

A NICE FIRM.

An original Comic Drama.

IN ONE ACT.

BY

TOM TAYLOR.

AUTHOR OF

"A Trip to Kissingen," "Diogenes and his Lantern," "The Philosopher's Stone," "The Vicar of Wakefield," "To Parents and Guardians," "Our Clerks," "Little Red Riding Hood" &c. &c.; and one of the Authors of "Masks and Faces," "Plot and Passion," "Slave Life" &c. &c. &c.

THOMAS HAILES LACY,
WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND,
LONDON.

*First Performed at the Royal Lyceum Theatre,
on Wednesday, Nov. 16, 1853.*

Characters.

MR. MESSITER	<i>(of the Firm of Messiter & Moon, Solicitors and Attornies at Law).</i>	MR. CHARLES MATHEWS.
MR. MOON		MR. FRANK MATTHEWS.
MR. JOHN RIPTON	.....	MR. ROBERT ROXBY.
MR. RICHARD RIPTON	.....	MR. JAMES BLAND.
MR. DUNCUFT MEAZLE	.....	MR. BASH. BAKER.
MR. MUMPS, M.R.C.S.	.....	MR. WILLIAMS.
RYDER	.....	MR. HENRY BUTLER.
TOTTIE	.....	MR. C. SWAR.
MISS SUSANNAH APPLEJOHN	.....	MRS. FRANK MATTHEWS.
MARY MOON	.....	Miss WADHAM.

COSTUMES OF THE PRESENT DAY.

A NICE FIRM.

SCENE.—*The Private Office of Moon and Messiter. A table with law papers, books, inkstand, pens and papers, R.—another furnished in the same way, L. A door, C. communicating with the clerk's office. Doors R. and L. 2 E. communicating with waiting rooms. The iron door of a safe, or strong room, in the wall, R. C.; and a door, L. C. leading to Mr. Moon's private apartments, above the office. A fireplace, R. 1 E. Practicable window, L. C. F. Hanged against flat, japanned boxes, inscribed with "Miss S. Applejohn, Exetrix," "Mr. Meazle," "Meazle v. Mudlark," "In Chancery—I., II., III., IV., V., VI., and dates on them," "1715-30," "1730-65," "1765-96," "1796-1810," "1810-1835," "1835-51." "Mr. Mumps," "Mr. Ripton," "Isle of Skye Railway Company," "Everlasting Insurance Office."*

RYDER *discovers* turning over papers on table, E.

RYDER. No ! I can't find a trace of this infernal policy, Mr. Tottie ! (*calls*) Mr. Tottie! have you found what we want ?

TOTTIE. No, sir—it ain't possible to find anything one wants among these here chancery papers!

RYDER. If a clerk can't, how should a client ? You may as well give up the search, Mr. Tottie.

TOTTIE. (*coming out of the safe covered with dust, &c.*) How them chancery suits does breed cobwebs! and what a lot of dust I've got in my eyes!

RYDER. To throw dust in people's eyes is one of the great merits of equity papers, Tottie.

TOTTIE. I do believe, sir, we shall never find anything any more in this office. Since Mr. Messiter went away for his vacation, Mr. Moon's lost himself, and everything else too.

RYDER. Did you look in Mr. Moon's desk ?

TOTTIE. I'll take my oath it's not there.

RYDER. Why ?

TOTTIE. Because it's the proper place to put it in.

Exit at door, L. C.

RYDER. It's very odd—and deuced awkward—the policy on the life of the late Richard Ripton not to be found.

Enter MARY MOON, L. D.

MARY. May I come in ?

RYDER. Yes, Mary.

MARY. Have you found this horrid paper yet ?

RYDER. No—though we've turned the office upside down ; and as your father turned it upside down yesterday, our turn this morning ought to have put things to rights.

MARY. How provoking !—isn't it, Henry ? Papa's in such a way about it—he could eat no breakfast this morning, jumping up first to look into the cellaret, and then into my workbox—he nearly found all your letters—and now he's gone into the kitchen—he thinks he may have put it into the plate warmer.

RYDER. It's most unfortunate he should be so absent.

MARY. And now that Mr. Messiter's away, too.

RYDER. Oh ! Mr. Messiter's presence is as bad as your father's absence, for he unsettles matters as much with his slap-dash way, as your father with his forgetfulness.

MARY. They ought to take a steady young man into the firm, Henry.

RYDER. Yes, Mary—that's what I've always said.

MARY. Like you, Henry.

RYDER. Yes, Mary—that's what I've often thought.

MARY. How nice it would be if you were a partner, Henry.

RYDER. (*putting his arm round her waist*) Say if we were partners, dear.

MARY. Oh, that would come perhaps, Henry. Have you ever spoken to papa about it ?

RYDER. I've ventured a hint or two.

MARY. Oh, hints will never do. You must ask him in a straightforward way.

RYDER. No, no—that would have been all very well, if old Rennet had left me, besides his name, a little hard cash to gild it with. As it is, I've nothing in the world but my salary here as managing clerk.

MARY. And you don't think that two could manage upon that ? I should make such a good managing wife—I'm sure I should; for I've read "Soyer's Modern Housewife," all about Hortense and Eloise, and the patent stove, and Mr. B.; and you should never have cold meat twice running.

RYDER. Bread and cheese, and—(*kissing her*) that Mary, are worth all the made dishes in the world.

MARY. And you might have that every day, you know. But hark ! there's papa scolding the cook—I must run away, or he'll catch me. But mind you ask him for a share of the business, and when you've his hand to the bargain, you shall have my hand into the bargain.

Exit, L. D

RYDER. Bless her bright eyes ! That such a little duck should be the daughter of such a great goose. It's a *lusus naturæ*.

Enter MR. MOON, D. F. in his dressing gown, with one slipper and one shoe, carrying a pile of boots.

MOON. Good morning, Mr. Ryder. Have you found the policy on Mr. Richard Ripton's life yet ?

RYDER. No, sir—I've hunted everywhere, and I've had the clerks hunting too. and it can't be found.

MOON. Can't be found? But I say it shall be found, sir! I'd like to see the paper that can't be found in this office! (*hits his pile of books and knocks them over*)

RYDER. (*aside*) So should I—uncommonly, (*aloud*) Allow me, sir—

MOON. Dear me! when I'd just arranged them in chronological order. Mind how you place them, Mr. Ryder—arrangement is the soul of business. Talking of soles, I wonder if Mary ordered a pair for dinner to-day? Messiter likes soles. So you haven't found the policy? I certainly had it in my pocket yesterday at the pastrycook's. Well, sir, can't you answer me?

RYDER. I beg your pardon, sir—I did not hear your question.

MOON. However, I shall find a note of it in my agenda-book. (*sits at table, L.*) Where's my agenda-book? These clerks are always shifting papers on my table. (*rings*) How often must I give orders that my papers must not be disturbed? (*turning all the papers over on the table*)

Enter TOTTIE, D. F.

TOTTIE. Did you ring, sir?

MOON. How often must I tell you not to address that question to me? You hear the bell—you are there to answer, not to ask. Eh! What was it I wanted him for? (*to RYDER*)

RYDER. Your agenda-book.

MOON. Of course—of course. Where's my agenda-book?

TOTTIE. I never see a gender book in the office, sir; unless it's Mr. Slurk, which he's got a gender book in his desk, sir, called "French without a Master."

MOON. A-genda-book, you blockhead! My book, in which I put down things to be done. You don't think one can carry everything in one's head.

TOTTIE. (*aside*) I don't think you can carry anything in your head. (*aloud*) I never see such a book, sir.

Exit, D. F.

RYDER. I think, sir, you are sitting upon it.

MOON. Bless my soul! so I am—to be sure I am! (*takes book*) And it's locked! Where did I put the key, I wonder? (*looks amongst the papers*) Eh! Draft will of John Rennet, Esq.! By the way, has that muddle-headed woman been here this morning?

RYDER. Miss Applejohn, sir? Yes, sir—she called at nine. Mr. Tottie was here, luckily, sir, and said you would be here at half-past ten; but she would wait—so he put her into the waiting room, without a fire, and she's there now if you wish to see her.

MOON. Wish to see her, sir? Wish to have my mind distracted for the rest of the day by her doubts, her difficulties, and distresses? If you don't want your assigns to get into the Insolvent Court, or your attorney into chancery, don't leave a woman your executrix, or residuary legatee. It's very odd I can't find any of my papers on this table—I left a power of attorney here yesterday.

RYDER. Don't you think it's likely to be on your own table, sir? This is Mr. Messiter's.

