

CHARITY

by W. S. Gilbert

A Drama in Four Acts

Opened January 3, 1874, Haymarket Theatre

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DR. ATHELNEY	a Colonial Bishop-elect
TED ATHELNEY	his son, aged 38
MR. JONAS SMAILEY	a Country Gentleman, aged 60
FRED SMAILEY	his son, aged 22
MR. FITZ-PARTINGTON	a Private Inquiry Officer
BUTLER	
FOOTMAN	
MRS. VAN BRUGH	a widow, aged 35
EVE	her daughter, aged 17
RUTH TREDGETT	a tramp, aged 37

ACTS I & II

Boudoir in Mrs. Van Brugh's country house.

ACT III

Room in Mr. Smailey's House.

ACT IV

Library at Dr. Athelney's.

[A few days' interval between each Act.]

CHARITY

ACT I

SCENE - A PRETTY BOUDOIR IN MRS. VAN BRUGH'S COUNTRY-HOUSE.

[FREDERICK DISCOVERED ON CHAIR, DICTATING TO EVE WHO IS ON FOOTSTOOL. SHE WRITES IN A MEMORANDUM BOOK AT HIS FEET.]

FRED (DICTATING): Let me see. Three hundred oranges, six hundred buns, thirty gallons of tea, twelve large plum cakes. So much for the school-children's bodies. As for their minds ...

EVE: Oh, we've taken great care of their minds. In the first place, the amateur minstrel from Locroft are coming, with some lovely part songs.

FRED: Part songs. Come, that's well. Dr. Watts?

EVE: Oh dear, no. Doctors Moore and Burgess! - Much jollier. [HE SHAKES HIS HEAD GRAVELY.] Then we have a magic lantern. Here are the views. [HANDING THEM.]

FRED (EXAMINING THEM): A person on horseback, galloping at full speed. Here he is again. Probably the flight of Xerxes.

EVE: No - the flight of John Gilpin.

FRED: Very trivial, Eve dear; very trivial.

EVE: Oh, but it will amuse them more than the flight of Xerxes.

FRED (GRAVELY): My dear Eve, is this giddiness quite consistent with the nature of the good work before us?

EVE: Mayn't one be good and jolly too?

FRED: Scarcely. Grave work should be undertaken gravely, and with a sense of responsibility.

EVE: But I don't call a school feast grave work.

FRED: All work is grave when one has regard to the issues that may come of it. This school feast, trivial as it may seem to you - this matter of buns and big plum cakes - may be productive, for instance of much - of much ...

EVE: Indigestion? That's grave indeed! [HE SEEMS ANNOYED.] There, I'm very sorry I teased you, dear old boy; but you look at everything from such a serious point of view.

FRED: Am I too serious? Perhaps I am. And yet in my quiet undemonstrative way I am very happy.

EVE: If **you** are not happy, dear, who **should** be?

FRED: Yes, Eve, who indeed! [KISSES HER.]

EVE: I did not mean that. There is very little in me to make such a man as you happy, unless it be the prospect of making me as good and earnest as yourself - a poor prospect, I'm afraid, from I'm a very silly little girl.

FRED: At least I will try.

EVE: Begin now; tell me of my faults.

FRED: No, no: that would be a very ungrateful task.

EVE: Oh, if you neglect all tasks that are not pleasant you are too like me to allow of my hoping to learn anything of you.

FRED: Very aptly put, Eve. Well, then, you are too giddy, and too apt to laugh when you should sigh.

EVE: Oh, but I am naturally rather - jolly. Mamma has taught me to be so. Mamma's views are so entirely opposed to yours.

FRED: Yes; I am deeply sorry for it. If it were not so, perhaps Mrs. Van Brugh would like me better.

EVE: Mamma does like you, dear. She thinks you are very grave and precise and methodical, but I am sure she likes you - or why did she consent to our engagement?

FRED: Because she loves you so well that she has the heart to thwart you in nothing. She is an admirable woman - good, kind - charitable beyond measure - beloved, honoured, and courted by all ...

EVE: The best woman in the world!

FRED: But she does not understand me. Well, time will work a change, and I must be content to wait.

[ENTER SERVANT.]

SERVANT: Mr. Edward Athelney, miss, is in the drawing room.

EVE: Dear me, how tiresome.

FRED (CALMLY): Miss Van Brugh is not at home.

EVE (ASTONISHED): Oh, Frederick, I am!

[EXIT SERVANT.]

FRED: Well, yes, of course in one sense, you certainly are. But being engaged upon a good work, with which an interruption would seriously interfere, you may be said - metaphorically, of course, and for the purposes of this particular case - to be, to a certain extent, out.

EVE (PUZZLED): I am quite sure I am at home, dear, in every possible sense of the word. You don't dislike Edward, do you?

FRED: You know very well that I dislike no one.

EVE: I'm sure of that. You love all men.

FRED: No doubt, Eve, I love all men. But you will understand that I love some men less than others; and, although I love Edward Athelney very much indeed, I love him, perhaps, less than anybody else in the world.

EVE: But this is quite astonishing! Has Ted Athelney a fault? What is it? Come, sir, name one fault if you can. And mind, he's my big brother, or as good, so be careful.

FRED: "Frater nascitur non fit."

EVE: Oh!

FRED: I don't believe in your amateur brother. With every desire to confine himself to the duties of the character he undertakes, he is nevertheless apt to overlook the exact point where the brother ends and the lover begins.

EVE (PUZZLED): The lover!

FRED: The brother by birth keeps well within bounds, but the amateur treads so often on the border line that in time it becomes obliterated and the functions merge.

EVE: Ted Athelney a lover of mine! Oh, that's too absurd. Ted Athelney - that great, clumsy, middle-aged, awkward, good-natured, apple-faced man, a lover of anybody's, and, least of all, mine! Why he's forty! Oh, it's shocking - it's horrible! I won't hear anything so dreadful of any one I love so much.

FRED: You admit that you love him?

EVE: Oh, yes, I love him - but I don't **love** him. [NESTLING AGAINST FRED.] Don't **you** understand the difference?

FRED: I don't like his calling you Eve.

EVE: Why you wouldn't have him - oh, you never **could** want Ted

Athelney to call me Miss Van Brugh?
FRED: Then he kisses you.
EVE: Of course he does, dear. Kisses me? So does mamma!
FRED: No doubt, but there's some difference.
EVE: A difference! What difference?
FRED: This, if no other : that I object to the one and I don't
object to the other. [TURNS AWAY.]
EVE (DISAPPOINTED): Then I'm not to kiss Ted Athelney any more.

[ENTER TED ATHELNEY.]

TED: Well, Eve, old lady, here I am, back again - well and
hearty.
EVE: Ted, stand back; I'm not to kiss you.
TED: Eh? Why not?
EVE: It's wrong. Isn't it? [TO FRED.]
FRED: I'm sorry you think it necessary to ask the question.
EVE: There, Ted. Only think of the wrong we've been doing for
years and years, and never knew it!
TED: But who told you it was wrong. Not conscience, I'll be
sworn.
EVE: No; that's the worst of it. There's something wrong with
my conscience; it doesn't seem to be up to its work. From
some motive - mistaken politeness, perhaps - it declines to
assert itself. Awful, isn't it?
TED: Come, something's happened during my absence in town; tell
me what it is.
EVE: Something of a tremendous nature **has** happened! Ted
Athelney, I mustn't call you Ted Athelney any longer!
TED: What?
EVE: And I mustn't let you kiss me, because I'm going to be
married.
TED: Married! [STARTING.]
EVE: Yes.
TED: To ... ? [INDICATING FREDERICK.]
EVE: Yes. [HE IS MUCH AGITATED.] Won't you tell me that you
are glad to hear it?
TED (AFTER A PAUSE): Yes, Eve, I'm glad of everything that makes you happy.
It has come upon me very suddenly. I never thought of your
getting married. I was a great ass, for it must have come
about some time or other, and why not now? and it must have
been to some fellow, and why not Fred Smailey? God bless
you, Eve. I must get it well into my mind before I can talk
about it, and mine is a mind that takes a good deal of
getting at. I hope and believe that you will be happy.
[SHE RETIRES.] Fred, old man ...

[GOES TO FRED; TAKES HIS HAND AND TRIES TO SPEAK, BUT IN VAIN.]

[ENTER MRS. VAN BRUGH.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Well, I've done for myself now; go away from me; I'm a
pariah, an outcast; don't, for goodness' sake, be seen
talking to me.
EVE: Why, mamma dear, what on earth have you been doing?
MRS. VAN BRUGH: Doing? Listen and shudder! I've put a dissenter into my
almshouses! [SITS AT TABLE.]
FRED (RISING): A Dissenter?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: A real live Dissenter. Isn't it awful?

FRED: No, awful is too strong a term; but I think it was a very, very sad mistake.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: A thousand thanks for your toleration - I shall never forget it. The village is outraged - they have stood my eccentricities long enough. It was bad enough when I put a Roman Catholic in, but in consideration of the almshouses being my own they were good enough to swallow the Roman Catholic. Then came a Jew - well, the village was merciful, and with a few wry faces they swallowed even the Jew. But a Dissenter! The line *must* be drawn somewhere, and high and low church are agreed that it must be drawn at dissenters. The churchwardens look the other way when I pass. The clerk's religious zeal causes him to turn into the "Red Cow," rather than touch his hat to me, and even the dirty little boys run after me shouting "No Popery" at the top of their voices, though I'm sure I don't see how it applies.

FRED: But, my dear Mrs. Van Brugh, you mean well I'm sure - but a Jew, a Catholic and a Dissenter! - is there no such thing as a starving Churchman to be found?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: There are but too many starving men of all denominations, but while I'm hunting out the Churchman, the Jew, the Catholic, and the Dissenter will perish, and that would never do, would it?

FRED: That is the Christianity of Impulse. I would feed him that belonged to my own church, and if he did not belong to it, I would not feed him at all.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: That is the Christianity of Religious Politics. As to these poor people, they will shake down and agree very well in time. Nothing is so conducive to toleration as the knowledge that one's bread depends upon it. It applies to all conditions of life, from almshouses to Happy Families. Where are you going?

EVE: We are going down to the school to see the cakes and oranges and decorations ...

FRED (SERIOUSLY): And to impress upon the children the danger of introducing inharmonious elements upon *their* little almshouses,

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Well, I hope you'll be more successful with them than with me. Their case is more critical than mine, I assure you.

[EXEUNT EVE AND FRED. MRS. VAN BRUGH SEES EDWARD, WHO IS SITTING AT BACK, WITH HIS HEAD BETWEEN HIS HANDS.]

Why, who's this? Edward Athelney, returned at last to his disconsolate village? Go away, sir - don't come near me - you're a reprobate - you've been in London ten days and nobody to look after you. Give an account of yourself. It's awful to think of the villainy a thoroughly badly disposed young man can get through in ten days in London, if I'm not there to look after him - come, sir, all your crimes, please, in alphabetical order - now then, A - Arson. Any arson? No? Quite sure? Come now, that's something - Then we go to Burglary? Bigamy? No Bigamy? Come, it's not as bad as I thought. - Why, [SEEING THAT HE LOOKS VERY WRETCHED] what on earth is the matter - why, my poor Ted - what is distressing you? I never saw you look so

wretched in my life!

