



TRAPPING A TARTAR.

A Serio-Comic Drama,

IN ONE ACT.

BY

EDWARD STIRLING, Esq.,

AUTHOR OF

*Lost Diamonds, Blue Jackets, Anchor of Hope, Aline, Jane Lomax,
Pet of the Public, Baby Battler, Cabin Boy, Bag Picker of Paris,
Legacy of Honour, Nicholas Nickleby, Teacher Taught, Lestelle,
White Slave, Woodman's Spell, Chimes, Royal Command, Struggle
for Gold, Sea King's Vow, Hand of Cards, Idiot of the Mill,
Norah Creina, The Reapers, or Forget and Forgive !*

THOMAS HAILES LACY,
89, STRAND, LONDON.

TRAPPING A TARTAR.

First performed at Astley's Theatre, (under the management of Mr. E. T. Smith), on Monday, the 6th day of June, 1864.

Characters.

GENERAL KERCHIOFF (*Governor of a Polish Fortress*) Mr. FRASER.
COUNT PLOTSKI ...(*a Fugitive Pole*)..... Mr. FRIER.
IVAN, THE HAMMER (*a Polish Peasant*) Mr. BELTON.
Officers, Guards.
IDA..... (*Daughter to Plotski*)..... Miss BURTON.
YELVA.....(*Wife to Ivan*) Miss FUTARDO.

Scene.—P O L A N D

GENERAL.—Blue military frock, epaulets, aiguettes, cocked hat, boots, &c.

COUNT.—Dark frock, fall trunk breeches, boots, slouch hat, cloak.

IVAN.—Polish cap, braided frock, full breeches, boots.

IDA.—Polish cap and pelisse, blue petticoat, ankle boots.

YELVA.—Polish pelisse of blue merino, edged with fur, yellow petticoat.

Time in representation Forty-five Minutes.

TRAPPING A TARTAR.

SCENE.— *The Hut of a Polish Peasant, of rude construction ; window and door in fiat; secret door in wainscot, R.; fire place, R.; table and chairs; a lamp burning on the table; noise of wind, and snow seen falling through the window—Music—noise heard of hammering.*

YELVA. (*calling, without*) Help me ! husband, I've lost my shoe. (*the appears at the window*) Ivan! do you hear your wife, sir ? No notice taken of me. (*opens door*) The saints be praised! I'm safely at home again. (*sits*) What an awful night—wind blowing from all quarters of the globe at once. At one time I thought my poor head had departed from my shoulders. (*noise of hammer*) Working as usual, regardless of all domestic ties and feminine requirements. Those horrid scythes and swords occupy all my husband's time. Heaven send our countrymen a good use for them, say I—Ivan terms his weapons " razors for Muscovite throats"—may they shave closely. (*calls*) Ivan ! Ivan ! sluggard! I am here, sir.

Enter IVAN from secret door, R., carrying a large hammer.

IVAN. Returned all safe, eh, my darling ? (*kissing her*)

YELVA. Much you care about my safety. The snow might have frozen me, or the wind blown me away for all you thought of the matter. A wife is a nonentity now a days.

IVAN. A what, little grumbler ? Are you not the solace and comfort of my life, eh?

YELVA. Take more care of your comforts then—my shoes were nearly lost in the snow.

IVAN. We'll soon repair that mischief, dear. What news do you bring of our taskmasters ?

YELVA. Bad, as usual—another ukase for a general conscription throughout Poland, taking the first-born sons, for the Russian armies, in Asia and Siberia. (*giving a printed paper*)

IVAN. (*tearing it*) Curses on their decree! this will drive us into open revolt. We have now but one resource—arms ! better die freemen than live in slavery, say I.

YELVA. That's all very well, but I am not pepared to die—therefore pray keep your thoughts within your teeth; remem-



ber that we live rather too near the fortress to be very communicative—spies are always abroad.

IVAN. And at home, too, worse luck for us.

YELVA. YOU know the terrible penalty attached to concealing arms.