MOON. (*crosses to R.*) Eh? Bless me! so it is—of course—no doubt it's on my own table. Yes, here it is—I never mislay things on my own table. And Mr. Ripton's coming 'about the policy on his brother's life next week, you say? It must be found, for he wants the money.

RYDER. And I don't think he can wait, sir, for he's desperately hard up. There's Mr. Meazle has entered up judgment against him in that undefended action on the bill of exchange. The ca-sa's issued, sir.

MOON. (*in an abstracted manner, and not listening to him*) No—I don't think it could have been in the hat-case I lost on the Great Western last week.

Enter TOTTIE, D. F.

TOTTIE. Mr. Mumps, sir, has called about concluding that mortgage, sir.

MOON. Mr. Mumps,—which mortgage? (to RYDER) I don't remember, Mr. Ryder—

RYDER. The mortgage for eight thousand pounds on the Duncuft property, sir. Our conveyancer had the title-deeds to look for prior incumbrances. You remember, sir?

MOON. Yes, yes, perfectly! Beg Mr.——, to sit down in the office for one moment.

Exit TOTTIE.

By the way, Mr. Ryder, Mr. Messiter returns to-day—you had better not say anything to him about the policy being mislaid. It would unsettle him, poor man—besides, it's sure to turn up in the course of the day.

RYDER. Very well, sir. Will you allow me to speak to you on a matter affecting myself, sir?

MOON. Eh! Bless me! Certainly, Mr. Ryder, certainly. (*in abstraction*) Mumps—mortgage-money? Mumps! what an odd name to be sure.

RYDER. I believe, sir, you are satisfied with the way in which I have discharged my duties—first as your articled, and since as your managing clerk?

MOON. Eh! Certainly, yes, yes! How we shall ever get that Miss Applejohn through the swearing at the Legacy Duty office to-day, I can't think! Eh? Oh, yes, quite satisfied.

RYDER. And the press of business on the firm is very heavy, Mr. Moon.

MOON. Eh! Business? Oh, yes! the press of business would be serious for most firms, but with Mr. Messiter's extraordinary quickness, and my old-established habits of regularity, my method, Mr. Ryder, we get through it easily—quite easily. I forget if our conveyancer found any prior incumbrances?

RYDER. Still I think, sir, the assistance of a young and diligent partner might be useful.

MOON. Well, I've sometimes thought so myself—particularly

when I'm away; for Mr. Messiter's rash—exceedingly rash. They draw their policies in duplicate, don't they ?

RYDER. And though I can bring no capital into the business, integrity, regularity, and unwearied zeal, may replace the want of fortune; and if you would allow me to suggest that, as a junior partner, with a nominal share of the profits at first——

MOON. Eh ? Bless me ! You, Mr. Ryder ?—take you into partnership ? Why, you've not passed your examination three years yet; and then, sir, habits of business are not formed in a day. Do you suppose I was master of my business at eight-and-twenty ? No, no, Mr. Ryder—when you've shewn yourself equal to the details of a really difficult case, like our great chancery suit of " Meazle v. Mudlark," that begun—Bless me!—when did it begin, Mr. Ryder ?

RYDER. I don't know, sir—I believe it's been going on from the time " whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary."

MOON. Ha, ha!—good!—Mr. Ryder,— that's the time of legal memory; but somehow I forgot it. However, as I was saying, Miss Applejohn will give us a great deal of trouble ; so perhaps it's as well I should see her at once.

RYDER. (*aside*) Confound his wool-gathering old brains !—there's no bringing him to the point, (*aloud*) But you can hardly receive clients in that costume, sir ?

MOON. (*looking at himself*) Eh?—why not? Bless me! I've been so bothered this morning with that policy—No, no—of course not. I'll put on my coat—and by the way, did you look into the washstand ?

Enter TOTTIE, D. F.

TOTTIE. A parcel from Mr. Duncuft Meazle, sir. The boy said he was to have two shillings, sir.

MOON. Eh? Ah!—two shillings. Here—where's my purse ?

TOTTIE. You left it in your hat, sir. (*giving it*)

MOON. Yes—here. Bless me! it's a very small parcel for two shillings—marked " Immediate and private." I see ! (*puts it down on the table with his purse*) Well, I'll put on my coat, and be down in a twinkling!
Exit TOTTIE.

MR. MUMPS puts his head in at door, L.

MUMPS. About that little business of mine, Mr. Moon ?

MOON. Eh ? Ah !—good morning, Mr.—(*aside*) Who's he, I wonder ? Yes—in one moment, my dear sir—I'll attend to you in one moment. (*MUMPS retires—to RYDER*) You'd better send to Mr. Mould's chambers for the—the—thingumbobby papers; and on his way, he might ask the cheesemonger if he has bought any waste paper of the laundress lately—that policy might be among'em.

Exit at door, L. 1 E.

RYDER. Now that's what I call a pleasant man to do business with—and Messiter's just as bad, in his harum-scarum style. By Jove! if it wasn't for me, the concern would be in Basinghall Street in a month—and I'm only a managing clerk, on two hundred

a year, with as little chance of a partnership in the firm as in the family. However, I must run along to old Mould's chambers for the Duncuft title deeds. Mumps is to advance the money—the mortgage deeds were to be signed and sealed to-day, if they were found all right. (*brushing his hat*)

MISS APPLEJOHN *puts her head out of the waiting room*, R. 1 B.

MISS A. Mr. Moon, if you please, sir ?

RYDER. He'll be here" directly, ma'am. He's just gone out to speak to a client on very particular business. (*aside*) That's managing clerk for "changing one's coat."

MISS A. Because I've been waiting an hour and three quarters ; and it's very cold here, sir.

RYDER. (*aside*) Why the deuce don't you go, then ? (*aloud*) I'm very sorry, ma'am, but the chimney smokes so——

MISS A. Ah !—yes—I know what that is. I'm sorry to say there's not a chimney in my villa at Bayswater, but——

RYDER. Yes, ma'am. But I beg your pardon—I must run to the Temple. If you'll sit down again for a moment, Mr. Moon will attend you, ma'am.

MISS A. You don't think he'll be long, sir—for I'm dreadfully nervous, sir, about all these oaths I'm to take to-day. You see, sir, as a delicate and sensitive female, I'm not in the habit of swearing. I suppose they'll make me swear a great deal ?

RYDER. (*aside*) You'll make them swear a great deal, I'll be bound! (*aloud*) Oh, it's nothing, ma'am, when you're used to it. Taking oaths is like taking pills—the first may stick in your throat, but the rest go down as easy as oysters. Good morning, ma'am !

Exit, D. F.

MISS A. That's a very off-hand young man. I'm really most anxious to see Mr. Moon—not only about that legacy duty, but I wish to consult him about the position and prospects of his client, Mr. Duncuft Meazle, who has been very attentive to me lately. He certainly is a most accomplished man ; and I understand from him that the Duncuft property is a fine one. Well, I suppose I ought not to stay here among all these papers and things ; though it is really uncommonly chilly in that room, and smells dreadfully of soot.

MR. MESSITER. (*outside*) All right! all right! You can carry the gun case up stairs—and take the birds to the Parcels Delivery—and leave the portmanteau in the passage! And here!—put these letters in the post, one of you!

Enter MR. MESSITER, with carpet bag, and great coat in his hand.

MESS. Anybody here? Eh! (*sees Miss APPLEJOHN*) Good morning, ma'am. (*aside*) New client—don't know her. Married woman, come to execute a deed—see it in her face. (*aloud*) Good morning, ma'am, Charming morning, though chilly—but one must expect that, at this time of year—eh? Here, Tottie !

Enter TOTTIE.

MESS. I've brought my gun case up stairs instead of my writing

case—run after Slurk, and get it. I told him to take it to the Parcels Delivery. Here—stop! You will always be in such a confounded hurry. Take the bag with you—I mean the gun case—and bring back the carpet bag!

Exit TOTTIE.

Good morning, ma'am! (*runs to door after* TOTTIE) Stop! It's my writing case I want—not my carpet bag! And send Mr. Ryder, will you? Good morning, ma'am!—Mrs.—Ahem! Glad to see you looking so well. (*aside*) I certainly never saw her face before. (*aloud*) Your little affair is in Mr. Moon's department, or I should be delighted to dispose of it for you at once.

Miss A. You are very kind, sir. I've been waiting for Mr. Moon since nine o'clock, and I wish you would settle it for me, sir, for I am naturally anxious.

MESS. (*sits at table, L.*) Anxious, my dear madam? Pooh, pooh! Not the least occasion for that—and as for waiting—you know the proverb, ma'am—"the law's delays." "Slow and sure" is our motto, ma'am, (*aside*) Who the devil has been rummaging among my papers—eh? Good gracious!—you're standing, ma'am. Pray take a chair, (*gives her a chair*) And if you will just let me have an outline of your little business, ma'am—I'm all attention, (*aside*) Not a thing but has been turned upside down, I do believe. (*looking hastily through his papers*) Now then, ma'am, if you please!