TED: Oh! Mrs. Van Brugh, I'm awfully unhappy!

MRS. VAN BRUGH: My poor old friend - tell me all about it.

TED: It's soon told - Mrs. Van Brugh, you have a daughter, who's the best and loveliest girl I ever saw in my life.

MRS. VAN BRUGH (PAUSE): My poor Edward!

TED: Did - did you know that I - that I was like this?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: No! no! no!

TED: Nor I, it came upon me like a thunderclap - my love for that little girl has grown as imperceptibly as my age has grown - I've taken no note of either till now - when I rub my eyes and find that I love her dearly, and that I'm eight and thirty!

MRS. VAN BRUGH: But, surely you know - you must have heard ...

TED: Yes, yes, I've just heard - Fred Smailey's a lucky fellow, and he deserves his luck.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Perhaps. I don't know. I don't like Fred Smailey.

TED (AMAZED): You don't like Smailey?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: No, I don't, and I'm afraid I show it. My dear old friend, it would have made me very happy to have seen you married to Eve, but he was first in the field, and she loves him. At first I wouldn't hear of it - but she fell ill - might have died - well, I'm her mother, and I love her, and I gave in. I know nothing against him.

TED: Oh, Fred Smailey's a good fellow, a thorough good fellow. You do him an injustice, indeed you do; I never knew a man with such a sense of gratitude - it's perfectly astonishing. Remember how he gave me that splendid collie, when I pulled him out of the ice, last February, and how in return for my lending him money to pay his college debts, he got his father to let me shoot over Rushout - no - no - if Fred Smailey has a fault, he's too good for this world.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Is he? - at all events he's too solemn.

TED: Here's the dad coming - he mustn't see me like this. Goodbye, Mrs. Van Brugh. You won't speak of this to anyone, I know - not that I've reason to be ashamed of it, but it'll pain Eve and Fred too. I'll bear up, never fear, and Eve shall never know - after all her happiness is the great end, and, so that it's brought about, what matter whether Fred or I do it, so that it's done. It's Fred's job, not mine - better luck for him, worse luck for me. [EXIT.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Poor fellow! There goes a heart of gold with a head of cotton-wool! Oh, Eve, Eve, my dear, I'm very sad for you! Is it head or heart that makes the best husband? Better that baby-hearted simpleton than the sharpest Smailey that ever stepped! I'm very unjust. Heaven knows that I, of all women in this world, should be slow to judge. But my dislike to that man, to his family, to everything that relates to him, is intuitive. However, the mischief, if mischief there be, is done; I'll make the best of it.

[ENTER DR. ATHELNEY, VERY HURRIEDLY.]

DR. ATHELNEY: My dear Mrs. Van Brugh, I come, without a moment's loss of time, to thank you in my late curate Twemlow's name for your great kindness in presenting him to the Crabthorpe living. He has a wife and four children, and is nearly mad

with joy and gratitude. I've brought you his letter.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: I won't read it, doctor. I can't bear gratitude; it makes my eyes red. Take it away. I am only too glad to have helped a struggling and deserving man. Now, I'm very glad you've come, because I want to consult you on a business matter of some importance.

DR. ATHELNEY: My dear Mrs. Van Brugh, I have been the intellectual head of this village for fifty-three years, and nobody ever yet paid me the compliment of consulting me on a matter of business.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Then I've no doubt I'm going to hit upon a neglected mine of commercial sagacity!

DR. ATHELNEY: It's very possible. I was second wrangler of my year.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: I told you last night of Eve's engagement. Well, old Mr. Smailey has sent me a note to say that he will call on me tomorrow week to talk over the settlement I propose to make on the occasion of my darling's marriage with his son. Now, doctor, look as wise as you can, and tell me what I ought to do.

DR. ATHELNEY: Well, in such a case I should be very worldly. I think, my dear, I should prepare a nice little luncheon, with a bottle of that Amontillado, and then, having got him quietly and cozily tete-a-tete, I should ask him what **he** proposes to do.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Very good indeed, doctor. Upon my word, for a colonial bishop-elect, that's not bad. But, unfortunately, I've already ascertained that he proposes to do nothing. All his money is tied up.

DR. ATHELNEY: Oh, is it indeed? Bless me! Tied up, is it? And may I ask, what do you understand by that expression?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Well, in round terms, it's his, but he mustn't spend it. Do you understand?

DR. ATHELNEY: Oh, yes. When I was a boy my uncle gave me a guinea on those terms.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Now come, doctor dear, the young people look to me, and, when one is looked to, one should be equal to the emergency. What would you advise me to do?

DR. ATHELNEY: **Your** property is not, I suppose, tied up?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: No; it is quite unfettered, and consists principally of long leaseholds and funded property, left me by my god-father, and a small sum of money acquired by Captain Van Brugh on his first marriage.

DR. ATHELNEY: His first marriage! Bless me, I never knew he had married before.

MRS. VAN BRUGH (MUCH AGITATED): Yes, a most unhappy match. She - left him under discreditable circumstances - went to Australia - resumed her maiden name, and, under that name, died in Melbourne.

DR. ATHELNEY: And when did this unhappy lady die?

MRS. VAN BRUGH (STILL AGITATED): Oh! years ago - It's a terrible story. I don't like to think of it - I can't bear to talk of it.

DR. ATHELNEY (ASIDE): What a blundering old savage I am! If there is a pitfall open, ten to one I tumble into it! [ALOUD.] I have always understood that where marriage settlements of any consideration are concerned, it is customary to employ a solicitor. I can't quote my authority, but I feel sure that I am right.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Old Mr. Smailey is an executor under Captain Van Brugh's will, and **his** solicitor has always acted for me.

DR. ATHELNEY: His solicitor! what, that queer little red-faced fellow who accompanies him everywhere?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: No. Ha! ha! ha! I suppose Mr. Fitz-Partington is a junior partner, or head clerk, or something of the kind - at all events, his name doesn't appear in the firm.

DR. ATHELNEY: Well, leave it to me, Mrs. Van Brugh, and I'll write to my brother, the Vice-Chancellor, who will tell us what to do. Now I'm off. [NOISE WITHOUT.] Why - what's this? Bless me, Mrs. Van Brugh, what is the cause of this commotion?

[NOISE HEARD WITHOUT, AS OF PEOPLE STRUGGLING WITH
A WOMAN, WHO RUDELy EXPOSTULATES WITH THEM.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Why, what in the world is the matter?

[ENTER THREE OR FOUR SERVANT-MEN WITH RUTH TREDGETT
IN CUSTODY. SHE IS WILD-LOOKING AND DISHEVELLED,
AS IF SHE HAD BEEN STRUGGLING VIOLENTLY.]

GROOM: We've got her, ma'am. Don't be afraid. [TO RUTH.] Stand quiet, you jade, will yer? Woa, there! We've got her, sir, but we've had a desperate hard job to do it.

DR. ATHELNEY: What has been done?

GROOM: She's knocked two teeth clean out of my head, sir, and give notice to quit to a dozen more.

DR. ATHELNEY: We will hear your grievance presently. What has this woman done that she is brought here?

ALL: Done, sir, why ...

BUTLER (WITH DIGNITY TO THE OTHERS): If you please! [TO MRS. VAN BRUGH.] Ma'am, Edwards found this 'ere woman creepin' out of my pantry, ma'am, on all fours.

DR. ATHELNEY: On what?

BUTLER: On her hands and knees, like a quadruped, sir.

DR. ATHELNEY: Have you searched her?

BUTLER (SHOCKED): No, sir, I have **not** searched her.

DR. ATHELNEY: Well, well, I mean has she been searched?

BUTLER (WITH DIGNITY): I put my hand in her pocket, sir, and I looked under her shawl.

DR. ATHELNEY: Well, you didn't search her, but you put your hand in her pocket, and you looked under her shawl. What did you find there?

BUTLER: A decanter of sherry, sir. [PRODUCING IT.]

DR. ATHELNEY (TO MRS. VAN BRUGH): Well, you hear what this man says; did you take this wine?

RUTH: Ay, I took it, sure enough.

DR. ATHELNEY: And why did you take it?

RUTH: Why, to drink, of course. Why **should** I take it?

DR. ATHELNEY: You **shouldn't** take it.

RUTH: Don't you never take wine?

DR. ATHELNEY: Not other people's wine - except, of course, with their permission.

RUTH: Maybe you've got a cellar of your own.

DR. ATHELNEY: Maybe I have.

RUTH: Well, maybe I haven't. That's my answer.

DR. ATHELNEY: Now, what are we to do with her?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Leave her to me. Dr. Athelney, please remain here with me. Every one else, except the woman, leave the room.

BUTLER: But she's a desperate character, ma'am; it took six of us, including me, to bring her here.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Never mind. Dr. Athelney and I will see her alone. Take your hands from her and go.

BUTLER: Hadn't we better keep within hearing? If help was wanted -

MRS. VAN BRUGH: No help will be wanted. I am in earnest. Go. Shut the door. [THE SERVANTS RELUCTANTLY DEPART.]

RUTH: You're a cool hand, missis; ain't you afeard on me?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Not at all. Why should I be afraid of you? I mean you no harm.

RUTH: Who's he?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Dr. Athelney, a clergyman and magistrate.

RUTH: Beak, is he? Well, let him make out the committal. Where's it to be? Sessions?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: We have no wish to prosecute you. We wish to help you to arrive at a sense of right and wrong.

RUTH: Can't it be done without a parson? I dunno much good o' parsons. I'd rather it was done without a parson.

DR. ATHELNEY (KINDLY): Don't think of me as a clergyman, if that calling is distasteful to you. Perhaps some day we may succeed in overwhelming your prejudice. In the mean time, think of me only as a harmless old gentleman, who is willing and able to help you to earn your living respectably, if you desire to do so.

RUTH: Ah, I've come across the likes o' you afore now. Three weeks agone comes a parson, as it might be you. "I've come to help you, poor fallen creetur," says he; "I've come to tell you blessed truths, poor miserable outcast," says he. "Read that, wretched lost sheep," says he. "I'll call again in a month and see how you feel," says he. A month! Heugh! When I was bad with fever, the doctor come every day. **He** never come no more. There's ladies come odd times. I call to mind one - come in a carriage, **she** did! Same story - poor, miserable, lost one - wretched, abandoned, fellow-creetur, and that. She called me a brand from the burnin', and wanted to stretch out a hand to save me, **she** did. Well, she stretched it out, and I thought she meant it (for I was green then), and fool-like, I took it, and kissed it. She screeched as tho' I'd bit her!

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Will you take my hand?

RUTH (ASTONISHED): Do you know what I am?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Yes; I know well what you are. You are a woman who wants help, and I a woman who will help you. [TAKING HER HAND.]

RUTH (MUCH MOVED): Thankee, missis! you've spoke fair to me. I've had no one speak like that to me for many a long year. Thankee, missis. [STRUGGLING WITH TEARS.] Don't mind me. [THROWS HER APRON OVER HER FACE AND SOBS.] They **will** come odd times!

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Will you tell me your name?

RUTH: Ruth Tredgett. I come from Cambridge.

DR. ATHELNEY: Born there?

RUTH: I dunno as I was born there, but I come from there.

DR. ATHELNEY: What are you?

RUTH: I s'pose I'm a thief. I s'pose I'm what gentlefolks thinks is wus than a thief. God help me! I s'pose I'm as bad as I can be. [WEEPING.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Are your parents alive?

