miles out of Sandbourne, in the opposite direction to this.

*Servant exits.*

JULIAN (*to himself but loud enough for Faith to hear*) A widow.

FAITH That makes no difference to us, does it?

*Julian and Faith exit.*

Scene 1.11 The Shore by Wyndway

*Enter Ethelberta and Picotee.*

ETHELBERTA I have come, Picotee, but not as you might imagine from a night's sleep. We have actually been dancing till daylight at Wyndway.

PICOTEE Then you should not have troubled to come! I could have borne the disappointment under such circumstances. But you look so tired, Berta. I could not have stayed up all night for the world!

ETHELBERTA One gets used to these things. I should have been in bed, certainly, had I not particularly wished to use this opportunity to meet you before you go home

tomorrow. I could not have come to Sandbourne today, because we are leaving to return to Rookington. I have a few things for you to take to mother (*hands her a small parcel*) and this one is for you (*hands Picotee another small parcel*). It will pay your fare home and back and leave you something to spare.

PICOTEE (*docilely*) Thank you.

ETHELBERTA Now, Picotee, let us talk for a few minutes before I return. We may not meet again for some time.

*They put their hands round each other's waist and walk up and down.*

ETHELBERTA Now, tell me, Picotee, what do you think of my poems?

PICOTEE I like them but do not fully understand the experiences you write about. They are so different to mine. Yet that made them so interesting to me. I think I should so like to mix with those people but, of course, that is impossible.

ETHELBERTA That, of course, is so. Did you post the book I gave you?

PICOTEE Yes. I have told nobody we are sisters or that we even know each other or anything about mother. I think that is best in the circumstances.

ETHELBERTA Yes. Perhaps that is best for the moment.

PICOTEE Tell me, Berta, will you become Lady Petherwin when your mother-in-law dies?

ETHELBERTA No, of course not. She is only a knight's widow, and that's nothing.

PICOTEE The lady of a knight looks as good on paper as the lady of a lord.

ETHELBERTA Yes and in other places too sometimes. Now, about your journey home. Be very careful. At the station only make enquiries to the officials. If any man wants to be friendly with you try to find out if he is genuine or only attracted by your fresh face.

PICOTEE How shall I know which?

ETHELBERTA (*laughing*) If Heaven does not tell you at the moment I cannot. Well, Picotee, has anybody paid you real attentions yet?

PICOTEE No-that is -

ETHELBERTA There is something going on.

PICOTEE Only a wee bit.

ETHELBERTA I thought so. There is a dishonesty about your dear eyes that has never been there before and love-making and dishonesty are as inseparable as coupled hounds. Up comes man and away goes innocence. Are you going to tell me anything about him?

PICOTEE I would rather not, Berta, because it is hardly anything.

ETHELBERTA Well, be careful. And mind this, never tell him what you really feel.

PICOTEE But then he will never know it.

ETHELBERTA Nor must he. He must think it only. The difference between his thinking and knowing is often the difference between your winning and losing. But general advice is not of much use. I would be able to give better advice if I knew his name.

*Picotee remains silent.*

ETHELBERTA Never mind: keep your secret. However, listen to this: not a kiss - not so much as a shadow, a hint or meereest seedling of a kiss.

PICOTEE There is no fear of it, though not because of me!

ETHELBERTA You see, my dear Picotee, a lover is not a relative; and he isn't quite a stranger; but he may end in being either, and the way to reduce him to whichever of the two you wish him to be is to treat him like the other. Men who come courting are just like bad cooks: if you are kind to them, instead of ascribing it to an exceptional courtesy on your part, they instantly set it down to their own exceptional worth.

PICOTEE But I ought to favour him just a little, poor thing? Just the smallest glimmer of a gleam!

ETHELBERTA Only a very little indeed - so that it comes as a relief to his misery, not adding to his happiness.

PICOTEE This is all too clever. We ought to be harmless as doves.

ETHELBERTA Ah, Picotee, to continue harmless as a dove you must be wise as a serpent.

PICOTEE But if I cannot get at him, how can I manage him in these ways you speak of?

ETHELBERTA Get at him? I suppose he gets at you in some way, does he not?- tries to see you or to be near you?

PICOTEE No - that's just the point - he doesn't do any such thing, and there's the worry of it.

ETHELBERTA Well, what a silly girl! Then he is not your lover at all!

PICOTEE Perhaps he is not. But I am his, at any rate - twice over.

ETHELBERTA That's no use. You cannot supply the love of both sides.

PICOTEE (*sighing*) Have you got a young man too, Berta?

ETHELBERTA A young man?

PICOTEE A lover I mean - that's what we call 'em down here.

ETHELBERTA (*evasively*) It is difficult to explain. I knew one many years ago, and I have seen him again but that is all.

PICOTEE According to my idea you have one, but according to your own you do not. He does not love you but you love him - is that how it is?

ETHELBERTA I have not quite considered how it is.

PICOTEE Do you love him?

ETHELBERTA I have never seen a man I hate less.

PICOTEE A great deal lies covered up there, I expect.

ETHELBERTA (*referring to Christopher, but Picotee does not realise this*) He was in that carriage which drove over the hill at the moment we met here.

PICOTEE Ah ha! Some great lord I suspect! Someone who has as much idea of the cost of a loaf of bread as I do of the cost of pearls and diamonds.

ETHELBERTA Not at all. I am afraid he is only a commoner at the moment and not a great one either. But surely you can guess Picotee. He is Mr Julian to whom you posted the book. Such changes he has seen. From affluence to poverty. He and his sister play at dances such as the one last night at Wyndway. (*Picotee looks shocked and anguished*) But what is the matter, Picotee?

PICOTEE Nothing. Just a sharp pain. It will be all right soon.

ETHELBERTA My dear Picotee-

PICOTEE I think I'll sit down for a while.

ETHELBERTA Why, have you walked too far?

PICOTEE Yes, and I got up very early today.

ETHELBERTA I hope you're not going to be ill child. You look as if you ought not to be here.

PICOTEE Oh, it will soon pass. Let us carry on talking about what we were talking before. About your young man, Berta. I always thought he was connected to you by marriage and he had asked you for a copy of your book. Have you been courting this Mr Julian and been on walks with him?

ETHELBERTA No, of course not. I knew him once and he is interesting.

PICOTEE So is the love all on one side, as it is with me?

ETHELBERTA Oh, no, no, no. There is nothing like that. I am not attached to anyone, strictly speaking - though more strictly speaking I am not unattached.

PICOTEE What a delightful muddle to be in. I know how you feel for I felt like that once. I wish we poor girls could contrive to bring a little wisdom into our love by way of a change.

ETHELBERTA Goodness how time has flown. I must go in ten minutes.

*They both exit.*

Scene 1.12 A Room in Doncastle's  
House

*Enter Ladywell, Neigh and Doncastle.*

LADYWELL They are witty and original. They must have been written by a female hand.

DONCASTLE But is it a female hand?

LADYWELL Do you know the authoress, Mr Neigh?

NEIGH Can't say that I do.

LADYWELL She will be famous one day and you ought at least to read the book.

NEIGH Yes I should. In fact some time ago I was on the verge of becoming a poet myself. But a man has so much to do.

LADYWELL What a pity you didn't follow it up. A man of such powers as yourself, Neigh.

NEIGH After some time I realised I was too normal to

become a poet. Besides, so many other men are on the same tack.

DONCASTLE It appears that these poems are very clever.

LADYWELL Clever! They are marvellously brilliant.

NEIGH I hear she is rather warm in her assumed character.

LADYWELL That's a sign of her actual coldness.

NEIGH Oh, I don't mean to call her warmth of feeling virtue or vice. Warm sentiment of any sort disturbs us too much to leave us repose enough to write it down.

DONCASTLE I am sure when most people are at an ardent age they could no more print such emotions and make them public than they can help privately feeling them.

LADYWELL I wonder if she has gone through half she says? If so, what an experience!

NEIGH Oh, no. Not at all likely. It is as risky calculating people's ways of living from their writings as their incomes from their way of living.

LADYWELL She is as true to nature as fashion is false. I don't think that she has written a word more than what every woman would deny feeling in a society where no woman says what she means or does what she says. And can any praise be greater than that?

NEIGH Ha! Ha! Capital! But I have heard it said all her poems seem to be Tral-la-la- lal-la-la-la and so on.

LADYWELL (ignoring Neigh's last comments) The *London Light* correspondent says they are one of the finest things he has ever read in the way of admiration. (Pause) Colonel Staff said a funny thing to me yesterday about these very poems. He asked me if I knew her and -

NEIGH Her? Why, you have known it is a lady all the time. Shame on you, Ladywell.

LADYWELL Well, maybe. Upon my word the secret is not mine alone. But do you want to hear what I am saying?

DONCASTLE We shall be delighted.

LADYWELL The colonel said between U and E, Ladywell, I believe there is a close affinity. Meaning me, you know, by U. Ha! ha!

*There is a silence as the other two men do not understand what Ladywell is saying. His face becomes a little pained.*

LADYWELL Meaning by E, you know, the E of the poems. Ha! ha!

NEIGH It was a very humorous incident, certainly.

*Ladywell and Doncastle laugh, the latter out of politeness.*

LADYWELL Anyway, gentlemen, I must admit I do know it was a lady. In fact-

DONCASTLE We would not for the world be the people to lead you to betray a confidence, Ladywell.

LADYWELL No, no - it is not that at all. But you must listen just for a moment.

DONCASTLE Ladywell, don't betray anyone on our account. Whoever the illustrious lady may be, she has seen a great deal of the world and puts her experience in a very vivid light.

*Pause*

NEIGH (to Doncastle) Your butler Chickerel is a highly intelligent man.

DONCASTLE Yes, he does very well.

NEIGH But is he not a very extraordinary man?

DONCASTLE Not to my knowledge. Why do you think that, Neigh?

NEIGH Well, perhaps it is not for me to say. He reads a great deal, I believe.

DONCASTLE I don't think so.

NEIGH But I noticed how wonderfully his face kindled when we began to discuss the poems during dinner. Perhaps he is a poet himself in disguise. Did you observe it?

DONCASTLE No. To the best of my belief he is a very honest and trustworthy man. He has been with us for five months having been fifteen years at his last place. It certainly is a new side to his character if he publicly showed any interest in the dinner table conversation.

LADYWELL As we are talking about it, I must say I noticed the singularity of it.

DONCASTLE Well. I hope that is the first and last time such a thing will happen. I would have thought him the last person to infringe such an elementary rule. I hope you weren't annoyed.

LADYWELL Not at all. It might have been a mistake of

mine. I should have forgotten it if it had not been raised. Please do not mention this to him on my account.

NEIGH Certainly do not mention it.

DONCASTLE Of course, Chickereel is Chickerel. We all know what that means. Upon thinking of it, I believe he is of a literary turn of mind. When I read my newspaper in the morning, I sense Chickerel has run his eye over it first.

*Exit Ladywell, Neigh and Doncastle. Enter Chickerel.*

CHICKEREL (holding a letter and reading it to himself) My Dear Ethelberta, although I didn't intend to write to you just yet, events in this house have forced me to write you a few lines with some urgency. We have just had a dinner-party here and a young man Ladywell (do you know him?) has been talking a great deal about your verses. He is a painter but reasonably provided for without his earnings. His family own a fair amount of land around Aldbrickham. The ladies at the dinner-party were convinced the poet was thirty-five and had a blighted existence. It was as much as I could do to tell them you are no more than twenty-one. It is probably best, Berta, not to reveal your name in public just yet. I wish you every success, your affectionate father, etc etc.

Scene 1.13 Christopher's Lodgings

at Sandbourne

*Enter Julian and Faith.*

FAITH Kit, these poems seem to have increased in value with you. The lady would be flattered if she knew how much time you spent reading them. Are you going to thank her for them?

JULIAN I would thank her straightaway if I was sure she had anything to do with them but I am not certain of that yet.

FAITH They are strange verses for a woman to write.

JULIAN Not at all strange. They are natural outpourings. Why do you say strange? There is no harm in them.

FAITH No, no. No harm at all. However I think in order to write them she must be rather a fast lady. Not a bad fast lady - a good one. There. I have said it now. I expect you disagree with me for calling her fast.

JULIAN I suppose you mean bold or forward.

FAITH Yes, I suppose I do.

JULIAN My idea of her is just the reverse. A poetess must intrinsically be sensitive, or she could never feel. I was

going to tell you something but I doubt if you will be interested.

FAITH You know I am always interested in hearing all your affairs.

JULIAN It is only that I have composed an air to one of her prettiest songs 'When tapers tall' but I am not sure if it works. I wrote it in just a few minutes last night.

FAITH I am sure it is delightful. How could you compose it so quickly?

JULIAN I was thinking as I cannot very well write to her, I will send this to her. (Holds the music in his hand) Perhaps you could give this suggestion some thought, Faith while I go out. I shall return in an hour or two.

*Julian exits. Faith sits down to read a book.  
Julian returns.*

JULIAN I'm surprised to see you still up Faith. I told you I was going for a long walk.

FAITH No, Christopher. Really, you did not. How tired and sad you look.

JULIAN Oh, I forgot I did not tell you.

FAITH Have you been walking up and down the sands?

JULIAN No.

FAITH The turnpike road to Rookington is pleasant.

JULIAN Faith, that is really where I have been. How did you know?

FAITH I only guessed. Verses and an accidental meeting produce a special journey.

JULIAN Ethelberta is a fine woman, physically and mentally. I wonder people do not talk about her twice as much as they do.

FAITH You are certainly getting attached to her again. Are you beginning to fall in love?

JULIAN No, no. That is only nonsense. There is another brute after her, it seems. I saw him waiting for a sight of her on my walk.

FAITH That's no surprise. I expect there are a number of would-be suitors. Remember her position in society is above ours so there is no point in pursuing her.

*Julian and Faith exit. They return a few days later. Julian is reading a newspaper.*

JULIAN Well, I see the news is out.

FAITH What news?

JULIAN The secret of the true authorship of the book of poems is out at last and it is Ethelberta.

FAITH But can we believe it?

JULIAN Yes, we can. Listen to what the correspondent says. The author of 'Metres by E', a book, which has been the talk for some weeks now in literary clubs is a young lady, who was widowed before she reached the age of nineteen. I was informed by a friend, on his way to the House of Lords, it is Mrs Petherwin - christian name Ethelberta, who resides with her mother-in-law in Exonbury Crescent. She is, moreover, the daughter of the late Bishop of Silchester (if report may be believed) whose active benevolence left his family in comparatively straightened circumstances at his death. Her marriage was a secret one and much against the wishes of her husband's friends, who are all wealthy. The bridegroom died within two or three weeks after the wedding and this led to a reconciliation with the family.

FAITH If you want to send her your music, you could do so now.

JULIAN I might have sent it sooner but I want to deliver it to her personally. However, it is all the same, now, whether I send it or not. I always knew our destinies would set us apart but I think I'll still send it.

FAITH In the way of business as composer only.

*They both exit.*

Scene 1.14 A house on the north side of Hyde Park

*Neigh is talking to another man, a writer. In the room also having a conversation are Ethelberta and Mrs Doncastle. Another conversation is taking place (near Neigh and the Writer) between Mrs Napper and a lady guest.*

WRITER Neigh, who is that charming woman with her back towards us?

NEIGH I was just going to ask you the same question. But Mrs Napper will know.

*Neigh turns to speak to Mrs Napper.*

NEIGH (pointing to Ethelberta) Ah, Mrs Napper, pray tell me the name of that lady talking over there.

MRS NAPPER O - that is the celebrated Mrs Petherwin, the woman who makes rhymes and prints them.

*Mrs Napper turns away from Neigh to continue her previous conversation.*

NEIGH (to Man) O, is that the woman at last?

WRITER The rhymes as Mrs Napper calls them are not to be despised. The writer's opinions of life and society differ from mine, but I can't help admiring her in the reflective pieces; the songs I don't care for.

NEIGH I have not read them but I suppose I must. The truth is I never care much for reading what one ought to read; I wish I did but I cannot help it. No doubt you much admire the lady for writing them: I don't. Everybody is so talented now-a-days that the only people I care to honour as deserving real distinction are those who remain in obscurity.

WRITER I believe one of her songs, called 'When tapers tall' has been set to music by three or four composers already.

NEIGH Men of any note?

WRITER Oh, no. Established music writers do not use up their energies on new verse until they find that such verse is likely to endure. For if the poet is shortly forgotten then their labour is in some degree lost.

MRS DONCASTLE Tell me, Ethelberta, whose music scores do you think best fits your poems?

ETHELBERTA The sweetest and best of them are not yet known generally. It only reached me by post this morning from Wessex and it is written by an unheard-of man who lives somewhere down there. He is a man who will be well-known one day I think and hope.

MRS DONCASTLE Let us hear it, Ethelberta.

ETHELBERTA I am so sorry but I will not be able to oblige you as the music is at home. I had not received it when I lent the others to Miss Belmaine.

MRS DONCASTLE What a shame. I look forward so much to hearing it.

*All except Ethelberta exit.*

ETHELBERTA (in reflective mood, to herself) I had decided not to write to thank Mr Julian for his music score but, on reflection, I think I will.

*Ethelberta sits at a writing desk and begins her letter. The scene ends as she leaves the stage.*

**ACT 2**Scene 2.1 Lady Petherwin's House

*Enter Lady Petherwin and Ethelberta.*

LADY PETHERWIN What does this mean, Ethelberta?

ETHELBERTA (quietly) It means what it says.

LADY PETHERWIN Then it is true?

ETHELBERTA Yes. I must apologize for having kept it such a secret from you. It was merely to avoid disturbing your mind that I did it so privately.

LADY PETHERWIN But surely you have not written every one of those ribald verses?

ETHELBERTA Ribald? What do you mean by that? I don't think you know what ribald means.

LADY PETHERWIN Perhaps I don't. It is the same with words and persons, the less you are acquainted with them the more it is to your credit.

ETHELBERTA I don't quite deserve this, Lady Petherwin.

LADY PETHERWIN You might have left them unwritten and shown some fidelity.

ETHELBERTA Fidelity? What has fidelity to do with it?

LADY PETHERWIN Fidelity to my dear boy's memory.

ETHELBERTA I did expect you might judge them as you have done and that is why I kept them secret from you.

LADY PETHERWIN I think you have forgotten your late husband.

ETHELBERTA Lady Petherwin It is over three years since I last saw my boy-husband. We were mere children. It is time for me to move on.

LADY PETHERWIN When you came under my protection it was to keep his memory alive. I have been very good to you, Ethelberta, taking you on foreign trips and mixing in good society to enlarge your mind.

ETHELBERTA I do agree you have been very kind to me. And I don't know how the secret of my name has leaked out. However, I am certainly not ribald.

LADY PETHERWIN Then you own you are not so ardent as you seem in your book?

ETHELBERTA I do.

LADY PETHERWIN And you are sorry your name has been published?

ETHELBERTA I am.

LADY PETHERWIN And you think these verses may tend to misrepresent your character as a gay and rapturous one, when it is not?

ETHELBERTA I do fear it.

LADY PETHERWIN Then you will suppress these poems immediately. That is the only way in which you can regain the position you have hitherto held with me.

*There is a pause with no reply from Ethelberta.*

LADY PETHERWIN Well?

ETHELBERTA I did not expect such a command as that. I have been obedient for some four years and would continue so - but I cannot agree to suppress my poems. They are not mine now to suppress.

LADY PETHERWIN You must get them into your hands. Money will do it I suppose.

ETHELBERTA Yes, I suppose it would - a thousand pounds.

LADY PETHERWIN Very well. A thousand pounds it is. You had better sit down and write about it at once.

ETHELBERTA I cannot do it and I will not. I don't wish them to be suppressed. I am not ashamed of them.

LADY PETHERWIN Then you are an ungrateful woman and wanting in natural affection for the dead. Considering your birth -

ETHELBERTA That's an intolerable --

*Lady Petherwin departs very hurriedly. She returns again shortly in a panic.*

LADY PETHERWIN What have I done? I have just thrown my will onto the fire upstairs.

ETHELBERTA And I was just going to tell you I will cling to you no matter how you ill-use me.

LADY PETHERWIN Such an affectionate remark sounds curious at such a time. Selfishness, my dear, has given me such crooked looks that I can see it round a corner.

ETHELBERTA I was just coming to see you to ask for your forgiveness.

LADY PETHERWIN We two have got all awry - it cannot be

concealed - awry, awry! Who shall set us right again? I must immediately go and see my solicitor, Mr Chancerly. I am going out on other business and I will call in and see him.

*Lady Petherwin departs. Ethelberta exits shortly afterwards.*

Scene 2.2 In a London Street

*Enter Julian and Faith carrying their luggage.*

JULIAN Now we have reached London I'm sure the occasion will arise when I meet Ethelberta again. London will provide us with income and security, Faith.

FAITH I feel you have more confidence than me, Christopher. Still, I agreed to come with you so let's try our hardest to make this move to London a success.

JULIAN I have arranged an apartment near the British Museum. Let's go there and unpack our things.