Miss A. First, sir, there's that dreadful business of the——

Enter TOTTIE, with writing case.

TOTTIE. Cabman wants to know how long he's to wait?—and please, sir, he's not took by the hour.

MESS. Confound the fellow! I thought I paid him. Here! (*takes up* MOON'S purse) Give him half-a-crown.

Exit TOTTIE.

The fare's not above two shillings; but he came along at a good pace—and a cab, ma'am, is one of the few things I like to go fast in. Well, ma'am, the dreadful business you speak of? (*jumps up*) Eh! The fellow's not satisfied with half-a-crown! (*runs to window and throws it open*) I'll tell you what it is, my fine fellow!—your fare's two shillings—and as you're saucy about it, you shan't have any more! Give him two shillings. Tottie—and the address, if he wants it. (*shuts window*) These fellows are getting unbearable! Don't you think so, ma'am? (*sits again*) And now, ma'am, your dreadful affair, you said—(*looks under table*) What's this, knocking about here? (*takes up a slipper*) One of Moon's slippers! Now, what a ridiculous thing to leave his slippers—Yes, ma'am—— (*assumes a listening attitude, holding slipper in his hand*)

Miss A. (*aside*) I'm glad I'm to get a word in edgeways at last. (*very quick*) You see, sir, I am left executrix and subsidiary—

MESS. Residuary.

Miss A. Yes, decidual legatee, by my uncle Rennet, from whom I had always expectations. (*MESSITER puts the slipper into his pocket—takes up* MR. MEAZLE'S parcel)

MESS. Certainly, madam—very natural expectations. Marked

" private and immediate." What the devil does Mr. Moon mean by leaving parcels marked ' Private and immediate' lying about unopened? Excuse me an instant, my dear madam. (*opens parcel and reads*) " Dear Sir—I shall be with you at half-past ten. That mortgage must be concluded to-day. All right in the other matter I talked to you about—I have referred her to you. Yours truly, Duncuft Meazle." Oh, this is some business of Moon's, come into the office since I was away. The note doesn't explain much. (*rings bell*) Now, ma'am, if you please.

MISS A. (*with dignity*) When you are at liberty to listen to me, sir.

MESS. Certainly, madam—quite at liberty.

Enter TOTTIE.

Has the gentleman come who sent this note? (*holding up the note*)

TOTTIE. Not yet, sir.

MESS. Show him in, when he comes, directly. Our principle as a firm, madam, is never to keep a client waiting; and always to attend to one affair at a time.

MISS A. Well, sir, as I have been waiting here close upon two hours—

MESS. Ah, the press of business, you know, my dear madam. Eh! Here's Moon coming down stairs at last; and as it's his affair—

Enter MOON, L. D.

MISS A. Oh, Mr. Moon! I'm so glad you've come.

MOON. So, Messiter—back at last, eh? Had a pleasant vacation? Good morning, Miss Applejohn. You remember Miss Applejohn, Mr. Messiter? (*aside*) Get her out of the room.

MESS. Of course—of course! Miss Applejohn and I have been talking over her affair, and it's perfectly simple—but hollo! it's half-past ten; and here's our valued client, Mr. Duncuft Meazle (*taking note*) has an appointment with us at that hour.

MISS A. Mr. Duncuft Meazle! It was partly to enquire about him I came here this morning. You know him?

MESS. Oh, yes!—a most valuable client—a highly respectable man!

MOON. Oh, yes! (*abstractedly*) It isn't in any of my coat pockets.

MESS. What? Oh!—ay—yes. The Duncuft family's highly respectable—been in chancery these hundred and thirty years—none but a most respectable family can afford a chancery suit like that. Yes, the Duncuft property lies near Queensborough—was a fine property when it got into chancery, ma'am, and has been nursing ever since. Oh, snug as possible—with a Lord Chancellor to administer it, and a receiver, and no end of masters—so, you see, we owe him every attention; and as he'll be here directly, you'll excuse our postponing your business till after he's gone—so if you'll just walk into that room, (*shows her back to waiting room*) and sit down for one minute—

MISS A. Oh, but I've sat there an hour and three quarters already.

MESS. Then one minute more cannot make much difference, my

dear Miss Applejohn. (*bows her in, and shuts the door*) And now, Moon, do let me know what you've been doing since I've been away, that I may be up to the business.

MUMPS *puts his head in at door, L.*

MUMPS. About that little affair of mine, Mr. Moon?

MESS. In one moment, my dear sir. (MUMPS *retires*) Who's that, Moon?

MOON. Eh? Why it's—oh, you know—Ryder told me this morning—a man, about a—ah! Ryder will tell you. (*rings*) It's in his hands. I wish that policy was—

Enter TOTTIE.

MOON. Eh! What is it?

MESS. Bless the man!—he's wandering again. Beg Mr. Ryder to step here.

TOTTIE. He's just gone down to Mr. Mould's, sir.

MESS. Very well, very well—it's of no consequence.

Exit TOTTIE.

Confound it, Moon!—now do try to recollect this fellow's business. What's his name?

MOON. Eh? Bless me! His name—it's—let me see. I remember it's an odd name—a disease children have, you know.

MESS. Thrush—croop—hooping cough? Can't be hooping cough—that's ridiculous! Mea—I have it! Meazles. There's a note come here, signed "Meazle." (*takes slipper out of his pocket*) No—that's your slipper. I picked it up under my table—take it, man. (*throws it to him*) Put this and that together. Man with odd name there—man with odd name here. Half-past ten there—half-past ten here. Oh, yes; it's Meazle, no doubt—and his business—(*reads*) "That mortgage must be concluded to-day." *That mortgage!* What mortgage?

MOON. Oh, I remember—of course. Ha, ha!—to think I should forget it. It's a mortgage of the Duncuft estates, for eight thousand pounds. There's a man coming about it—to-day, I think. The papers ought to be here somewhere—eh?

MESS. Confound it!—you'll never find 'em. Here! (*rings*)

Enter TOTTIE.

The Duncuft papers, Mr. Tottie?

TOTTIE. They're not come back from Mr. Mould's, sir. Mr. Ryder has gone after 'em.

MOON. To be sure he has—I sent him.

MESS. Then he'll be back directly. Just beg Mr. Meazle to wait for one minute, Tottie. Give him *The Times*, Tottie—the supplement—there's most reading in that. *Exit TOTTIE.*

MESS. (*goes to L. D. and speaks off*) In one moment, my dear sir. Mr. Moon and myself are just looking over the title deeds—must be regular, you know—ha, ha! (*shuts the door*)

MEAZLE. (*without*) Mr. Moon in? Very well—I've an appointment with him.

MESS. Who's this, Moon ?

MOON. Eh? Who? Really I don't recognise the voice.

Enter MEAZLE, D. F.

MEAZLE. *(to MOON)* Well, old boy, it's all right about the lady; so if you can manage that other business for me—is she here ?

MOON. Eh !—why—ah!

MESS. The other business Will be settled directly—we expect him here every minute. If you'll just walk into that room—we've rather a press of business this morning. Like a paper ? Here, Tottie, give that gentleman the *Times*. *(bows him into the room, R. and shuts the door. TOTTIE taken in the Times.)* Now who the devil is this ? He calls you " old boy !"

MOON. It's very odd, but I cannot recal his name. Know him perfectly, though—perfectly.

MESS. What's he come about ? Who's the lady?—and which is the other business?—and who's the man we expect every minute ?

MOON. Egad ! that was what I was going to ask him, only you are always in such a hurry. He'll tell us, though—no doubt he knows. *(going towards floor, R.)*

MESS. Not a bit of it! Never expose your ignorance—always appear to know everything about everybody, and you'll end by finding everything out, somehow—that is, if you can put this and that together, as I do.

MOON. But there's three of 'em waiting for us all at once.

MESS. Never mind—let 'em wait. Ripton may be here every minute, to draw the three thousand pounds payable on his brother's death.

MOON. Ah! Yes, of course. *(aside)* I'd better not say I've mislaid the policy, till I can't help it.

MESS. He spoke of coming up next week, but I told him as the three thousand pounds were to be paid over yesterday, he'd better come here to-day and receive it.

MOON. *(aside)* Confound it!—why will you be in such a hurry ? If the man didn't want to be paid to-day, why suggest it to him ? How often must I tell you, Messiter, that your headlong way of doing business is most dangerous ?

MESS. Dangerous ? Come, I like that.