RUTH: No, I never had no father - my mother was such as me. See here, lady. Wot's to become of a gal whose mother was such as me? Mother! Why, I could swear afore I could walk!

DR. ATHELNEY: But were you not brought up to any calling?

RUTH: Yes, sir, I were; I were brought up to be a thief. Every soul as I knowed was a thief, and the best thief was the best thought on. Maybe a kid not long born ought to have knowed better. I dunno, I must ha' been born bad, for it seemed right enough to me. Well, it was *in* prison and *out* o' prison - three months here and six months there - till I was sixteen. I sometimes thinks as if they'd bin half as ready to show me how to go right as they was to punish me for going wrong, I might have took the right turnin' and stuck to it afore this. At sixteen I got seven year for shop-liftin', and was sent out to Port Philip. I soon got a ticket and tried service and needlework, but no one wouldn't have me; and I got sick and tired of it all, and began to think o' putting a end to it, when I met a smooth-spoken chap - a gentleman, if you please - as wanted to save me from the danger afore me. Well, wot odds? He was a psalm-singing villain, and he soon left me. No need to tell the rest - to such as you it can't be told. I'm 'most as bad as I can be - as bad as I can be!

MRS. VAN BRUGH: I think not; I think not. What do you say, Doctor?

DR. ATHELNEY (STRUGGLING WITH HIS TEARS): Say, ma'am? I say that you, Ruth Tredgett, have been a most discreditable person, and you ought to be heartily ashamed of yourself, Ruth Tredgett; and as a clergyman of the Church of England I feel bound to tell you that - that your life has been - has been what God knows it couldn't well have helped being under the circumstances.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Ruth Tredgett, I am very, very sorry for you. If you are willing to leave this unhappy course of life I will provide you with the means of earning your living honestly.

RUTH: Honestly! Why, lady, I'm too far gone for that!

MRS. VAN BRUGH: I hope not. I have assisted many, very many such women as yourself, and I have seldom found my efforts wasted.

RUTH: But you - a lady, high-born, high-bred, beautiful, rich, good ... [IN ASTONISHMENT.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Hush. [RISES.] No matter what I am. [WITH EMOTION.] Who shall say what the very best of us might not have been but for the accident of education and good example? Tell me, Ruth Tredgett, will you accept my offer?

RUTH (KNEELS AT HER FEET AND LOOKS UP INTO HER FACE): I will!

CURTAIN - END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE - SAME AS IN ACT I.

[ENTER MR. SMAILEY AND SERVANT]

MR. SMAILEY (VERY GENTLY): Will you have the goodness to tell Mrs. Van Brugh that Mr. Smailey is here to see her, by appointment?
SERVANT: Mr. Smailey, sir? Yes, sir. [GOING.]

[ENTER MR. FITZ-PARTINGTON.]

FITZ-PARTINGTON (STOPPING SERVANT): **And** his solicitor.

MR. SMAILEY (WITH MILD STERNNESS): You have followed me again, sir?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Followed you again, sir; according to contract.

MR. SMAILEY: There is no contract between us that entitles you to dog my footsteps as though you were hunting down a thief.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Hunting down a thief? Oh yes. To enable me to assist you in blighting the character of the best and loveliest woman that ever shed a light upon a private detective's thorny path, I am to have the free run of your home and papers; I am to accompany you wherever you go, and you are to introduce me everywhere as your solicitor.

MR. SMAILEY: Sir, you are not in the least like a solicitor. You are a ridiculously dressed person. You are like nothing in the world but what you are - a private detective. I desire to press hardly on no fellow-creature, but you are a spy! that base and utterably abject thing - a spy!

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Mr. Smailey, when you complain that you find my society irksome, you have my profoundest sympathy; I find it so myself. When you revile my profession, my sentiments are entirely in accord, for I have the very poorest opinion of it. But when you imply that I don't look the character I undertake to represent, why, **then**, sir, you touch the private detective on the most sensitive part of his moral anatomy. I'm not a blameless character, but if I undertook to personate the Archbishop of Canterbury I believe I should look the part, and my conversation would be found to be in keeping with the character.

MR. SMAILEY: Pray, silence; oh, pray, pray, silence. You shock me inexpressibly. It is most painful to me to have to resort to your assistance. My son, my dear son, has engaged himself to marry Mrs. Van Brugh's daughter. I have lately had reason to believe that there is something discreditable in Mrs. Van Brugh's marriage relations, though I do not know its precise nature. You tell me you have a certain clue to this flaw, though you decline to tell me what it is until your proofs are matured. Well, sir, the Smaileys are a very old and very famous family. Caius Smaileius came over with Julius Caesar; his descendants have borne an untarnished scutcheon for eighteen hundred years. In its interest I am bound to employ you, and upon your most exacting terms, though I cannot think of your contemptible calling without a feeling of the most profound abhorrence.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Sir, I am heartily ashamed of it.

MR. SMAILEY: You are a professional impostor; a hired lie.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: It is too true. I not only lie myself, but I am the cause

of lying in others.
MR. SMAILEY: For the lies that have to be told in accounting for you I hold you entirely responsible. I wish that to be understood. I wash my hands of them altogether; and, when I think of the deep, deliberate, and utterly indefensible falsehoods that I have had to utter on your behalf, I tremble for your future - I tremble for your future.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Unselfish man.

MR. SMAILEY: As for the preposterous terms you have dictated ...

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Terms! I have ensured to myself the unbroken enjoyment of your desirable society for six weeks; and believe me, when I say that if I had been acquainted with the inexpressible charms of the most fascinating woman that ever shed a light on a private detective's thorny path, I wouldn't have undertaken the job, no, not even for a lifetime of your society!

[ENTER MRS. VAN BRUGH.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Good morning, Mr. Smailey. I am sorry to have kept you waiting. [ASIDE.] That absurd little man with him again. [ALOUD.] Good morning, Mr. -

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Fitz-Partington.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Fitz-Partington, of course.

FITZ-PARTINGTON (ASIDE): She might remember **my** name. I can't conceive any circumstances under which I could forget **hers**!

MR. SMAILEY: Mr. Fitz-Partington is entirely in my confidence. I brought him, because I believed that his familiarity with legal forms might assist us in our interview. You can speak without reserve before Mr. Fitz-Partington. [ASIDE TO FITZ.] A lie, sir! Another lie, from first to last!

MRS. VAN BRUGH: I suppose the facts will come before Mr. Fitz-Partington when they are decided on. The steps by which they are arrived at will only bore him. I'm sure Mr. Fitz-Partington won't be angry with me, when I ask him to amuse himself in the next room until preliminaries are arranged.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Mrs. Van Brugh, I have made it a part of my moral code to step without hesitation into any apartment you may think fit to indicate. [EXIT.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Now, Mr. Smailey, about these settlements. I will tell you at once what I propose to do. My income is, as you know, a very large one - much larger than any one would suppose who judges from the quietness of my mode of life. I am an odd woman, and I spend my money in my own way. I have very many claims upon it, and, although I wish to deal handsomely with my darling Eve, I must not disappoint those who have counted upon me for some years past. To come to the point, I propose to settle my Buckinghamshire farm upon her, on the usual terms of a marriage settlement. I don't know the technical expression - but on the usual terms.

MR. SMAILEY: The Buckinghamshire farm, yes. Thank you. I forget whether that is the leasehold or the freehold farm, for you have two.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: You mustn't ask me. Your solicitor knows. It's worth five hundred pounds a year, and that, I suppose, is the main point.

MR. SMAILEY: Not altogether; the difference in value may be prodigious.

Have you a copy of the will?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: I never saw the will.

MR. SMAILEY: Never saw the will? I think I have a copy of it at home - with your permission I will go and fetch it, and the matter can be decided at once.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Do, by all means. I only know that my property is all my own, and that I can do what I like with it; and I assure you, Mr. Smailey, I avail myself of the privilege.

MR. SMAILEY: You do indeed. And that reminds me, Mrs. Van Brugh, that I am anxious to speak to you on another topic - a topic of a singularly painful character. I will endeavour, Mrs. Van Brugh, to approach it as delicately as possible.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Indeed! [ALARMED.] You rouse my curiosity, Mr. Smailey. Does it - does it refer in any way to myself?

MR. SMAILEY: Directly to yourself.

MRS. VAN BRUGH (MUCH ALARMED): May I ask in what way?

MR. SMAILEY: As I said before, it is a most difficult subject to approach, and I would willingly spare you. Give me a moment to think how I can best put it to you.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Pray have no hesitation in telling me what it is. [WITH HALF-DISGUISED EMOTION.] Does it - does it refer in any way to my - to my past life, for instance? [WITH AFFECTED CHEERFULNESS.]

MR. SMAILEY: It does refer to incidents in your past life. To many incidents in general, and to one incident in particular.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: For Heaven's sake, sir, be explicit. Speak out, I implore you. [WITH SUPPRESSED AGITATION.]

MR. SMAILEY: You seem strangely agitated, Mrs. Van Brugh.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: No, no; I am ill and nervous today. Your manner is rather alarming. [WITH AFFECTED CHEERFULNESS.] You know I'm a very bad hand at guessing riddles, Mr. Smailey. Come, what is it? I give it up. [HE HESITATES.] Why have you any hesitation in telling me?

MR. SMAILEY: Because it involves a particularly delicate moral point. [SHE IS MUCH AGITATED.] God bless me, you seem very much alarmed.

MRS. VAN BRUGH (WITH DETERMINATION): Mr. Smailey, once and for all, I insist upon knowing what it is.

MR. SMAILEY: Well, then, to be quite plain with you, it is currently reported in the village that you have taken a miserable woman from the streets and established her in the character of a respectable workwoman within a hundred yards of this spot.

[MRS. VAN BRUGH, WHOSE AGITATION AND ALARM HAVE BEEN INTENSE, IS GREATLY RELIEVED.]

Moreover, I have been informed that you have, for some years past, been in the habit of searching out women of bad character who profess penitence, with the view of enabling them to earn their living in the society of blameless Christians.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: I have.

MR. SMAILEY: I tell you at once that I am loth to believe this thing.

MRS. VAN BRUGH (WITH INDIGNANT SURPRISE): Why are you loth to believe this thing?

MR. SMAILEY: Why? [RISES.] Because its audacity, its want of principle,

and, above all, its unspeakable indelicacy, shock me beyond power of expression.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Mr. Smailey, is it possible that you are speaking deliberately? Think of any blameless woman whom you love and honour, and who is loved and honoured of all. Think of the shivering outcast whose presence is contamination, whose touch is horror unspeakable, whose very existence is an unholy stain on God's earth. Woman - loved, honoured, courted by all. Woman - shunned, loathed, and unutterably despised, but still - Woman. I do not plead for those whose advantages of example and education render their fall ten thousand times more culpable. Let others speak for such as they. [WITH A BROKEN VOICE.] - It may be that something is to be said, even for them. I plead for those who have had the world against them from the first - who with blunted weapons and untutored hands have fought society single-handed, and fallen in the unequal fight. God help them!

MR. SMAILEY: Mrs. Van Brugh, I have no desire to press hardly on any fellow-creature; but society, the grand arbiter in these matters, has decided that a woman who has once forfeited her moral position shall never regain it.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Even though her repentance be sincere and beyond doubt?