*They both exit. Julian reappears without luggage and walks to Ethelberta's house door. He knocks. It is opened by a footman.*

JULIAN Good afternoon. Is this the house of Ethelberta Petherwin?

FOOTMAN It was but the ladies left London for the Continent. The family here now are only temporary tenants, sir.

JULIAN Do you know the Petherwins' present address?

FOOTMAN The old lady is underground, sir. She died some time ago in Switzerland and, I believe, is buried there.

JULIAN And Mrs Petherwin, the young lady?

FOOTMAN We are not acquainted personally with the family. My master has only taken the house for a few months, while his own house is undergoing extensive repairs. If you wish, I can give you her address.

JULIAN Ah, yes. Thank you.

FOOTMAN Arrowthorne Lodge, Upper Wessex.

JULIAN Dear me! Not far from Melchester and fairly near Sandbourne.

*The Footman closes the door. Christopher exits.*

Scene 2.3 Arrowthorne Park andLodge

*Enter Julian and a Countryman.*

JULIAN I believe Mrs Petherwin lives here.

COUNTRYMAN No, sir. Not to my knowledge. Unless she's only just arrived.

JULIAN She may only be visiting.

COUNTRYMAN I see, sir. Come to think of it I have seen a strange face recently. A young good looking maid.

JULIAN Yes. She's considered a very handsome lady.

COUNTRYMAN Well sir. Look over there. That's Arrowthorne Lodge. You see those three elms on the left.

JULIAN Those ones with edges shaped like edges of clouds.

COUNTRYMAN No sir. They are oaks.

JULIAN It's hard to tell the difference between elms and oaks from this distance.

COUNTRYMAN Not to me, sir. Anyhow, when you get to the elms you bear away to the north-west and walk in a straight line to the Lodge.

JULIAN How on earth do I know the direction of north-west without the sun to guide me.

COUNTRYMAN What! Not know the four quarters. I don't think there's any man round these parts who doesn't know his four quarters.

JULIAN Well thank you. I will follow your directions as best I can.

*They part. The countryman exits. Julian walks around the stage for a while and then approaches a door. He knocks. It is opened by another footman.*

JULIAN Good afternoon. Is Mrs Petherwin at home?

FOOTMAN Who did you say, sir?

JULIAN Mrs Petherwin.

FOOTMAN Don't know the person.

JULIAN The lady may be visiting - I call on business.

FOOTMAN She is not visiting in this house, sir.

JULIAN Is not this Arrowthorne Lodge?

FOOTMAN Certainly not, sir. It is nearly a mile from here. Under the trees by the high road. If you go across by that footpath it will bring you out quicker than by following the bend of the drive.

*Julian walks around the stage again and approaches another door. It is opened by Picotee who, initially, is not in full view of Julian.*

JULIAN Does Mrs Ethelberta Petherwin, the poetess, live here?

PICOTEE (in a faltering voice) She does, sir.

JULIAN This is indeed a surprise - I am glad to see you.

PICOTEE Yes. I am home for the holidays. If you wish to speak to my sister she is in the plantation.

JULIAN Oh no. Not at all. I only wish for an interview with a lady called Mrs Petherwin.

PICOTEE Yes; Mrs Petherwin - my sister. She is in the plantation. That little path will take you to her in five minutes.

*Julian is surprised at this discovery but persuades himself it is very delightful. He walks away from the door and finds Ethelberta in the plantation.*

ETHELBERTA (suddenly seeing Julian) Mr Julian!

JULIAN I was in the neighbourhood and ventured to call on a matter of business, relating to the poem which I had the pleasure of setting to music at the beginning of the year. However I fear your life has changed since last we met.

ETHELBERTA It has changed. My mother-in-law, Lady Petherwin, is dead. She has left me nothing but her house and furniture in London. More than I deserve but less than she had led me to expect. So I am somewhat in a corner. Lady Petherwin was exceedingly capricious. When she was not foolishly kind she was unjustly harsh. One day we quarrelled and she, being absolute mistress of her wealth, destroyed her will that was in my favour and made another one leaving me the fag-end of the lease of her London house and all her furniture. She then changed her mind and wrote a letter to her brother saying she wished me to have £20,000 of the £100,000 she had bequeathed to him. But she died before making another will and her brother refused to accept the terms of the letter on the grounds it was not a legal document. When I was an active member of the Petherwin family I was refused permission to see my relatives but from now on at least I will have some more liberty.

JULIAN Will you continue to write poems?

ETHELBERTA I cannot. At least no more that satisfy me. After some thought I have decided to appear in public.

JULIAN Not on the stage?

ETHELBERTA Certainly not on the stage. Recently I have written a prose story in the first person. I have decided to become a story-teller.

JULIAN Well thought of! There is a way for everybody to live, if they can only find it out.

ETHELBERTA It has occurred to me tales of a weird kind are made to be spoken not written. I have prepared a draft of an announcement. (*Hands a piece of paper to Julian*)

JULIAN (*reading aloud approximately the contents*) Mrs Petherwin, professed story-teller, will devote an evening to that ancient form of the romancer's art, at a well-known fashionable hall in London. Ethelberta, if only I had half your enterprise, what I might have done in the world.

ETHELBERTA I think it might be tea-time. Tea is a great meal with us here. You will join us, will you not?

*Enter Ethelberta's two brothers, Sol and Dan*

SOL Mr Julian - you'll bide and have a cup of tea wi' us? An old friend of yours is he not, Mrs Petherwin? Dan and I be going back to Sandbourne tonight and we can walk with 'ee as far as the station.

JULIAN I shall be delighted.

*Ethelberta, Picotee, Julian, Sol and Dan sit at a table. Picotee takes some tea and goes to a window.*

ETHELBERTA Our mother lives here but is bedridden. We are thinking of a plan of living which will, I hope, be more convenient than this is; but we have not yet decided what to do.

PICOTEE (*looking out of the window*) There's a very large dinner party at the House tonight. That was Lord Mountclere. He's a very wicked man, so they say.

ETHELBERTA Lord Mountclere? I used to know some friends of his. In what way is he wicked?

PICOTEE I don't know, Perhaps it's because he breaks the commandments.

ETHELBERTA Oh, I see Mr Ladywell is arriving now.

JULIAN Is he a friend of yours?

ETHELBERTA I hardly know him and certainly do not value him.

JULIAN (rising to leave followed by Sol and Dan) My thanks to you all for a most enjoyable tea.

*Julian, Sol and Dan exit.*

Scene 2.4 A Turnpike Road

*Enter Julian, Sol and Dan.*

SOL We be thinking of coming to London ourselves soon. I am a carpenter and joiner by trade and I figure there's so much opportunity for me there than here. Tell me sir, if you were me, how should you set about getting a job?

JULIAN What can you do?

SOL I'm good at staircases and people say I'm neat at sash-frames. I'm ok with doors and shutters too. And cabinet making. Also roofs.

DAN I'm a house painter and can mix and lay flat tints. And pick out mouldings and grain in every kind of wood you can mention.

JULIAN H'm. In London each tradesman just does one thing so you wouldn't be able to do all those things. Stick to a speciality like doors or painting blue and you may stand a chance of employment.

DAN Thank ee. We'll bear that in mind.

SOL If we do come, we won't mix with Mrs Petherwin at all.

JULIAN O indeed.

SOL O no. You may think it odd we call her Mrs Petherwin but we are such rough chaps and she is a lady so it is best that way. It would demean her to be associated with us tradespeople.

JULIAN Not at all. I would have thought she would be pleased to meet you socially.

DAN You don't know Ethelberta.

JULIAN How? In what way do you mean?

DAN So lofty! So lofty! Isn't she Sol? She'll never stir out from mother's till after dark and then her day begins. She'll traipse under trees and never go on the high road. We don't mind but she doesn't speaks to us in the street.

SOL Berta is so much cleverer than us. She stayed on at school, you know, sir. She was always one of the independent sort - now Picotee is exactly the opposite.

JULIAN Has Picotee left Sandbourne entirely?

DAN O no. She is just home for the holidays. Well Mr Julian, our roads part here. The station is thataway.

JULIAN I am obliged to you two gentlemen. Will I see you in Sandbourne tomorrow?

SOL I doubt it, sir. It is unpleasant for a high sort of man such as yourself to mix with the likes of us so we will not trouble you if we meet you. I hope you take that meaning right and take no offence, Mr Julian.

JULIAN And do you do the same with Picotee?

SOL O Lord, no. There's no getting rid of Picotee. The more in the rough we be, the more she'll stick to us. If we tell her she can't come with us she'll bide and fret about it until we are forced to take her.

JULIAN (laughing) It's been an enjoyable walk. Goodnight!

Scene 2.5 An inner room at the

Lodge

*Enter Mrs Chickereel (Ethelberta's mother),  
Ethelberta, Picotee, their brother Joey and  
sisters Georgina and Myrtle.*

ETHELBERTA I still think the plan I first proposed is the best. I am convinced it will not do to attempt to keep on the Lodge. If we are all together in town, I can look after you all much better than when you are far away from me down here.

MRS CHICKEREL Shall we not interfere with you - your plans for keeping up your connections?

ETHELBERTA Not nearly so much as by staying down here.

PICOTEE But if you let lodgings, won't the gentlemen and ladies know it?

ETHELBERTA I have thought of that and this is how I shall manage. In the first place if mother is there, the lodgings can be let in her name, all the bills will be receipted by her, and all tradesmen's orders will be given as from herself. Then we will take no English lodgers at all; we will advertise the rooms only in Continental newspapers as suitable for a French or German gentleman or two.

PICOTEE Then it is down to Gwendoline and Cornelia.

ETHELBERTA Yes. If Gwendoline is to be our cook she will have to give her notice to her present place as indeed will Cornelia so she can be housekeeper. There is no great rush. Christmas will do. If they cannot come then the whole plan will break down. The one vital condition is that all of us must be family members. When we put Joey in buttons he will do a good job at the door.

JOEY When Sol and Dan come to visit us they will have to enter through the back door.

ETHELBERTA Yes. They already know of my plan and are happy with it.

JOEY And father?

ETHELBERTA He can come in whatever door he chooses. He will be pleased we are all in London instead of down here.

PICOTEE And I shall not be wanted at all.

MRS CHICKEREL It is better if you stay where you are. Of course, you can come and visit us during your holidays.

PICOTEE (sorrowfully) I would much prefer to live in London. I *hate* being in Sandbourne now.

ETHELBERTA (severely) Nonsense. We are contriving how to live comfortably and it is by far best if you continue to work at the school. You used to be happy enough there.

*Picotee sighs but remains silent.*

#### Scene 2.6 A Large Public Hall

*Enter Ethelberta, Julian, Faith, Ladywell and Neigh. This is the interval of one of Ethelberta's performances.*

NEIGH Ladywell, how come this Mrs Petherwin came to think of such a queer trick as telling romances, after doing so well as a poet?

LADYWELL What? Don't you know? - everybody did, I thought.

NEIGH A mistake. I only came here because I believe I met her at Belmaine's last year and I thought her to be handsome and clever.

LADYWELL I imagine I know her better than you. I put the idea into her head as a pleasant way of adding to her fame. Depend upon it, dear Mrs Petherwin, I said during a pause in one of our dances, any public appearance of yours would be successful beyond description.

NEIGH O, I had no idea you knew her so well. Then it is through you she adopted this course?

LADYWELL Well not entirely. I could not say entirely. She had a vague idea and I reduced it to form.

NEIGH I should not mind knowing her better. I must get you to throw us together in some way. I had no idea you were such an old friend. You could do it, I suppose?

LADYWELL Really, I am afraid I may not have the opportunity of obliging you. I met her at Wyndway, you know where she was visiting Lady Petherwin. It was some time ago and I cannot say I have met her since.

NEIGH Or before?

LADYWELL Well no. I never did.

NEIGH Ladywell, if I had half your power of going to your imagination for facts, I would be the greatest painter in England.

LADYWELL Now, Neigh, that's too bad. But I do speak with some interest.

NEIGH In love with her? Smitten down? Done for?

LADYWELL Now,now. But I am thinking of getting her permission to use her face in a portrait I am planning.

NEIGH Dream on young fellow.

JULIAN Well, what do you think of her, Faith?

FAITH I like the quiet parts of the tale best, I think, but, of course, I am not a good judge of these things.

JULIAN I see that fellow Ladywell is here.

FAITH I wonder if she looks on this as a blessing or an affliction.

JULIAN I fear you are criticizing her just now but I don't wish to defend her.

FAITH I think you do, just a bit.

JULIAN No. I am indifferent about it all. Perhaps it would have been better for me if I had never seen her. I think you would like her.

FAITH I might but it is not a good idea. We live in such a simple way at present.

Scene 2.7 Ethelberta's House

*Julian knocks on the door of Ethelberta's house. It is opened by Joey.*

JULIAN Ah, Joseph. Are you here in office? Is your-

*Joey puts his finger to his mouth to indicate caution.*

JOEY Yes sir, Mrs Petherwin is my mistress. I'll see if she is at home, sir.

*He disappears and then returns inviting Julian in. He takes him to a room where Ethelberta is sitting. She gives Julian her hand.*

ETHELBERTA And how do you like London society?

JULIAN Pretty well, as far as I have seen it; to the surface of its front door.

ETHELBERTA You will find nothing to be alarmed at if you get inside.

JULIAN Oh no - of course not- except my own shortcomings. London society is made up of much more refined people than society anywhere else.

ETHELBERTA That's a very prevalent opinion. Sol and Dan are here doing some work.

JULIAN Is Mrs Chickerel living here as well?

ETHELBERTA Yes but confined to her room as usual. Two of my other sisters are also here. Gwendoline is my cook and Cornelia is my housemaid. My younger children, aged between five and eight, are here being educated by Emmeline but they are only receiving the rudiments of education.

JULIAN I understand the tale-telling has been one of the successes of the season.

ETHELBERTA Indeed it has but I am a little despondent because of the children. It is my duty to educate and provide for them. The grown up ones I cannot help much but the younger ones I can. I have two French lodgers for their sakes.

JULIAN The lodgers, of course, don't know the relationship between yourself and the rest of the people in the house?

ETHELBERTA Oh no, nor will they ever know unless I am discovered. If that happens then let it be. Life is a battle but only like a game of chess is a battle. Still enough about us, I do hope you will succeed Christopher.

JULIAN I never will if success means getting what one wants.

ETHELBERTA Why should you not get that?

JULIAN It has been forbidden to me.

ETHELBERTA (realising his meaning) If you were as bold as you are subtle, you would take a more cheerful view of the matter.

JULIAN (more cheerfully) I will instantly! Shall I test the truth of my cheerful view by asking you a question?

ETHELBERTA (also cheerfully) I deny you are capable of taking that view and until you prove you are, then no question is allowed.

JULIAN Ethelberta, you have my heart, my whole heart. You have had it ever since I first saw you.

ETHELBERTA You have all of me that you care to have and may keep it for life if you wish it. (A knock is heard on the door) Listen, surely there is a knock at the door.

*Joey appears.*

JOEY Please, Berta, Mr Ladywell has called and I have shown him into the library.

ETHELBERTA (turning to Christopher) Will you excuse me for a moment? I shall not be long.

*Ethelberta exits.*

*Julian walks up and down the room, obviously not too happy at Ladywell's appearance.*

*Ethelberta returns.*

ETHELBERTA I did not calculate upon being so long. But I was - longer than I expected.

JULIAN It seemed rather long but I don't mind.

ETHELBERTA I am glad of that.

JULIAN I have been pleased to meet you again but now I must wish you goodbye.

ETHELBERTA You are not vexed with me? Mr Ladywell is nobody, you know.

JULIAN Nobody?

ETHELBERTA Well not much I mean. The case is that I am sitting to him for a subject in which my face is to be

used - otherwise than as a portrait - and he called about it. He is a true artist.

*Julian makes no reply and exits. Joey brings a letter from Picotee, which Ethelberta reads. Joey exits.*

ETHELBERTA Great powers above - what worries do beset me ! What can possess Picotee so suddenly? - she used to like Sandbourne well enough! (She reads from the letter) I only wish you knew how dismal it is here, and how much I would give to come to London. (She puts the letter down) I have just enough time to write a reply before the post goes. I will tell her how nice Sandbourne is and let her know how much better it is for her to follow straight on the path she has chosen to follow.

*Ethelberta exits. There is a small silence and then Picotee appears at the front door, which is opened by Joey.*

PICOTEE Joey, don't tell Berta I am come. She has company, has she not?

JOEY Oh, no. Only Mr Julian. He's now quite one of the family.

PICOTEE Never mind. Can I go down along to the kitchen with you.

*They walk to another part of the stage.*

PICOTEE Does Mr Julian come to see her very often?

JOEY Oh, yes. He's a regular bore to me.

PICOTEE A regular what?

JOEY Bore! Ah, I forgot, you don't know our town words.

*The front door bell rings. Joey opens the door and Sol and Dan enter.*

DAN God bless my soul! It's Picotee. Well, I say. This is splendid.

SOL Picotee, what brings you here? (Continues without giving Picotee the chance to reply) Is anybody upstairs with Mrs Petherwin?

JOEY Mr Julian was up there just now but he may be gone. Berta always lets him slip out how he can, it not being necessary to let me know. Wait a minute - I'll see.

*Joey exits. Then Dan and Sol exit as well. Joey returns.*

JOEY Such a lark, Picotee. Berta's been courting her young man. Would you like to see how they carries on a bit?

PICOTEE Dearly I should.

*They exit and then reappear listening at the other side of a door through which are Ethelberta and Christopher, who are offstage.*

JOEY My, what's the matter?

PICOTEE If this is London, I don't like it at all!

JOEY Well - I never see such a girl- fainting all over the stairs for nothing in the world.

PICOTEE O - it will soon be gone - it is only indigestion.

JOEY Indigestion? Much you simple country people can know about that! Here people eat such great dinners and suppers they require clever physicians to carry them off.

*They continue listening.*

PICOTEE They are raising their voices.

JOEY You needn't be afraid. They won't fight. They busts out quarelling like this times and times again when they are being over-friendly but it soon gets sorted out. Ah I think he is leaving now.

PICOTEE I don't like listening like this.

JOEY O 'tis how we do all over the West End. 'Tis your ignorance of town life that makes you feel uneasy.

*They return to the room they were in before listening to Ethelberta and Christopher.*

PICOTEE Do you think Berta will be angry with me? How does she treat you?

JOEY Well, I can't complain. You see she's my own flesh and blood. But the wages are terribly low and barely pays for the tobacco I consume.

PICOTEE O Joey, you wicked Boy! If mother only knew you smoked!

JOEY L don't mind the wickedness so much as the smell. And Mrs Petherwin has got the nose for a fellow's clothes.

PICOTEE How much more you know of life than I do. But don't smoke Joey, that's a dear.

JOEY What can I do? Society has its rules and you have to do what the world does.

*Ethelberta enters. Picotee looks rather afraid.*

ETHELBERTA Ah, there you are, Picotee. I am glad to see you.

PICOTEE Yes, Berta. I have been thinking how much help I could be to you here. I could be governess to the children and be a lady's-maid to you.

ETHELBERTA I'll think about it. At least stay on for the time being.

*They all exit. Ethelberta and Picotee re-enter.*

PICOTEE Why don't you go out and get some fresh air?

ETHELBERTA I can hardly tell. I have been expecting someone.

PICOTEE When she comes I must run up to mother at once, must I not?

ETHELBERTA It is not a lady. It is Mr Julian. He is - I suppose- my lover, in plain English.

PICOTEE Ah!

ETHELBERTA Whom I am not going to marry until he gets rich.

PICOTEE Ah, how strange. If I had him -such a lover, I mean- I would marry him if he continued to be poor.

ETHELBERTA I don't doubt it, Picotee. But somebody in the family must take a practical view of affairs or else we shall all go to the dogs.

PICOTEE Do you love this Mr what's-his-name of yours?

ETHELBERTA Mr Julian? O, he's a very gentlemanly man. That is except when he is rude and ill-uses me and will not come and apologise.

PICOTEE If I had him - a lover- I would want him to come to me. When did you first get to care for him, dear Berta?

ETHELBERTA When I had seen him once or twice.

PICOTEE Goodness - how quick you were.

ETHELBERTA Yes. If I am in the mind for loving I am not to be hindered by the shortness of the acquaintanceship.

PICOTEE Nor me neither!

ETHELBERTA We don't need to know a man well in order to love him. That's only necessary when we want to leave off.

PICOTEE Oh, Berta! - you don't believe that!

ETHELBERTA If a woman did not invariably form an opinion of her choice before she has half seen him, and love him before she has half formed an opinion, there would be no tears and pining in the whole feminine world and poets would starve for want of a topic. Ah, well, we shall see.

*They both exit.*

Scene 2.8 A Street near the Hall  
where Ethelberta is story-telling

*Enter Ethelberta, having finished her  
performance.*

ETHELBERTA (to herself) I thought Christopher might have been here tonight but I have not seen him. Wait! Who is this approaching?

*Enter Ladywell. Julian is in the background  
unable to be seen by both Ethelberta and  
Ladywell.*

LADYWELL Allow me to bring you your note-book, Mrs Petherwin. I think you had forgotten it. I assure you nobody has handled it but myself.