MOON. We know what happens when railway trains go too fast—they smash, Mr. Messiter.

MESS. And we know what happens when railway trains go too slow—they get run into, Mr. Moon. But there's Ripton's voice.

Enter TOTTIE, presenting a card with a very deep black edge.

TOTTIE. Mr. Ripton's card, sir—and he's come. He's very much affected, sir.

Exit

TOTTIE.

MESS. Show him in. Queer client this Ripton, Moon. Did you know anything about him before effecting this insurance on his brother's life?

MOON. Eh! I? No—I don't remember ever to have seen him before.

MESS. His brother was a sad rogue, I hear.

Enter MR. JOHN RIPTON, in exaggerated mourning, with MR. RICHARD RIPTON, who wears green spectacles, a large beard, whiskers and moustaches, and long hair.

J. RIPTON. Good morning, Mr. Messiter—good morning, Mr. Moon. Heigho ! *(sighs)* This is a melancholy occasion, Mr. Messiter. *(sighs)* A most melancholy occasion, Mr. Moon. *(sighs again—he is echoed by RICHARD RIPTON, whom he nudges to imitate him)*

MESS. Heart-breaking—quite ! Mr. Moon and I were just saying what an irreparable loss you had sustained in your worthy brother. I wish I could relieve you. Allow me to relieve you of your hat.

J. RIPTON I have brought with me, gentlemen, a friend of my late brother, Mr. Limpet—Mr. Richard Limpet.

MESS. My dear sir, I sympathise with you. *(aside MOON)* Why the devil don't you sympathise with them, Moon? However, it's what we must all come to—that must be our comfort in general. But three thousand pounds insurance money is not what we must all come to ; and that must be your comfort in particular.

J. RIPTON. The paltry dross will but make his loss more keenly felt, Mr. Messiter—yes, every note of the three thousand pounds—I think it was three thousand pounds, Mr. Moon ? for I have no head for money matters.

MOON. Three thousand.

J. RIPTON. Every note of the three thousand pounds will be a fresh note of woe.

MESS. No doubt, no doubt. Every sovereign will drop into your purse with a mourning ring, eh ?

J. RIPTON. *(waving his hand, and taking out his pocket handkerchief)* Spare the feelings of a brother, Mr. Messiter.

MESS. Certainly, certainly—don't mention it. And now as there's nothing like despatch, and we've a tremendous press of business at this moment, if you'll draw a cheque for the amount, Mr. Moon, and let Mr. Ripton have the receipted policy——

MUMPS *looks in at the door.*

MUMPS. About that little affair of mine, Mr. Moon ?

MESS. In one moment, my dear sir. *(MUMPS retires)*

R. RIPTON. *(seeing Mumps)* Oh, lord, John! it's Mumps, who attended me in my last illness.

J. RIPTON. *(aside)* Hold your tongue, you fool! *(aloud)* Pardon my friend Limpet's emotion, but the gentleman who looked in just now was the gentleman who attended my poor brother.

MESS. What, Meazle—eh ?

J. RIPTON. No ; Mr. Mumps, the eminent surgeon.

MESS. *(aside)* Oh, that's Mumps—not Meazle. *(aloud)* Yes, Mumps, to be sure—an esteemed client of ours. *(aside)* Thought I should find him out. *(aloud)* So, it was Mumps saw him out of the world. Ah! devilish disagreeable association, But come, Moon, get the policy, and I'll draw the cheque, and——

MOON. (*aside*) Now do oblige me by not drawing any cheques. (*aloud*) Eh? Ah!—yes—I suppose the policy ought to be produced?

MESS. Indispensable! It's our voucher, and must be receipted. (*aloud*) Why don't you produce it?

MOON. It ain't here at this moment. (*aside*) It was here yesterday—yes, it was certainly here yesterday—but where it is now—

MESS. Then get it, can't you? (*aside*) What an old twaddle it is!

MOON. (*aside*) I wish I could get it. Eh! Yes—to think I never thought of that before. I must have left it at the pastrycook's yesterday—to be sure I must. I remember the tarts were stale. I'll just run over to the corner and fetch it. (*aloud*) Excuse me for a moment, Mr. Ripton, while I go for the policy. (*aside to MESSITER*) Now, for goodness sake, Messiter, don't you be going and drawing cheques till I come back.

Exit, D. F.

MESS. An admirable man of business, Moon, but slow and cautious: now, a man may be cautious, you know, and sharp at the same time. That's my character—quite a Perkins's steam gun, Mr. Limpet—takes a good while to get my steam up, but then every bullet straight to the mark!

MISS APPLEJOHN *looks out of the waiting room.*

MISS A. How long, Mr. Messiter, am I to be kept waiting in this room, with no fire, and smelling dreadfully of soot?

MESS. In one moment, my dear madam. Pray do not interrupt us just now. (*shuts her in again*) These women are so impatient, Mr. Ripton.

R. RIPTON. (*aside to his brother*) Do get the money, and come away—I'm not easy in my mind, since I've seen that infernal doctor!

J. RIPTON. My dear sir, my time is very precious this morning; so if you could expedite Mr. Moon's movements—

MESS. Expedite, my dear sir? I could just as soon expedite his namesake up in the sky yonder. However, I'll get you the policy, if you'll wait for one moment. (*rings*)

Enter TOTTIE.

The *Times* to Mr. Ripton.

TOTTIE. It's in hand, sir. There's the party in No. 1 has got one sheet; and the party in No. 2 has got the other; and the party in the outer office has got the supplement.

MESS. Oh, then get these gentlemen anything to amuse them. The *Law Journal*, or the last number of the *Old Bailey Reports*.

Exit, D. F.

R. RIPTON. The *Old Bailey Reports*! Oh, lord! I fancy I see our names figuring in there; for it's felony—

J. RIPTON. You cowardly ass! do you want to ruin us, just as we are going to touch the tin? But it serves you right, for your unbrotherly want of confidence.

R. RIPTON. What, because I wouldn't trust you to receive the money alone? No, Jack; I know a trick worth two of that. I've

been the cat's-paw in this rascally business, and you've been the monkey, but I'm not going to have my fingers burnt without having a taste of the chestnuts.

J. RIPTON. And this from a fellow whose fortune I've made, without doing anything for it!

R. RIPTON. And you don't call it anything to be dead and buried, with a certificate of it into the bargain, and a tombstone over me, with two weeping willows, and an epitaph? Ain't I dead in the eyes of the world?—Isn't everybody lamenting me?

J. RIPTON. They'd never have done it as long as you lived, you ungrateful vagabond! Who was it gave you a disease of the heart, and brought Mr. Mumps to attend you, and saw you decently buried at Kensall Green? Why, if it hadn't been for me, you'd have been alive at this moment, and as hard up as ever—whereas, now you've departed this life, and are going to start a new one in America, with a nice little fortune.

R. RIPTON. I know you put me up to the crime, but I ought to have two-thirds of the money, out of consideration to my feelings. Confound it! a man can't be expected to go out of the world, in the flower of his age, without being paid for it.

J. RIPTON. Then suppose we split the difference?

Enter MEAZLE, at door, R. U. E.

MEAZLE. They told me to wait a minute; but hang me, if the minute hand of their office clock isn't the slowest goer I ever saw! Eh! Moon and Messiter not here?—and I'll be shot if that isn't Jack Ripton! So, Mr. Jack Ripton!

J. RIPTON. Duncuft Meazle, by jingo!—and I forgot to take up that bill he accepted for me. Ah, Meazle, my dear fellow!

MEAZLE. Thirty-five pounds, with two-and-sixpence for the stamp, and six-and-fourpence for noticing, is coming it rather too strong, Mr. Jack Ripton.

J. RIPTON. My dear Meazle, it was quite an oversight.

MEAZLE. Gammon! I've got judgment entered up, execution signed, and ca. sa. issued; and if you don't pay me the money down on the nail, I'll send for a sheriffs' officer on the spot!

J. RIPTON. My dear fellow

Enter MESSITER, door in F.

MESS. No Moon in the office, a total eclipse—eh! who have we here? Oh, the mysterious party from number one. My dear sir, we are coming to your little affair in one minute!

MEAZLE. I've a little affair of my own, Mr. Messiter, with Mr. Jack Ripton here, against whom I've judgment and execution, on an unpaid bill of exchange, for thirty-eight pounds, eight shillings and ten pence, with costs; so, if you've a sworn bailiff at hand perhaps you will oblige me by having him arrested.

MESS. Arrested! Mr.—Mr.

MEAZLE. Duncuft Meazle!