MR. SMAILEY: Even so.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Even though she fell unprotected, unadvised, perishing with want and chilled with despair?

MR. SMAILEY: Even so. For such a woman there is no excuse - for such a woman there is no pardon.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: You mean no pardon on earth?

MR. SMAILEY: Of course I mean no pardon on earth. What can I have to do with pardon elsewhere?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Nothing. Mr. Smailey, when you have procured the will, I shall be ready to see you; but before you go let me tell you that I am inexpressibly shocked and pained at the terrible theory you have advanced. [HE ENDEAVOURS TO SPEAK.] Oh, understand me, I do not charge you with exceptional heartlessness. You represent the opinions of society, and society is fortunate in its mouthpiece. Heaven teaches that there is a pardon for every penitent. Earth teaches that there is one sin for which there is no pardon-when the sinner is a woman!

[RUTH HAS ENTERED. SHE IS QUIETLY AND DECENTLY DRESSED,
AND CARRIES A PARCEL OF NEEDLEWORK IN HER HAND.]

MR. SMAILEY (ASIDE): Mrs. Van Brugh, pray be quiet; we are observed.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: By the subject of our conversation.

[EXIT MRS. VAN BRUGH.]

RUTH: I beg pardon - I thought the lady was alone. [GOING.]

MR. SMAILEY: Stop, woman. [SHE TURNS AND ADVANCES.] Don't - don't approach me - we have nothing in common. Listen at a distance. Mrs. Van Brugh has thought proper to place you on a pedestal that levels you, socially, with respectable Christians. In doing so, I consider that she has insulted respectable Christians. She thinks proper to suffer you to enter *my* presence. In so doing I consider that she has insulted me. I desire you to understand that when a woman

of your stamp enters the presence of a Christian gentleman,
she ...
RUTH (WHO HAS BEEN LOOKING AT HIM IN WONDER DURING THIS SPEECH):
Smailey! That's never **you**!

[MR. SMAILEY FALLS BACK IN HIS CHAIR.]

Ay, Smailey, it's Ruth Tredgett.
MR. SMAILEY (VERY CONFUSED): I did not know whom I was speaking to.
RUTH: But you knowed **what** you was speakin' to, Jonas Smailey. Go
on. I'm kinder curious to hear what **you've** got to say about
a woman o' my stamp. I kinder curious to hear wot Jonas
Smailey's got to say about his own work.
MR. SMAILEY: We meet in a strange way after so many years.
RUTH: Yes, we do meet in a strange way. Seems to me it's suthin'
of a topsy-turvy way. But it's a topsy-turvy world, ain't
it?
MR. SMAILEY (RECOVERING HIMSELF, WITH BLAND DIGNITY): I have no desire
to press hardly on any fellow-creature ...
RUTH (QUIETLY): Come, that's kind, anyhow.
MR. SMAILEY: Perhaps, after all, you were not entirely to blame.
RUTH: Well, p'raps not.
MR. SMAILEY: Perhaps I myself was not altogether without reproach in the
matter. But in my case allowance should, in common charity,
be made for follies that arise from extreme youth and - and
inexperience. I was barely forty then.
RUTH: And I was just sixteen. Well, I forgive you, along o' your
youth, as I hope to be forgiven along o' my childhood.
MR. SMAILEY (RISES): The tone you adopt is in the worst possible taste.
The misguided lady who has taken upon herself, most
wickedly, to foist you upon society, has committed a fraud,
which ...
RUTH: Stop **there**, Smailey! You're getting on dangerous ground.
Best leave that lady alone. She's a bit chipped off
heaven - she's good right through. She's - she's - I'm slow
at finding words that mean goodness. My words run mostly
the other way, wus luck. If I had to tell o' **you**, Smailey,
they'd come in handy and strong. I can't find words that
mean **her**!
MR. SMAILEY: I have no wish to be hard on you, but it **is** a fraud, and ...
RUTH: Fraud? Fraud's a bad word to come from **you**, Smailey. I'd
ha' thought you'd ha' fought shy o' that word, for the rest
o' your days.
MR. SMAILEY (TAKEN ABACK): I don't know what you refer to.
RUTH: I'm referring to Martha Vane of Melbourne. What, yer
recklect Martha Vane, do yer?
MR. SMAILEY: Martha Vane! Yes, I remember Vane. Pooh! There is nothing
to connect me with that matter.
RUTH: Nothing? I've writing' of yours which is fourteen year, if
it's a day.
MR. SMAILEY: And do you mean to say that you would be guilty of such
inhumanity - such devilish inhumanity (I use the word
"devilish" is its religious sense) as to bring up an act of
youthful folly - guilt if you will - against me now that I
have achieved wealth, reputation, and social position?
RUTH: No, you're safe, Smailey. Bring it up agin yer now? Why,
you may have repented - who knows? You was a bad lot, sure

enough; but that's twenty years agone, and you may ha' repented.

MR. SMAILEY: I have; I'm an altered person - I - I - will make it worth your while to give up that writing you refer to. I will pay you very handsomely for it.

RUTH: Pay? no; I ain't on that lay. I'm square now. I'm a 'spectable woman. I only takes money wot I earns. It comes slow, but it comes comfortable.

MR. SMAILEY: Your sentiments do you credit. I confess I did not look for such delicacy of feeling from you; it exalts one's idea of human nature. I am thankful for anything that exalts one's idea of human nature. Thank you, Tredgett. Give me these papers.

RUTH: No; I'm 'spectable, but I ain't a fool. I'll keep 'em, case I want 'em.

MR. SMAILEY: As you please. Remember, Tredgett, I am a person of influence here, and a county magistrate ...

RUTH: What, d'you sit at quarter sessions?

MR. SMAILEY: Certainly.

RUTH: And sentence poor prigs?

MR. SMAILEY: Yes. Why do you ask?

RUTH: Nothing; go on - it's all topsy-turvy!

MR. SMAILEY: I shall be happy if I can serve you in any way. I shall always be glad to hear that you are doing well, and I feel certain that the admirable lady who has so kindly taken you in hand will have no reason to regret her charity. It is easy to fall, and hard to rise again - Heaven bless those who extend a helping hand. I am very glad indeed that we have met. I've no wish to press hardly on any fellow-creature. [EXIT.]

RUTH: Jonas Smailey! Smailey here! Things come about queerly. I seed him last at t'other end o' the world, and to meet him here! Who's that?

[FITZ-PARTINGTON HAS ENTERED UNOBSERVED
ON TIPTOE, AND TAPPED HER ON THE SHOULDER.]

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Come here. [TAKING OUT NOTE-BOOK.] Your name's Ruth Tredgett?

RUTH (SURPRISED): Ay?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: What are you?

RUTH: A 'spectable woman. Wot are **you**?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: A detective.

RUTH (FALLING BACK HORRIFIED): Wot's it for?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Nothing. **You** ain't wanted, but your address is.

RUTH: I'm living at Barker's in the village.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Present occupation?

RUTH: Needlewoman.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Late occupation?

RUTH: Tramp. There's nothin' agin me?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Nothing against you, everything for you; even this half-crown.

RUTH: I don't like p'leece money. I never took none yet, I ain't agoin' to begin now. I wish yer good day. I don't like p'leece money. [EXIT.]

FITZ-PARTINGTON: I'm not a policeman, I'm a private detective; but we won't split hairs. [POCKETS COIN.] I thought Smailey was my

man, now I'm sure of it. Ha! ha! Now, Smailey has a game. The question is, what is it? He says it's his scutcheon, but that is Walker, because his father was a wig-maker. However, it's quite clear that, whatever his game may be, it is my duty to put that inestimable woman on her guard.

[ENTER MRS. VAN BRUGH.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Has not Mr. Smailey arrived?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: No, ma'am, he has not. [HE SHOWS TRACES OF EMOTION.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Mr. Fitz-Partington, is anything the matter?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Ma'am, you have come upon me in a moment of professional conscientiousness. Avail yourself of it, for such moments are rare and fleeting. Beware of Smailey.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: What in the world do you mean?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: I mean that he is endeavouring to prove that - that you were not legally married to Captain Van Brugh.

MRS. VAN BRUGH (INTENSELY AGITATED): Mr. Fitz-Partington, you cannot be aware of the full import of your words. What can be Mr. Smailey's motive for making these preposterous inquiries?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: That's just what I want to get at. In a general way it's sure to be something dirty. Perhaps he thinks that the property you inherit from Captain Van Brugh isn't legally yours, and, therefore, can't be settled on your daughter.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: But I inherited very little indeed from Captain Van Brugh. The bulk of my property was left me by my godfather.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Then I'm wrong. But does Smailey know this?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Know it! Why, of course he knows it. He's my godfather's nephew and next-of-kin.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: What! His next-of-kin? Next-of-kin is a fruitful expression. I see a whole plantation of motives cropping out of "next-of-kin." Have you a copy of the will?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: No. But Smailey has - indeed, he has gone to fetch it.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Can you tell me the terms of the legacy?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: No, not precisely. I have never seen the will. My solicitor has told me its purport in general terms.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Are you referred to in that will by your married or maiden name?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Oh, by my maiden name.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: You are sure of that?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Quite sure. At least, I **feel** quite sure. I can't be absolutely certain, but - oh yes, I am sure of it.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: What was the date of the will?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Eighteen fifty-six.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: What was the year of your marriage?

MRS. VAN BRUGH (AFTER A PAUSE): Eighteen fifty-six.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: My dear Mrs. Van Brugh, this is most important. The news of your marriage might or might not have reached the testator in Australia. If there is any flaw in your marriage, and if you are described in that will as Captain Van Brugh's wife, every penny you possess will revert to Smailey. Now, Smailey is a scoundrel.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Mr. Fitz-Partington, pray explain yourself.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: In the full conviction that what I am going to say will be treated as confidential, I **will** explain myself. I'm after Smailey. Smailey will soon be wanted.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: This is scarcely an explanation.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Scarcely an explanation. Twenty years ago, when in Australia, Smailey forged a burial-certificate to get some trust-funds into his possession. The job was given to our house to investigate, only six weeks ago. Two days after, who should come to us for a detective to inquire into your affairs but Smailey; so we put the two jobs together, and I'm doing them both.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: But how is it that a gentleman in your profession ...

FITZ-PARTINGTON: A gentleman! Mrs. Van Brugh, for reasons that will go down with me to the tomb, I am humbly and hopelessly anxious to stand high in your good opinion. Appreciate my disinterestedness, when I voluntarily tell you that which will blight me in your estimation for ever. You think I'm an eminent solicitor. I ain't; I'm the insignificant minion of a Private Inquiry Office.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: But you were introduced to me as a solicitor.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: It is a tantalizing feature of my contemptible calling, that I am continually being introduced as somebody I should particularly like to be. In the course of the last twelve months I've been a Spanish Hidalgo, a Colonel of the Hussars, an Ashantee Nobleman, and a Bishop of the Greek Church. What was the date of your marriage?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Some time in February, fifty-six. [WITH HESITATION.]

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Day?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: The - the thirtieth.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: The thirtieth? Try again. Never more than twenty-nine days in February - seldom that.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: I forget the exact date.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Where were you married, and by whom?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: By - by - [AFTER SOME HESITATION] - Sir, by your own admission you are a mere spy. How am I to know that you are not asking these questions with a view to using them against me?