ETHELBERTA My thanks to you, Mr Ladywell. I use it to look into between the parts, in case my memory should fail me. I remember I did lay it down, now you have reminded me.

LADYWELL Your triumph tonight was very great, and it was as much a triumph to me as to you. I cannot express my feeling- I cannot say half that I would - If I might only  
-

ETHELBERTA Thank you very much. Thank you for bringing my book, but I must go home now. I know that you will see that it is not necessary for us to be talking here.

*Julian exits.*

LADYWELL Yes. You are quite right. Blame me. I ought to have known better. But perhaps a man - well, I will say it - a lover without indiscretion is no lover at all. Circumspection and devotion are a contradiction in terms. I saw that, and hoped that I might speak without real harm.

ETHELBERTA (with a hint of sarcasm) You calculated how to be uncalculating, and are natural by art! But pray do not attend me further - it is not at all necessary or desirable. I must go now to meet my maid and go home.

*Ethelberta exits.*

LADYWELL (to himself) It was harsh! I was a fool but it

was harsh. Yet what man on earth likes a woman to show too great a readiness at first? She is right. She would be nothing without repulse!

*Ladywell exits.*

*Ethelberta re-enters with Picotee.*

PICOTEE What man was that?

ETHELBERTA O - a mere Mr Ladywell ; A painter of good family, to whom I have been sitting for what he calls an Idealization. He is a dreadful simpleton.

PICOTEE Why did you choose him?

ETHELBERTA I did not: he chose me. But his silliness of behaviour is a hopeful sign for the picture. I have seldom known a man cunning with his brush who was not simple with his tongue; or indeed, any skill in particular that was not allied to general stupidity.

PICOTEE Your own skill is not like that, is it Berta?

ETHELBERTA In men - in men. I don't mean in women. How childish you are!

*They continue walking until they reach home.  
They knock on the door, which is opened by Joey.*

JOEY Mr Julian left his card. He has forgotten you would be performing tonight. He particularly wished to speak to you.

*Joey exits.*

ETHELBERTA (to Picotee) Now won't I punish him for daring to stay away so long! It is as bad to show constancy in your manners as fickleness in your heart at such a time as this.

PICOTEE But I thought honesty was the best policy?

ETHELBERTA So it is, for the man's purpose. But don't you go believing in sayings, Picotee: they are all made by men, for their own advantages. Women who use public proverbs as a guide through events are those who have not ingenuity enough to make private ones as each event occurs. I will write a line to Mr Julian informing him that I do not think he should pay a visit to me for some time.

*Ethelberta and Picotee exit. Ladywell returns to the street and meets Neigh*

NEIGH Has anything happened? You don't seem in your usual mood tonight.

LADYWELL O, it is only that affair between us.

NEIGH Affair? Between you and whom?

LADYWELL Her and myself, of course. It will be in every fellow's mouth now, I suppose!

NEIGH But - not anything between yourself and Mrs Petherwin?

LADYWELL A mere nothing. But surely you started, Neigh, when you suspected it just this moment.

NEIGH No - you merely fancied that.

LADYWELL Did she not speak well tonight! You were in the room, I believe.

NEIGH Yes, I just turned in for half an hour. It seems that everybody does, so I thought I must. But I had no idea that you were feeble that way.

LADYWELL It is very kind of you, Neigh - upon my word it is - very kind; and, of course, I appreciate the deicacy which - which -

NEIGH What's kind?

LADYWELL I mean your well-intentioned plan for making me believe that nothing is known of this. But stories will of course get wind.

NEIGH Remember you are a rising man, Ladywell, whom some day the world will delight to honour.

LADYWELL Thank you for that, Neigh. Thank you sincerely.

NEIGH Not at all. It is merely justice to say it, and one must be generous to deserve thanks.

LADYWELL That's very nicely put and undeserved I am sure. And yet I need a word of that sometimes.

NEIGH Genius is proverbially modest.

LADYWELL Pray don't Neigh - I don't deserve it, indeed. Of course it is well meant in you to recognise any slight powers, but I don't deserve it. It is the misfortune of all children of art that they should be so dependent upon any scraps of praise they can pick up to help them along. But tell me, what would you do, Neigh?

NEIGH She has refused you, then?

LADYWELL Well - not positively refused me; but it is so near that a dull man couldn't tell the difference. I can hardly do so myself.

NEIGH (with an anxiety ill-concealed) How do you stand with her, then?

LADYWELL Off and on - neither one thing or the other. But I never shall be such a fool as to marry her.

NEIGH (taking a photograph of Ethelberta out of his pocket, looking at it, but not showing it to Ladywell)(To himself) Ah, my lady; if you only knew this, I should be snapped up like a snail! Not a minute's peace for me till I had married you. I wonder if I shall - I wonder.

*Ladywell and Neigh exit only to be replaced on stage by Julian and Faith walking in opposite directions.*

JULIAN What - Faith! you have not been out alone?

FAITH I have been to hear Mrs Petherwin's story-telling again.

JULIAN And walking all the way home through the streets at this time of night, I suppose.

FAITH Well, nobody molested me, either going or coming back.

JULIAN Faith, I gave you strict orders not to go into the streets after two o'clock in the day, and now here you are taking no notice of what I say at all!

FAITH The truth is, Kit, I wanted to see with my spectacles what this woman is really like, and I went without them last time. I slipped in behind and nobody saw me.

JULIAN I don't think much of her after what I have seen tonight.

FAITH Why? What is the matter?

JULIAN I thought I would call on her this afternoon but when I got there I was told she had left already for her performance. I went to the back of the Hall to catch a word with her afterwards but when I saw her she was talking to another man. I have come to the opinion a woman's affection is not worth having.

*Julian and Faith keep walking for a while and then exit.*

Scene 2.9 Ethelberta's House

*Enter Ethelberta and Picotee.*

PICOTEE Oh, Berta, you are back from the University Boat Race. did you enjoy the sight?

ETHELBERTA I scarcely know. We couldn't see at all from Mrs Belmaine's carriage, so two of us - very rashly - agreed to get out and be rowed across to the other side where the people were quite few. Well when we were halfway across the boatman declared he couldn't land on the other side because of the barges and we were tossed about in the middle of the river. I was sure I would be drowned. Eventually we returned to our bank but there were so many people we couldn't find our carriage. Mrs Belmaine sent a man to find us, which he did, but what a rude man he is. His name is Mr Neigh. Apparently he is a nephew of Mr Doncastle and he lives somewhere near Piccadilly and has some acres in the country but I don't know much about him.

PICOTEE A letter has arrived for you.

ETHELBERTA (picks up an envelope and opens it) It is from Mr Julian. (She reads it) What audacity! Here read it yourself. (hands letter to Picotee) It is very brief . He wants to come to see me but I have forbidden him to do so. In fact he is already on his way.

PICOTEE Where there's much love there's little ceremony, didn't you say so yourself.

ETHELBERTA And where there's little love, no ceremony at all. These manners of his are dreadful and I believe he will never improve.

PICOTEE (hopefully) It must make you care for him not at all.

ETHELBERTA I wouldn't say that. Remember he is a musician and he is not like ordinary men.

PICOTEE You forgive him very quickly and easily.

ETHELBERTA I hadn't finished, Picotee. If you continue to interrupt me then I won't tell you anything. I will write to him telling him not to come.

PICOTEE But he is already on his way.

ETHELBERTA Quite. But at least he will know my thoughts on the matter. I will give it to Joey to post. It takes two hours for a letter to go to Bloomsbury so it may reach him in time.

*Pause. The next day.*

ETHELBERTA He must have received my letter as he did not come last night.

*Joey brings in a letter, which Ethelberta opens.*

ETHELBERTA It is another letter from him.

*Joey departs.*

ETHELBERTA I will not see him! Why did he not call last night?

PICOTEE Because you told him not to.

ETHELBERTA Good gracious! As if a woman's word should be translated as literally as Homer. If all men took words as superficially as he does, we should die of decorum in shoals.

PICOTEE Ah Berta, how could you write a letter that you did not mean should be obeyed?

ETHELBERTA I did in a measure mean it, although I could have shown Christian forgiveness if it had not been. Never mind, I will not see him. I will lie down for a bit as I now have a headache. I fear I have made a mistake as Joey is bound to make a mess of things when he calls.

*Enter Joey.*

JOEY Mr Julian is here, Berta. He says he will wait.

ETHELBERTA You were not to ask him to wait.

JOEY I know that and I didn't. He's doing that out of his own head.

ETHELBERTA Then let Mr Julian wait by all means. Allow him to wait if he likes but tell him it is uncertain if I shall be able to see him.

*Exit Joey. A pause.*

ETHELBERTA I wonder if he's gone.

PICOTEE Shall we ask Joey? I have not heard the door close.

*Picotee calls Joey, who enters.*

PICOTEE Has he gone?

JOEY He's there just the same. He doesn't seem to be in any hurry.

PICOTEE What is he doing?

JOEY O, sometimes he looks at his watch and at other times he hums a tune. He says he doesn't mind waiting for a bit.

ETHELBERTA You must have made a mistake with the message.

JOEY No, not at all. I just said you may be engaged all evening or perhaps you wouldn't.

*Exit Joey.*

ETHELBERTA Picotee, you go down and talk to him. I am determined he shall not see me. You know him a little; you remember, when he came to the Lodge?

PICOTEE What must I say to him?

ETHELBERTA (after a pause) Try to find out if - if he is much grieved at not seeing me and let him know I will forgive him, Picotee.

PICOTEE Very well.

ETHELBERTA And Picotee -

PICOTEE Yes.

ETHELBERTA If he says he *must* see me then I think I will see him. But only if he says *must*: you remember that.

*Exit Ethelberta and Picotee.*

Scene 2.10 Another room in  
Ethelberta's house.

*Julian is already sitting in a chair. Picotee enters and approaches the back of the chair. It is rather dark.*

PICOTEE Mr Julian ! (she touches Christopher on the shoulder)

JULIAN (standing) Oh, you have come, thank you Berta. (He gets hold of Picotee's hand and kisses it passionately)

*Picotee gasps. Julian then realises it is Picotee, who has spoken to him.*

JULIAN How could you allow such an absurd thing to happen? You knew I might mistake you for Berta. I thought you were miles away at Sandbourne. But I see you are both playing a joke on me. Ha! ha!

PICOTEE O-O-O-O-! It is not done for a joke.

JULIAN Not done for a joke? Then never mind, Picotee. What was it done for, I wonder?

PICOTEE When you went away - went away from - Sandbourne

- I - I - I didn't know what to do, and then I ran away, and came here, and then Ethelberta - was angry with me; but she says I may stay; but she doesn't know - that I know you, and how we used to meet along the road every morning - and I am afraid to tell her - O, what shall I do!

JULIAN Never mind it. Where is your sister?

PICOTEE She wouldn't come down, unless she *must*. You have vexed her, and she has a headache besides that, and I came instead.

JULIAN So that I mightn't be wasted altogether. Well it's a strange business between the three of us. I have heard of one-sided love, and reciprocal love, and all sorts, but this is my first experience of concatenated affection. You follow me, I follow her and she follows - Heavens knows who!

PICOTEE Mr Ladywell.

JULIAN Good God, if I didn't think so.

PICOTEE No, no, no! I am not sure it is Mr Ladywell. That's altogether a mistake of mine!

JULIAN Ah yes, you want to screen her. Very sisterly, doubtless; but none of that will do for me. I am too old a bird by far - by very far! Now are you sure she does not love Ladywell?

PICOTEE Yes!

JULIAN Well, perhaps I blame her wrongly. She may have some little good faith - a woman has, here and there. How do you know she does not love Ladywell?

PICOTEE Because she would prefer Mr Neigh to him, any day.

JULIAN Ha!

PICOTEE No, no - you mistake, sir - she doesn't love either at all - Ethelberta doesn't. I meant she cannot love Mr Ladywell because he stands lower in her opinion than Mr Neigh, and him she certainly does not care for. She only loves you. If you only knew how true she is you wouldn't be suspicious about her, and I wish I had not come here - yes, I do!

JULIAN I cannot tell what to think of it. Perhaps I don't know much of this world after all, or what girls will do. But you don't excuse her to me, Picotee.

*This is all too much for Picotee, who sits in another chair and sobs. Meanwhile, the door opens and Ethelberta sees Julian and Picotee*

*sitting at opposite sides of the room. It dawns on Ethelberta, who is unseen by either of them that Picotee is in love with Julian. She departs. Shortly afterwards Julian exits. Ethelberta enters.*

ETHELBERTA I fear he has forgotten me - that's what it is.

PICOTEE O no, he has not.

ETHELBERTA I suppose he remembered you after the meeting at Anglebury.

PICOTEE Yes, he remembered me.

ETHELBERTA Did you tell me you had seen him before that time?

PICOTEE I had seen him at Sandbourne. I don't think I told you.

ETHELBERTA At whose house did you meet him?

PICOTEE At nobody's. I only saw him sometimes.

ETHELBERTA Picotee, I would rather be alone now, if you don't mind.

*Picotee departs in a distressed state. Shortly afterwards she knocks on the door.*

PICOTEE Berta, may I come in?

ETHELBERTA O yes.

*Enter Picotee.*

ETHELBERTA Has everything gone right with the house this evening?

PICOTEE Yes. Gwendoline went out just now to buy a few things and she is going to call round upon father when he has got his dinner cleared away.

ETHELBERTA I hope she will not stay and talk to the other servants. Some day she will let drop something or other before father can stop her.

PICOTEE (kneeling in front of Ethelberta) O Berta! I came in again to tell you something which I ought to have told you just now, and I have come to say it at once because I am afraid I shan't be able to tomorrow. Mr Julian was the young man I spoke to you about a long time ago and I should have told you all about him but I didn't because you said he was your young man too and I didn't know what to do because I thought it was wrong of me to love your young man and, Berta, he didn't mean me to love him at all

, it was all my doing. I didn't want to but it just happened. When I began to have these feelings for him I didn't know he belonged to you. If I had have known I would not have allowed him to meet me.

ETHELBERTA Meet you? You don't mean to say you used to meet him?

PICOTEE Yes but he could not help it. We used to meet on the road. And then I had to see him again so that is why I ran away from Sandbourne and came here. And then he mistook me for you.

ETHELBERTA O, well, it does not much matter. You ought not to have come to London but as you are here we will make the best of it. Perhaps it will end happily for you and for him. Who knows?

PICOTEE Then don't you want him, Berta?

ETHELBERTA O no, not at all! I would much rather he paid his addresses to you. We are just old friends and it is not at all likely we will see each other again! I shall certainly not see him unless you are present.

PICOTEE That will be very nice.

*Exit Picotee.*

*Enter Gwendoline.*

ETHELBERTA Is father very well?

GWENDOLINE Yes and he is going to call round when he has time.

ETHELBERTA I was just going to say something to you about family matters and Picotee but it can wait until tomorrow.

GWENDOLINE I have some chores to do.

*Exit Gwendoline.*

*Enter Mrs Chickereel.*

MRS CHICKEREL Berta, did you want to say something?

ETHELBERTA Yes: but nothing of importance, mother. I was thinking about Picotee and what would be the best thing to do--

MRS CHICKEREL Ah, well you may, Berta. I am so uneasy about this life you have led us into, and full of fear your plans may let us down. If they do, whatever will become of us? I know you are doing your best but I cannot help thinking coming to London was wild and rash and not thought about sufficiently before we came. We may all end up ruined.

ETHELBERTA O mother, I know all that so well. Don't depress me more than I am already. My only chance is in keeping in good spirits; and why don't you try to help me by taking a brighter view of things?

MRS CHICKEREL I know I ought to but I cannot. I do so wish I never let you tempt me and the children away from the Lodge. You are not to blame - it is I. I am much older than you, and ought to have known better than listen to such a scheme. This undertaking seems too big - the bills frighten me. I have never been used to such wild adventure and I can't sleep at night for fear that your tale-telling will go wrong and we shall all be exposed and shamed. A story-teller seems such an impossible castle-in-the-air sort of trade for getting a living by - I cannot think how you ever came to dream of such an unheard-of-thing.

ETHELBERTA But it is not a castle in the air and it does get a living.

MRS CHICKEREL Well, yes but it is still new. I am afraid it cannot last - that's what I fear. People will find you out as one of a family of servants and their pride will be stung at having gone to hear you. Then they will go no more and then what will happen to us all?

ETHELBERTA Well all I can say is that I will do my best. I wish you a goodnight now.

*Exit Ethelberta*

*There is a pause to indicate another day. Mrs Chickereel exits and Ethelberta enters looking at some bills. Picotee follows her silently.*

PICOTEE Berta, how silent you are. I don't think you know I am in the room.

ETHELBERTA I did not observe you. I am very much engaged: these bills have to be paid.

PICOTEE What, and we cannot pay them?

ETHELBERTA O yes I can pay them. The question is, how long will I be able to do it?

PICOTEE That is sad; and we are going on so nicely, too. It is not true, is it, that you have decided to leave off story-telling and not so many people come to hear you now?

ETHELBERTA I think I shall leave off.

PICOTEE And begin again next year?

ETHELBERTA That is very doubtful.

PICOTEE Why don't you travel to other towns and continue to tell your stories splendidly?

ETHELBERTA A man in my position might do that but I don't think I could. Perhaps it is time for me to make other plans to assure financial security, such as marriage.

PICOTEE Surely Berta you are not going to marry any stranger, who turns up?

ETHELBERTA I had no such intention.

PICOTEE You might marry Mr Ladywell.

ETHELBERTA If I do it will be in cold blood without a moment to prepare himself. Mother is worried we will be poor in London, which would be a horror.

PICOTEE Sometimes you are so gloomy, Berta. I can take in sewing and you can do translations. How much longer will this house be yours?

ETHELBERTA Two years. If I keep it longer I will have to pay rent of three hundred pounds a year.

PICOTEE I see. So you will want to marry high before that time is up?

*Exit Picotee. Enter Julian.*

JULIAN Ah, Ethelberta, I have called to tell you I am going to leave this part of England. I have applied to become the assistant organist at Melchester Cathedral and understand I will be successful through the interest of one of my father's friends.

ETHELBERTA I congratulate you.

JULIAN No, Ethelberta, it is not worth that. I did not originally mean to follow this course at all; but events seemed to point to it in the absence of a better.

ETHELBERTA I too am compelled to follow a course I did not originally mean to take.

JULIAN I know what you mean. In short, Ethelberta, I am not in a position to marry, nor can I discern when I shall be, and I feel it would be an injustice to ask you to be bound in any way to one lower and less talented than you. You cannot, from what you say, think it desirable that the engagement should continue. I have no right to ask you to be my betrothed, without having a near prospect of making you my wife.

ETHELBERTA It is unspeakably generous in you to put it all before me so nicely, Christopher. I think infinitely more of you for being so unreserved, especially since I too have been thinking much on the indefiniteness of the days to come. Let it be only that we shall see each other less. We will think of each other as friends if not definite lovers. When do you leave London?

JULIAN I hardly know. I suppose I shall not call here again.

*Enter Picotee silently.*

ETHELBERTA Come here, Picotee. Mr Julian is going away. He will not see us again for a long time. We are not thinking of marrying, Picotee. It is best that we do not.

JULIAN Perhaps it is. Let me now wish you goodbye. Of course you will always know where I am, and how to find me.

ETHELBERTA (as Christopher is leaving) Care for us both equally?

JULIAN (calling back) I will.

ETHELBERTA I think Picotee would like to correspond with Faith; don't you, Mr Julian?

JULIAN My sister would like that very much.

ETHELBERTA And you would too, Picotee?

PICOTEE O yes.

*Exit Ethelberta and Picotee. Julian re enters walking along the street, where he meets Faith.*

JULIAN So Faith, it is all over between me and Ethelberta. We did not quarrel this time. It is worse than quarrelling. We did not think it was of any use going on as we were any longer.

FAITH The subject is too large for me to take it all in at this time, Christopher. Talking of Ethelberta, I have just come from the Royal Academy. What do you think I saw? - Ethelberta - in the picture painted by Mr Ladywell.

JULIAN It is never hung?

FAITH Yes. The picture is of an Elizabethan knight and a lady, who, of course, is Ethelberta. I think the knight is Ladywell.

JULIAN No wonder I am dismissed! And yet she hates him!

Scene 2.11 The Royal Academy

*Enter Ethelberta (with catalogue in hand and dressed rather soberly), Sol and Dan.*

ETHELBERTA Now, we are coming near the picture which was partly painted from myself. And, Dan, when you see it, don't you exclaim Hullo or That's Berta to a T, or anything at all. It would not matter were it not dangerous

for me to be noticed here today. That is why I am wearing the dress of a respectable workman's relative and not my usual attire. I see several people who would notice me on the least provocation.

DAN Not a word. Don't you be afraid of that. I don't feel I am on my home ground today and won't do anything to cause an upset.