IVAN. TOO well—our lives! but we have escaped hitherto their Cossack eyes, thank providence.

YELVA. Beware! the Russian eagle is a difficult bird to frighten or drive from his quarry. I tremble for your life, dear husband.

IVAN. I should not deserve life, if I hesitated, even for a moment, to aid our suffering country in her struggle for freedom.

YELVA. What have we to hope ? a helpless, disorganized people, opposed to the resources of a mighty empire ?

IVAN. We have right and justice on our side, and national honour for our flag; fear not the result; blessed with the assistance of heaven—but no more politics; working and chattering gives one an appetite for supper.

YELVA. (*placing food on the table*) We have little in the house to-night.

IVAN. Little ? do you call content little? join that to bread and cheese and kisses. (*kissing her*) Here's a repast fit for a king. (*they sit at table—a knock heard at the door*)

YELVA. Who's there ?

PLOTSKI. (*without*) Travellers.

IVAN. We don't take in travellers. (*eating*)

PLOTSKI. I entreat you to help us.

IVAN. We can't help ourselves.

IDA. We are perishing.

YELVA. A woman's voice! (*opens the door*)

Enter COUNT PLOTSKI and IDA, fatigued and weary, C. door.

YELVA. Come in, lady ; you are heartily welcome to all our humble home affords—let me take your cloak; sit here ! (*places stool by the fire*) Husband, fetch the cordial; the poor lady is almost frozen. (*IVAN fetches a bottle—YELVA gives cordial to IDA*)

PLOTSKI. Thanks, my friends, for your timely hospitality ; we were nearly lost endeavouring to cross the mountains; guided by a light from your window, we fortunately reached this spot alive, and to—

IVAN. Supper, fire, and shelter—not so bad in a storm—try a bit of this bear's head ; a real Russian.

YELVA. And not so bad as the name would infer—taste a mouthful, lady; pray do.

PLOTSKI. YOU are not admirers of the Russians, friends ?

IVAN. Admirers ? If I had my will, I'd strangle—

YELVA. Hold your silly tongue, do, husband.

PLOTSKI. Speak out; there is nothing to fear from us.

IVAN. Fear! bless you, sir, fear is a word unknown in the Polish language. *(a distant trumpet heard)*

YELVA. *(runs to the window)* Soldiers are descending the mountain from the fortress. They approach the cottage rapidly.

PLOTSKI. Child, we are lost !

IDA. Save us from our cruel persecutors. My father's life will be sacrificed! Oh, save us, as you hope for mercy—we are lost!

IVAN. Not if we can help it. *(opens secret door)* Here you will be safe. A walk to Siberia or the knout will reward us if you betray our secret. Go in.

PLOTSKI. A thousand deaths rather!

IVAN. One would do. In—in—and trust to Providence and my hammer. *(puts them in the closet)* To work, wife! we must amuse these Tartar dogs.

(YELVA sits, IVAN hammers chair, singing)

COSSACK. *(without)* Open the door to the General, quickly!

YELVA. Kerchioff! we dare not trifle with him. *(opens the door)*

Enter GENERAL KERCHIOFF, OFFICERS, and SOLDIERS, some with torches, c. door.

GENERAL. Slaves! why did you keep me at the door ?

IVAN. *(aside)* I should be sorry to keep you anywhere!

YELVA. Pardon, your Excellency ! my husband was at his work, and he's rather noisy with it.

GENERAL. *(aside)* How beautiful!—search the hovel. *(SOLDIERS disperse)* Ivan Mickeloff, you are suspected !

YELVA. That's right, your Excellency. I suspect him, too, of everything!

GENERAL. *(smiling)* Of secreting arms.

IVAN. I ! I ! Lor bless you, General; it's a mistake !

YELVA. That I'll answer for, we never keep secrets.

GENERAL. Pretty one, your word will have great weight with me ! but beware how you deceive; you are Poles.