FITZ-PARTINGTON (MUCH HURT): Ma'am, may you never know the depth of the wound you have inflicted. It will canker, ma'am; but don't be alarmed, it shall not inconvenience you, for I will remove it from your sight. When we meet again, you will find me in the assumed character of a person who has not had his best feelings harrowed up for a considerable time. It will be a difficult assumption, ma'am, but I will do my best to sustain the fiction. [EXIT.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: At last! at last my punishment is at hand. And Eve - great heavens, what will become of **her**? Eve - who loves and honours me - Eve, my child! I mustn't think of that. It will madden me. I shall want all my head for what is to come! If news of this - marriage of mine [WITH A BITTER LAUGH] had reached my godfather, he would have described me in his will as Captain Van Brugh's wife, and then I am lost, and Eve is lost. Oh, why don't that man come? This suspense is terrible. At last! He's here!

[ENTER EVE AND FRED WITH DR. ATHELNEY.]

EVE: Mr. Smailey has returned with the will. Frederick has been explaining to me the difference between freehold and leasehold, and you don't know how anxious I am to know which it is.

FRED: Eve, Eve, this is very mercenary.

[ENTER SMAILEY.]

MR. SMAILEY: Mrs. Van Brugh, I am most happy to tell you that it is everything that could be wished. My dear Mrs. Van Brugh, the Buckinghamshire farm is freehold. Here is the clause which refers to it: [READS VERY DELIBERATELY.] After giving you Westland Park, the Blackfriars estate, and the two reversions, the testator goes on to say, "And I further will and bequeath all that messuage known as Goldacre Farm, together with all out-houses, ways, watercourses, trees, commonable rights, easements and appurtenances, and all the estate and rights of the said Richard Goldacre in and to the same, unto and to the use of the said Catherine Ellen, wife of Richard Van Brugh, Esq., a captain in the Royal Navy, her heirs and assigns for ever."

[MRS. VAN BRUGH FALLS SENSELESS INTO A CHAIR, HER DAUGHTER BENDING OVER HER.]

CURTAIN - END OF ACT II.

ACT III

SCENE - MORNING ROOM IN SMAILEY'S HOUSE.
DOOR AT BACK, GIVING ON TO A PRETTY GARDEN.

FREDERICK DISCOVERED SEALING A LETTER.

FRED: "Your eternally attached Frederick." If there was any flaw in Mrs. Van Brugh's marriage, as my father seems to suspect - and his suspicions are corroborated by her astonishing behaviour on reading her godfather's will - then Mrs. Van Brugh is penniless - and Eve is penniless too. Poor little lady! I'm afraid I shall have to cry off. I'm sorry for the poor child, because I'm sure she is fond of me. I'm sorry for myself, because I'm sure I'm fond of her. But when a man proposes to marry, he must not allow himself to be misled by his affections. As far as Eve is concerned, I see no difficulty. She is a tender-hearted and sensitive little thing, Heaven bless her, and can easily be shaken off. But my poor old father; how indignant he will be if I dare to suggest what he would consider a dishonourable course! Why, if he thought me capable of breaking a solemn engagement for a mercenary motive, he'd disown me. No, I must rest my excuse on a surer ground. I must touch his sense of family pride. I must remind him of the blight that would fall on our race, if I intermarried with a tainted family. A really good man does a deal of harm in the world. One has to stoop to so much dirty dissimulation before one can meet him on equal terms.

[ENTER MR. SMAILEY.]

MR. SMAILEY: Frederick, I want to speak seriously ...
FRED (AT THE SAME TIME): Father, I want to speak seriously ...
MR. SMAILEY: Eh?
FRED: I beg your pardon.
MR. SMAILEY: I was about to say that I want to speak to you on a most serious and important matter.
FRED: Dear me, that's very odd! Do you know, I was about to say the very same thing! I am most anxious to speak to **you** on a **most** serious and **most** important matter. Excuse me for one moment, while I give this note to Robins.
MR. SMAILEY: Whom are you writing to?
FRED: To my darling, of course. [EXIT.]
MR. SMAILEY: To his darling! Poor lad! He's a noble fellow! No mercenary thought in connection with the girl has ever entered his head! But he must never marry her. Everything points to the fact that Mrs. Van Brugh's marriage was illegal, and, if so, her daughter is portionless. Thank Heaven! his sense of moral rectitude is so high that when he knows that her mother's conduct is open to suspicion he may feel bound to dissociate himself from her. Ah, it is a pleasant and a goodly thing when a parent finds that the strict principles he has instilled into his offspring are bearing golden fruit on which they both may feed!

[ENTER FREDERICK.]

MR. SMAILEY (ASIDE): How shall I break it to him?
FRED (ASIDE): How shall I begin? [ALOUD.] Now I am at your disposal.
MR. SMAILEY: Frederick, my dear lad, this life of ours is made up of hopes frustrated, and cherished schemes brought to nothing.
FRED: Very true. A man who places himself under the sweet dominion of his conscience, must not count on the fulfilment of even his most innocent intentions.
MR. SMAILEY: Unforeseen circumstances occasionally arise that render it almost criminal to carry out an otherwise laudable purpose.
FRED: For instance: a discovery that a contemplated act would, if carried out, bring dishonour on a long line of ancestors.
MR. SMAILEY: Or give an implied sanction to a discreditable, if not an immoral, relationship. Events might occur which would justify him in breaking the most solemn pledge.
FRED: Justify him! I can conceive a state of things under which he would be morally bound to cast his most sacred obligations to the wind.
MR. SMAILEY: My dear boy!
FRED: My dear father! [THEY SHAKE HANDS.]
MR. SMAILEY: Now, Fred, this is what I was coming to, my boy. We are the descendants of a very noble family.
FRED: So I have often heard you say. And that reminds me to mention a matter, upon which I have long desired to talk to you ...
MR. SMAILEY (INTERRUPTING): I am free to admit that I am proud of my ancestry.
FRED: My dear father, the safe keeping of their honour is my dearest aim. And, talking of my ancestors' honour, reminds me ...
MR. SMAILEY (INTERRUPTING): If Caius Samileius heard that one of his race was about to marry, for instance, into a tainted family, I believe the doughty old Roman would turn in his tumulus!
FRED: What you say about a tainted family is so true, that I venture ...
MR. SMAILEY: My dear Fred, it's no use beating about the bush. The girl you are engaged to - as good a girl as ever lived - is (there is no use in disguising it) a member of a tainted family. [FRED TURNS FROM SMAILEY.] It is therefore my duty to urge upon you, as the last of our line, the propriety, the necessity, of releasing Eve from her engagement. [FRED APPEARS HURT AND INDIGNANT.] I know I am asking much, very much, of you. I know how tenderly you love the girl; but a flaw, my dear Fred, and you are a Smailey! My boy, it is impossible.
FRED (IN AFFECTED INDIGNATION): Am I to understand that you require me to surrender my darling Eve? Never! With all possible respect for your authority - Never!
MR. SMAILEY: But, Fred, remember, my boy, remember, her mother has committed a faux pas of some kind.
FRED: It would certainly seem so; but I have given my word, and it is my duty to keep it.
MR. SMAILEY: What is duty to the living compared with duty to the dead? Think what your ancestors have done for you. And are we to neglect our duty to them, because they can do no more for us? Oh! shame! shame!

FRED (WITH APPARENT RELUCTANCE): There is much truth in what you say,
still ...

MR. SMAILEY: To marry into such a family as hers, now that we know the
truth, would be, as it were, to countenance her guilt.

FRED: I cannot deny it. Nevertheless, I ...

MR. SMAILEY: Would it be just - would it be *moral* to do this?

FRED: No, no; I see it now.

MR. SMAILEY: Show yourself to be a man of moral courage. As for what the
world will say, do the right thing, my boy, and let them say
what they please.

FRED (AFTER A PAUSE): Father, you are right. As a moral man I have no
alternative but to comply with your wish. At any cost it
must be done - at any cost it *shall* be done!

MR. SMAILEY: That's right, my dear, dear boy; and you shall find that
you have lost little by your determination. And now that
that's settled, let us enter into *your* affairs. What was it
that you wanted to speak to me so seriously about just now?

FRED: I? Oh dear, no.

MR. SMAILEY: But surely, you said ...

FRED: Oh, to be sure! I - oh, it's not of the least consequence.

MR. SMAILEY: Something about poor little Eve, wasn't it?

FRED: Yes; about poor little Eve. How little do we know what five
minutes may bring forth! I was actually going to consult
you about fixing a day for our wedding. [WIPING HIS EYES.]

MR. SMAILEY: My poor boy, you have behaved nobly. You are a true
Smailey.

FRED (TAKING HIS HAND): I hope it is not presumptuous in me, but I
sometimes think I am.

MR. SMAILEY: I have wounded you deeply. Let me compensate you by telling
you a more pleasant piece of news. I have discovered
Fitz-Partington's clue.

FRED: Indeed! I am rejoiced to hear it.

MR. SMAILEY: Yes. Mrs. Van Brugh told me on Tuesday that she had never
actually seen her godfather's will. So I felt it to be my
duty to make an excuse for reading aloud that part of the
will in which she is particularly described. I did so, and
she fainted. Now, my dear Fred, what does this point to?

FRED: I should say bigamy.

MR. SMAILEY: You would say bigamy, and so should I. I suggested this to
Fitz-Partington, and he seemed amazed at my penetration. We
laid our heads together, and, at his suggestion, I drew up
this advertisement. [HANDS MANUSCRIPT ADVERTISEMENT,
WHICH HE HAS TAKEN FROM TABLE-DRAWER.]

FRED (READS): "Fifty pounds reward. This sum will be paid for a true copy
of the burial certificate of the first wife of the late
Captain Van Brugh, R.N. She is known to have died in
Melbourne within the last eight years." Are you sure
Fitz-Partington is acting straightforwardly with you?

MR. SMAILEY: Why should he do otherwise?

FRED: Fifty pounds is a large sum.

MR. SMAILEY: A large sum? If I can only establish the fact that the
first Mrs. Van Brugh died within the last eight years, every
penny of this so-called Mrs. Van Brugh's income - eight
thousand pounds a year at least - reverts to me.

FRED: Then, dear me ...

MR. SMAILEY: Eh?

FRED: Poor Eve will lose her settlement!

MR. SMAILEY: True; quite true. Dear me, I never thought of that. Poor Eve!
FRED: Poor, poor Eve!

[ENTER RUTH.]

RUTH: I've brought this note from my lady.
MR. SMAILEY: Oh! There may be an answer. Stay.
RUTH (QUIETLY): Yes; I'll stay.
MR. SMAILEY (READS NOTE): Oh! Mrs. Van Brugh writes to say that she wishes to see me this afternoon - alone. [SITS DOWN TO WRITE.]
FRED: Alone! Oh, then - then perhaps I'd better withdraw.
[WITH AFFECTED EMOTION.]
RUTH: Aye, perhaps you better had.

[SHE FOLLOWS HIM WITH HER EYES AS HE GOES TO THE DOOR. HE SEEMS UNEASY. THEN EXIT.]