*Enter Man One and Man Two, unnoticed by the others. They speak to each other and can be heard by Ethelberta and her two brothers.*

MAN ONE Of course, Ladywell has painted some bad pictures but this perhaps is not quite in that category. I assume you know which lady's face he used in this painting?

MAN TWO Mrs Petherwin's, I hear.

MAN ONE Yes, Mrs Alfred Neigh, that's to be.

MAN TWO What, that elusive fellow caught at last?

MAN ONE So it appears. Though she herself is hardly so well secured as yet. But he takes the uncertainty as coolly as possible. I knew nothing about it until he introduced the subject as we were standing here on Monday and said in an off-hand way 'I mean to marry that lady'. 'Easily, I will have her if there are a hundred at her heels'. You will understand that was said quite in confidence.

MAN TWO Of course, of course.

*The two men slowly exit. Then Ethelberta, Sol and Dan exit.*

Scene 2.12 The Farnfield Estate.

*Enter Ethelberta and Picotee.*

ETHELBERTA So here we are, Picotee, at the Farnfield Estate. We must be careful we are not spotted.

PICOTEE Why have we come here, Berta?

ETHELBERTA I will tell you one day. It is the London season and doesn't look as if anybody is here at present.

*They hear the noise of a kennel of hounds.*

*Picotee holds Ethelberta tightly to her arm.*

ETHELBERTA We are close to a kennel of hounds. They cannot get out so there is no need to be afraid, Picotee. And over there are some poor horses, which are not well looked after and are probably here only to be killed for their food.

*Enter a Local Man.*

ETHELBERTA Could you tell me who owns this estate?

LOCAL MAN The owner is one of the name of Neigh. 'Tis a family which has made a large amount of money by the knacker business and tanning, though they be only sleeping partners now, and live like lords. Mr Neigh was going to make many improvements and build a mansion here. In fact he went so far as to have the grounds planted, and the roads marked out and the fish-pond made and christened it Fairfield Park but he did no more. He said as he would never have a wife why should he go to the trouble of building a house to put her in. I hear he is a terrible hater of women, particularly the lower class.

ETHELBERTA Indeed!

LOCAL MAN Yes, and since then he has let half his land to the Honourable Mr Mountclere, a brother of Lord Mountclere. Mr Mountclere wanted a spot for some kennels, as you can hear, and as the land is too poor for cropping Mr Neigh let him have it.

*Exit Local Man.*

PICOTEE Berta, why did we come here?

ETHELBERTA To see the nakedness of the land. It was a whim only, and as nothing will come of it, there is no point in explaining things to you.

*Exit Ethelberta and Picotee.*

Scene 2.13 Ethelberta's Drawing

Room

*Enter Ethelberta.*

ETHELBERTA (to herself) That was an interesting excursion. Neigh is handsome, grim-natured, rather wicked and an indifferentist, which I find rather interesting. However I feel we are too nearly cattle of the same colour for a union to take place between us.

*Enter Joey.*

JOEY Mr Neigh is here to see you, Ethelberta.

ETHELBERTA Mr Neigh? Oh, show him in.

*Enter Neigh.*

NEIGH Ethelberta, I have been intending to write a line to you but I felt I could not be sure of writing my meaning in a way which might please you. I am not bright at a letter - never was. The question I mean is one that I hope

you will be disposed to answer favourably, even though I may show the awkwardness of a fellow-person who has never put such a question before. Will you give me a word of encouragement - just a hope that I may not be unacceptable as a husband to you? Your talents are very great; and of course I know that I have nothing at all in that way. Still people are happy together sometimes in spite of such things. Will you say 'Yes' and settle it now?

ETHELBERTA I was not expecting you had come upon such an errand as this . I cannot say what you wish, Mr Neigh.

NEIGH Perhaps I have been too sudden and presumptuous. Yes, I know I have been that. As soon as I saw you I knew you came so near to my idea of what is desirable in a lady. The only obstacle I can see is your refusal to my request. I know I may be judged to be a man of inattentive habits but that will all change so please do not let your dislike to little matters influence you.

ETHELBERTA I would not indeed, but believe me there can be no discussion of marriage between us.

NEIGH If that is the case there can be no more I can add to what I have said already.

ETHELBERTA My affairs are too lengthy, intricate and unpleasant for me to explain to anybody at present. And that would be a necessary first step.

NEIGH Not at all . I would put my lawyer in touch with yours and they can sort all that out. All you need to do is to say 'I will' to me in that little church here at the end of the Crescent.

ETHELBERTA I am sorry to pain you, Mr Neigh - so sorry. But I cannot say them.

NEIGH Oh, there is no need to worry about paining me. Don't take that into consideration at all. But I did not expect you to leave me so entirely without help - to refuse me absolutely as far as words go - after what you did. If it had not been for that I should never have ventured to call.

ETHELBERTA What do you allude to? How have I acted?

NEIGH (brusquely) I wish my little place at Farnfield had been worthier of you. I wish I had known you were going there - I would have offered to drive you there myself. It is useless to build a house there yet.

ETHELBERTA Yes, I walked round.

NEIGH (slowly) I supposed by doing that you occasionally give me a little thought. How could I help doing so. It was you who encouraged me. Now, was it not natural - I put it to you?

ETHELBERTA (excitedly) It was through you in the first place that I did look into your grounds! It was your presumption that caused me to go there.

NEIGH I hope sincerely that I never said anything to disturb you?

ETHELBERTA Yes, you did - not to me but to somebody.

NEIGH What have I said to somebody that could be in the least objectionable to you?

ETHELBERTA You said - you said you meant to marry me - just as if I had no voice in the matter! And that annoyed me and made me go out of curiosity.

NEIGH Well I did say that. I felt that I must marry you, that we were predestined to marry ages ago, and I feel it still! You seem to regret your interest in Farnfield; but to me it is a charm, and has been ever since I heard of it.

ETHELBERTA If you only knew all!

NEIGH I do not wish to know more.

ETHELBERTA And would you marry any woman off-hand, without being thoroughly acquainted with her circumstances?

NEIGH I would marry a woman off-hand when that woman is you. I would make you mine this moment did I dare; or, to speak with absolute accuracy, within twenty-four hours. Do assent to it, dear Mrs Petherwin, and let me be sure of you for ever. I'll drive to Doctors' Common this minute and meet you tomorrow morning at nine o'clock in the church just below.

ETHELBERTA One whose inner life is almost unknown to you, and whom you have scarcely seen except at other peoples' houses!

NEIGH We know each other far better than we may think at first. We are not people to love in a hurry and I have not done so in this case. I know you are beautiful and talented. What more do I wish to know? Shall it be?

ETHELBERTA Certainly not tomorrow.

NEIGH I am entirely in your hands in that matter. I will not urge you to be precipitate. If I have done wrong forgive me.

ETHELBERTA I prize your friendship but it is not for me to marry now. You have convinced me of the goodness of your heart and freedom from unworthy suspicions. The best way I can convince you of the goodness of my heart is by asking you not to see me again in private.

NEIGH And do you refuse to think of me as - why do you treat me like that, after all?

ETHELBERTA (impatiently) I cannot explain, I cannot explain. I would and I would not - explain, I mean, not marry. I don't love anybody and don't have the heart left for beginning. I am interested in watching the progress of another man's career but ,I hasten to say, I do not intend to marry him. But I do not wish to speak of this anymore. Do not press me any more.

NEIGH Certainly I will not. But do consider me and my wishes. Tomorrow I believe I shall have the happiness of seeing you again.

*Exit Neigh.*

ETHELBERTA (to herself) How can he be blamed for his manner after knowing what I did?

*INTERVAL*

ACT 3Scene 3.1 Cripplegate Church

*Enter Neigh.*

*Enter Mr and Mrs Belmaine, Mrs Doncastle and Ethelberta. They do not see Neigh.*

MRS BELMAINE (to Mrs Doncastle) What a good idea for us all to see this wonderful church. I have also invited Mr Neigh and Mr Ladywell, who may well join us shortly.

MRS DONCASTLE I wish to go into the vestry to enquire about the marriage register of Oliver Cromwell, who was married here.

MRS BELMAINE What an interesting thing. Mr Belmaine, let us join Mrs Doncastle. Mrs Petherwin, do join us.

*Mr and Mrs Belmaine, Mrs Doncastle and Ethelberta exit.*

*Neigh moves centre stage.*

*Enter Ladywell.*

NEIGH Ah, here you are Ladywell. I had nearly given you up. My aunt said you would not care to come. They are all in the vestry.

LADYWELL Never mind them - don't interrupt them. The plain truth is that I have been very greatly disturbed in mind; and I could not appear earlier by reason of it. I had some doubt about coming at all.

NEIGH I am sorry to hear that.

LADYWELL Neigh, I might as well tell you straight. I have found a lady of my acquaintance has two strings to her bow or I am very much in error.

NEIGH What? Mrs Petherwin? But I thought your fancy with her was over long ago.

LADYWELL In a measure it is. But I tell you what you call a fancy is anything but a fancy with me. Neigh, I consider myself badly used by that woman.

NEIGH Badly used?

LADYWELL Well, I ought not to talk like that. All is fair in courtship, I suppose, now as ever. If I am beaten, then I am. But it is very provoking, after supposing matters to be going on smoothly, to find out that you are quite mistaken.

NEIGH I told you you were quite mistaken in supposing she cared for you.

LADYWELL (warmly) That is just the point I was not mistaken in. She did care for me, and I stood as well with her as any man could stand until this fellow came along, whoever he is. I sometimes feel so disturbed about it that I have a good mind to call upon her and ask her his name. Wouldn't you, Neigh? Will you accompany me?

NEIGH (earnestly) I would in a moment, but, but -- I strongly advise against it. It would be rash, you know, and rather unmannerly; and would only hurt her feelings.

LADYWELL Well, I am always ready to yield to a friend's arguments. A sneaking scamp, that's what he is. Why does he not show himself?

NEIGH (in a pronounced and exceptional tone, on purpose to give Ladywell a chance of suspecting) Don't you really know who he is?

*Neigh is holding a pocket-book from which falls to the ground a few rose-leaves.*

LADYWELL Rose-leaves, Neigh? I thought you did not care for flowers. What makes you assume yourself with sentimental objects usually fit only for women or painters, like me? Whatever makes you keep rose-leaves in your pocket-book?

NEIGH The best reason on earth. A woman gave them to me.

LADYWELL That proves nothing unless you she means a great deal to you.

NEIGH She does mean a great deal to me.

LADYWELL If I did not know you as a confirmed misogynist I should say that this is a very serious matter.

NEIGH (quietly) It is serious. The probability is that I will marry the woman who gave me these. Anyway, I have asked her the question and she has not altogether said no.

LADYWELL (heartily) I am glad to hear it, Neigh. I am glad to hear that your star is higher than mine.

*The party return from the vestry.*

LADYWELL (to Neigh) Mrs Petherwin here!

NEIGH (to Ladywell awkwardly) I forgot to tell you. Mrs Petherwin was to come with us.

ETHELBERTA (approaching Ladywell) I did not see you before this moment. We had been thinking you would not come.

*Ladywell looks pale. He has noticed the stem of a rose being worn by Ethelberta.*

ETHELBERTA (to Ladywell) Yes, I have lost my pretty rose. This may as well go now. (She removes the rose and flings it on the floor)

*Ladywell gracefully leaves Neigh and Ethelberta and joins Mr and Mrs Belmaine.*

NEIGH (to Ethelberta) What! - going on like that! After being compromised together, why don't you close with me? Ladywell knows all: I had already told him the rose leaves were given me by my intended wife. Nevertheless I do say I am sincerely sorry to have offended you by exceeding my privileges. I will not do so again.

ETHELBERTA Don't say privileges. You have none.

NEIGH I am sorry that I thought otherwise. Others will think so too, especially Ladywell. It would have been better to have let him know more gently.

ETHELBERTA There is nothing to make known. I don't understand.

*Ethelberta walks away from Neigh towards Mrs Doncastle, who is standing on her own.*

MRS DONCASTLE Oh, Mrs Petherwin. I have not seen much of you today. A friend of my husband's, Lord Mountclere, is very keen to meet you. He is a great admirer of your poems and even more of your story-telling abilities. When will you dine with us to meet him? I know you will like him. Will Thursday be convenient?

ETHELBERTA (after a period of reflection) I shall have great pleasure at meeting a friend of yours and am pleased to accept your kind invitation.

### Scene 3.2 Ethelberta's House

*Enter Joey (looking dejected) and Picotee.*

PICOTEE Well, what's the matter?

JOEY O - nothing.

PICOTEE Nothing? How can you say so?

JOEY The world's a holler mockery -- that's what I say.

PICOTEE (sighing) Yes, so it is, to some; but not to you.

JOEY Don't talk argument, Picotee. I only hope you'll never feel what I feel now. If it wasn't for my duties here I would enlist but I have to stay as I'm the only responsible man-servant here.

PICOTEE Has anybody been beating you?

JOEY Beating! As if anybody could beat beat me! No, it is a madness. I am in love.

PICOTEE (reprovingly) Oh, Joey you are only a boy! (but with interest) Tell me, Joey. Who is it?

JOEY Only a boy! That's your old-fashioned attitude. I am in love but have a rival to contend with.

PICOTEE But who is the young woman, Joey?

JOEY Mrs Doncastle's new maid. I was at father's the other night and saw her.

PICOTEE But Joey. Mrs Picotee's new maid is at least twelve years older than you.

JOEY What is that to a man in love? Pooh. I wish you would leave me Picotee. I want to be alone.

*They depart. Picotee re-enters with Ethelberta.*

ETHELBERTA (angrily) What a fearful nuisance that boy is becoming. Does father know anything of this?

PICOTEE I think not. O no, he cannot; he would not allow such a thing. She is much older than Joey.

ETHELBERTA I should think he wouldn't allow it. I must ensure there is absolutely no friendliness between our family and the Doncastle servants. It is far too dangerous. I shall speak to father about it shortly. I am to dine there on Thursday.

PICOTEE To dine there, Berta? Well that is a strange thing. Father will be close to you.

ETHELBERTA (quietly) Yes.

PICOTEE How I should like to see you sitting at a grand dinner-table among lordly dishes and shining people and father about the room unnoticed! Berta, I have never seen a dinner-party in my life and father promised me I should not long ago.

ETHELBERTA (gently) How will he be able to arrange that, my dear child?

PICOTEE Father says that for an hour and a half the guests are quite fixed in the dining-room and as unlikely to move as if they were trees planted round the table. Do let me go and see you, Berta?

ETHELBERTA I will discuss it with father and let you know what he says when I get home later tonight.

*Exit Ethelberta and Picotee.*

Scene 3.3 Mr Chickerel's Room

*Enter Ethelberta and Mr Chickerel*

ETHELBERTA Can you sit with me a few minutes, father?

MR CHICKEREL Yes, for a quarter of an hour or so. Has anything happened? I thought it might be Picotee.

ETHELBERTA No. All is well. However, there are a couple of matters which are troubling me. The first is that stupid boy Joey has become entangled in some way with the lady's-maid here. A ridiculous affair it must be but it is too serious for me to treat lightly. She will worm everything out of him if we are not careful.

MR CHICKEREL God bless my soul! She is old enough to be his mother. I have never heard a sound of it until now. What do you propose to do about it?

ETHELBERTA I have hardly thought. I cannot tell at all. But we must consider what to do. The other thing is I am to dine here tomorrow.

MR CHICKEREL You dining here? Dear me, that's news. We are indeed having a dinner-party here then but I was not aware you know my people.

ETHELBERTA I have accepted the invitation. But if you think I should stay away I will manage to get out of it somehow.

MR CHICKEREL I don't see why you may not come. Of course you will take no notice of me, nor shall I of you. It is to be rather a large party. Lord What's-his-name is coming and several good people.

ETHELBERTA Yes, he is coming to meet me, it appears. But father, how wrong it would be for me to come close to you and not recognize you. I don't like it. How I wish you could have given up being in service by now. We would be able to manage.

MR CHICKEREL (crossly) Nonsense, nonsense. There is not the least reason why I should give up. I want to save a little money first. If you don't like me as I am you must stay away from me. I have been in service for more than thirty-seven years. It is an honourable calling and I do not want to have to rely on your earnings. After all the old woman left you very little and you must need all your earnings yourself.

ETHELBERTA I wish I could get a living by some simple means and drop the name of Petherwin and revert to Berta Chickerel living in a green cottage as we used to do when

I was small. I am miserable to a pitiable degree sometimes and sink into regrets that I ever fell into such a groove as this. I don't like covert deeds, such as coming here tonight, and many are necessary with me from time to time.

MR CHICKEREL You chose your course. You have begun to fly high and you had better keep there.

ETHELBERTA And to do that there is only one way. That way is marriage.

MR CHICKEREL Marriage? Who are you going to marry?

ETHELBERTA God knows. Perhaps Lord Mountclere. Stranger things have happened.

MR CHICKEREL Yes, so they have though not many wretcheder things. I would sooner see you in your grave, Ethelberta, than Lord Mountclere's wife, or the wife of any like him, great as that honour would be.

ETHELBERTA Of course that was only something to say; I don't know the man even.

MR CHICKEREL I know his valet. However marry who you may, and I hope you'll be happy, my dear girl. You would be still more divided in that event but when your mother and I are dead it will make little difference.

ETHELBERTA (placing her hand on his shoulder) (cheerfully) Now, father, don't despond. All will be well. Leave all to me. I am a rare hand at contrivances.

MR CHICKEREL You are indeed, Berta. It seems to me quite wonderful that we should be living so near together and nobody suspect the relationship, because of the precautions you have taken.

ETHELBERTA Yet the precautions were rather Lady Petherwin's than mine, as you know. Consider how she kept me abroad. My marriage being so secret made it easy to cut off all traces, unless anybody had made it a special business to search for them.

*They walk to the side of the stage. Enter Mrs Menlove.*

MRS MENLOVE Is that you, Mr Chickerel?

MR CHICKEREL Yes.

MRS MENLOVE (tossing a quantity of wearing apparel into Mr Chickerel's arms) Please take them upstairs for me - I am late.

*MRS MENLOVE exits hurriedly.*

*Mr Chickereel and Ethelberta resume their original positions.*

ETHELBERTA Good heavens, what does that mean?

MR CHICKEREL That's the new lady's-maid just come in from an evening walk. She is that young scamp's sweetheart if what you tell me is true. I don't yet know what her character is but she runs neck and neck with time closer than any woman I ever met. She often stays out late at night.

ETHELBERTA What an extraordinary woman. A perfect Cinderella. Fancy Joey getting desperate about a woman like that. No doubt she has just come in from meeting him.

MR CHICKEREL No doubt. A blockhead. That's his taste is it? I'll soon see if I can cure his taste if it inclines towards Mrs Menlove.

ETHELBERTA Mrs what?

MR CHICKEREL Menlove. That's her name. She came about a fortnight ago.

ETHELBERTA And is that Menlove - what shall we do! The idea of the boy singling her out - why it is ruin to him, to me, to us all. She was Lady Petherwin's maid for some three months but left because of her flightiness. I don't think she learned anything of my history but we did speak to each other occasionally. She was one of the cleverest and lightest-handed women we ever had about us. When she came my hair was rather weak but she worked on it and returned it to splendid condition.

MR CHICKEREL I have snubbed her a few times already as I don't care for her style.

ETHELBERTA This is all simply dreadful. Joey is shrewd and trustworthy. But in the hands of such a woman as that! I suppose she did not recognize me.

MR CHICKEREL There was no chance of that in the dark.

ETHELBERTA Well I can't do anything about it. I cannot manage Joey at all.

MR CHICKEREL I will see if I can. Courting at his age, indeed - whatever shall we hear next. Let me escort you out until we find a cab to take you home.

*Exit Ethelberta and Mr Chickereel.*

Scene 3.4 Ethelberta's DressingRoom*Picotee is helping Ethelberta to dress.*

ETHELBERTA We will have a change soon - we will go out of town for a few days. It will do good in many ways. A week or two at Knollsea will see us right.

PICOTEE Oh! how charming! Why Knollsea?

ETHELBERTA Because of aunt's letter from Rouen. Have you seen it?

PICOTEE I did not read it through.

ETHELBERTA She wants us to get a copy of the register of her baptism. She is not quite sure in which exact parish they were living in or about Knollsea when she was born. Mother, being a year younger cannot tell, of course. I shall be pleased to get away from here for a while. Aunt invites us to go to Rouen afterwards but I don't think there will be time for that.

*Ethelberta has finished dressing.*

ETHELBERTA (as she leaves Picotee) Picotee, if you still want to come to see the procession you may but be careful when you are speaking to Menlove.

Scene 3.5 Mr Doncastle's House*Ethelberta is speaking quietly to Mr Chickereel before she enters the main room.*

MR CHICKEREL In excellent time. About half of them are come.

ETHELBERTA Mr Neigh?

MR CHICKEREL Not yet. He is coming.

ETHELBERTA Lord Mountclere?

MR CHICKEREL Yes. He came absurdly early; ten minutes before anybody else. And he's as nervous as a boy.

ETHELBERTA Father, let Picotee see me at dinner if you can. She is very anxious to look at me. She will be here directly.