MESS. (*aside*) Then this is Meazle, and not the other—this must be the other business. I see—knew I should find him out! (*aloud*)

Mr. Meazle, I'm astonished at you! I may say shocked, at your want of common humanity! Arrest that man, sir, at this moment! Look at him, observe these habiliments of woe, that sunken cheek! (*aside*) He looks too fresh, though, for the effect, (*aloud*) These eyes, still red with grief; that handkerchief, steeped with tears! (*aside to RIPTON*) Display your handkerchief! (*aloud*) And you can arrest this man at a moment when bowed to the earth.—(*aside*) bow to the earth, (*aloud*) He comes to this office to touch the sum of three thousand pounds, insured for profits on the life of the late Richard Ripton, in the Bereaved Relative Fire and Life Assurance Office, 16, Bridge Street, Blackfriars.

MEAZLE. Dick Ripton dead! huzza!

J. RIPTON. Mr. Duncuft Meazle, spare the feelings of a brother.

MESS. Don't pursue your indignant triumph beyond the tomb, there's a good fellow! (*aside to MEAZLE*) You haven't got a lien on the insurance money have you?

MEAZLE. No. Excuse me, Jack; I forgive you the thirty-five pounds, eight shillings and tenpence, with costs, since Dick's popped off.

J. RIPTON. Popped off! (*weeps*)

MESS. Popped off—as if a man were a bottle of soda water.

MEAZLE. Old Rennet's will, you know. You drew it—at least Moon did—he left £20,000 money in the funds—India stock and other personal property, to his vagabond nephew Dick Ripton, Dicky Rip as we used to call him—and failing Dick, to Susannah Applejohn her executors and assigns for ever. So now Dick's happily dead, Miss Applejohn comes in——

J. RIPTON. (*aside*) The devil!

R. RIPTON. Just like my luck!

MEAZLE. And, *entre nous*, I can marry Miss Applejohn, for holding up my finger. I've no doubt you'll have her here, to make inquiries about me.

MESS. Will have her here? We have had her here since nine o'clock this morning. She's here now—in that room. (*points to room, R.*)

MEAZLE. Then I'd better strike now the iron's hot.

MESS. You may find it rather cold, for there's no fire.

J. RIPTON. Stop one moment, Mr. Meazle. Mr. Messiter will tell you, as a lawyer, that though my poor brother's dead, yet his personal representatives——

R. RIPTON. That's me.

J. RIPTON. Mr. Limpet, here, and myself, stand in his shoes, and succeed to all his rights.

MEAZLE. The deuce you do! Eh, Mr. Messiter?

MESS. Undoubtedly—just what I was going to point out to you, but Mr. Ripton prevented me; so, if you please, we'll have the transfers made out in proper form——

MEAZLE. Stop, Mr. Messiter. When did Dick pop off the hooks?

J. RIPTON. Off the hooks!

MESS. Off the hooks!—as if a man were a leg of mutton, at the butcher's.

J. RIPTON. Mr. Richard Ripton departed this life on the fifteenth ultimo, universally regretted.

MESS. Universally! (*aside*) Especially by his creditors.

MEAZLE. And the date of Mr. Rennet's death?

MESS. Let's see. We've the draft of the will here—date of testator's death—the eighteenth ultimo—

MEAZLE. Then don't you see, as Dick died first, the right never vested, and Dick's representative has no claim.

MESS. Exactly—just the point I was about to take. You see you can't stand in deceased's shoes, because he never had any shoes to stand in.

J. RIPTON. (*aside*) Confound it! why didn't you linger three days longer?

R. RIPTON. (*aside*) All your fault—you would hurry me out of the world so fast.

MEAZLE. Well, as Miss Applejohn's there, I may as well go in and wish her good morning.

MESS. Certainly. But by-the-bye, there's the other business—about the money you want to lend—

MEAZLE. Eh!

MESS. Ah, you wonder at my knowing everybody's business. Oh! it becomes a perfect instinct at last. I no sooner saw you enter the office, than I said—that's a man come to advance money on mortgage. You want to advance eight thousand pounds on the Duncuft estates?

MEAZLE. Not exactly. The fact is, I want somebody else to advance eight thousand pounds on the Duncuft estates.

MESS. Precisely—comes to the same thing in the end.

MEAZLE. I understood there was a client of yours willing to lend the money.

MESS. Oh, yes—in fact, he's here at this moment. Your title deeds are satisfactory—perfectly.

MEAZLE. The clerk outside told me they hadn't come back from the conveyancer's.

MESS. Eh? (*aside*) No more they have. (*aloud*) Yes, yes—we send them to our conveyancer to satisfy our clients; but it's a mere form. I always arrive at my own opinion first; so if you like, we'll settle the mortgage.

MEAZLE. Stay—it would be better not to do that till I've seen Miss Applejohn (*aside*) Twenty thousand pounds in stock and shares. Egad! it's too tempting—so here goes for the sensitive and refined female.

Exit into room, R. 1 E.

MUMPS *puts his head in at door.*

MUMPS. About that little affair of mine, gentlemen?

MESS. In one moment, my dear sir, if you'll sit down and amuse yourself with the Times.

MUMPS. I've got nothing but the supplement, sir.

MESS. My dear sir—here, my dear sir. (*gives him another part of the Times*)

MUMPS. But this is the outside sheet—nothing but advertisements.

MESS. Excellent article in it to-day—top of second column—a letter in cypher. Quite a nut to crack, I assure you. (*bows him off and shuts door*)

MESS. (*to RIPTON*) Well, gentlemen, Moon hasn't brought that policy yet; but as you said before, it can be sent after you—so we need not detain you any longer at present.

J. RIPTON. Mr. Messiter, as my confidence in the firm is unbounded, if you'll just draw the cheque for the amount—

MESS. (*aside*) Why shouldn't I? Draw it for three thousand pounds, minus our bill of costs. (*gets his book—rings*) In one moment, my dear sir.

Enter TOTTIE.

Is Mr. Ripton's bill of costs made out?

TOTTIE. Yes, sir—you said it had best be made out at once, 'cause they wasn't clients you liked trusting.

MESS. Hold your tongue, sir! Leave the office, and bring the bill.

Exit TOTTIE

That's a man that allows himself very great liberties—a most insolent man; but Moon insists on keeping him in the office.

Enter TOTTIE, with bill.

I'll deduct our trifling bill of costs from the three thousand pounds—saves the time of writing a cheque.

J. RIPTON. Done, by Jove!

MESS. There you are—two thousand six hundred and forty pounds, six shillings, and eightpence is the balance. You will observe we've not charged advising upon your last letter, when I asked you to call at four, and you answered same date you couldn't. We never make a bill, like too many of the profession. I have receipted the bill—here you are. (*gives cheque*)

J. RIPTON. And now that this affair is settled, Mr. Messiter, I've a serious charge to bring against this firm.

MESS. A serious charge, Mr. Ripton? Mind your words, will you? When the honour of Messiter and Moon are at stake, a breath may be actionable—a sneer may be followed by swingeing damages. Now, sir, your charge.

J. RIPTON. May I ask when you drew Mr. Rennet's last will and testament?

MESS. Tell you in a moment, by referring to my diary—in a moment. Where is my diary? (*rings*)

Enter TOTTIE.

My diary, Mr. Tottie?

TOTTIE. Please sir, don't you remember it was lost six weeks since, in the great cleaning, and Mr. Ryder said it was of no consequence, for it was kept in such a higgledy-piggledy, that nothing could be found in it.

MESS. Beg Mr. Ryder to step this way.

Exit TOTTIE.

I don't understand clerks presuming to judge of the arrangement of their principal's diaries.

Enter RYDER.

Mr. Ryder, pray what was the date of an attendance upon Mr. Rennet, to advise with him as to his last will and testament?

RYDER. The eighth ultimo, sir.

Exit RYDER.

MESS. Thank you, Mr. Ryder. Then on the eighth ultimo, gentlemen, we were aware of the disposition of the property.

J. RIPTON. Then why didn't you let my brother know of the good fortune in store for him? It might have prolonged his life.

R. RIPTON. If he'd known what was coming, he'd have been alive this day to get it, as sure as I stand here.

MESS. But you remember you were at that moment in a state of temporary eclipse—under a cloud, as the vulgar saying goes. We sent a card by the postman that knocks at every man's door—the *Times*—of the truth, eleventh, twelfth, and following week, of something to Mr. Richard Ripton's advantage—which you will find charged in the bill of costs.

J. RIPTON. An advertisement in the *Times*. I read that invaluable journal regularly, and I never saw it.

MESS. Excuse me, I remember it; and Moon settled it, and had it inserted. I prove it—we file the *Times*. (*rings*) I'll shew you the advertisement.

Enter TOTTIE.

The file of the *Times* for last month.