MR. SMAILEY: There is the answer. [FINISHING NOTE.]
RUTH: Smailey; wot's wrong with my lady?
MR. SMAILEY: Wrong?
RUTH: Aye, there's ruin comin' to her, and she knows it. She's been queer-like these two days. I've come upon her cryin' odd times, and she's as white as death. Wot is it, Smailey?
MR. SMAILEY: Probably a headache. I'm not a doctor.
RUTH: I am. It's no headache - it's heartache. It's ruin.
MR. SMAILEY: It **is** ruin; to her wealth, and her good name.
RUTH: Her good name? Why, **you're** never goin' to meddle wi' **that**.
MR. SMAILEY: You are deceived in your mistress. [RISES.] I will tell you what she has been ...
RUTH: Stop! I won't hear it, Smailey - I won't hear it. Let bygones go by: no odds what she **has** been; think wot she is; think wot **you've** been. As I've dealt fair wi' you, deal fair wi' her. Take wot's yourn, but don't take no more.
MR. SMAILEY: My rights and her good name are bound up together; I cannot claim the one without destroying the other. I only want what the law will give me, if I commence proceedings.
RUTH (CHANGING HER TONE): If you commence proceedings, wot the law will give you is fourteen year, take my word for it. I've spoke fair, and no good's come of it, so I'll speak foul. Look here, Smailey, you've put a plot afoot to ruin my lady. Now, my lady's got a dog, Smailey, and that dog won't stand no plots. Do you hear that, Smailey? Stir hand or foot to harm that pure and spotless creature, and sure as my lady's dog has a set of fangs she'll fix them in your throat.
MR. SMAILEY: This is hard. This is very hard. Even Mrs. Van Brugh would herself at once admit the justice of my claim.
RUTH: Well, wait till she does.
MR. SMAILEY (AFTER A PAUSE): There is a good deal of sound commonsense in what you say, Tredgett. Still, if - **if** Mrs. Van Brugh should at any time make a statement of **her own free will**, you will surely allow me to profit by it?
RUTH: Wotever my lady does of her own free will is angels' doin', and is right accordin'.
MR. SMAILEY (ASIDE): Then I think I see my way. [ALOUD.] Well, Ruth, on that understanding you have my promise.
RUTH: Promise? **Your** promise? Smailey, don't you meddle with

things you don't understand. Promises are ticklish goods in **your** hands. They're temptin' things to break, and you was always easy tempted. No, no; don't **you** promise. **I'll** promise this time, Smailey. **I'll** promise. [EXIT RUTH.]

MR. SMAILEY: A sin, an early sin - a sin committed twenty years ago - brought up against me now that I am an honest man, and a regular church-goer! I am absolutely bound hand and foot by it - and to what end? For the protection of a woman who has committed Heaven knows what offence against morality. If this crime were to be proved against me, what on earth would become of me? For years I have endeavoured to atone for my sin against society by treating wrong-doers brought before me with the strictest and most unflinching severity. Would Society be grateful for this - would it even take heed of it? No; my atonement would go for nothing - absolutely nothing. Ah! this is a merciless world, and one on which penitence is taken no account of. But have a care, Mrs. Van Brugh; I'll bide my time. You shall yet see that a sin against morality is not to be wiped out by a few years of sentimental self-denial!

[ENTER EVE AND FRED.]

FRED: Father, I have met Mrs. Van Brugh and my darling on their way here, so I turned back with them.

MR. SMAILEY: My dear Eve. [KISSES HER AS MRS. VAN BRUGH ENTERS.] Mrs. Van Brugh, I am very pleased to see you. Pray sit down. You look pale: I am afraid you are tired.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: No, I have not been well lately.

EVE: Mamma wished to come alone, as she wants to speak to you on business, but I wouldn't hear of that, as she is really very far from well, so I've brought her to you, Mr. Smailey; and now I'm going to take a turn in the garden with Fred. Dr. Athelney is waiting for us in the arbour.

FRED: If the arbour were a consecrated arbour, and I had a licence in my pocket, we might take a turn - in the garden - that would surprise our dear friends.

EVE: What, without a wedding-dress and bridesmaids, and bouquets and presents, and a breakfast? My dear Fred, it wouldn't be legal! [EXEUNT EVE AND FRED INTO THE GARDEN.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH (AFTER A PAUSE): Mr. Smailey, I come to you in great distress. On Tuesday last a circumstance occurred, no matter what it was, that induced me to believe that there was a flaw - a vital flaw - in my title to all I possess. Mr. Smailey, I haven't a shilling in the world.

MR. SMAILEY: A shilling! My very dear lady, you haven't a penny.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: What! Do you know this?

MR. SMAILEY: Mrs. Van Brugh, I will be candid with you. The Smaileys are a very, very old and very famous family. No suspicion of a bar sinister has ever shadowed their escutcheon. My son is betrothed to your daughter, and I have reason to believe that you are not entitled to the name you bear. Therefore, in his interests, and in those of his slumbering ancestors, I have taken steps to ascertain the truth.

MRS. VAN BRUGH (MUCH AGITATED): What do you hope to prove?

MR. SMAILEY: That when you went through the form of marriage with the late Captain Van Brugh you knew that his first wife was

still alive.

MRS. VAN BRUGH (WILDLY): No, no, no! Mr. Smailey, it is bad enough, but not as bad as that. Oh, Mr. Smailey, dismiss that fearful thought from your mind, and I will tell you the truth I came here to tell. It's a bitter, bitter truth, but not so bad as you would make it out to be.

MR. SMAILEY: What is the truth? [STERNLY]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: I - I - when I met Captain Van Brugh - I was very young, and my mother was dead - and - [BURSTS INTO TEARS, AND SOBS WILDLY, LAYING HER HEAD ON THE TABLE.]

MR. SMAILEY: What is the truth?

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Oh, man, man, can't you read it in these tears? Is there not shame enough in my face, that you want it in shameful words? Read that you see before you, and as you are a man with a heart, keep my secret; oh, keep my unhappy secret!

MR. SMAILEY: What! am I to understand that you never even went through the *form* of marriage with Captain Van Brugh?

MRS. VAN BRUGH (UNDER HER BREATH): Never!

MR. SMAILEY (AFTER A PAUSE): I decline to believe you. I had hoped that it was barely possible you were the unconscious dupe of a reckless scamp. I now believe that you were well aware of this crime you were committing, and you take this step to avoid its legal consequences.

MRS. VAN BRUGH (WITH FORCED CALMESS): Mr. Smailey, I have, perhaps, no right to be indignant at the insult; but you are mistaken - utterly mistaken. Have you no pity, no sympathy? See, everything I possess is legally yours; I leave your presence penniless. Commence an action against me, and I will quietly yield up everything before the case comes into court; but, if you love your son, spare me the shame, the intolerable shame, of a public exposure!

MR. SMAILEY: I will spare you nothing; neither will I take the step you suggest, nor any other step to dispossess you. In this matter I am passive; I leave you to act as conscience may prompt you. But understand that I will be a party to no concealment, no subterfuge. On these terms, and on no other, will I consent to take this property.

MRS. VAN BRUGH (WILDLY): What am I to do? I cannot keep it, and I have no one to advise me!

MR. SMAILEY: I will advise you. You have sinned, and must make atonement. There are witnesses at hand; let them hear the truth: whatever the truth may be, let them hear it.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: What witnesses?

MR. SMAILEY: Dr. Athelney, my dear son, Ruth Tredgett, and your daughter.

MRS. VAN BRUGH (WILDLY): No, no; not before Eve. You cannot mean that I am to say this before Eve. Think, Mr. Smailey, what you are asking me to do. I am her mother!

MR. SMAILEY: I desire to press hardly on no fellow-creature, but it is meet that she should know the truth. Indeed, as a principle, truth cannot be too widely known.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: But she knows nothing of this miserable matter. She believes, as others believe, that I was married abroad and that my husband died soon after.

MR. SMAILEY: A mother seeking to deceive her own child!

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Take every penny I possess, but for Eve's sake spare me this intolerable shame. I will sign any deed you please that will convey my property to you, but leave me the love

and honour of my darling child.

MR. SMAILEY: I decline to place myself in the invidious position of one who takes steps to dispossess a helpless lady; I also decline to be a party to any deception. If you refuse to make the public admission I require, you may **keep** your ill-gotten wealth.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Keep it! Why. I am here, of my own free will to surrender into your hands my wealth, and with it my good name!

MR. SMAILEY: I feel it my duty to remind you that you have as little right to one as to the other.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: What shall I do - what shall I do? If I refuse to publish my sin, this man will make it known to the whole world.

MR. SMAILEY: No; there you wrong me. That would be an unmanly act indeed, Miss Brandreth.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Miss Brandreth!

MR. SMAILEY: That, I presume, is your name. Pardon me, but now that I know the truth, I could not conscientiously call you Mrs. Van Brugh. It would be a lie. For the future I shall call you Miss Brandreth, but - I shall systematically withhold my reasons for so doing.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Mr. Smailey, think what you are compelling me to do. I have sinned, and for many years I have unceasingly endeavoured to atone for that sin. Blessed with an ample fortune, I have devoted four-fifths of it to the rescue of the unhappiest among unhappy women. In my search for them, I have waded, year after year, through the foulest depths of misery and disgrace, with ears and eyes outraged at every turn. In the face of galling rebuke and insult unspeakable, in the face of cold ridicule and insolent misconstruction, I have held on to the task I set myself, and through the mercy of Heaven - I have succeeded. I have no desire to speak of these things, and to no other man will I utter them. But you talk to me of atonement; and have I not atoned? Oh! have I not atoned?

MR. SMAILEY: See how the deeds and words of these last years show in the fierce light you have just thrown upon them. You have lost no opportunity of rebuking my hardness of heart because I cannot pardon an act of immorality. See from what a foul and muddy source your own forgiveness springs. You have taunted me with my severity towards wrong-doers. See from what an interested motive your own leniency arises. You have publicly assailed my want of charity. Had I the control of another man's income my charities might perhaps outvie your own. In one word, if you retain your social position, you are morally an impostor. If you retain my property, you are morally ...

MRS. VAN BRUGH (INTERRUPTING HIM): Enough! You have spoken, and I know you now. I can see through those cold hard eyes down into the cold hard heart from which they take their tone. I read there the stony creed, "A woman who has fallen once shall never rise again." So let it be. You are strong - for you have the world on your side. I am weak - for I am alone. If I am to die this moral death, it shall be by my own hand. They **shall** hear the truth.

[EVE AND FREDERICK HAVE APPEARED AT THE DOOR; SHE TURNS AND SEES THEM; THEY ARE FOLLOWED BY DR. ATHELNEY AND EDWARD.]

Come here, Eve; come here, Dr. Athelney; all of you come here.

[EVE COMES FORWARD AND KNEELS AT HER MOTHER'S FEET.]

Eve, my darling, my pet - Eve, dear, kiss me. Kiss me again and again - my child, my child! Kiss me now, for you may never kiss me again. Dr. Athelney, you love me, I know. Edward, my dear old friend, listen while I tell you what manner of woman you have loved ...

RUTH (RUSHING FORWARD): No, no, mistress, you mustn't say it; don't, don't speak it; for the love of mercy don't speak it. As I am a sinful woman, it'll be worse than death to me.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: I must go on to the end. Do you know on what kind of thing you have lavished the treasure of your love? You have lavished it on a fallen woman - an unhappy creature, who has committed that one sin for which on earth there is no atonement - no forgiveness. You think of me as Captain Van Brugh's widow; God forgive me, I never was his wife!