*Ethelberta enters the main room. Meanwhile Picotee enters the house-keepers room, which is just off the main room. She is met by Menlove.*

MENLOVE Are you Miss Chickereel?

PICOTEE Yes.

MENLOVE I hear you have come to visit your father and would like to look at the company going to dinner. Well, they are not much to see, you know, but you are welcome to have a look. Come with me.

*They depart and are next seen hiding on a balustrade overlooking the main room.*

MENLOVE No need to be timid. You will never be seen and anyway we are all independent here. It's not like the country. No slaves here. Ah, here they come.

*The guests arrive for dinner. There is no need for the guests to be seen on stage.*

PICOTEE There she is! there she is! How lovely she looks, does she not?

MENLOVE Who?

PICOTEE My dear mistress. There she is on Mr Doncastle's arm. Who is that funny old man the lady is helping along?

MENLOVE He is our honoured guest. Lord Mountclere. Mrs Doncastle will have him all through dinner and then he will devote himself to Mrs Petherwin, your 'dear mistress'. He keeps looking at her and no doubt thinking it is a nuisance he is not with her now.

PICOTEE Oh, there's my father. He is taking some wine to my mistress.

MENLOVE You seem mightily concerned about your mistress. Do you want to see if you have dressed her properly?

PICOTEE Partly. And I like her, too. She is very kind to me.

MENLOVE I have to go for a while. You are welcome to stay here.

*Exit Menlove.*

*Not long afterwards Menlove returns.*

MENLOVE The dashing widow looks very well, does she not? I see she is speaking to both Mr Doncastle and Lord Mountclere. She will do some damage here tonight you will find. How long have you been with her?

PICOTEE O, a long time - I mean rather a short time.

MENLOVE I know her well enough. I was her maid once, or rather, her mother-in-law's, but that was well before you knew her. I did not by any means find her so lovable as you seem to think her when I had to do with her at close quarters. An awful flirt - awful. Don't you find her so.

PICOTEE I don't know.

MENLOVE If you don't yet you will know.

*Enter Mr Chickereel.*

MR CHICKEREL (to Picotee) Picotee, it is time to go home now.

*Exit Picotee and Mr Chickereel without saying a word to Menlove.*

Scene 3.6 Ethelberta's House

*Enter Ethelberta and Picotee.*

PICOTEE I am so sorry I was asleep when you came home last night, Berta. I was so anxious to tell you something but fell asleep. Did you see me at all?

ETHELBERTA Never once. I had the impression you were there by the look on father's face but I did not see you. Were you careful what you said and did you see Mrs Menlove?

PICOTEE I saw her and talked to her. I am certain she suspected nothing. I enjoyed myself very much and there was no risk at all.

ETHELBERTA I am glad it is no worse news. However, you must not go there again.

PICOTEE It was a good thing I did go. I'll tell you why when you tell me what happened to you.

ETHELBERTA Nothing of importance happened to me.

PICOTEE I expect you got to know the lord you were to meet?

ETHELBERTA O yes - Lord Mountclere.

PICOTEE And it's dreadful how fond he is of you - quite ridiculously taken up with you - I saw that well enough. Such an old man too. I wouldn't have him for the world!

ETHELBERTA Don't jump at conclusions so absurdly, Picotee. Why wouldn't you have him for the world?

PICOTEE Because he is old enough to be my grandfather and yours as well.

ETHELBERTA Indeed he is not; he is only middle aged.

PICOTEE O Berta ! Sixty-five at least!

ETHELBERTA He may or may not be that. If he is then he is not old. He is so entertaining that one forgets all about age in his company.

PICOTEE He laughs like this. Hee-hee-hee.

ETHELBERTA (wanting to change the subject) A very odd thing occurred. I was saying to Mr Neigh that we are going to spend a few days at Knollsea and Lord Mountclere overheard. He said he would be nearby at Enckworth Court studying Corvsgate Castle with the Imperial Archaeological Association. He hoped I would be able to attend. Now, not for his sake, but I would find this visit very interesting but am not sure if I should go alone. Now, a question for you Picotee, how would you like me to marry Mr Neigh? He has asked me to marry him.

PICOTEE I should not like him for you at all. I would rather you had Mr Ladywell.

ETHELBERTA O, don't name him.

PICOTEE I wouldn't have Mr Neigh at any price. He has told people of our escapade to his estate.

ETHELBERTA Then I will never marry him. That settles it. You need not think anymore of it, Picotee. He is a man who loves with his eyes but the rest of him has no such feelings.

PICOTEE That theory also applies to Lord Mountclere according to my view.

ETHELBERTA No. You are wrong there, Picotee. We will go to Knollsea and when we are there I shall visit Corvsgate Castle when the meeting is taking place.

Scene 3.7 A Room in Enckworth

Court

*Enter Lord Mountclere and his valet Tipman.*

MOUNTCLERE Are you sure the report is true?

TIPMAN I am positive, my lord. But it is not a report as it is a secret shared only by myself and Mrs Doncastle's maid.

MOUNTCLERE H'm - h'm; the daughter of a butler. Does Mrs Doncastle know of this yet, or Mr Neigh, or any of their friends?

TIPMAN No, my lord.

MOUNTCLERE You are quite positive?

TIPMAN Quite positive. It was, by accident, that Mrs Menlove named the matter to me, and I told her it might be much to her advantage if she took particular care it should go no further.

MOUNTCLERE Mrs Menlove! Who's she?

TIPMAN The lady's maid at Mrs Doncastle's my lord.

MOUNTCLERE O, ah--- of course. You may leave now, Tipman.

*Exit Tipman, the valet.*

MOUNTCLERE (to himself) A clever little puss, to hoodwink us all like this - hee hee!. Her education - how finished; and her beauty- so seldom that I meet such a woman. Cut down my elms to please a butler's daughter - what a joke - certainly a good joke! To interest me in her on the right side instead of the wrong was strange. But it can be made to change sides - hee-hee! it can be made to change sides. Tipman!

*Enter TIPMAN.*

MOUNTCLERE Will you take care that that piece of gossip you mentioned to me is not repeated in this house? I strongly disapprove of talebearing of any sort and wish to hear no more of this. Such stories are never true. Answer me -do you hear? Such stories are never true.

TIPMAN I beg pardon, but I think your lordship will find this one is true.

MOUNTCLERE Then where did she get her manners and education? Do you know?

TIPMAN I do not, my lord. I suppose she picked them up by her wits.

MOUNTCLERE (impatiently) Never mind what you suppose. Whenever I ask a question of you tell me what you know and no more.

TIPMAN Quite so, my lord. I beg your lordship's pardon for supposing.

MOUNTCLERE H'm - h'm. Have the fashion books and plates arrived yet?

TIPMAN *Le Follet* has, my lord; but not the others.

MOUNTCLERE Let me have it at once. Always bring it to me at once. Are there any handsome ones this time?

*Tipman fetches the paper and gives it to Mountclere.*

TIPMAN They are much the same class of female as usual, I think, my lord.

MOUNTCLERE (looking through the paper) Yes, they are. Yet they are very well: that one with her shoulder turned is pure and charming - the brown-haired one will pass. All very harmless and innocent, but without character; no

soul, or inspiration or eloquence of eye. What an eye was hers! There is not a girl among them so beautiful.. Tipman! Come and take it away. I don't think I will subscribe to these papers any longer - how long have I subscribed? Never mind - I take no interest in these things, and I suppose I must give them up. Tell me Tipman, do you think I am an old man?

TIPMAN An old man in one sense - old in a young man's sense, but not in a house of parliament or historical sense. Just a little oldish, my lord.

MOUNTCLERE I may be an old man in one sense or in another sense in your mind but there are older men than me.

TIPMAN Yes, so there are, my lord.

MOUNTCLERE People may call me what they please and you may be impertinent enough to repeat to me what they say, but let me tell you I am not a very old man after all. I am not an old man.

TIPMAN Old in knowledge of the world I meant, my lord, not in years.

MOUNTCLERE Well yes. Experience of course I cannot be without. And I like what is beautiful. Tipman, you must go to Knollsea. Don't send anybody else you must go yourself as I do not wish anyone else to become involved in this matter. Find out when the steambot for Cherbourg starts and then I shall want you to send Taylor to me. I wish Captain Strong to bring the *Fawn* round into Knollsea Bay. Next week I may want you to go to Cherbourg in the yacht with me - if the Channel is pretty calm - and then perhaps to Rouen and Paris.

TIPMAN Very good, my lord.

MOUNTCLERE Meanwhile I recommend that you and Mrs Menlove repeat nothing you may have heard concerning the lady you just now spoke of. Here is a slight present for you and Mrs Menlove (gives Tipman some money).

TIPMAN Your lordship may be sure we will not.

*Exit Mountclere and Tipman.*

Scene 3.8 The English Channel -

Normandy

*Enter Ethelberta and Cornelia, who are on the steamer Speedwell on the way to Cherbourg. A member of the crew enters.*

ETHELBERTA (to crew member - Cornelia is standing some way apart) I see there is a yacht sailing quite close to us and going in the same direction. Do you know whose yacht that is?

CREW MEMBER That is *The Fawn* Miss. It belongs to Lord Mountclere.

ETHELBERTA Lord Mountclere's?

CREW MEMBER Yes - a nobleman of this neighbourhood. But he don't do so much yachting as he used to in his younger days. I believe he's aboard this morning, however.

*Ethelberta walks over to Cornelia.*

ETHELBERTA The man who handed us on board - didn't I see him speaking to you this morning?

CORNELIA Oh, yes. He asked if my mistress is the popular Mrs Petherwin.

ETHELBERTA And you told him, I suppose?

CORNELIA Yes.

ETHELBERTA What made you do that, Cornelia?

CORNELIA Well, when I went through the toll-gate such a nice gentleman offered to help me take my bags to the pier. As we were walking he asked me if I was Mrs Petherwin's maid and I said I am. He and the crew member met and were having a chat so having told one of them it was no use denying it to the other.

ETHELBERTA Who was this gentlemanly person?

CORNELIA I asked the crew member that and he told me he was one of Lord Mountclere's upper servants. I knew then there was no harm in having been civil to him. He is well-mannered and talks splendid language.

ETHELBERTA That yacht over there is Lord Mountclere's property and I suspect you may meet the gentleman again. Be careful what you say to him.

*Exit Cornelia and the Crew Member. Ethelberta remains and sits on a chair.*

ETHELBERTA (to herself) Oh, I forgot about the letter I received this morning just as we were leaving.

*Ethelberta takes the letter from her bag and reads some of it aloud.*

ETHELBERTA (to herself) I have something to tell you, which is not quite satisfactory. Do not be alarmed. The other day I followed Menlove, when she went out. Sure enough fairly soon after she left the house our Joe appears, smoking a cigar. Menlove sensing someone was near went to move away but Joe said 'don't worry it's only the old man'. Being very annoyed with them both I gave him

some smart cuts across the shoulders with my cane and told him to go home, which he did with a flea in his ear. I believe I have cured his courting tricks for some little time. Menlove then walked by me very coolly but I told her she ought to be served in the same way. She was just going to argue with me when I told her I had better things to do than argue with a woman of her character at that time in the evening. She followed me home and marched into the pantry and told me I had better be careful in calling her a bad character. She then mentioned my stuck-up daughter 'a daw in eagle's plumes' so I suspect Joe has told her about our family situation. Hopefully she will do no serious damage but I will let you know if anything worrying happens.

*Ethelberta replaces the letter and thinks awhile before Cornelia returns.*

ETHELBERTA (to Cornelia) Now we are at Cherbourg I imagine we may well meet Lord Mountclere. Tomorrow morning we have a train journey to go on.

*Exit Ethelberta and Cornelia.*

*They return on a train. Ethelberta has a first-class ticket and Cornelia a second-class one, as she is again pretending to be Ethelberta's maid. So they are sitting in different parts of the train.*

*Enter Lord Mountclere.*

ETHELBERTA (without surprise) I saw you some time ago; what a singular coincidence.

MOUNTCLERE A charming one. Perhaps we must not call it coincidence entirely. My journey, which I have contemplated for some time, was not fixed this week altogether without a thought of your presence on the road. Do you go far today?

ETHELBERTA As far as Caen.

MOUNTCLERE Ah, that is the end of my day's journey, too.

*Mountclere sits in a seat some distance from Ethelberta. Cornelia sits apart from Ethelberta.*

*After a while they all leave the train at Caen.*

ETHELBERTA (to Mountclere) I now have to catch another train to Rouen.

MOUNTCLERE So do I.

*They both get on another train but do not sit with each other. Cornelia also gets on the train but sits some distance from the others. When they arrive at Rouen they all leave the train.*

ETHELBERTA (to Mountclere) Tomorrow afternoon I am going to Paris.

*They depart to go to their respective hotels.*

Scene 3.9 In Ethelberta's Hotel

the next morning

*A letter has arrived from Ethelberta's mother.*

ETHELBERTA (to herself) What does Mother have to say. Ah, Menlove has wormed everything out of poor Joey. She has had another quarrel with Father and is threatening to expose us to Mrs Doncastle and all my friends. I think the only answer for you is to marry. Ladywell called just now and I have given him your address in Rouen. Don't refuse this time.

O this false position! - it is ruining your nature, my too thoughtful mother! But I will not accept any of them. I'll brazen it out.

*Ethelberta throws the letter down and picks it up to read again.*

ETHELBERTA I must decide to do something!

*ETHELBERTA puts on her coat and leaves.*

*Enter Ethelberta and is seen walking. She is just about to enter the cathedral when she meets Lord Mountclere, who had entered the stage and walked towards her.*

ETHELBERTA I am about to ascend to the parapets of the cathedral.

MOUNTCLERE I should be delighted to accompany you.

*They leave the stage only to re-enter having climbed the steps.*

The prospect will be very lovely from this point when the fog has blown off. The air is clearing already; I fancy I saw a sunbeam or two.

ETHELBERTA It will be lovelier above. Let us go to the platform at the base of the spire and wait for a view there.

MOUNTCLERE With all my heart.

*They move to another part of the stage.*

MOUNTCLERE (breathing with some difficulty) Is your ambition satisfied now? I recollect going to the top some years ago and it did not occur to me as being a thing worth doing a second time. And there was no fog then, either.

ETHELBERTA O, it is one of the most splendid things a person can do! The fog is going fast and everybody with the least artistic feeling in the direction of bird's-eye views makes the ascent every time of coming here.

MOUNTCLERE Of course, of course. And I am only too happy to go to any height with you.

ETHELBERTA Since you so kindly offer, we will go to the very top of the spire - up through the fog and into the sunshine.

*They exit and re-enter (at the top).*

MOUNTCLERE That was some climb. I am wondering why the person we have just met coming down said there were only fifty-five steps to go when in fact it must have been some two hundred.

ETHELBERTA Perhaps it was to encourage us to go further. (*It is still foggy. A short pause*) How extraordinary this is. It is sky above, below, everywhere. It does not look as if this fog is going to clear soon. We have lost our labour; there is no prospect for you after all, Lord Mountclere. Listen; I hear sounds from the town: people's voices and carts and dogs and the noise of a railway train. Shall we now descend and own ourselves disappointed?

MOUNTCLERE Whenever you choose.

*They exit and then re-enter on the way down.  
Neigh's voice is heard.*

ETHELBERTA Please wait a minute! Let us go round the other side for a few moments.

*They exit. Neigh enters on the way up and then exits.*

*Ethelberta and Mountclere return and continue on their way down until they reach the bottom.*

MOUNTCLERE (looking up) It looks as if there is an English gentleman up there. I wonder who that is? It looks as if he is searching for someone.

ETHELBERTA It is only Mr Neigh. He told me he was coming here. I believe he is waiting for an interview with me.

MOUNTCLERE H'm

ETHELBERTA Business - only business.

MOUNTCLERE Shall I leave you? Perhaps the business is important- most important.

ETHELBERTA Unfortunately it is.

MOUNTCLERE You must forgive me this once: I cannot help - will you give me permission to make a difficult remark?

ETHELBERTA With pleasure.

MOUNTCLERE Well, then, the business I meant was - an engagement to be married.

ETHELBERTA So did I.

MOUNTCLERE But how does he know - dear me, dear me! I beg pardon.

ETHELBERTA There is no engagement as yet.

MOUNTCLERE Then may I have a few words in private?

ETHELBERTA Not now - not today. Believe me, Lord Mountclere, you are mistaken in many things. I mean, you think more of me than you ought. A time will come when you will despise me for this day's work, and it is madness in you to go further.

MOUNTCLERE Well, well, I'll be responsible for the madness. I know you to be -- a famous woman at all events; and that's enough. I would say more, but I cannot here. May I call upon you?

ETHELBERTA Not now.

MOUNTCLERE When shall I?

ETHELBERTA If you must, let it be a month hence at my house in town. Yes, call upon us then and I will tell you everything that may remain to be told, if you should be inclined to listen. A rumour is afloat which will undeceive you in much, and depress me to death. And now I will walk back: pray excuse me.

*Exit Ethelberta.*

MOUNTCLERE (to himself) Upon my life I've a good mind! Upon my life I have! I must make a straightforward thing of it, and at once; or he will have her. But he shall not, and I will!

Scene 3.10 In Ethelberta's Hotel a short while later

*Enter Ethelberta's Aunt, M. Moulin. She sits down at a desk/table to do the hotel's accounts.*

*Enter Ethelberta.*

ETHELBERTA Has a gentleman called Mr Neigh been here?

M.MOULIN O yes - I think it is Neigh - there's a card upstairs. I told him you were alone at the cathedral, and I believe he walked that way. Besides that one, another has come for you - a Mr Ladywell and he is waiting.

ETHELBERTA Not for me?

M. MOULIN Yes, indeed. I thought he seemed so anxious, under a sort of assumed calmness, that I recommended him to remain until you came in.

ETHELBERTA Goodness, aunt; why did you?

M.MOULIN I thought he had some good reason for seeing you. Are these men intruders, then?

ETHELBERTA O no - a woman who attempts a public career must expect to be treated as public property: what would be an intrusion on a domiciled gentlewoman is a tribute to me. You cannot have celebrity and sex-privilege both.

*M. Moulin exits as Ladywell appears in the background. He makes his way towards Ethelberta.*

LADYWELL Mrs Petherwin! I am so glad to see you. I have been misinformed about your future intentions, which has led to me absenting myself from your presence.

ETHELBERTA (tersely) Yes. A false report is in circulation. I am not yet engaged to be married to any one, if that is your meaning.

LADYWELL (tentatively) Am I forgotten?

ETHELBERTA No; you are exactly as you always were in my mind.

LADYWELL Then I have been cruelly deceived. I was guided too much by appearances, and they were very delusive. I am beyond measure glad I came here today. I called at your house and learned that you were here; and as I was going out of town, in any indefinite direction, I settled then to come this way. What a happy idea it was! To think of you now -- and I may be permitted to --

ETHELBERTA Assuredly you may not. How many times have I told you that!

LADYWELL But I do not wish for any formal engagement. I'll wait - I'll wait any length of time. Remember, you have never absolutely forbidden my -- friendship. Will you delay your answer till some time hence, when you have thoroughly considered; since I fear it may be a hasty one now?

ETHELBERTA Yes, indeed; it may be hasty.

LADYWELL You will delay it?

ETHELBERTA Yes.

LADYWELL When shall it be?

ETHELBERTA Say a month hence. I suggest that, because by that time you will have found an answer in your own mind: strange things may happen before then. 'She shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them; then shall she say, I will go and return to my first'. - however, that's no matter.

LADYWELL What-- did you---

ETHELBERTA It is a passage in Hosea which came to my mind, as possibly applicable to myself some day. It was mere impulse.

LADYWELL Ha-ha! - a jest-- one of your romances broken loose. There is no law for impulse: that is why I am here.

*Enter M. Moulin.*

M.MOULIN Ethelberta, Mr Neigh has been inquiring for you again.

ETHELBERTA Send him in.

*Exit M. Moulin. Shortly after Neigh enters.  
Ladywell exits rear stage at same time.*

NEIGH (to Ethelberta) Have you been able to bestow a thought on the question between us. I hope so.

ETHELBERTA It is no use. Wait a month, and you will not require an answer. You will not mind speaking low, because of a person in the next room?

NEIGH Not at all-- Why will that be?

ETHELBERTA I might say; but let us speak of something else.

NEIGH (brusquely) I don't see how we can. I had no other reason on earth for calling here. I wish to get the matter settled, and I could not be satisfied without seeing you.

I hate writing on matters of this sort. In fact I can't do it, and that's why I am here.

*Enter M. Moulin and gives a note to Ethelberta, then exits.*

ETHELBERTA Will you excuse me one moment?

*Ethelberta moves away from Neigh and opens the note. She looks concerned.*

NEIGH If anything has happened I shall be pleased to wait.

ETHELBERTA O no, it is nothing. Yet I think I will ask you to wait.

NEIGH I shall be only too happy to stay till you are at leisure.

ETHELBERTA I may be rather a long time.

NEIGH My time is yours.