Exit TOTTIE.

Enter MOON.

Ah ! here's Moon, at last.

Enter TOTTIE, with file of *Times*.

Now, gentlemen, I shall have the pleasure of shewing you that the neglect is not with this office, but with yourselves. (*turning over the papers*) If we have any fault, it's the excessive nicety of our arrangements.

J. RIPTON. Tenth, eleventh, twelfth. There, sir—you see !

R. RIPTON. I was sure there was nothing to my advantage.

MESS. Moon, there's no advertisement !

MOON. No advertisement!—where ?

MESS. In the *Times*.

MOON. Bless me! how very odd!—when there's generally two sheets, besides the supplement.

MESS. I mean, there's no advertisement of anything to Mr. Richard Ripton's advantage.

MOON. You don't say so ! I've a distinct recollection of sending it to the *Times*. 'Twas at this very table, at this very pad I addressed the letter.

MESS. (*goes to pad and finds the letter*) I knew it—here it is.

MOON. Stop—let me see. Bless me !—yes, I remember now—

MESS. Eh?

MOON. No, I don't; but there was some reason why I didn't send the advertisement—a strong reason—but what it was, just at this moment——

J. RIPTON. It's not worth while puzzling for an excuse, Mr. Moon—it is the neglect on the part of the firm. We will consider what we ought to do at this unexpected discovery; but first let me receipt the policy, and give you a discharge, Mr. Moon.

MOON. The policy? Why—the fact is—(*aside*) Confound it! I've looked everywhere. The fact is, gentlemen, the policy has been mislaid.

MESS. By the negligence of a clerk, who will be instantly dismissed.

J. RIPTON. Am I to understand, gentlemen, that the policy is lost?

MOON. Oh! no, no, no!

MESS. Lost! Certainly not—not at all—merely that it can't be found, which is a different thing.

J. RIPTON. So, gentlemen! (*aside*) I've got the money, and the loss of the policy removes the evidence of fraud, (*aloud*) This neglect of your firm is really serious: we will consider what steps we ought to take.

MESS. Certainly, gentlemen—in this room, (*shows them in room, R.U.E.*) You will not be interrupted—we will await your decision.

Exit JOHN and RICHARD RIPTON into room, U. E. R.
Confound it all, Moon! you don't mean to say you've really lost that policy?

MOON. Oh, no—only I've looked everywhere, and it's nowhere; and so I was obliged to say so.

MESS. A pretty mess you've got us into, Mr. Moon! Why, the court would hold them entitled to sue us in damages for the amount which I've paid.

MOON. But the company won't pay it without the policy. You're ruining the business.

MESS. And you've lost the papers on which we should have received the money. The firm is going to the devil! (*they walk angrily up and down on opposite sides of the stage*)

Enter MISS APPLEOHN and MEAZLE.

MEAZLE. Why, you do not fly from the warmth of my attachment?

MISS A. No, Mr. Meazle; but from the damp of that room; I've a cold in my head coming on, and rheumatism flying all over me, from my shoulders to my knees.

MEAZLE. Would I might fly there also!

MISS A. You extravagant creature! (*seeing MESSITER*) Oh, there you are. Mr. Moon promised to go to the Legacy Duty Office, to swear to the amount of uncle Rennet's property.

MESS. Then I'll leave you in Moon's hands, for you can't be in better. Get them out of the way. I must talk over Ripton, or, by Jove! he'll expose us.

Exit into room, R. U. E.

MOON. And to think he's paid the money!

MEAZLE. As I was saying, Miss Applejohn, the Duncuft property has been in the family since the conquest.

MISS A. Indeed, sir ! I do so love an old family. A fire's a great comfort in November, Mr. Meazle.

MEAZLE. With a flame inside. In what other part can one feel cold?

MISS A. I feel it most in my feet. There's no more feeling in my feet than in a pair of flat irons.

MEAZLE. Allow me to place a chair for you near the fire, Miss Applejohn, and move this screen to keep off the draft, and we will continue our interesting conversation. (*places chair near fire, and one for himself*)

MISS A. Oh, I call this really comfortable. Well, Mr. Meazle ? (*as they sit they are concealed from observation by the screen, which is between them and the rest of the characters*)

Enter MESSITER, and JOHN and RICHARD RIPTON, from room, U. E. R.

J. RIPTON. The policy, then, you admit is lost, Mr. Messiter ?

MESS. For the present—but the loss will be ours, not yours, as you've the money.

J. RIPTON. True; but the disappearance of so important a paper ?

MESS. No doubt, if there were any fraud in the case, the policy would be a necessary link in the evidence to bring it home to the perpetrator.

J. RIPTON. (*aside*) Capital! I thought so.

MESS. But even then the loss would be ours; for our case against the fraudulent insurer would fail for want of the paper.

J. RIPTON. (*aside*) Better and better! (*aloud*) Are we alone, gentlemen ?

MOON. Eh ? Yes, yes !

MESS. What the deuce is he up to now, I wonder ?

J. RIPTON. Be seated, gentlemen. I have thought over the circumstances in which I am placed, and have come to a bold and what to some would appear a desperate resolution.

MESS. Not suicide, Mr. Ripton ?

J. RIPTON. Not the least notion of it. But let us see where we are. I've received the balance of the insurance money——

MOON. Yes—(*to MESSITER*) thanks to you.

J. RIPTON. The policy is lost——

MESS. Yes—(*to MOON*) thanks to you.

J. RIPTON. And if my brother was alive, he would be heir, under old Rennet's will, to twenty thousand pounds of personal property.

MESS. Precisely.

J. RIPTON. Then, gentlemen, I have to communicate to you that my brother, Richard Ripton is alive !

MOON. Alive! The Insured!

MESS. Alive! The Insured!

MISS A. (*aside*) Oh, gemini!

MEAZLE. (*aside to her*) Be calm—don't stir !

J. RIPTON. Alive and kicking, gentlemen; as he'll satisfy you.

R. RIPTON. (*rising*) Here I am, gentlemen, at your service.
(*removes wig, &c.*)

MESS. Then you're not dead ?

MOON. And not buried ?

R. RIPTON. Neither the one nor the other.

MISS A. (*aside*) Oh, the wretch !

MEAZLE. (*aside*) Be quiet! (MESSITER *rings*)

Enter TOTTIE.

MESS. (*aside*) Stop our cheque of this day to John Ripton.

Exit TOTTIE.

MESS. (*to* RIPTON) But we forwarded the certificate of death to the insurance office.

MOON. And the certificate of registration of burial with it.

J. RIPTON. My dear sir, evasion of these formalities of the law may be secured with so little ingenuity. We should have remained satisfied with our little *ruse*—

MOON. A little *ruse* ! Did you hear, Messiter ?

MESS. Oh, I suspected it all along.

J. RIPTON. Had we not been informed of the will of our late venerable uncle, in my dear brother's favour—

MOON. Their late venerable uncle!

J. RIPTON. I have therefore induced my brother, in justice to himself, to come forward and claim his rights.

MISS A. (*aside*) His rights—the impostor !

MEAZLE. (*aside*) Miss A.'s done for!

MESS. But you lose the insurance money.

J. RIPTON. Thanks to you, it's paid.

MOON. There, Messiter!

MESS. But do you not see you are putting yourself in *our* power, sir ? What is to prevent our indicting you ?

J. RIPTON. In the first place, the chief evidence against us—the policy of insurance—thanks to Moon, is lost.

MESS. There, Moon!

J. RIPTON. Do not suppose, however, that I trusted to that only. I've another security against your moving in the matter.

MESS. Name it, scoundrel!

J. RIPTON. Regard for your own credit, and a natural reluctance on the part of the principals of the highly respectable firm of Messiter and Moon to stand in the Old Bailey dock, by the side of your humble servant, with every prospect of ultimately accompanying Messrs. John and Richard Ripton on a visit to our Australian dependencies, at the public expense.

MESS. This is going too far.

MOON. Yes—all the way to Australia.

J. RIPTON. You remember it was through your office the insurance was effected.

MOON. There—you would do it—you are always in such a hurry.

J. RIPTON. That it was you, Mr. Moon, who gave the company a guarantee of my perfect solvency and respectability.

MESS. That was you, Moon; for I begged you not to do it. I said

I thought they looked like slippery customers. I was not to be hoodwinked, Mr. Ripton.

J. RIPTON. Mr. Moon was present at the funeral ; Mr. Moon was conspicuous for the whiteness of his handkerchief, and the length of his physiognomy.

MESS. (*aside to MOON*) It's quite clear we're in a devil of a mess. Why the deuce did you thrust yourself forward in the matter ?