YELVA. Yes, sir, North *(pointing to IVAN)* and I'm South!

IVAN. In our remarkable case the two Poles meet! *(taking YELVA'S arm)*

GENERAL. Are you satisfied with our paternal goverment ?

IVAN. More than satisfied, General!

GENERAL. Let your conduct prove your assertion, my friend. What is the meaning of the footsteps traced in the snow over the mountain to your door, eh ?

YELVA. *(aside)* Oh, we're betrayed!

GENERAL. Beware! It is known traitors are lurking in the mountains; the rebel Count Plotski and his daughter. Now some of the footmarks are evidently those of a female.

IVAN. My wife's.

GENERAL. What induced your wife to be out such a night as this ?

IVAN. A wandering fancy.

GENERAL. Aft at excuse, I find; exercise your wit in aid of the Government, and a fortune is within your reach.

YELVA. We'll reach far enough to get it!

GENERAL. A thousand silver roubles will be paid to any one arresting the Count and his daughter.

IVAN. A thousand, all silver; no brass; good-bye, Peter, I've knocked the right nail on the head at last! Hence! *(throws hammer away)*

GENERAL. Peter?

IVAN. My hammer, sir.

YELVA. Christened so in England, where my husband once worked at a forge.

GENERAL. DO you like England ?

IVAN. Don't I! Everybody there's alike, rich and poor, work hard, obey the law, mind your own business, and you're equal to the first lord in the land—independent of all paternal governments.

GENERAL. My enthusiastic friend, let caution guide your tongue, remember that this is not England.

IVAN. There's no mistaking that.

YELVA. The strong beer in England affected his head and makes him talk silly at times.

GENERAL. For you—I pardon his absurdities—I must watch over your welfare. *(takes her hand)*

IVAN. I keep a good watch on that, sir, thank you.

GENERAL. Doubtless—be vigilant—and the roubles may be yours. *(aside)* I will return.

Exeunt GENERAL, OFFICERS, and SOLDIERS, C. door,

IVAN. Depend on my best exertions—to deceive you. Ha, ha! the old fox is off the scent.

YELVA *opens the secret door—re-enters* PLOTSKI and IVA.

PLOTSKI. May my gratitude never—

IVAN. I know, sir, keep the rest, for another time. You had better go. Caution, and the Cossacks may be outwitted yet.

YELVA. Husband, one of the soldiers returns.

IVAN. Does he! Then he returns no more, Peter shall doctor him; once more back to your hiding place.

(PLOTSKI and IDA re-enter closet—IVAN stands behind a large cloak which is hung on the wall—SOLDIER at door)

SOLDIER. She is alone, that's lucky.

IVAN. (*peeping*) Is it!

Enter SOLDIER, C. door.

SOLDIER. (*to YELVA*) This from his Excellency. (*gives note*)

IVAN. (*striking him on the head*) This from Peter! (SOLDIER falls insensible) Quick, the cellar, wife. (YELVA opens a trap door in the stage—IVAN thrusts body down) There, that job's jobbed.

YELVA. We shall be punished when he is missed.

IVAN. Who's to miss such a hound as that ? food for powder is too plentiful, more's the pity.

YELVA. (*gives note*) The General is coming back.

IVAN. What for?

YELVA. For me.

IVAN. Where's Peter ! (*seizes hammer*)

YELVA. Listen, have you any faith in me?

IVAN. Implicit, love!

YELVA. Then leave this Muscovite Adonis to my treatment.

IVAN. Agreed, but don't let him touch you—paws off, or down comes Peter. (*shakes hammer*)

YELVA. There, go into the closet and remain quiet. (*pushes him in*) Now for a demure face and smooth tongue to receive his Excellency. (GENERAL appears at the window)

GENERAL. She is waiting for me. Yelva, (*at door*) I am here.

YELVA. Dear me, sir, why did you come back? have you lost anything?

GENERAL. My heart, fair-one, to you.

YELVA. Perhaps it's better *lost* than *found*.