[RUTH RECOILS FROM HER WITH AN EXCLAMATION OF HORROR.
EVE FALLS SENSELESS INTO EDWARD'S ARMS. SMAILEY AND
FREDERICK WATCH THE GROUP FROM A CORNER OF THE STAGE.]

CURTAIN - END OF ACT III.

ACT IV

SCENE - LIBRARY AT DR. ATHELNEY'S.

MRS. VAN BRUGH DISCOVERED SEATED, READING LETTERS.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: "The Rev. Mr. Twemlow presents his compliments to Mrs. Van Brugh, and begs to return her annual subscription of fifty guineas to the Fund for providing Shelter for the Homeless Poor. He does not feel justified, under the circumstances, in accepting any aid from Mrs. Van Brugh on their behalf. With respect to the living to which Mrs. Van Brugh has recently presented Mr. Twemlow, he desires that she may understand that, if he consents to retain it, it is because he feels that it affords him a more extended sphere of spiritual usefulness than the curacy he had hitherto held." [OPENS ANOTHER LETTER.] "We, the aged occupants of the Locroft Almshouses, are humbly pained and respectfully shocked at the disclosures that have recently been made with reference to Miss Brandreth's relations with the late Captain Van Brugh. We trust that it is unnecessary for us to add that, if it were not that the Almshouses pass at once from Miss Brandreth's hands into those of an upright and stainless Christian, whom it is an honour respectfully to know and a satisfaction humbly to profit by, we would not have consented to occupy them for another day; we would rather have worked for our living. Signed." [OPENS ANOTHER LETTER.] "Honoured Madam, We shall feel greatly flattered and obliged if you will kindly afford us a sitting for your photograph at your earliest convenience. We are, Honoured Madam, With much esteem, Most respectfully yours, Scumley and Ripp." When these people address me, I am degraded indeed! My name a word of reproach in every household in the country; my story a thing to be whispered and hinted at, but not to be openly discussed, by reason of its very shame. My years of atonement held to be mere evidence of skilfully sustained hypocrisy. Myself a confessed counterfeit, a base and worthless imposition, a living fraud on the immaculate beings with whom I dared to surround myself. And Ruth - Ruth to whom my heart opened - even Ruth has left me. Poor blind, wayward woman, you are of the world, worldly; your idol is shattered, and there is an end. So let it be; it is meet that such as I should be alone!

[ENTER EVE, WHO HAS OVERHEARD THE LAST FEW LINES. SHE APPROACHES HER MOTHER QUIETLY, AND PLACES HER ARMS ROUND HER NECK.]

EVE: Mamma, you have many kind friends left to you; Dr. Athelney, who has given you a home; Edward and myself.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: A daughter's love comes of honour. Can that love live without the honour that gives it sustenance?

EVE: Mamma, I am very young, and I know little of the world and its ways. Will you forgive me if I speak foolishly? Dear mamma, I think my love for you began with my life. It was born with me, and came of no other cause than that you are

my mother. As I brought it with me into the world, so I believe I shall take it with me out of the world. Do you understand me? I mean, that if I had no other reason for loving you than that you are my mother, I should still love you, for I am your child.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: A child to whom I have given a life that is worse than death; a life that brings with it a curse that will be flung in your teeth by all who know you, and first of all, and above all, by him who was to have married you.

EVE: No, no; your bitter sorrow has made you unjust. Remember, he loves me. I do not know why he loves me, but whatever he saw in me to love is still there. I am not changed, and why should **he** change? I trust his heart as I trust my own.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Eve, I know the world too well. That man will visit my fault upon you. He will renounce you now, my poor child, and the world will say that he is right.

EVE: I will believe this when I hear it from his own lips.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: You will hear it today. It is part of the punishment of women who sin as I have sinned, that those who are dearest to them shall suffer with them. See how I am punished. I have placed a mark of shame on you whom I love beyond all on earth. I have inflicted a lasting injury on you whom I would have died to serve. I have cursed you whom I would have blessed. I have degraded you whom I would have exalted. Eve, my darling - out of my sin has come your love for me. I have no claim to that love. I have cheated you into honouring me; for that honour comes of my sin. I do not ask for love - I do not ask for honour. Humbled, unworthy, and spirit-broken, I plead to you for pardon - only for pardon. [KNEELS TO EVE.]

EVE: Pardon! My mother - my gentle-hearted mother. There is no thought in my mind but the perfect woman of the past eighteen years. The lustre of those years fills my world. I can see nothing else; I will see nothing else. As you have always been to me, so shall you always be - the type of gentle charity, tender helpfulness, brave, large-hearted womanly sympathy. When the bright light of those bygone years pales in my eyes, then let me suffer ten times the sorrow of today, for indeed I shall have deserved it.

[SHE RISES AND THEY EMBRACE.]

[FITZ-PARTINGTON ENTERS CAUTIOUSLY, LEFT.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Mr. Fitz-Partington?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Yes, but don't be alarmed. If it is open to a person in my debased position to be regarded as a friend, regard me as one.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Mr. Fitz-Partington, I did you an injustice when I saw you last - I doubted you. Will you forgive me? [HOLDING OUT HER HAND.]

FITZ-PARTINGTON (MUCH AFFECTED, TAKES IT): Ma'am, this is the most unprofessional moment of my career. No one has ever apologized to me before. It is very unmanly. It is like having a tooth out. I hope no one will ever apologize to me again.

EVE: Have you brought us any news, Mr. Fitz-Partington? I am

sure you are here for some kind purpose.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: It is my fate to appear continually before you in the character of the Mysterious Warner of penny romance. Mrs. Van Brugh, once more, beware of Smailey. That abject man is going at you again.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Has he not done with me yet? Can I be poorer than I am - or more unhappy - or more despised?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: He proposes to make you so, but he will be sold.

EVE: But with what motive does he do this?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Revenge. To adapt the words of the poet to Smailey's frame of mind, "Revenge is sweet, especially on women."

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Revenge on **me**! Through him, whom I have never injured, I have lost my home, my fortune, and my good name, and **he** seeks revenge on **me**?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Mrs. Van Brugh, if it is a source of pain to you to know that your friends have cut **you**, it may console you to know that they have also cut **him**. He is hooted in the streets. His windows are a public cockshy. Nobody is at home to him, and though he is at home to everybody, it is to no purpose. The very tradesmen refuse to supply him. He is a desolate, and a hungry being, and nobody calls on him except the taxes.

EVE: I fear, Mr. Fitz-Partington, that you may yourself have suffered from your association with this man.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: I? I believe you! Why, I go about in fear of my life. Not only am I deprived of the necessaries of existence, but I have become the very focus of public execration. I couldn't be more unpopular if I had come down to stand for the borough.

EVE: But, Mr. Fitz-Partington, how in Heaven's name does he propose to injure my mother? What can he do to her, that he has not already done?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: He is advertising for the present Mrs. Van Brugh's marriage certificate, and the late Mrs. Van Brugh's burial certificate, with a view to a prosecution for bigamy.

EVE: Mamma, mamma, do you hear this? [CROSSES TO HER.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Yes, I hear it. I knew that he had conceived this monstrous idea, but I have already assured him there is no ground for his suspicion. I have told him - [AFTER A PAUSE, AND WITH MUCH SHAME] - the truth.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Yes, but he don't believe you. Read that.

[HANDS NEWSPAPER TO EVE, WHO GIVES IT TO
MRS. VAN BRUGH, POINTING OUT ADVERTISEMENT.]

Such is the snake-like and foxy character of that unparalleled old Pharisee, that he don't believe you. Why, I am a professional sceptic at two guineas a day, and even I believe you.

MRS. VAN BRUGH (WHO HAS BEEN READING THE ADVERTISEMENT): This is most shameful. This is monstrous beyond expression. I have borne my terrible punishment to this point patiently, and without undue murmur, but I will bear no more. Let that man know this. He has roused me at last, and I will meet him face to face. Let him know that, helpless and friendless as he believes me to (be); crushed as I am under the weight of the fearful revelation he has extorted from me; shunned as I

am, and despised even by those whom all despise but I, I am yet strong in this, that I have nothing more to lose. He has made me desperate, and let him beware. There are men in these days as hot in the defence of an insulted woman as in the days gone by, and he shall have a legion of them about his ears. I have been punished enough. I will be punished no further.

EVE: But who could have put this monstrous scheme into his head? What demon could have suggested it to him?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: I suggested it to him, but I ain't a demon.

EVE & MRS. VAN BRUGH: You!

FITZ-PARTINGTON: I - I drew up the advertisement, put it in, and paid for it. It's a dodge; I've put him on a wrong scent.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: How am I to understand this?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: That's just it; you are **not** to understand - at present. You are to do me justice to believe that, when you **do** understand it, you will like it very much. I've put him on a wrong scent, and if I'm not very much mistaken, it will have the effect of taking him in his own toils. For the present it is enough to tell you that his advertisement has been answered, and that the person who answered it is to meet him here this afternoon.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Here? Why does he come to **me**?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Because he conceives, with some reason, that you are not likely to go to him. But don't be alarmed. I shall accompany him, as per usual. [EXIT FITZ-PARTINGTON.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH (COVERING HER FACE): Oh, the shame of it! Oh, the shame of it! To know that my terrible story is the common gossip of every plough-boy in the village; to feel that there is not a flighty servant-girl who does not gather her skirts about her as she passes me; to be certain when women cross the road it is to escape the contamination of my presence; and when they meet me face to face, it is that they may toss their head and tell each other that they knew it from the first! Oh, the shame of it! Oh, the shame of it!

EVE: But Mr. Smailey can do nothing. His wicked schemes must recoil upon himself. We will leave Locroft; we will leave this fearful place. Dr. Athelney sails in a fortnight, and he has made arrangements that we may accompany him. There, in a new world, with new friends and new duties, we shall forget all that is bitter in the past, and gather new stores of happiness from the future that is before us. [THEY EMBRACE.]

[ENTER DR. ATHELNEY, L.D. CROSSES TO EVE.]

DR. ATHELNEY: Mrs. Van Brugh; Eve, my dear, prepare yourself for a surprise. This morning, Mrs. Van Brugh and I were discussing Frederick Smailey's probable course of action. That very good or very bad young man is at this moment crossing the lawn with my son, Ted. He is coming with the view, no doubt, of setting all future discussion on that point at rest. Let us suspend judgment on that admirable or detectable lad until he has explained himself.

EVE: I knew he would come; I was sure of it. Mamma, dear, I told you he loved me; I told you he would come.

[ENTER FRED AND TED ATHELNEY, ARM-IN-ARM.]

FRED: Eve!
EVE (RUNNING TO HIM): Fred, my dear Fred! [HE EMBRACES HER.]
TED: Here he is; I was sure of him; Eve and I were both sure of him. We knew him, Eve, didn't we?
FRED: Edward came to me, Mrs. Van Brugh, and told me that - that you doubted me. [MUCH AFFECTED.]
TED: Yes, I told him that. Don't be angry with me, but when Fred Smailey's honour is at stake, Ted Athelney doesn't beat about the bush. I went straight to him and told him at once how the land lay. "Fred," said I, "Eve knows you, and I know you, but the others don't. Come over with me, and show them what you really are. Show them that you are the brave, straight-hearted, thorough-going fellow I know you to be." He didn't give me time to say it twice.
FRED: Mrs. Van Brugh, will you take my hand?