MOON. Common humanity——

MESS. Humanity has no business to be common in a lawyer's office. What's to be done ?

J. RIPTON. After all, gentlemen, I've no wish to make any *éclat* in the business—all scandal had better be avoided.

MESS. Certainly, all scandal had better be avoided; but how is it to be avoided if your d——d brother will come to life ?

R. RIPTON. Mr. Messiter!

J. RIPTON. It has occurred to us that Miss Applejohn——

MISS A. (*aside*) I thought the viper was coming to me !

J. RIPTON. Who is a very silly woman——

MISS A. (*aside*) Me—silly !

MESS. Yes, weak—decidedly !

MISS A. (*aside*) Me—weak!

J. RIPTON. May, by a representation of the effects of a scandal, and the certainty of her ultimately losing all Mr. Rennet's property, be induced to make a compromise, by which she and Richard might share and share alike, whilst he returns to the tomb from which we have disturbed him.

Miss APPLEJOHN *bursts out.*

ALL. Miss Applejohn !

MISS A. Compromise ! Me compromise with a wretch like you ? Yes, Mr. John Ripton, I may be silly—I may be weak, Mr. Messiter—which I will not observe on the meanness of saying such things to a delicate female's face, behind her back ; but I trust I know too well what is due to myself as a female, and to the memory of my dear uncle Rennet—who never would stand by to see his niece treated in this way ! (*sobs*)—ever to consent to any compromise with a serpent that he nourished in his bosom—to go and pretend that his brother was dead, like a hard-hearted villain as he is ! Though my peace of mind is to be destroyed for ever, and my happiness ruined—(*with a look at MEAZLE*) for there are parties which I despise—I will go to the Queen's Bench, or the proper authorities at Bow Street, and denounce all the parties in this abominable transaction ! I, weak ! weak—(*falls into chair in a fit of hysterics, C.*)

MESS. She'll ruin everything ! Compose yourself—compose yourself, my dear madam. Run for a doctor!

MUMPS *puts his head in at door.*

MUMPS. About that little affair of mine, gentlemen ?

MESS. Ha, Mumps !—you're a surgeon. Here, quick !—here's a lady in hysterics!

MUMPS. Oh, we'll soon settle that, (*comes down R. C. to Miss A.*)

J. RIPTON. We will wait Miss Applejohn's decision.

Exit with RICHARD, R. U. E.

MUMPS. I'll soon bring her to.

MESS. Don't, my dear sir—pray don't!

MUMPS. Call a cab, and send her home.

MESS. (*aside*) It's most important she should not leave the office.

MUMPS. Well, perhaps she had better lie down till more composed.

MISS A. No—let me go to the authorities and tell all!

MESS. My dear madam, you are not fit to go—you will be risking your life.

MISS A. Ah, I see too plainly by a certain party's manner that all is at an end between us. (*weeps*)

MESS. (*aside to her*) Happy riddance, ma'am. Meazle is not the man for you at all—out at elbows, ma'am—hard-up—

MISS A. Why, you said he was a most respectable man, and a valued client.

MESS. Not valued—valuable client. He's been such a long time in chancery.

MISS A. And that he came to lend money on mortgage.

MESS. To borrow money. Mumps comes to lend—Mumps, M.R.C.S.—highly respectable man—large practice—shall be proud to introduce you. Mr. Mumps, Miss Applejohn—Miss Applejohn, Mr. Mumps.

MUMPS. You feel better now, my dear madam?

MESS. You must really lie down a little. Miss Moon will take care of you up stairs. (*aside*) Ring for Mary, Moon. (MOON *rings*)

MISS A. Sir, if I walk barefoot for the rest of my life, and am reduced to a single room and needlework, I shall still be happy to think that I have brought those wretches to the scaffold!

Enter MARY MOON, R. 2 E,

MARY. Did you ring, papa?

MOON. Eh!—did I ring? Did you ring, Messiter?

MESS. Miss Moon, Miss Applejohn has had a slight nervous attack. Will you take care of her, and see that she lies down and composes herself?

MOON. (*aside to* MARY) Your wretched parent's life depends upon her not getting out of the house.

MARY. Papa!

MESS. You will take a glass of wine? You really must allow us to prescribe for you.

MISS A. You are very kind.

MUMPS. I shall not leave the office till I'm satisfied you are quite recovered, my dear madam.

MISS A. You are too kind. (*aside*) A most agreeable man!

MARY. This way, Miss Applejohn.

MOON. (*to* MARY) Keep her here, Mary, or you may see your unhappy, but innocent father, in Newgate before to-morrow.

MARY. Papa! (*going to scream*)

MESS. Silence! (*checking her*)

Exit MARY and Miss APPLEJOHN.

Oh, certainly. Mr. Mumps is here with the money; you're here with the mortgage—why not settle it at once ?

Enter RYDER, with papers.

RYDER. The Duncuft title deeds from Mr. Mould's, sir.

MESS. T. O. in the corner, (*reads*) " As the property has been some time in chancery, it might be as well to consult the last report of the master, to see how much of it is left," A mere formality; but refer to the last report, Mr. Ryder:

RYDER. It's in the safe, sir, with the other, papers in the Duncuft suit. If you'll give me the key, sir——

MESS. Yes; here it is. (*gives key*)

MOON. (*to MESSITER*) For mercy's sake, get 'em away ; and let's see what's to be done in this awful business of Ripton's.

MESS. Don't betray yourself. Look at me, how calm I am. Here, gentlemen, are the papers. Mr. Mumps, you've perused the deed?

MUMPS. Oh, yes—several times.

MESS. And understand it ?

MUMPS. Not in the least, sir.

MESS. Then it's no use reading it over to you. If you'll sign here, and say, " I deliver this as my act and deed."

MUMPS. " I deliver this as my act and deed." (*signs*)

MESS. Now you, Mr. Meazle.

MEAZLE. " I deliver this as my act and deed." (*signs*)

Enter RYDER, from safe, with a pile of papers in his hand, and leaves door open behind him.

RYDER. The key of the safe, sir.

MESS. (*taking key*) What's that ?

RYDER. The master's report on the Duncuft suit, which Mr. Mould recommended our reading before settling the mortgage.

MESS. Much obliged to him; but the parties can't wait here till next month.

RYDER. Then I must try and pick the- grain of wheat out of this bushel of legal chaff.

Exit with papers.

MEAZLE. Now as to the amount——

MUMPS. You'd like a cheque ?

MEAZLE. Why, yes.

MUMPS. Ah, I've forgot my cheque-book, in the other office. I'll get It in a minute.

MEAZLE. We'll draw it there if you like. (*aside*) I've done it!

Exit with MUMPS.

MOON. And now they're gone, do let us reflect calmly on our awful position.

MESS. How can we reflect calmly if you fidget so? There, don't twiddle your fingers. Let's see—the first part is—can we transport the Messrs. Ripton ?

MOON. Without getting transported ourselves?

MESS. Of course. Now, to prove them guilty, we want the policy.

MOON. I had it last Wednesday. (*groans*) I'm certain I had it last Wednesday.

MESS. And to prove ourselves innocent, we must have evidence that what you did, you did not as Ripton's accomplice, but as his innocent agent. Now where shall we find such evidence, eh?

MOON. Goodness gracious knows !

MESS. (*jumping up*) Eh! Of course he can—Mumps—Mumps was the surgeon who gave the certificate—he saw you there.

MOON. Yes.

MESS. Mumps is our man. (*goes to door and calls*) Mumps ! This way, my dear sir—one moment!

MEAZLE. (*at door*) Mr. Mumps is just going to draw the cheque.

MESS. It's most important—I won't keep him an instant.

Enter MUMPS.

You were present, Mr. Mumps, at the—ahem!—death of Mr. Richard Ripton ?

MOON. Who isn't——

MESS. (*aside*) Hold your tongue !

MUMPS. Yes.

MESS. And do you remember my respected friend and partner here being present on that occasion ?

MUMPS. Perfectly. He acted throughout in the kindest way as the agent of Mr. John Ripton.

MOON. As the innocent agent, Mr. Mumps. Didn't I seem innocent, sir ?

MUMPS. Innocent ? Of course. Mr. Ripton himself begged you to see to the certificate. I remember you declined at first, as you said you were present only in your legal character; but he pressed you, and you consented.

MOON. Bless you, Mr. Mumps—bless you !

MEAZLE. I've found the cheque-book, Mr. Mumps.

MESS. Mr. Meazle, may I beg of you not to interrupt business ? (to MUMPS) And you're ready to swear as much in a court of justice ?

MUMPS. Certainly I'll swear to it.

MESS. Here's our evidence of innocent agency, my dear Mr. Mumps.