*Exit Neigh. Enter M. Moulin.*

ETHELBERTA O, Aunt Charlotte, I hope you have rooms enough to spare for my visitors, for they are like the fox, the goose and the corn in the riddle. I cannot leave them together, and I can only be with one at a time. I want the nicest drawing-room you have for an interview of a bare two minutes with an old gentleman. I am so sorry this has happened, but it is not altogether my fault! I only arranged to see one of them; but the other was sent to me by mother, in a mistake, and the third met with me on my journey: that's the explanation. There's the oldest of them just come.

*Exit Ethelberta. Enter Neigh. He looks out of a window.*

NEIGH (to himself) Surely that cannot be Lord Mountclere?

*Enter Ladywell.*

LADYWELL What -- you, Neigh! -- how strange.

NEIGH Yes; it is rather strange. Still a fellow must be somewhere.

*They both look down i.e. out of the window, as voices can be heard. It is Ethelberta and Mountclere off-stage.*

ETHELBERTA As I have said, Lord Mountclere, I cannot give you an answer now. I must consider what to do with Mr Neigh and Mr Ladywell. It is too sudden for me to decide at once. I could not do so until I have got home to

England, when I will write you a letter, stating frankly my affairs and those of my relatives. I shall not consider that you have addressed me on the subject of marriage until, having received my letter, you --

MOUNTCLERE Repeat my proposal.

ETHELBERTA Yes.

MOUNTCLERE My dear Mrs Petherwin, it is as good as repeated! But I have no right to assume anything you don't wish me to assume, and I will wait. How long is it that I am to suffer in this uncertainty?

ETHELBERTA A month. By that time I shall have grown weary of my other two suitors perhaps.

MOUNTCLERE A month! Really inflexible?

NEIGH (to Ladywell) They must have gone away from the window as we can no longer hear them. Just let me write a note, Ladywell, and I'm your man.

LADYWELL I was going to do the same thing.

*They both write a hurried note.*

NEIGH (closing and directing his letter) There's for you, my fair one.

LADYWELL (closing and directing his letter) Yours is for Mrs Petherwin? So is mine.

*They leave their letters on a table.*

NEIGH Now, let us get out of this place.

*Exit Neigh and Ladywell.*

Scene 3.11 The Quay Front

*Enter Neigh and Ladywell.*

LADYWELL I have been considerably misled, Neigh and I imagine from what has just happened that you have been misled too.

NEIGH Just a little. But it was my own fault: for I ought to have known that these stage and platform women have what they are pleased to call Bohemianism so thoroughly engrained with their natures that they are no more constant to usage in their sentiments than they are in their way of living. Good Lord, to think she has caught old Mountclere! She is sure to have him if she does not dally with him so long that he gets cool again.

LADYWELL A beautiful creature like her to think of marrying such an infatuated idiot as he!

NEIGH He can give her a title as well as younger men. It will not be the first time that such matches have been made.

LADYWELL (vehemently) I can't believe it! She has too much poetry in her-- too much good sense; her nature is the essence of all that's romantic. I can't help saying it, though she has treated me cruelly.

NEIGH She has good looks, certainly. I'll own to that. As for her romance and good-feeling, that I leave to you. I think she has treated you no more cruelly, as you call it, than she has me, come to that.

LADYWELL (emotionally) She told me she would give an answer in a month.

NEIGH So she told me.

LADYWELL And so she told him.

NEIGH And I have no doubt she will keep her word to him in her usual precise manner.

LADYWELL But see what she implied to me! I distinctly understood from her that the answer would be favourable.

NEIGH So did I.

LADYWELL So does he.

NEIGH And he is sure to be the one who gets it, since only one of us can. Well, I wouldn't marry her for love, money, nor--

LADYWELL Offspring.

NEIGH Exactly: I would not. I'll give you an answer in a month -- to all three of us! For God's sake let's sit down by the quay and have something to drink.

*Exit Neigh and Ladywell.*

ACT 4Scene 4.1 The House in Town

*Enter Ethelberta, Chickereel and Mrs.Chickereel and Gwendoline.*

CHICKEREL A surprising change has come over Menlove. She has sworn a vow of secrecy, which I cannot account for, unless any friend of yours has bribed her.

ETHELBERTA O no -- that cannot be. Any influence of Lord Mountclere to that effect was the last thing that could enter her thoughts. However, whatever Menlove does makes little difference to me now. I have almost come to a decision which would entirely alter our way of living.

MRS CHICKEREL I hope it will not be of the sort your last decision was.

ETHELBERTA No; quite the reverse. I shall not live here in state any longer. We will let the house throughout as lodgings, while it is ours; and you and the girls must manage it. I will retire from the scene altogether, and stay for the winter at Knollsea with Picotee. I want to consider my plans for next year, and I would rather be away from town. Picotee is left there, and I return in two days with the books and papers I require.

MRS CHICKEREL What are your plans to be?

ETHELBERTA I am going to be a schoolmistress -- I think I am.

MRS CHICKEREL A schoolmistress?

ETHELBERTA Yes. And Picotee returns to the same occupation, which she ought never to have forsaken. We are going to study Geography and Arithmetic until Christmas; then I shall send her adrift to finish her term as pupil-teacher, while I go into a training school. By the time I have to give up this house I shall just have got a little country school.

MRS CHICKEREL But why not write more poems and sell them or why not go on with your tales at Mayfair Hall?

GWENDOLINE Why not be a governess as you were?

MRS CHICKEREL Why not go on with your tales at Mayfair Hall?

ETHELBERTA I'll answer as well as I can. I have decided to give up romancing because I cannot think of any more that pleases me. I have been trying at Knollsea for a fortnight and it is no use. I will never be a governess again. I would rather be a servant. If I am a school-mistress I

shall be entirely free from all contact with the great, which is what I desire, for I hate them, and am getting almost as revolutionary as Sol. Father, I cannot endure this kind of existence any longer. I sleep at night as if I have committed a murder: I start up and see processions of people, audiences, battalions of lovers obtained under false pretences - all denouncing me with the finger of ridicule. I don't want to marry a second time among people, who would regard me as an upstart or intruder. I am sick of ambition. My only longing now is to fly from society altogether and go to any hovel on earth where I can be at peace.

MRS CHICKEREL What - has anybody been insulting you?

ETHELBERTA Yes; or rather I sometimes think he may have: that is, if a proposal of marriage is only removed from being a proposal of a very different kind by an accident.

MRS CHICKEREL A proposal of marriage can never be an insult.

ETHELBERTA I think otherwise.

CHICKEREL So do I.

MRS CHICKEREL Unless the man was beneath you, and I don't suppose he was that.

ETHELBERTA You are quite right; he was not that. But we will not talk of this branch of the subject. By far the most serious concern with me is that I ought to do some good by marriage, or by heroic performance of some kind.

CHICKEREL Never you mind us, mind yourself.

ETHELBERTA (dryly) I shall hardly be minding myself either, in your opinion, by doing that. But it will be more tolerable than what I am doing now. Georgina, Myrtle, Emmeline and Joey will not get the education I intended for them; but that must go, I suppose.

MRS CHICKEREL Really Ethelberta, this is very odd. Making yourself miserable in trying to get a position on our account is one thing and not necessary; but I think it ridiculous to rush into the other extreme, and go wilfully down in the scale. You may just as well exercise your wits in trying to swim as in trying to sink.

ETHELBERTA I own it is foolish - I suppose it is. Perhaps you are right, mother; anything rather than retreat. Well I will think of it again. Do not let us speak more about it now.

*They all exit.*

Scene 4.2 Knollsea - an  
Ornamental Villa

*Enter Ethelberta and Picotee.*

PICOTEE A letter has arrived for you, Ethelberta. (She hands over the letter)

ETHELBERTA (reading the letter) It is from Lord Mountclere. He wishes to call here. Now, Picotee, we shall have to receive him, and make the most of him, for I have altered my plans since I was last in Knollsea.

PICOTEE Altered them again? What are you going to be now - not a poor person after all?

ETHELBERTA Indeed not. And so I turn and turn. Before I reply to this letter we must go into new lodgings to give them as our new address.

*Ethelberta and Picotee exit.*

*Ethelberta and Picotee enter (this being their new house).*

PICOTEE Now we have given Lord Moutclere this address, when is he due to arrive?

ETHELBERTA Very soon.

PICOTEE I am just going out for a moment. The coastguardmen are practising the life-apparatus today, to be ready for the autumn wrecks.

*Exit Picotee.*

*Picotee returns.*

ETHELBERTA Did you see Lord Mountclere?

PICOTEE No, there was no old man there - but I did meet Mr Julian. He told me Lord Mountclere had only called in Knollsea for a few minutes on business and then left in his carriage. However, shortly after leaving the horses shied and a wheel fell off the carriage. Mr Julian rushed to help an old man out. He did not know the gentleman's name but described him as a sly old dog. The old man had badly sprained an ankle. Another carriage was called and he departed in that.

ETHELBERTA That must have been Lord Mountclere and explains why he has not called.

PICOTEE I think I have just heard a letter arrive.

*Exit Picotee and then reurns with a letter for Ethelberta. She hands her the letter.*

ETHELBERTA (reading the letter) It is from Lord Mountclere. He is unable to call here but invites me to Enckworth Court.

*Exit Ethelberta and then re-enters after a short pause.*

PICOTEE Ah, Ethelberta, you are back. Did you enjoy your stay at Enckworth Court?

ETHELBERTA It was very pleasant. There were a number of guests there and they asked me to tell them a story. I told them one about me and my circumstances, without mentioning any names, and they were rather shocked, except Lord Mountclere. Afterwards, when we were alone, I told him I thought he must have known about me already, as he was not shocked. He confirmed he had known for some time and it was of no concern to him. I then said 'I shall think it a great honour to be your wife'.

Scene 4.3 Melchester

*Enter Ethelberta, Picotee and Lord Mountclere.*

MOUNTCLERE (pointing) There's the cathedral.

ETHELBERTA Yes.

MOUNTCLERE It boasts a very fine organ.

ETHELBERTA Ah.

MOUNTCLERE And the organist is a clever young man.

ETHELBERTA Oh.

MOUNTCLERE By the way, you may remember that he is the Mr Julian who set your song to music.

ETHELBERTA I recollect it quite well.

MOUNTCLERE I thought you would like to go to the Hall to hear a concert.

ETHELBERTA What a good idea!

*They walk a little way and then are at the Hall. They enter by a side door.*

MOUNTCLERE By entering this door we will be able to see the musicians arrive and then step down to our seats from the front.

*Julian arrives but does not see the party.*

*Ethelberta then sees him.*

ETHELBERTA (to Mountclere - angrily) So this is your pretty jealous scheme - I see it.

*Ethelberta rises and goes to Julian, who is a little flustered. Picotee then sees Julian and nearly swoons. They go to help Picotee.*

ETHELBERTA (to Julian) Are you better?

JULIAN Quite well - quite. I am glad to see you. I must go into the next room now to prepare for the concert.

*Exit Julian.*

ETHELBERTA (to Picotee) Are you better, too?

PICOTEE Quite well.

ETHELBERTA (to Mountclere) You are quite sure you know between whom the love lies now - eh?

MOUNTCLERE I am - beyond a doubt. My dearest - forgive me; I confess I doubted you - but I was beside myself.

*Ethelberta ignores him.*

MOUNTCLERE An old man - who is not very old - naturally torments himself with fears of losing -- no, no - it was an innocent jest of mine - you will forgive a joke - hee-hee?

ETHELBERTA You had no right to mistrust me!

MOUNTCLERE I do not - you did not blench. You should have told me before that it was your sister and not yourself who was entangled with him.

ETHELBERTA You brought me to Melchester on purpose to confront him?

MOUNTCLERE Yes, I did.

ETHELBERTA Are you not ashamed?

MOUNTCLERE I am satisfied. It is better to know the truth by any means than to die of suspense; better for us both - surely you see that?

*Ethelberta begins to cry.*

MOUNTCLERE Ethelberta, don't be vexed! It was an inconsiderate trick - I own it. Do what you will, but do not desert me now! I could not bear it - you would kill me if you were to leave me. Anything, but be mine.

*Exit Ethelberta and Mountclere.*

*Enter Mountclere. He has entered The White Hart Hotel.*

MOUNTCLERE (to himself) (holding a letter) I must reply to this immediately. I wrote to Ethelberta to tell her again how much her love means to me and begging her not to be so cruel as to break her plighted word to me. Now she has informed me she is not prepared at present to enter into the question of marriage at all. She says the incident which has occurred affords her every excuse for withdrawing her promise, since it was given under misapprehensions on a point that materially affects her happiness. Miss Hoity-toity! I must tell her I cannot release her - I must do anything to keep my treasure. I will ask her to see me for a few minutes - I am sure this can all be sorted out.

*Exit Mountclere.*

*Enter Ethelberta. She is out on a stroll and meets Julian, who has just entered.*

ETHELBERTA You are not at the concert, Mr Julian? I am glad to have a better opportunity of speaking to you and of asking for your sister. Unfortunately there is not time for us to call upon her today.

JULIAN (with some sadness) Thank you, but it makes no difference. I will tell her I have met you; she is away from home just at present. The chief organist, old Dr Breeve, has taken my place at the concert, as it was arranged he should do after the opening part. I am now going to the cathedral for the afternoon service. You are going there too?

ETHELBERTA I thought of looking at the interior for a moment.

JULIAN You will come with your sister to see us before you leave? We have tea at six.

ETHELBERTA We shall have left Melchester before that time. I am now only waiting for the train.

JULIAN You two have not come all the way from Knollsea alone?

ETHELBERTA (evasively) Part of the way.

JULIAN And going back alone?

ETHELBERTA No. Only for the last five miles. At least that was the arrangement - I am not quite sure if it holds good.

JULIAN You don't wish me to see you safely in the train?

ETHELBERTA It is not necessary: thank you very much. We

are well used to getting about the world alone, and from Melchester to Knollsea is no serious journey, late or early.... Yet I think, in honesty, I ought to tell you that we are not entirely by ourselves in Melchester today.

JULIAN I remember I saw your friend -- relative-- in the room at the Town-hall. It did not occur to my mind for the moment that he was any other than a stranger standing there.

ETHELBERTA He is not a relative. I hardly know, Christopher, how to explain to you my position here today, because of some difficulties that have arisen since we have been in the town, which may alter it entirely. On that account I will be less frank with you than I should like to be, considering how long we have known each other. It would be wrong, however, if I were not to tell you that there has been a possibility of my marriage with him.

JULIAN The elderly gentleman?

ETHELBERTA Yes. And I came here in his company, intending to return with him. But you shall know all soon. Picotee shall write to Faith.

*They have arrived at the Cathedral.*

JULIAN I thought at one time that our futures might have been different from what they are apparently becoming. But one gets weary of repining about that. I wish Picotee and yourself could see us oftener; I am as confirmed a bachelor now as Faith is an old maid. I wonder if - should the event you contemplate occur - you and he will ever visit us, or we shall ever visit you?

*They enter the Cathedral to go their separate ways.*

*Exit Julian. Enter Mountclere and approaches Ethelberta, who is studying an interior feature of the Cathedral.*

MOUNTCLERE (with great agitation) I have been trying to meet with you. Come, let us be friends again! - Ethelberta, I must not lose you! You cannot mean that the engagement shall be broken off?

ETHELBERTA I do not mean anything beyond this that I entirely withdraw from it on the faintest sign that you have not abandoned such miserable jealous proceedings as those you adopted today.

MOUNTCLERE I have quite abandoned them. Will you come a little further this way, and walk in the aisle? You do still agree to be mine?

ETHELBERTA If it gives you any pleasure, I do.

MOUNTCLERE Yes, yes. I implore that the marriage may be soon - very soon.

ETHELBERTA Well, Lord Mountclere?

MOUNTCLERE Say in a few days? - it is the only thing that will satisfy me.

ETHELBERTA I am absolutely indifferent as to the day. If it pleases you to have it early I am willing.

MOUNTCLERE Dare I ask that it may be this week?

ETHELBERTA I could not say that.

MOUNTCLERE But you can name the earliest day?

ETHELBERTA I cannot now. We had better be going from here, I think.

*Organ music played by Julian is heard.*

*Enter Picotee in another part of the Cathedral.*

ETHELBERTA (pointing to Picotee) Do you see that? That little figure is my dearest sister. Could you but ensure a marriage between her and him she listens to, I would do anything you wish!

MOUNTCLERE That is indeed a gracious promise - and would you agree to what I asked just now?

ETHELBERTA Yes

MOUNTCLERE When?

ETHELBERTA As you requested.

MOUNTCLERE This week? The day after tomorrow?

ETHELBERTA If you will. But remember what lies on your side of the contract. I fancy I have given you a task beyond your powers.

MOUNTCLERE Well, darling, we are at one at last. And if my task is heavy and I cannot guarantee the result, I can make it very probable. Marry me on Friday - the day after tomorrow - and I will do all that money and influence can effect to bring about their union.

ETHELBERTA You solemnly promise? You will never cease to give me all the aid in your power until the thing is done?

MOUNTCLERE I do solemnly promise - on the conditions named.

ETHELBERTA Very good. You will have ensured my fulfilment

of my promise before I can ensure yours; but I take your word.

MOUNTCLERE You will marry me on Friday! Give me your hand upon it.

*Ethelberta gives her hand.*

MOUNTCLERE Is it a covenant?

ETHELBERTA It is.

*Mountclere raises her hand to his lips and then releases it.*

MOUNTCLERE Two days and you are mine.

ETHELBERTA That I believe I never shall be.

MOUNTCLERE Never shall be? Why, darling?

ETHELBERTA I don't know. Some catastrophe will prevent it. I shall be dead perhaps.

MOUNTCLERE You distress me. Ah - you meant me - you meant that I should be dead, because you think I am old! But that is a mistake - I am not very old!

ETHELBERTA I thought only of myself - nothing of you.

MOUNTCLERE Yes, I know. Dearest it is dismal and chilling here let us go.

*Exit Ethelberta and Mountclere. Picotee continues to listen to the organ music. When it stops, she exits.*

*Enter Ethelberta and Moutclere, strolling slowly.*

MOUNTCLERE I fear it becomes necessary for me to stay in Melchester tonight. I have a few matters to attend to here, as the result of our arrangements. But I will first accompany you so far as Anglebury, and see you safely into a carriage there that shall take you home. Tomorrow I will drive to Knollsea, when we will make the final preparations.

ETHELBERTA There is no need for you to do that. Here is my sister approaching. We will go to the railway station and take the train.

MOUNTCLERE Very well, then. I will take my leave of you, my darling.

*Exit Mountclere. Almost immediately afterwards Picotee enters.*

ETHELBERTA Picotee, the marriage is to be very early indeed. It is to be the day after tomorrow - if it can. Nevertheless I don't believe the fact - I cannot.

PICOTEE Did you arrange it so? Nobody can make you marry so soon.

ETHELBERTA I agreed to the day.

PICOTEE How can it be? The gay dresses and the preparations and the people - how can they be collected in the time, Berta? And so much more of that will be required for a lord of the land than for a common man. O, I can't think it possible for a sister of mine to marry a lord!

ETHELBERTA It is to be not only a plain and simple wedding, without any lofty appliances, but a secret one - as secret as if I were some under-age heiress to an Indian fortune, and he a young man of nothing a year.

PICOTEE Has Lord Mountclere said it must be so private? I suppose it is on account of his family.

ETHELBERTA No. I say so; and it is on account of my family. Father might object to the wedding, I imagine, from what he once said, or he might be disturbed about it; so I think it better that he and the rest should know nothing until all is over. You must dress again as my sister tomorrow, dear. Lord Mountclere is going to pay us an early visit to conclude necessary arrangements.

PICOTEE O, the life as a lady at Enckworth Court! The flowers, the woods, the rooms, the pictures, the plate and the jewels! Horses and carriages rattling and prancing, seneschals and pages, footmen hopping up and hopping down. It will be glory then!

ETHELBERTA (drily) We might hire our father as one of my retainers to increase it.

PICOTEE How shall we manage all about that? 'Tis terrible, really.

ETHELBERTA My only hope is that my life will be quite private and simple, as will best become my inferiority and Lord Mountclere's staidness.

PICOTEE And you will not go to town from Easter to Lammastide as other noble ladies do?

ETHELBERTA I don't know.

PICOTEE But you will give dinners, and travel, and go to see his friends and have them to see you?

ETHELBERTA I don't know.

PICOTEE Will you not be, then, as any other peeress; and shall not I be as any other peeress's sister?

ETHELBERTA That too, I do not know. All is mystery. Nor do I even know that the marriage will take place. I feel that it may not; and perhaps so much the better, since the man is a stranger to me, I know nothing whatever of his nature, and he knows nothing of mine.

*Exit Ethelberta and Picotee.*

Scene 4.4 Julian's House

*Enter Julian and Faith.*

JULIAN Faith, I have just discovered Ethelberta is to marry Lord Moutclere.

FAITH What a brilliant match!

JULIAN O Faith, you don't know. You are far from knowing. It is as gloomy as midnight. Good God, can it be possible?