[SHAKES HER HAND. CROSSES TO
DR. ATHELNEY, THEN SHAKES HIS HAND]

Dr. Athelney, my very dear friend, this is very, very kind of you. You are too noble-hearted a man to confound the son with the father.

DR. ATHELNEY: I hope and trust, sir, that I have done you an injustice. [GOES UP.]

FRED: Mrs. Van Brugh, I know not how to express my opinion of my father's behaviour in terms that would be consistent with my duty as a son. I am most painfully situated. Permit me to content myself with offering you my deepest and most respectful sympathy.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Mr. Smailey, you speak very kindly.

TED: And he means kindly, mind that. I'll stake my life he means kindly.

FRED: Thank you, Edward; thank you very heartily. My father, Mrs. Van Brugh, is, I have learnt, a very hard man; a good man, a truly good man, but a very hard one. He is unaccountably incensed against you; I have pleaded for you; but, alas! in vain. I have implored him to allow you, at least, to continue to occupy the cottage which is endeared to me by so many happy recollections, dear Eve, but in vain. [HE TAKES EVE'S HAND.] He - he answered me harshly for the first time in his life. [MUCH MOVED.]

TED: My very dear fellow, Heaven bless you for that.

FRED: Under these circumstances I said to myself, How can I lighten this intolerable burden to them? If not to Mrs. Van Brugh, at least to Eve. I lay awake all last night, thinking it over, and at last - at last I saw my way.

TED (TO DR. ATHELNEY): Trust Fred Smailey to find the right thing to do.

FRED: I said to myself, Here is an amiable and blameless young lady placed, through no fault of her own, in the painful position of being engaged to a member of a family which has done her and her mother a fearful and irreparable injury. Association with such a family must be, to her, a source of inconceivable distress. To a sensitive and high-minded girl, such as I know my darling to be, an alliance with such a family must be simply insupportable. Deeply as I love

her, and because I love her deeply, I will fight with the great love that is within me; I will act as becomes a man of honour; I will at once, and of my own free will, release her from this engagement. Eve, my dear Eve, you are free.
[EVE FAINTS IN MRS. VAN BRUGH'S ARMS.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: My darling! My poor, poor darling!

DR. ATHELNEY (CENTRE): Sir, I have been a clergyman of the Church of England for five and forty years, and, until today, I have never regretted the restrictions that my calling has imposed upon me. My hands, sir, are tied. Ted, my boy, these remarks do not apply to you.

TED (CROSSES TO FRED SMAILEY): You infernal villain! You unutterably mean and sneaking villain! [SEIZING HIM.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Edward! Edward!

TED: Don't stop me, or I shall kill him. Look there, you miserable hound [POINTING TO EVE], look there! Do you see the work that your infernal heart has done? Why, you miserable cur, she loved you! You trembling hypocrite, she loved you! Eve loved you - loved **you!** Look at her, man, and if your devil's heart don't beat the harder for the sight, it hasn't a beat left in it!

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Dr. Athelney, pray, pray stop him.

DR. ATHELNEY: Stop him? No, certainly not. I'm too fond of plain truth, and I hear it too seldom to stop it when I do hear it. Go on with your remarks, my boy, if you've anything left to say.

[ENTER SMAILEY, FOLLOWED BY FITZ-PARTINGTON, LEFT.]

MR. SMAILEY: When your son has quite finished shaking my son, perhaps you will kindly devote a little attention to me.

FRED: Edward, I sincerely hope you may live to apologize for this.
[OFFERS TO SHAKE HANDS; TED REFUSES.]

DR. ATHELNEY: Mr. Smailey, I must tell you that your presence here is an act of audacity for which I was not prepared.

MR. SMAILEY: I fear that the surprise of my appearance here is but the first of a series of surprises in store for you.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: And I am convinced of it.

DR. ATHELNEY: Leave my house, sir! [TO SMAILEY.]

MR. SMAILEY: Nay, nay. I am here in the discharge of a high public duty, and I propose to remain. Come, Dr. Athelney, is this quite considerate? Is this quite as it should be? You are a minister of the Church, about to be invested with the very highest Colonial functions. In affording shelter to this unhappy person, have you not allowed your sympathy for her misfortunes to blind you to the fact that you are a clergyman?

DR. ATHELNEY: Sir, I never had my duty as a clergyman so strongly before my eyes as when I placed my home at the disposal of this admirable lady. And, believe me, sir, I never felt so strongly disposed to forget my duty as a clergyman as I do at this moment. My hands are tied. Ted, my boy, these remarks do not apply to you.

TED: Mr. Smailey, if you'll come with me, I'll see you out.

FITZ-PARTINGTON (TO TED): See him out? Nonsense. Hear him out. He's worth listening to, I can tell you.

MR. SMAILEY (TO MRS. VAN BRUGH): Miss Brandreth, when you denied having

ever gone through the form of marriage with Captain Van Brugh, I considered it my duty, as a magistrate accustomed to deal with evidence, to disbelieve you. At the suggestion of my solicitor - [ASIDE, TO FITZ.] - A lie, sir, for you are no solicitor; Heaven forgive you! [ALOUD.] At his suggestion I advertised for the burial certificate of the late Mrs. Van Brugh. That advertisement has been answered.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: That advertisement has been answered.

MR. SMAILEY: The person who answered it is at this moment waiting without.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Waiting without.

MR. SMAILEY: And, with or without your permission, shall be introduced.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Shall be introduced.

MR. SMAILEY: Mr. Fitz-Partington shall introduce him.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: It ain't a **him**, it's a **her**.

[OPENS DOOR AND DISCOVERS RUTH.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Ruth Tredgett!

RUTH: Ay, missis, 'tain't no other.

MR. SMAILEY: What does this mean? Is this a hoax?
[INDIGNANTLY, TO FITZ-PARTINGTON.]

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Is this a hoax? [APPEALING TO THE OTHERS.]

MR. SMAILEY: What does this woman want here?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: Woman, what do you want here?

RUTH: Want to help you agin **her**. [INDICATING MRS. VAN BRUGH.]

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Oh, Ruth, Ruth!

MR. SMAILEY: Do you mean this, Tredgett? [CROSSES TO RUTH.]

RUTH: Ay, I mean it, Smailey. It's justice; and justice must be done. It was done agin me, years ago, and why not agin her now?

MR. SMAILEY: Dr. Athelney, this poor woman is an example to you. She has learned her mistress's true character.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: Ruth, how have I injured you, that even you turn against me? I loved you, Ruth!

RUTH (WITH SOME EMOTION): You ha'n't injured me, but I'm a 'spectable woman. You've made me 'spectable, and you must bide the consequence. [TO MR. SMAILEY.] You want the burial-ticket of Captain Van Brugh's dead wife?

MR. SMAILEY: Yes; I have offered fifty pounds for it.

RUTH: Gi' us the money.

MR. SMAILEY: Why?

RUTH: I've got the paper.

MR. SMAILEY: How? How did you get it?

RUTH: No odds how. I've got it.

MR. SMAILEY: Give it to me, and you shall be paid.

RUTH: Nay, I must ha' the brass first.

MR. SMAILEY: As soon as I've verified it you shall be paid.

RUTH: Maybe you'll take some time over it. I must ha' the brass.

MR. SMAILEY (GIVING HER A BANK-NOTE): There is the money, but mind, if you are deceiving me, there is a constable outside.

RUTH: No fear. [TEARS UP THE NOTE.]

MR. SMAILEY: You fool, what have you done! Give me the paper.

RUTH: I'll give it to him. [INDICATING FITZ-PARTINGTON WHO HAS COME BETWEEN THEM.]

FITZ-PARTINGTON (TAKES PAPER AND READS): "St. Andrew's Church, Port Philip, seventeenth of July, eighteen hundred and fifty-eight."

MR. SMAILEY: Fifty-eight? Why, she died in sixty-nine - I know she died in sixty-nine. This is some forgery. We shall want the constable yet.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: This is some forgery. We shall want the constable yet. [READS.] "This is to certify that on the above date, I read the burial service over the remains of Martha Vane, of Port Philip." [SMAILEY SINKS INTO A CHAIR.]

DR. ATHELNEY: Martha Vane!

MRS. VAN BRUGH: That was her maiden name, the name under which she passed when she left her husband.

MR. SMAILEY (MUCH CONFUSED): This is not what I advertised for.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: No, but it's what I advertised for.

MR. SMAILEY: You? What have you to do with this?

FITZ-PARTINGTON: I was engaged to trace this forgery to you at the time when you engaged me to undermine the character of this inestimable lady. In strict compliance with the terms of our contract, you allowed me the free run of all your books, papers, and memoranda, and I am much obliged to you.

FRED (WHO HAS HEARD THIS WITH THE GREATEST CONCERN): Father! Tell them that it's a lie.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: It ain't a lie. The case is only too clear. Tredgett and he were both in it, but she turns Queen's evidence. Mr. Smailey, I desire to press hardly on no fellow-creature, but your own policeman is without, and he will be happy to walk off with you whenever you find it convenient to be arrested. [ABOUT TO TOUCH SMAILEY ON THE SHOULDER.]

FRED: Father, tell them that it's a lie. [TO FITZ.] Keep your hands off him - stand back - it's a lie, I tell you. Stand back, or I shall do you a mischief. Father, whatever others believe of you, I believe you to be the best and truest man on earth. For my sake, for the sake of my belief, tell them that it's a lie. For the love of God, tell them it's a lie.

MR. SMAILEY: I have nothing to say, my boy; I have lied enough.

FRED: But they will take you away! Great Heaven, think what will follow!

MR. SMAILEY: I care not what may follow. Whatever punishment may be in store for me, will be a nothing compared to the bitter shame of my degradation in the eyes of my poor boy, whom I have loved. He will desert me now! And what matters the rest - what matters the rest?

FRED: Father, I swear that where you are, there will I be to the end.

MR. SMAILEY: Heaven bless you for that.

FRED: Whatever you may have been - whatever I may have been - I am your son, and I love you; and I will be with you - to the end!

MR. SMAILEY: And the end is at hand.

FITZ-PARTINGTON: And the end is at hand.

[EXEUNT FREDERICK, SMAILEY, FOLLOWED BY FITZ-PARTINGTON. EVE STRETCHES OUT HER ARMS TOWARDS FREDERICK AS HE GOES, BUT HE DOES NOT SEE HER. DURING THE PRECEDING DIALOGUE, RUTH HAS BEEN KNEELING AT MRS. VAN BRUGH'S FEET.]

RUTH (KNEELING): Mistress, my good and kind mistress, I had that paper in safe keeping miles away. I walked day and night to fetch it. It was hard to have to leave you in your sorrow, but

none other could have got it. My mistress, my pure and perfect mistress, my angel from heaven, we will never part again.

MRS. VAN BRUGH: We will never part again, Ruth. Under the guidance of our loving friend, we will sail to a new land, where, humbly as becomes penitents, cheerfully as becomes those who have hope, earnestly as becomes those who speak out of the fulness of their experience, we will teach lessons of loving-kindness, patience, faith, forbearance, hope, and charity.

DR. ATHELNEY: "And the greatest of these is CHARITY."

CURTAIN