GENERAL. I cannot conceal the delight that your charms have inspired me with—such grace and vivacity, buried in this rude hovel, is a sin against nature—be mine the task to rescue and transfer it to a more befitting sphere.

YELVA. I am quite contented where I am.

GENERAL. Contented with this grinding poverty?—I swear—

IVAN. (*peeping*) D—— it. (*shakes hammer*) be still, Peter!

GENERAL. I love you to madness, siren !

YELVA. Love me ?—what fun !

GENERAL. Be merciful.

YELVA. That's what the oppressed Poles pray you to be to them!

GENERAL. Pretty moralist; permit me to assist you. (*offers purse*)

YELVA. I can assist myself, thank you.

GENERAL. YOU are poor!

YELVA. I am *rich* in love—

IVAN. Bravo ! Lie still, Peter. (*shakes hammer*)

GENERAL. Words cannot describe the impression your charms have made on my heart!—I am enslaved.

YELVA. I hate slavery, in any shape.

GENERAL. Will you accept my friendship ? (*holds up the gold*)

IVAN. (*runs forward, snatching a purse*) I will—sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

GENERAL. (*surprised*) My friend, I have returned to—

IVAN. DO a good action.

YELVA. His Excellency is so kind—

IVAN. Considerate—

YELVA. Just—

IVAN. And honourable !

GENERAL. Hush! I do not require these expressions of gratitude ; suffice to know that I take a deep interest in your welfare. (*to YELVA*)

IVAN. Ours, my lord ! She is part of myself—bone of my bone !

GENERAL. Be zealous in your fidelity to the Emperor, and I will reward you.

YELVA. Thank your Excellency !

GENERAL. (*to YELVA*) Expect me again in a few moments—contrive to get rid of your husband ! (*aside*) Mine she shall be !

Exits, c. door— YELVA fastens door.

IVAN. Peter, be quiet ! Oh, how my fingers itch (*shakes hammer*) to drive a nail into his head !

YELVA. We've trapped the Tartar—(*laughs*)

IVAN. With a golden bait—ha, ha, ha—Love you, does he ? Be still, Peter.

YELVA. Well, what of it ?—women were made to be loved, Sir! (*opens closet*) Now lady, you are free—hasten on your road, and heaven speed you.

IVAN. Take this staff, it will support your steps. (*gives staff*)

YELVA. Heaven guard you !

PLOTSKI. Our gratitude—

IVAN. NO time for words—we must trudge on—bar the door, wife. I'll speedily return—take care of Peter.

Exits with PLOTSKI and IDA, door in flat.

YELVA. (*shuts door—sighs*) Oh, these men ! these men ! why don't they leave us poor girls to ourselves? I fancy the world grows worse every day; age loses respect, and youth is lost in folly. A pretty figure that odious General makes of himself in loving me as he terms it! Persuade me to sacrifice my duty, will he? weak mortal! how little he is acquainted with a woman's heart. Why does he not give his gold and his fine sentiments to the great ladies of his own rank? they, I hear, are brought

up to flattery and love-making. For my part, I don't understand such nonsense; plain words from honest lips suit me best. Ivan won't be long, I hope. I'm getting tired of my own company; perhaps a song might pass away the time—I'll try. (*Song, if required*)

The GENERAL opens the window and jumps in—YELVA starts up, screams.

GENERAL. Be not alarmed, I entreat.

YELVA. Not be alarmed, when my heart's in my shoes ?

GENERAL. I must speak to you; the spell your bewitching beauty casts over me deprives me of reason. Where's your husband ?

YELVA. Asleep, where you ought to be.

GENERAL. Have you considered my proposal ?

YELVA. I have not.

GENERAL. My future destiny is in your hands—have pity!

YELVA. Have pity on yourself, and don't be a stupid any longer; think of your grey hairs, and respect them if you can.

GENERAL. Disdainful creature ! am I scorned ?