MUMPS. But what have I done ?

MOON. You've saved Messiter and Moon from transportation.

Enter RYDER, D. F.

RYDER. May I speak with you, Mr. Messiter, for one minute, in the clerk's office ?

MESS. Certainly, Mr. Ryder. (*aside to MOON*) We are saved. The point now is to transport them—we can't do that without the policy.

MUMPS. And I'll go and draw the cheque-

RYDER. May I beg of you not to do so till after I have spoken With Mr. Messiter.

MUMPS. Eh?

Exit MESSITER and RYDER, followed by MUMPS.

MOON. Yes, the policy must be found—shall be found. I'll transport those scoundrels, or perish in the attempt. (sees *safe door open*) Eh ! there's the safe door open ! (*rings*) I was in it a few days ago looking for some of the Duncuft papers, I think.

Enter TOTTIE.

Wasn't I in the safe a few days ago ?

TOTTIE. Yes, sir; I see you come out very dirty.

MOON. Perhaps I had the policy in my hands, and laid it down there. I don't recollect bringing it out again. Yes—I'm sure it must be there, (*lights office candle, and exit into safe*)

TOTTIE. Bless him ! that there will be looking for a needle in a bottle of hay. *Exit.*

Enter MESSITER.

MESS. Moon ! Confound it ! he has gone again and left the safe door open as usual, (*closes the door with a slam*) We shall have all the papers in the office stolen some day. Here's a pretty, piece of business about Mumps's mortgage!

Enter MEAZLE and MUMPS, L. U. E.

MEAZLE. But I say, sir, the deed's signed, sealed, and delivered and you must pay the money.

MUMPS. But I say I shan't, sir!—the consideration's failed. Is it not so, Mr. Messiter ?

MEAZLE. Failed ! Why, is there not still the Duncuft estate, in the highly approvable neighbourhood of Queenborough, in the Isle of Sheppy ?

MESS. Yes; but isn't it stated in the master's report that one half of that estate has been blown over with sand, and the other half wasted away by the sea, while you represented it as arable ?

MEAZLE. Well, don't we plough the sea ?

MESS. And pasture——

MEAZLE. How do I know there mayn't be sea cows grazing on it this minute ?

MUMPS. You told me it was unincumbered.

MESS. So it is—not so much as a blade of grass upon it; but it's no use—I've executed the deed, and you are bound to pay the money.

MUMPS. Eh, Mr. Messiter ?

MESS. I'm afraid—eh ?

JOHN RIPTON opens door, R. U. E.

J. RIPTON. Well, Mr. Messiter, have you decided upon the course you mean to take ?

MESS. In one moment, sir.

Exit RIPTON.

Gentlemen, you must really excuse me for one minute—business requires that I should consult with Mr. Moon. Where can he be? Has Mr. Moon gone out?

TOTTIE. No, sir, not this way.

MESS. (*calling*) Moon! Moon!

MARY. (*outside*) Papa's in the office, Mr. Messiter!

MESS. (*to TOTTIE, at door*) When did you see Mr. Moon last?

Enter TOTTIE.

TOTTIE. I see him last go into the safe, sir.

MESS. Into the safe?—when?

TOTTIE. Just as you came in with those gents, sir.

MESS. Do you mean to say he was in then, when I shut—(*calls*) Mr. Ryder!

Enter RYDER.

Mr. Moon!

RYDER. Yes, sir—has he mislaid anything?

MESS. Mislaid himself, sir. I've shut him in the safe.

RYDER. Shut him in the safe!

MESS. Oh! yes! Spring plate over keyhole—he'll be smothered—no key in the lock. Run for a locksmith—quick!

RYDER. The lock's one of Bramah's best.

MESS. Send for Hobbs!

RYDER. He's left the country, sir—perhaps Mr. Moon's key may be in his desk: we had better look for it!

MESS. It's our only chance—be calm, Mr. Ryder, I beseech you.

Enter MARY and Miss APPLEJOHN.

MISS A. Thank you, my dear sir. I feel quite well now, and I've made up my mind to go to Bow Street.

MARY. (*aside*) Papa said she must leave the office. I'm sure you better stay a little longer, ma'am. Where's papa, Mr. Messiter?

MESS. He's shut up in the safe with the papers! No key! no key! (*in agony*).

MARY. (*giving papers to RYDER*) I found these papers in the hall. Perhaps that horrid policy is among them!

RYDER. Eh, eh! Mr. Messiter, here's the policy, sir!

MESS. Where?

RYDER. I've found it, sir!

MESS. You have enabled me to transport a couple of scoundrels! No key! no key! (*looks again*.)

RYDER. Oh, sir, here's another will of Mr. Rennet's, three days after the other, sir!

MISS A. Another will of Uncle Rennet's?

MESS. The key! the key!

RYDER. It's on your little finger, sir.

MESS. To be sure it is—here quick—quick!

Opens safe and brings out MOON.

MARY. What's the matter?

MISS A. He seems crazy!

MESSITER *leads MOON to a chair*

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MARY. Papa!

MISS A. Mr. Moon in a swoon—oh !

MESS. He revives—give him air!

MOON. The policy is not there. I looked as long as I could, till my candle went out!

RYDER. I have found it, sir,

MESS. Forgive me, my friend, I did not know that you were inside, or I would not have shut the door.

MOON. You will be so hasty; but who found it ?

RYDER. Miss——

MARY. Mr. Ryder, papa.

Enter JOHN and RICHARD RIPTON.

MISS A. There's that viper ; let me go to Bow Street.

Exit.

J. RIPTON. Don't let her go, she'll peach.

MESS. I hope she will!

J. RIPTON. To be sure—but you can't prove anything!

MESS. Can't we ? here's the policy!

J. RIPTON. But you'll suffer with us as accomplices, . . .

MOON. No, wretch; here's evidence of my innocent agency.

MESS. Stand forward, Mr. Mumps !

R. RIPTON. I felt that doctor would ruin everything after all.

MESS. But that new will—what is the disposition of the property, Mr. Ryder?

RYDER. He leaves personal estates to the amount of twenty thousand pounds—one half to Susannah Applejohn, and the other half to his godson, Henry Ryder—to me.

MESS. *(to J. & R. RIPTON)* So, gentlemen, you're done. This is a later will of Mr. Rennet's.

MOON. Oh ! Of course, I remember now ! That was why I didn't send that advertisement!

MUMPS. *(aside)* Then Miss Applejohn has ten thousand pounds—*(to her,)* I trust you feel quite restored.

MISS A. Quite, thank you, sir.

MESS. Mr. Ryder, you've saved the firm.

MOON. I think I remember you said something of a junior partner—what do you say to Mr. Ryder?

MESS. Why, really the press of business would justify——

RYDER. If I might add to that partnership one still dearer to my heart. *(takes MARY'S hand)*

MOON. Mary!—why I never perceived——

MARY. No, papa—but it's true for all that. *(they retire)*

MISS A. Ah ! Mr. Mumps, you sympathise with them, I'm sure.

MUMPS. I can't sympathise with anybody, ma'am. I've lost eight thousand pounds.

MISS A. Lost eight thousand pounds ?

MUMPS. Which I've advanced to Mr. Meazle there, on a security that's not worth a farthing.

MISS A. A rogue too—I've had a lucky escape !

MEAZLE. So, when it's quite convenient to you to draw the cheque—

MESS. (*comes down*) Stop, Mr. Meazle.—this deed is not binding.

MEAZLE. Not binding ?

MESS. It has no stamps—and is therefore invalid in law—thanks to Moon having forgotten them.

MEAZLE. No stamps—this is gross negligence on your part?

MESS. Did you suppose, sir, I did not know where the Duncuft property had gone to—when we'd had it in our hands these thirty years ? Mr. Mumps, the eight thousand pounds are safe in your pocket.

MISS A. (*aside*) Eight thousand pounds! (*aloud*) Mr.—dear Mr. Humps, how can I thank you for your attentions ?

MUMPS. My dear Miss Applejohn, there are people to whom it's a pleasure to be attentive.

MISS A. Oh! Mr. Mumps! (*he takes her hand*)

MEAZLE. I say it's a swindle !

MESS. No, sir, it's a swindle prevented and a swindle exposed. You didn't fancy it was an oversight, did you? Bless you! (*aside*) We've got well out of that I fancy.

MOON. No—no—we never commit oversights in this office. Now then for Bow Street.

MESS. Stop, Mr. Moon. You're going to commit your first oversight, you're going away without bidding our friends here good bye—one word in favour of our firm.

ALL. You're a nice firm.

MESS. Well, so we are a nice firm. Ain't we a nice firm, ladies and gentlemen?—of course.

Curtain