*Faith looks alarmed, but stays silent.*

JULIAN Did you ever hear anything of Lord Moutclere when we lived at Sandbourne?

FAITH I knew the name - no more.

JULIAN No, no - of course you did not. Well, though I never saw his face, to my knowledge till a short time ago, I know enough to say that, if earnest representations can prevent it, this marriage shall not be. Father knew him, or about him, very well; and he once told me - what I cannot tell you. Fancy, I have seen him three times - yesterday, last night and this morning - besides helping him on the road some weeks ago, and never once considered that he might be Lord Moutclere. He is here almost in disguise one may say; neither man nor horse is with him; and his object accounts for his privacy. I see how it is - she is doing this to benefit her brothers and sisters, if possible; but she ought to know that if she is miserable they will never be happy. That's the nature of women - they take the form for the essence, and that's what she is doing now. I should think her guardian angel must have quitted her when she agreed to a marriage which may tear her heart out like a claw.

FAITH You are too warm about it, Kit - it cannot be so bad as that. It is not the thing, but the sensitiveness to the thing, which is the true measure of its pain. Perhaps what seems so bad to you falls lightly on her mind. A campaigner in a heavy rain is not more uncomfortable than we are in a slight draught; and Ethelberta, fortified by her sapphires and gold cups and wax candles, will not mind facts which look like spectres to us outside. A title will

turn troubles into romances, and she will shine as an interesting viscountess in spite of them.

JULIAN I really think I must go to Knollsea and show her her danger.

*Exit Christopher and Faith.*

Scene 4.5 A room in the Green

Bushes Inn

*Enter Sol and Lord Mountclere's Brother.*

SOL Yes, Mrs Petherwin is my sister, as you supposed, sir; but on her account I do not let it be known.

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER Indeed. I am obliged to you for leaving your work over the road in order to allow me to talk to you. I speak of a matter which I thought you might know more about than I do, for it has taken me quite by surprise. My brother, Lord Mountclere, is, it seems, to be privately married to Mrs Petherwin tomorrow.

SOL Is that really the fact? I had no thought that such a thing could be possible!

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER It is imminent.

SOL Father has told me that she has lately got to know some nobleman; but I never supposed there could be any meaning in that.

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER You were altogether wrong. Do you feel it to be a matter upon which you will congratulate her?

SOL A very different thing! Though he is your brother, sir, I must say this, that I would rather she married the poorest man I know.

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER Why?

SOL From what my father has told me of him, he is not a more desirable brother-in-law to me than I shall be in all likelihood to him. What business has a man of that character to marry Berta, I should like to ask?

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER That's what I say. My brother is getting old, and he has lived strangely: your sister is a highly respectable young lady.

SOL And he is not respectable, you mean? I know he is not. I worked near Enckworth once.

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER I cannot say that. At any rate, we are agreed in thinking that this would be an unfortunate marriage for both.

SOL About both I don't know. It may be a good thing for him. When do you say it is to be, sir - tomorrow?

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER Yes.

SOL I don't know what to do! If half what I have heard is true, I would lose a winter's work to prevent her marrying him. What does she want to go mixing in with people who despise her for? Now look here, Mr Mountclere, since you have been and called me out to talk this over, it is only fair that you should tell me the exact truth about your brother. Is it a lie, or is it true, that he is not fit to be the husband of a decent woman?

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER That is a curious inquiry. There are reasons why I think your sister will not be happy with him.

SOL (angrily) Then it is true what they say. I know your meaning well enough. What's to be done? If only I could see her this minute, she might be kept out of it.

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER You think your presence would influence your sister - if you could see her before the wedding?

SOL I think it would. But who's to get at her?

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER I am going, so you had better come on with me - unless it would be best for your father to come.

SOL Perhaps it might. But he will not be able to get away; and it's no use for Dan to go. If anybody goes I must! If she has made up her mind nothing can be done by writing to her.

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER I leave at once to see Lord Mountclere. I feel that as my brother is evidently ignorant of the position of Mrs Petherwin's family and connections, it is only fair in me, as his nearest relative, to make them clear to him before it is too late.

SOL I don't think you need fear that. I make a great mistake if she has for a moment thought of concealing that from him.

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER She may not have deliberately done so. I knew nothing until this morning - never dreamt of such a preposterous occurrence.

SOL Preposterous! If it should come to pass, she would play her part as his lady as well as any other woman, and better. Things have come to a sore head when she is not considered lady enough for such as he. But perhaps you mean that if your brother were to have a son, then your heir-presumptive title would be lost.

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER It is hardly worth while for us to

quarrel when we both have the same object in view - do you think so?

SOL That's true - that's true. When do you start sir?

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER We must leave almost at once. My carriage is outside. Don't worry to change your clothes - there is not time. Let's go now!

*Exit Sol and Lord Mountclere's brother.*

Scene 4.6 The Doncastles'

Residence

*Enter Mrs Doncastle and Menlove.*

MENLOVE I should like to name something to you, m'm.

MRS DONCASTLE Yes.

MENLOVE I shall be wishing to leave you soon, if it is convenient.

MRS DONCASTLE Very well, Menlove. Am I to take this as a formal notice?

MENLOVE If you please; but I could stay a week or two beyond the month if suitable. I am going to be married - that's what it is m'm.

MRS DONCASTLE O! I am glad to hear it, though I am sorry to lose you.

MENLOVE It is Lord Mountclere's valet - Mr Tipman m'm.

MRS DONCASTLE Indeed.

MENLOVE I suppose you heard the other news that arrived in town today, m'm? Lord Mountclere is going to be married tomorrow.

MRS DONCASTLE Tomorrow? Are you quite sure?

MENLOVE O yes, m'm. Mr Tipman has just told me so in his letter. He is going to be married to Mrs. Petherwin. It is to be quite a private wedding.

MRS DONCASTLE I must go down to dinner.

*Exit Mrs Doncastle and Menlove.*

*Enter Doncastle and Neigh followed shortly after by Mrs Doncastle. Enter Chickereel who stands some way apart from them.*

MRS DONCASTLE (to her husband) Why did you not tell me of the wedding tomorrow? - or don't you know anything about it?

DONCASTLE Wedding?

MRS DONCASTLE Lord Mountclere is to be married to Mrs Petherwin quite privately.

CHICKEREL (to himself) Good God!

MRS DONCASTLE (to Chickerel) Did you speak?

DONCASTLE (also to Chickerel) Chickerel, what's the matter - are you ill? Was it you who said that?

CHICKEREL I did, sir. I could not help it.

DONCASTLE Why?

CHICKEREL She is my daughter, and it shall be known at once.

DONCASTLE Who is your daughter?

CHICKEREL Mrs Petherwin.

*Doncastle, Mrs Doncastle and Neigh utter exclamations.*

DONCASTLE Do you mean to say that the lady who sat here at dinner at the same time that Lord Mountclere was present, is your daughter?

CHICKEREL Yes, sir.

DONCASTLE How did she come to be your daughter?

CHICKEREL I - well, she is my daughter, sir.

DONCASTLE Did you educate her?

CHICKEREL Not altogether, sir. She was a very clever child. Lady Petherwin took a deal of trouble about her education. They were both left widows at the same time: the son died, then the father. My daughter was only eighteen then. But though she's older now, her marriage with Lord Mountclere means misery. He ought to marry another woman.

DONCASTLE It is very extraordinary. If you are ill you had better go and rest yourself, Chickerel. Send in Thomas.

*Exit Chickerel.*

MRS DONCASTLE Chickerel ought not to have kept us in ignorance of this - of course he should not!

DONCASTLE I don't see why not.

MRS DONCASTLE Then she herself should have let it be known.

DONCASTLE Nor does that follow. You didn't tell Mrs Petherwin that your grandfather narrowly escaped hanging for shooting his rival in a duel.

MRS DONCASTLE Of course not. There was no reason why I should give extraneous information.

DONCASTLE Nor was there any reason why she should. As for Chickerel, he doubtless felt how unbecoming it would be to make personal remarks upon one of your guests.

MRS DONCASTLE (angrily) I know this that if my father had been in the room, I should not have left the fact pass unnoticed, and treated him like a stranger! I say she should not have come. Of course, I shall dismiss Chickerel.

DONCASTLE Of course you will do no such thing. I have never had a butler in the house before who suited me so well. I am going upstairs to have a word with him.

*Exit Doncastle.*

NEIGH I don't blame Chickerel in objecting to Lord Mountclere. I should object to him myself if I had a daughter. I never liked him.

MRS DONCASTLE Why?

NEIGH For reasons which don't generally appear.

*Enter Doncastle.*

NEIGH Is Chickerel going?

DONCASTLE He leaves in five or ten minutes.

*Exit Doncastle, Mrs Doncastle and Neigh.*

Scene 4.7 On the Road with the  
Church in sight

*Enter Chickerel, Sol, Mountclere's brother and Julian.*

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER Well, we've all had a difficult journey to get here and now the church is in sight. It's a good job we all met up on the final stage of our journeys.

JULIAN (to Chickerel) I had no idea you are Mrs Petherwin's father.

CHICKEREL Thank God we are almost at the church.

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER Wait till you know he deserves it.

CHICKEREL Nothing's done yet between them.

MOUNTCLERE I am going straight to the church but I think it is too early for the marriage to have taken place.

JULIAN I think we all are intending to go to the church first.

*They continue walking and have now reached the church.*

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER It looks as if we have arrived not a minute too soon. Preparations have apparently begun. It was to be an early wedding, no doubt. Are here is someone.

*Enter The Parish Clerk.*

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER Are you the parish clerk?

PARISH CLERK I have the honour of that calling.

CHICKEREL (looking at a book open on a desk) Ah, we are too late! I see their signatures are in the marriage register.

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER Yes, yes, we are too late it seems - who would have thought they would have married at eight o'clock. (To the parish clerk) When did the marriage take place?

PARISH CLERK It was over about five minutes before you came in.

SOL (to Chickerel) Father, ought we not to go on at once to Ethelberta's instead of waiting? 'Twas no use in coming here.

CHICKEREL No use at all. Look at this. I would almost sooner have it that in leaving this church I came from her grave - well, no, perhaps not that, but I fear it is a bad thing.

*Julian sees the entries in the marriage register and exits.*

SOL I knew it. I always said that pride would lead Berta to marry an unworthy man, and so it has! What shall we do now? I'll see her.

MOUNTCLERE'S BROTHER Do no such thing, young man. The best course is to leave matters alone. They are married. If you are wise, you will try to think the match a good one, and be content to let her keep her position without inconveniencing her by your intrusions or complaints. She is a clever young woman and has played her cards adroitly. I only hope she may never repent of the game. Good morning.

*Exit Mountclere's Brother.*

CHICKEREL What an impertinent gentleman. As if we had tried for her to marry his brother!

SOL He knows better than that. But he'll never believe that Berta didn't lay a trap for the old fellow. He thinks at this moment that Lord Mountclere has never been told of us and our belongings.

CHICKEREL I wonder if she has deceived him in anything. I can hardly suppose it. But she is altogether beyond me. However, if she has misled him on any point she will suffer for it.

SOL You need not fear that, father. It isn't her way of working.

CHICKEREL If he had been any other lord in the kingdom, we might have been merry indeed. I believe he will ruin her happiness - not by any personal snubbing or rough conduct, but by other things, causing her to be despised - and that is a thing she can't endure.

SOL An old chap like that ought to leave young women alone, damn him!

PARISH CLERK I am afraid I cannot allow bad words to be spoke in this sacred pile. I would say the prettiest maid is left out of harness but the little witness was the chicken to my taste - Lord forgive me for saying it, and a man with a wife and family!

*Christopher paid particular attention to this last remark.*

SOL (to Chickerel) Do you think of trying to see Ethelberta before you leave?

CHICKEREL Certainly not. Mr Mountclere's advice was good in that. The more we keep out of the way the more good we are doing her. I shall go back to Anglebury by the carrier, and get on at once to London. You will go with me, I suppose?

SOL The carrier does not leave yet for an hour or two.

CHICKEREL I shall walk on, and let him overtake me. If possible, I will get one glimpse of Enckworth Court, Berta's new home, there may be time, if I start at once.

SOL I will walk with you.

JULIAN There is room for one with me. I shall drive back early in the afternoon.

SOL Thank you. I will endeavour to meet you at Corvsgate.

*Exit Sol and Chickerel.*

*Shortly after, enter Ladywell.*

LADYWELL The church appears to be interesting.

JULIAN Yes. Such a tower is rare in England.

LADYWELL I am here at present making sketches for my next subject - a winter sea. Otherwise I should not have - happened to be in the church.

JULIAN You are acquainted with Mrs Petherwin - I think you are Mr Ladywell, who painted her portrait last season?

LADYWELL Yes.

JULIAN You may have heard her speak of Mr Julian?

LADYWELL (offering his hand to Julian) O yes. (Pause) I saw it.

JULIAN Did she look troubled?

LADYWELL Not in the least - bright and fresh as a May morning. She has played me many a bitter trick, and poor Neigh too, a friend of mine. But I cannot help forgiving her...I saw a carriage at the door and strolled in. The ceremony was just proceeding, so I sat down here. Well, I have done with Knollsea. The place has no further interest for me now. I may own to you as a friend, that if she had not been living here I should have studied at some other coast - of course that's in confidence.

JULIAN I understand, quite.

LADYWELL I arrived in the neighbourhood only two days ago, and did not set eyes upon her until this morning, she has kept so entirely indoors.

*Exit Julian and Ladywell.*

Scene 4.8 On the road near

Enckworth Court

*Enter Sol and Chickereel.*

CHICKEREL We will just give a glance, and then go away. It don't seem well to me that Ethelberta should have this; it is too much. The sudden change will do her no good. I never believe in anything that comes in the shape of wonderful luck. As it comes, so it goes. Better have been admired as a governess than shunned as a peeress, which is what she will be.

SOL One man to want such a monstrous house as that! Well, 'tis a fine place. Perhaps Berta may hire me for a job now and then.

CHICKEREL I always knew she would cut herself off from us.

She marked for it from childhood, and she has finished the business thoroughly. Well, now I must move.

*They hear a carriage approaching, and in the distance see Lord and Lady Mountclere.*

CHICKEREL It is them! Let us get out of their way!

SOL No. Let us stand our ground. We have already been seen, and we do no harm.

*Lord and Lady Mountclere pass by out of sight. Chickereel and Sol raise their hats but no words are spoken.*

SOL Father, I don't think I will go further with you. She's gone into the house; and suppose she should run back without him to try to find us? It would be cruel to disappoint her. I'll bide about here for a quarter of an hour, in case she should.

CHICKEREL Well, one or two of her old ways may be left in her still, and it is not a bad thought. Then you will walk the rest of the distance if you do not meet Mr Julian. I must be in London by the evening.

SOL Any time tonight will do for me. I shall not begin work until tomorrow, so that the four o'clock train will suit my purpose.

*Exit Chickereel.*

PICOTEE (from off-stage) Sol! how did you come here?

SOL Hello, Picotee!

PICOTEE There's a little gate a quarter of a mile further on. We can meet there without you passing through the big lodge. I'll be there as soon as you.

*Exit Sol and then re-enters with Picotee.*

PICOTEE Berta says she wants to see you and father. You must come in and make yourselves comfortable. She had no idea you were here so secretly, and she didn't know what to do.

SOL Father's gone!

PICOTEE How vexed she will be! She thinks there is something the matter - that you are angry with her for not telling you earlier. But you will come in, Sol?

SOL No, I can't come in.

PICOTEE Why not? It is such a big house, you can't think. You need not come near the front apartments, if you think

we shall be ashamed of you in your working clothes. How came you not to dress up a bit, Sol? Still, Berta won't mind it much. She says Lord Mountclere must take her as she is, or he is kindly welcome to leave her.

SOL Ah well! I might have had a word or two to say about that, but the time has gone by for it, worse luck. Perhaps it is best that I have said nothing, and she has had her way. No, I shan't come in, Picotee, Father is gone, and I am going too.

PICOTEE O Sol!

SOL We are rather put out at her acting like this - father and I and all of us. She might have let us know about it beforehand, even if she is a lady and we what we always was. It wouldn't have let her down so terrible much to write a line. She might have learnt something that would have led her to take a different step.

PICOTEE But you will see poor Berta? She has done no harm. She was going to write long letters to all of you today, explaining her wedding, and how she is going to help us all on in the world.

SOL No, I won't come in. It would disgrace her, for one thing, dressed as I be: more than that, I don't want to come in. But I would like to see her, if she would like to see me; and I'll go up there to that little fir plantation and walk up and down behind it for exactly half-an-hour. She can come out to me there.

PICOTEE I'll go and tell her.

SOL I suppose they will be off somewhere, and she is busy getting ready?

PICOTEE O no. They are not going to travel till next year. Ethelberta does not want to go anywhere; and Lord Mountclere cannot endure this changeable weather in any place but his own house.

SOL Poor fellow!

PICOTEE Then you will wait for her by the firs? I'll tell her at once.

*Exit Picotee and Sol.*

*Enter Ethelberta. After a short while Sol enters.*

ETHELBERTA (taking Sol's hand) Is Father, then, gone?

SOL Yes. I should have been gone likewise, but I thought you wanted to see me.

ETHELBERTA Of course I did, and him too. Why did you come

so mysteriously, and, I may say, so unbecomingly? I am afraid I did wrong in not informing you of my intention.

SOL To yourself you may have. Father would have liked a word with you - before you did it.

ETHELBERTA You both looked so forbidding that I did not like to stop the carriage when we passed you. I want to see him on an important matter - his leaving Mrs Doncastle's service at once. I am going to write and beg her to dispense with a notice, which I have no doubt she will do.

SOL He's very much upset about you.

ETHELBERTA (sadly) My secrecy was, perhaps, an error of judgement. But I had reasons. Why did you and my father come here at all if you did not want to see me?

SOL We did not want to see you up to a certain time.

ETHELBERTA You did not come to prevent my marriage?

SOL We wished to see you before the marriage - I can't say more.

ETHELBERTA I thought you might not approve of what I had done. But a time may come when you will approve.

SOL Never.

ETHELBERTA Don't be harsh, Sol. A coronet covers a multitude of sins.

SOL I am a carpenter. How can a man, branded with work as I be, be brother to a viscountess without something being wrong? Of course there's something wrong in it, or he wouldn't have married you - something which won't be righted without terrible suffering.

ETHELBERTA No, no, you are mistaken. There is no such wonderful quality in a title these days. What I really am is second wife to a quiet old country nobleman, who has given up society. What more commonplace? My life will be as simple, even more simple, than it was before.

SOL Berta, I am ashamed of thee. A good woman never marries twice.

ETHELBERTA (almost crying) You are too hard, Sol. I have done it all for you! Even if I have made a mistake, and given my ambition an ignoble turn, don't tell me so now, or you may do more harm in a minute than you will cure in a lifetime. It is absurd to let republican passions so blind you to fact. Whether you like the peerage or no, they appeal to our historical sense and love of old associations.

SOL I don't care for history. Prophecy is the only thing

can do poor men any good. When you were a girl, you wouldn't drop a curtesy to 'em, historical or otherwise, and there you were right. But, instead of sticking to such principles, you must needs push up, so as to get girls such as you were once to curtesy to you, not even thinking marriage with a bad man too great a price to pay for it.

ETHELBERTA A bad man? What do you mean by that? Lord Mountclere is rather old, but he's worthy. What did you mean, Sol?

SOL Nothing - a mere sommat to say.

*Enter Picotee.*

PICOTEE Berta, Lord Mountclere is looking for you.

ETHELBERTA Well, Sol, I cannot explain all to you now. I will send for you in London.

*Exit Ethelberta and Picotee, followed shortly afterwards by Sol.*

Scene 4.9 A cottage in a wood  
near Enckworth Court

*Enter Ethelberta, who knocks on the cottage door, which is opened by a female servant.*

ETHELBERTA Who lives here in so pretty a place?

SERVANT Miss Gruchette. But she is not here now.

ETHELBERTA Does she live here alone?

SERVANT Yes - excepting myself and a fellow-servant.

ETHELBERTA Oh.

SERVANT (who has no idea Ethelberta is now Lady Mountclere) She lives here to attend to the pheasants and poultry, because she is so clever in managing them. They are brought here from the keeper's over the hill. Her father was a fancier.

ETHELBERTA Miss Gruchette attends to the birds, and two servants attend to Miss Gruchette?

SERVANT Well, to tell the truth m'm, the servants do almost all of it. Still, that's what Miss Gruchette is here for. Would you like to see the house. It is pretty.

ETHELBERTA I fear I can scarcely stay long enough; yet I will just look in.

*Ethelberta steps inside the cottage.*

ETHELBERTA Miss Gruchette is here to keep the fowls?

SERVANT Yes, but they don't keep her.

*The voices of two men are heard.*

FIRST MAN Lady Mountclere gone for good?

SECOND MAN I suppose so. Ha-ha! So come, so go.

*The men have walked by and no longer can be heard.*

ETHELBERTA What Lady Mountclere do they mean?

SERVANT They meant Miss Gruchette.