YELVA. What else do you desire ? ask your conscience, are your base proposals very likely to inspire me with respect for you ?

GENERAL. Think of your dependant state, the luxury, the riches I offer.

YELVA. What, sacrifice honour ? No, no, General, leave me to my destiny, do you follow yours ; there is something more sacred than wealth and vanity to be sought for—duty and obedience to vows pledged at the altar. Go home, and forget me; you'll sleep all the better for it, believe me.

GENERAL. I am not to be schooled—defied. Your husband's life is at my mercy—beware ! he is suspected of treasonable practices ; a word from my lips, and he dies.

YELVA. (*aside*) I never thought of Ivan's danger—I must dissemble. My lord, you judge rashly; my meaning was—was, that hurried friendships seldom prove lasting, and—

GENERAL. (*aside*) She relents—I shall triumph.

YELVA. I have always heard that great folks tell great—hem! that fine sayings and compliments are natural to them, especially where women are concerned.

GENERAL. Test my sincerity—demand any trial you please. My life is at your disposal—nay, more, my honour.

YELVA. I would not touch a bit of it, because I feel assured that you've none to spare.

GENERAL. Every wish you have shall be gratified.

YELVA. It's a serious consideration ; call again to-morrow.

GENERAL. To-night, fly with me! Why defer our happiness ?

YELVA. Enter the Castle with you—a pretty scandal for your soldiers to talk, about. No—if, mind *if*, I ever did take such a step, I should come alone and disguised, or not at all.

GENERAL. Anything you desire : I will remove the sentinels.

YELVA. And cause more surprise. Where's your head ? But I believe all Generals do *not* possess that necessary article. Is there no way that I may pass the gates, without observation or remark ?

GENERAL. Only one—by giving the pass-word of the night.

YELVA. And that is—

GENERAL. "Caesar."

YELVA. "Caesar"—I'll come. Oh! I'm very naughty ; but it's all your fault. Oh, that deluding tongue !

GENERAL. That acknowledgment—moments will count as ages until you are in my arms.

YELVA. Go away, do—with your insinuations, do.

GENERAL. (*aside*) I'll watch the little witch, lest she changes her mind. *Exit, c. door.*

YELVA. Dear me, what a fever of fright that old bear put me in ! Threaten my Ivan—I had the greatest mind to slap his face. " Caesar:" I shall not forget, General, nor shall you, the trust betrayed by your insane passion. How am I to act ?

IVAN *re-enters, rapidly, C. door.*

IVAN. They are safe, wife.

YELVA. I wish we were, husband.

IVAN. What do you mean ?

YELVA. More mischief.

IVAN. Speak out; who is it—what is it ?

YELVA. The General !

IVAN. The devil !

YELVA. I do believe that he is related to that individual. He came back just after you left.

IVAN. Again—and his *object*—

YELVA. I was his *object*, but I *objected*—he wanted me to fly !

IVAN. Where's Peter ? (*shakes hammer*) I'll strike—

YELVA. Stop ; where are you going to ?

IVAN. The devil—I mean the General—now, Peter !

YELVA. DO be patient.

IVAN. Patient, under such wrongs—never ! his life or mine ! (*shakes hammer*)

YELVA. Cunning is a much better weapon to use against him than force. Now, what would you give to be master of the fortress ?

IVAN. Life! nay a hundred lives !

YELVA. YOU are very liberal with other people's property. Have I no share in your existence, sir ?

IVAN. Pardon me, dear.

YELVA. Open your ears—"Caesar!"

IVAN. Seize who?

YELVA. "Caesar!"—enter the fortress, and conquer.

IVAN. I cannot understand you.

YELVA. Dull creature, hear me! the General in his love-sick mood betrayed his trust to me—by giving the pass-word of the night: "Caesar" is the word. This was to enable me to enter without question, and to serve his wicked purpose. Now, do you take advantage of this, assemble our friends and neighbours—secure the Castle for Poland, and leave his Excellency the Governor in my hands.

IVAN. Glorious! Wife, wife, you are a witch!

YELVA. Lose not a moment, or the prize may slip through our fingers—you've a good cause.

IVAN. And "Caesar" to help us. Good-bye, darling; when you hear the Castle bell sound our work will be done. You are a wife to be proud of! Why, you ought to have been born a Field Marshal, boots and all. *Exit, rapidly, door in flat.*

YELVA. The Russian eagle has a very fair chance of kissing the dust this time. I should like to see all the feathers plucked from the bird-of-ill-omen's wing. *(takes down cloak)* Now for my pretended disguise—my part must be played out, in order to give Ivan time. *(sighs)* Oh, this love—this love! rules all our hearts—in camp—in cottage—grey heads and beardless chins are equally its slaves. Cupid binds man's boasted reason in silken fetters more firmly than iron chains could hold them.

The GENERAL appears at the c. door.

Now, Ivan's cap will complete my toilet. *(sees GENERAL)* Oh! you are there, are you, sir. *(sighs and simpers)* My! what strange feelings inspire me. I wonder if the riches that the General promises will yield enjoyment? at all events I shall try. He is a charming man; so distinguished, so polite.

GENERAL. *(aside)* I'm a charming man.

YELVA. Carries himself with such an air, and his words are so soft.

GENERAL. *(aside)* She possesses taste.

YELVA. Then his tongue, oh! *(sighs)* that tongue, so delusive and oily.

GENERAL. It always was. *(aside)* Charming prattler!

YELVA. Why, it would wheedle a tax-collector out of his taxes.

GENERAL. *(aside)* Not very complimentary that.

YELVA. I am lost *(sighs)* I fear.

GENERAL. *(advancing)* Found in my affection, dearest.

YELVA. Returned again! what for, pray?

GENERAL. YOU, my enchantress. My impatience was uncontrollable. I came to escort you.

YELVA. Then you may spare your pains—I will come alone, or not at all.

GENERAL. May I not ?

YELVA. NO, you may not. My will ought to be law, if there's any truth in your fine words. (*sits*) I was coming—now I remain a fixture.

GENERAL. Destroy my hopes, cruel girl! Hear me.

ZELVA. I've heard too much already; if a woman's word is not to be believed—there the matter ends.

GENERAL. On my knees I swear. (*a distant bell*)

YELVA. The signal. (*aside*) Ivan's in the fortress.

GENERAL. I beseech you. (*bell*) Do you hear that sound ?

YELVA. What sound—the wind howling among the rocks ?

GENERAL. NO, I thought I heard the fortress bell.

YELVA. YOU must have good ears then. (*smiles—shots heard—drums and distant shouts*)

GENERAL. That alarm! treason's afoot! those sounds come from the fortress I am sure.

YELVA. They do, traitor to your sovereign and honour, they do—'tis the signal of its fall—betrayed by your folly.

GENERAL. (*drawing his sword*) Miscreant, your life.

YELVA. Strike if you dare ! I throw the miscreant in your teeth, double traitor !

GENERAL. Die ! (*he is in the act of striking YELVA when IVAN re-enters, c, and fires at him, he falls*)

YELVA. (*rushes into IVAN'S arms*) Husband !

IVAN. Victory is ours ; the affair was soon over—the rascals were all taken by surprise ; a few blows, and our flag floated on the walls. " Caesar " helped Poland this time, thanks to our considerate friend, the Governor.

GENERAL. Curses on my insane folly.

YELVA. Didn't I warn you? never mind, you are not the only old gentleman that has lived to lament his folly for the tender passion. (*laughs*)

IVAN. Return to St. Petersburg; the Emperor, your master, will be delighted to see you.

YELVA. Tell him you couldn't help it—love did it all.

IVAN. And tell him also that *might* is not *right*, and to learn and practise humanity to his fellow-creatures—and that the day is not far distant, when, enforced by public opinion, Poland must be free! (*picture—Music, the " Polish Hymn*)

Curtain.