ETHELBERTA Oh - a nickname.

SERVANT Yes.

ETHELBERTA Why?

*The servant whispers a story into Ethelberta's ear.*

ETHELBERTA Is she going to return?

SERVANT Yes; next week. You know her, m'm?

ETHELBERTA No, I am a stranger.

SERVANT So much the better. I may tell you, then, that an old tale is flying around the neighbourhood - that Lord Mountclere was privately married to another woman, at Knollsea, this morning early. Can it be true?

ETHELBERTA I believe it to be true.

SERVANT And that she is of no family?

ETHELBERTA Of no family.

SERVANT Indeed. Then the Lord only knows what will become of the poor thing!

ETHELBERTA Between whom?

SERVANT Her and the lady who lives here. She won't budge an inch - not she.

*Exit Servant. Ethelberta steps out of the cottage and walks around.*

ETHELBERTA (to herself) 'Tis what father and Sol meant! O heaven!

*Exit Ethelberta.*

Scene 4.10 At Enckworth Court

*Enter Ethelberta and Picotee.*

ETHELBERTA Picotee, put your things on again. You are the only friend I have in this house, and I want one badly. Go to Sol, and deliver this message to him - that I want to see him at once. You must overtake him - if you walk all the way to Anglebury. But the train does not leave until four, so there is plenty of time.

PICOTEE What is the matter? I cannot walk all the way.

ETHELBERTA I don't think you have to do that - I hope not.

PICOTEE He is going to stop at Corvsgate to have a bit of lunch: I might overtake him there if I must.

ETHELBERTA Yes. And tell him to come to the east passage door. It is that door next to the entrance to the stable-yard. There is a little yew-tree outside it. On second thoughts you, dear, must not come back. Wait at Corvsgate in the little inn parlour until Sol comes to you again. You will probably then have to go home to London alone; but do not mind it. The worst part for you will be in going from the station to the Crescent; but nobody will molest you in a four-wheel cab: you have done it before. However, he will tell you if this is necessary when he gets back. I can best fight my battles alone. You shall have a letter from me the day after tomorrow, stating where I am. I shall not be here.

PICOTEE But what is it so dreadful?

ETHELBERTA Nothing to frighten you. It is merely that I find I must come to an explanation with Lord Mountclere before I can live here permanently, and I cannot stipulate with him while I am here in his power. Till I write, goodbye. Your things are not unpacked, so let them remain here for the present - they can be sent for.

*Exit Picotee followed by Ethelberta.*

Scene 4.11 On the road to

Corvsgate

*Enter Picotee. As she walks along Julian appears in his carriage.*

JULIAN (surprised) Miss Chickerel!

PICOTEE Yes.

JULIAN Would you like to ride?

PICOTEE I should be glad. I am anxious to overtake my brother Sol.

JULIAN I have arranged to pick him up at Corvsgate.

*Julian descends and helps Picotee into the carriage. Shortly afterwards they see Sol.*

PICOTEE Thank you. There is my brother; I will get down now.

JULIAN He was going to ride on to Anglebury with me.

SOL What's the matter Picotee?

PICOTEE You are to go back and meet Ethelberta at the door by the yew.

SOL (to Picotee) And what are you to do?

PICOTEE I am to wait at Corvsgate until you come to me.

SOL (gloomily) I can't understand it. There's something wrong and it was only to be expected. That's what I say Mr Julian.

JULIAN If necessary I can take care of Miss Chickerel till you come.

SOL Thank you. Then I will return to you as soon as I can at the Castle Inn, just ahead. Tis very awkward for you to be so very burdened by us, Mr Julian; but we are in a trouble that I don't yet see the bottom of.

JULIAN (kindly) I know. We will wait for you.

*Exit Sol followed by Picotee and Julian.*

Scene 4.12 At Enckworth Court

*Enter Ethelberta and Sol.*

ETHELBERTA I have brought you to this room as we are safe here. But we must listen for footsteps. I have only five minutes: Lord Mountclere is waiting for me. I mean to leave this place, come what may.

SOL Why?

ETHELBERTA I cannot tell you - something has occurred, which makes it necessary that I should establish clearly that I am going to be mistress here, or I don't live with Lord Mountclere as his wife at all. Sol, listen, and do exactly what I say. Go to Anglebury, hire a brougham, bring it on as far as Little Enckworth: you will have to meet me with it at one of the park gates later in the evening - probably the west at half past seven. Leave it at the village, come on here on foot, and stay under the trees until just before six: it will then be quite dark, and you must stand under the projecting balustrade a

little further on than the door you came in by. I will just step upon the balcony over it, and tell you more exactly than I can now the precise time that I shall be able to slip out, and where the carriage is to be waiting. But it may not be safe to speak on account of his closeness to me - I will hand down a note. I find it is impossible to leave the house by daylight - I am certain to be pursued - he already suspects something. Now I must be going, or he will be here, for he watches my movements because of some accidental words that escaped me.

SOL Berta, I shan't have anything to do with this. It is not right!

ETHELBERTA I am only going to Rouen, to Aunt Charlotte! I want to get to Southampton, to be in time for the midnight steamer. When I am at Rouen I can negotiate with Lord Mountclere the terms on which I will return to him. It is the only chance I have of rooting out a scandal and a disgrace which threatens the beginning of my life here! My letters to him, and his to me, can be forwarded through you or through father, and he will not know where I am. Any woman is justified in adopting such a course to bring her husband to a sense of her dignity. If I don't go away now, it will end in a permanent separation. If I leave at once, and stipulate that he gets rid of her, we may be reconciled.

SOL I can't help you: you must stick to your husband. I don't like them, or any of their sort, barring about three or four, for the reason that they despise me and all my sort. But, Ethelberta, for all that I'll play fair with them. You have joined 'em and 'rayed yourself against us; and there you'd better bide. You have married your man, and your duty is towards him. I know what he is, and so does father; but if I were to help you to run away now, I should scorn myself more than I scorn him.

ETHELBERTA I don't care for that, or for any such politics! The Mountclere line is noble, and how was I to know that this member was not noble, too? I must shun him till I've tackled him.

SOL How can you shun him? You have married him!

ETHELBERTA Nevertheless, I won't stay! Neither law nor gospel demands it of me after what I have learnt. And if law and gospel did demand it, I would not stay. And if you will not help me to escape, I go alone.

SOL You had better not try any such wild thing.

ETHELBERTA (in desperation) O Sol, don't go into the question whether I am right or wrong - only remember that I am very unhappy. Do help me - I have no other person in the world to ask! Be under the balcony at six o'clock. Say you will - I must go - say you will!

SOL I'll think. There, don't cry; I'll try to be under the balcony, at any rate. I cannot promise more, but I'll try to be there.

*Exit Sol followed by Ethelberta.*

Scene 4.13 An inn at Corvsgate

*Enter Picotee, Sol and Julian.*

JULIAN When does she wish you to meet her with the carriage?

SOL Probably at half-past seven, at the west lodge; but that is to be finally fixed by a note she will hand down to me from the balcony.

JULIAN Which balcony?

SOL The nearest to the yew tree.

JULIAN At what time will she hand the note?

SOL As the Court clock strikes six. And if I am not there to take her instructions of course she will give up the idea, which is just what I want her to do.

JULIAN Sol, I beg you to go. She is in trouble and needs your help.

SOL (mournfully) It can do no good. It is better to nip her notion in its beginning. She says she wants to fly to Rouen, and from there arrange terms with him. But it can't be done - she should have thought of terms before.

Julian Then you don't mean to help her?

SOL I serve her best by leaving her alone.

JULIAN I don't think so.

SOL She has married him.

JULIAN She is in distress.

SOL She has married him.

PICOTEE I can go by myself. Do go back for Berta, Sol. She said I was to go home alone, and I can do it!

SOL You must not. It is not right for you to be hiring cabs and driving across London at midnight. Berta should have known better than propose it.

PICOTEE Go, Sol!

SOL It's time for us to go to the station or we will miss our train.

JULIAN Yes. You two go. I will catch up with you in a minute.

*Exit Picotee and Sol.*

JULIAN (to himself) I have no intention of deserting her. God forgive me for such a hollow pretence! But Sol would have been uneasy had he known I wished to stay behind. I cannot leave her in trouble like this!

*Exit Julian.*

Scene 4.14 Outside Enckworth

Court

*Enter Julian crouching down under the balcony. A hand appears with a note, which Julian takes. There is a sparkling ring on a finger of the hand.*

JULIAN (reading the note) At half-past seven o'clock. Just outside the North Lodge; don't fail.

*Julian exits only to re-appear with a driver of a brougham.*

JULIAN We may have to wait here ten minutes. And then, shall we be able to reach Anglebury in time for the up mail-train to Southampton?

DRIVER Half-past seven, half-past eight, half-past nine - two hours. O yes, sir, easily. A young lady in the case, perhaps, sir?

JULIAN Yes.

DRIVER Well, I hope she'll be done honestly by, even if she is of humble station. 'Tis best, and cheapest too, in the long run.

JULIAN Now then, silence; and listen for a footstep at the gate.

*Julian and the Driver exit.*

*A carriage is waiting. Ethelberta enters. Inside is a figure, who could not be seen from outside the carriage. Unknown to Ethelberta it is Lord Mountclere.*

ETHELBERTA (in a whisper) O! Sol - it is done.

*The figure inside does not reply.*

ETHELBERTA Sol? Why not talk to me? Where are we now? Shall we get to Anglebury by nine? What is the time, Sol?

MOUNTCLERE I will see. Hee-hee-hee! A very pleasant joke,

my dear- hee-hee! And no more than was to be expected on this merry, happy day of our lives. Nobody enjoys a good jest more than I do. Now we are in the dark again and we will alight and walk. The path is too narrow for the carriage, but it will not be far for you. Take your husband's arm.

*They alight from the carriage and Ethelberta sees they are in Enckworth Wood.*

ETHELBERTA We are one to one and I am the stronger!

MOUNTCLERE On the contrary, darling, we are one to half-a-dozen, and you considerably the weaker. (To his men hidden in the wood) Gentlemen, there are poachers in the grounds. Go looking for them. Anybody there who cannot give a good account of himself is to be brought before me tomorrow morning. (To Ethelberta) Now, dearest, we will walk a little further if you are able. I have provided that your friends shall be taken care of. I heard you arrange the meeting with your confederate and when he came for your note I was there a little earlier than you had arranged, and handed it down to him. It confirmed the time but changed the place. When you came with your note I was standing under the balcony to receive it. You dropped it into your husband's hands - ho-ho-ho-ho! I ordered a brougham to be at the west lodge as instructed in your note. I imagine your friend ordered a brougham to be at the north gate in accordance with my note. You came to the spot you had mentioned and like a good wife rushed into the arms of your husband - hoo - hoo - hoo - hoo!

*Ethelberta laughs hysterically and sinks to her knees. Lord Mountclere begins to panic. He is near the cottage, which Ethelberta had visited earlier. A door opens and a woman enters the stage.*

MOUNTCLERE Have you prepared for us, as I directed?

WOMAN Yes, my lord; tea and coffee are both ready.

MOUNTCLERE Never mind that now. Lady Mountclere is ill; come and assist her indoors. Then bring wine and water at once.

*Ethelberta is now calmer and manages to stand. The female servant enters bringing refreshment.*

MOUNTCLERE (to the servant) You may retire.

ETHELBERTA (recognising the female servant) Where is the other Lady Mountclere?

MOUNTCLERE Gone!

ETHELBERTA She shall never return - never?

MOUNTCLERE Never. It was not intended that she should.

ETHELBERTA That sounds well. Lord Mountclere, we may as well compromise matters.

MOUNTCLERE I think so too. It becomes a lady to make a virtue of a necessity.

ETHELBERTA It was stratagem against stratagem. Mine was ingenious; yours was masterly! Accept my acknowledgment. We will enter upon an armed neutrality.

MOUNTCLERE No. Let me be your adorer and slave again, as ever. Your beauty, dearest, covers everything! You are my mistress and queen. But here we are at the door. Tea is prepared for us here. I have a liking for this cottage mode, and live here on occasion. Woman, attend to Lady Mountclere.

*The female servant has now realised she had been speaking earlier to Lady Mountclere and is astonished. She helps Ethelberta through the door. Mountclere also goes through the door. They all exit the stage.*

Scene 4.15 At the North Gate

*Enter Julian.*

JULIAN (to himself) Something has gone wrong. Perhaps Ethelberta has decided to stay here after all.

*Julian hears male voices from the wood and hides.*

VOICE 1 Have ye zeed anybody?

VOICE 2 Not a soul.

VOICE 1 Shall we go across again?

VOICE 2 What's the good? Let's home to supper.

VOICE 1 My lord must have heard somebody. Or he wouldn't have sent us looking.

VOICE 2 Perhaps he's nervous now he's living in the cottage again. I thought that fancy was over. Well, I'm glad 'tis a young wife he's brought us. She'll have her routs and her rackets as well as the high-born ones, you'll see, as soon as she gets used to the place.

VOICE 1 She must be a queer Christian to pick up with him.

VOICE 2 Well, if she've charity; 'tis enough for us poor men; her faith and hope may be as please God. Now I'm for on-along homeward.

*Julian comes out of hiding and exits.*

Scene 4.16 Julian's House

*Enter Julian and Faith, who is holding a letter.*

JULIAN Well, I am tired of this life.

FAITH So am I. Ah, if we were only rich!

JULIAN Ah, yes!

FAITH Or, if we were not rich, if we were only slightly provided for, it would be better than nothing. How much would you be content with, Kit?

JULIAN As much as I could get.

FAITH Would you be content with a thousand a year for both of us?

JULIAN I daresay I should.

FAITH Or five hundred for both?

JULIAN Or five hundred.

FAITH Or even three hundred?

JULIAN Bother three hundred. Less than double the sum would not satisfy me. We may as well imagine much as little.

FAITH (sadly) O Kit, you always disappoint me.

JULIAN I do. How do I disappoint you this time?

FAITH By not caring for three hundred a year - a hundred and fifty each - when that is all I have to offer you.

JULIAN Faith! Ah - of course - Lucy's will. I had forgotten.

FAITH It is true and I had prepared such a pleasant surprise for you and now you don't care! Our cousin Lucy did leave us something after all. I don't understand the exact total sum, but it comes to a hundred and fifty a year each - more than I expected though not so much as you deserved. Here's the letter. (Hands the letter to Julian) I have been dwelling upon it all day and thinking what a pleasure it would be; and it is not after all.

JULIAN Good gracious Faith, I was only supposing. The real thing is another matter altogether. Well, the idea of Lucy's will containing our names! I am sure I would have gone to the funeral had I known.

FAITH I wish it were a thousand.

JULIAN O no - it doesn't matter at all. But certainly three hundred for two is a tantalising sum: not enough to enable us to change our condition, and enough to make us dissatisfied with going on as we are.

FAITH We must forget we have it and let it increase.

JULIAN It isn't enough to increase much. We may as well use it. But how? Take a bigger house- what's the use? Give up the organ? - then I shall be rather worse off than I am at present. Positively, it is the most provoking amount anybody could have invented had they tried ever so long. Poor Lucy, to do that, and not even to come near us when father died...Ah, I know what we'll do. We'll go abroad - we'll live in Italy.

Scene 4.17 Two and a half years  
later - The Red Lion Inn at Anglebury

*Enter Julian and another man.*

JULIAN Lord Mountclere is still alive, and well, I am told?

MAN O ay. He'll live to be a hundred. Never such a change as has come over the man of late years.

JULIAN Indeed!

MAN O, 'tis my lady. She's a one to put up with. Still 'tis said here and there that marrying her was the best day's work that he ever did in his life, although she's got to be my lord and my lady both.

JULIAN Is she happy with him?

MAN She is very sharp with the poor man - about happy I don't know. He was a good-natured old man, for all his sins, and would sooner any day lay out money in new presents than pay it in old debts. But 'tis altered now. 'Tisn't the same place. All her doings.

JULIAN Then she holds the reins?

MAN She do! There was a little tussle at first; but how could an old man hold his own against such a spry young body as that! She threatened to run away from him and kicked up Bob's-a-dying, and I don't know what all; being the woman, of course, she was sure to beat in the long run. Poor old nobleman, she marches him off to Church every Sunday as regular as a clock, makes him read family prayers that haven't been read in Enckworth for the last thirty years to my certain knowledge, and keeps him down to three glasses of wine a day, strict, so that you never see him any the more generous for liquor or a bit elevated at all, as it used to be. They say he would have been dead in five years if he had gone on as he was going so it has done him good in one sense.

JULIAN So that she's a good wife to him, after all.

MAN It is said when he's asked out to dine, or to anything in the way of a jaunt, his eye flies across to hers afore he answers: and if her eye says yes, he says yes: and if her eye says no, he says no. 'Tis a sad condition for one who ruled womankind as he, that a woman should lead him in a string whether he will or no.

JULIAN Sad indeed!

MAN She's steward, and agent, and everything. She has got a room called 'my lady's office'. In the old days there were a lot of people, who looked after Enckworth but she said they were eating out the property like a honeycomb, and then there was a terrible row and half of 'em were sent flying.

JULIAN I will leave you now and walk to Knollsea. There is ample time for meeting the last steamboat.

*Exit Julian and the man*

Scene 4.18 At the Chickerel's  
house in Sandbourne

*Enter Chickerel, Mrs Chickerel, Picotee and Julian. They sit on chairs.*

CHICKEREL It was a hard struggle for her. I never thought the girl would have got through it. When she first entered the house everybody was against her. She had to fight a whole host of them single-handed. But she stood her ground. She must have had a will of iron for everybody soon knew that we were of no family and that's what made it so hard for her. But she is as mistress now and everybody respecting her. I sometimes fancy she is occasionally too severe with the servants but she says it is necessary owing to her birth. Perhaps she is right.

JULIAN I suppose she often comes to see you?

PICOTEE Four or five times a year.

MRS CHICKEREL She cannot come quite so often as she would because of her lofty position. Well. Berta doesn't take after me. I couldn't have married the man even though he did bring a coronet with him.

CHICKEREL I shouldn't have cared to let him ask 'ee. However, all has ended better than I expected. He is fond of her.

PICOTEE If I were Berta I would go to London more often. But she lives mostly in the library and is writing an epic poem.

JULIAN Dear me. And how are Sol and Dan?

PICOTEE Berta has set them up as builders in London.

CHICKEREL Sol wouldn't accept her help for a long time, and now he has agreed to it on condition of paying her back the money, with interest, which he is doing. They have just signed a contract to build a hospital for twenty thousand pounds.

PICOTEE You know that both Gwendoline and Cornelia married two years ago and went to Queensland? They married two brothers, who were farmers. Georgie and Myrtle are at school.

JULIAN And Joey?

MRS CHICKEREL We are thinking of making Joey a parson.

JULIAN Indeed! A parson.

MRS CHICKEREL Yes. 'Tis a genteel living for the boy. And he's talents that way.

*They all exit.*

Scene 4.19 The garden of  
Chickerel's House

*Enter Julian and Picotee.*

JULIAN Your letters to my sister have been charming and so regular too. It was as good as a birthday every time one arrived.

*Picotee says nothing.*

JULIAN Other letters were once written from England to Italy, and they acquired great celebrity. Do you know whose?

PICOTEE (timidly) Walpole's?

JULIAN Yes; but they never charmed me half as much as yours. You may rest assured that one person in the world thinks Walpole your second.

PICOTEE You should not have read them; they were not writtern to you. But I suppose you wished to hear of Ethelberta?

JULIAN At first I did. But, oddly enough, I got more interested in the writer than in her news. I don't know if ever before there has been an instance of loving by means of letters; if not, it is because there have never been such sweet ones written. At last I looked for them more anxiously than Faith.

PICOTEE You see, you knew me before.

JULIAN Then, on my return, I thought I would just call and see you, and go away and think what would be best for me to do with a view to the future. But since I have been here I have felt that I could not go away to think without first asking you what you think on one point - whether you could ever marry me?

PICOTEE I thought you would ask that when I first saw you.

JULIAN Did you. Why?

PICOTEE you looked at me as if you would.

JULIAN Well, the worst of it is I am as poor as Job. Faith and I have three hundred a year between us but only half is mine. So that before I get your promise I must let your father know how poor I am. Besides what I mention, I have only my earnings by music. But I am to be installed as chief organist at Melchester soon, instead of deputy, as I used to be; which is something.

PICOTEE I am to have five hundreds when I marry. That was Lord Mountclere's arrangement with Ethelberta. He is extremely anxious that I should marry well.

JULIAN That's unfortunate. A marriage with me will hardly be considered well.

PICOTEE (quickly) O yes, it will.

*Picotee looks frightened. Julian draws her towards him, and kisses her cheek. Picotee does not try to pull away.*

PICOTEE (with vivacity) Berta will never let us come to want. She always gives me what is necessary.

JULIAN We will endeavour not to trouble her. However, it is well to be kin to a coach though you never ride in it. Now, shall we go indoors to your father? You think he will not object?

PICOTEE I think he will be very glad. Berta will, I know.

*Exit Julian and Picotee.*

**THE END**