

WINNING A WIFE.

A Petite Comedy.

IN ONE ACT.

BY

T. H. L.

THOMAS HAILES LACY,
89, STRAND, LONDON.

WINNING A WIFE.

CHARACTERS.

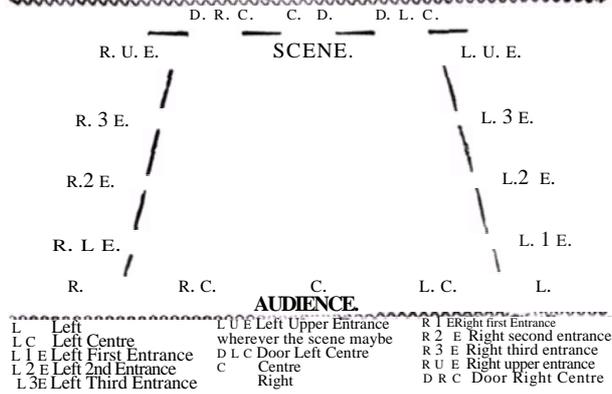
THEODORA MAISEY (a young widow—first comedy)
 SALLY GOODY (her maid—chambermaid)
 CAPTAIN DARING (first comedy)

—————
 Costumes of the Day.
 —————

Time in Performance—Thirty minutes.

EXPLANATIONS OF THE STAGE DIRECTIONS.

The Actor is supposed to face the Audience.



This Comedy is the property of Thomas Hailes Lacy.

WINNING A WIFE.

SCENE.—*Well-furnished apartment; window c, door &., door L. MRS. MAISEY discovered, seated at table, L. c.*

Enter SALLY, D.R.

MRS. M. Well, Sally ?

SALLY. Yes, mum !

MRS. M. Have you seen my lawyer ?

SALLY. Yes, mum.

MRS. M. Well, when will that lawsuit finish ?

SALLY. When the lawyers have all got tired of it—not a bit before, I expect.

MRS. M. I am almost worn out with these delays. I brought a good deal of money, but in London-----

SALLY. It soon goes, especially when we are engaged in a lawsuit.

MRS. M. I am consoled by the knowledge that my cause is good, and that I cannot fail to gain it.

SALLY. I know that 'tis you who are right, but if you had plenty of money you would be twice as right again, and your cause would be a good deal better even than it is now.

MRS. M. (*after a short pause*) Sally!

SALLY. Yes mum!

MRS. M. I find my life dreadfully tedious and wearisome.

SALLY. It's your widowhood that doesn't agree with you.

MRS. M. But I was the same formerly.

SALLY. That was because marriage didn't suit you.

MRS. M. What must I do then to enliven my life?

SALLY. Fall in love.

MRS. M. But love leads to marriage.

SALLY. (*sighing*) True, and it's all over then.

MRS. M. (*after a pause*) Sally !

SALLY. Yes, mum.

MRS. M. Give me a book.

SALLY. What book ?

MRS. M. (*wearily*) The first you lay you hand on.

SALLY. (*giving book*) You certainly are to be pitied, mum. You have got what I consider very singular and whimsical notions ; and, in a city like London, find yourself condemned to live in the most insipid and monotonous manner.

MRS. M. You are quite right. For two months I have scarcely smiled.

SALLY. It is to be hoped that at last something will turn, up to amuse us.

MRS. M. (*rising*) I have great need of it.

SALLY. So have I, mum; my fine spirits is being crushed out of me. (MRS. MAISEY *walks slowly, reading, to the window, against which she leans.*)

SALLY. (*aside*) She places herself at the window, I'll bet that our opposite neighbour is at his. (*aloud*) You have been very fond of looking out of window lately mum !

MRS. M. How dare you make such an observation?

SALLY. (*aside*) In a bad temper! The neighbour isn't there. For two months they have gone on looking at one another without speaking. A good marriage would be much better than that love in perspective, that gentleman as I hear, is quite an original, but an uncommonly nice man. Well, then why doesn't he make his appearance here; he must be a stupid if he can't find a pretence for coming to console a widow who finds her time pass so drearily.

MRS. M. (*half screaming*) Ah!

SALLY. (*quickly*) What's the matter mum?

MRS. M. Run down quickly, I have dropped my book into the street.

SALLY. You don't mean that!

MRS. M. Run, I tell you, there is a young gentleman picking it up; I am afraid lest he should bring it to me.

SALLY. Oh ! a young gentleman has picked it up—Oh, um!

MRS. M. How slow that girl is ! That gentleman will believe that I dropped the book—I know not if he saw me—oh, yes, he looked up and—if he should come up the stairs it would be Sally's fault, (*crossing*)

Re-enter SALLY, D. L.

The gentleman won't give the book up to anybody but you ; he didn't give me time to get down stairs. It's he, I think that lives over the way.

MRS. M. That gentleman?

SALLY. Yes, who behaves with such politeness, who always comes to his window when you are at yours, and who always bows to me whenever he meets me. You ought to know what all that means, mum.

MRS. M. What is to be done ? if you had hurried a little more-----

SALLY. Make up your mind, mum, is he to come in ?

MRS. M. A stranger—no—really-----

SALLY. He'll carry the book away with him.

MRS. M. (*pettishly*) Oh! but, I insist upon having my book.

SALLY. (*aside*) Of course you do ! (*aloud opening the door*) Walk in, sir.

Enter CAPTAIN DARING, D. L.

MRS. M. Oh ! sir, why give yourself the trouble to-----

CAPTAIN. Trouble, madam ? I have experienced it only in fearing that I should not be introduced.

MRS. M. Not having the honour to be known to you, I cannot but think it very extraordinary that-----

CAPTAIN. The matter is very simple, madam ; you drop a book, I pick it up, I bring it to you, you receive it; there is in that, madam, nothing extraordinary, except the pleasure which at this moment I experience.

MRS. M. At least, it is astonishing that you should insist on entering my house.

CAPTAIN. It would have been very astonishing if I had not so insisted after having seen you.

MRS. M. Notwithstanding your extreme politeness I would beg you to observe that this is the first time I have had the honour to see you.

CAPTAIN. Well, you know, madam, there must always be a first time that people see each other.

MRS. M. But to all appearance this will be the last.

CAPTAIN. The last ? If then this is to be the last happiness of my life, permit me to prolong it.

MRS. M. That is obstinacy, sir.

CAPTAIN. Allow that it is very pardonable: the stronger your determination to send me away, the more I ought to delay the moment when I shall cease to behold you.

MRS. M. (*pettishly*) Remain then, sir.

SALLY. (*aside, up stage*) Don't doubt it.

CAPTAIN. You would be much better seated, madam.

MRS. M. Why so, sir ?

CAPTAIN. Because I should have fewer scruples in remaining longer.

MRS. M. (*taking a chair*) Our interview, however, must have an end. (*she sits.*)

CAPTAIN. (*taking a chair*) That, madam, will not be my fault. (*he sits.*)

MRS. B. But what pleasure can you find in-----?

CAPTAIN. Madam, I have eyes.

MRS. M. It is a declaration you are making to me.

CAPTAIN. Yes, madam.

MRS. M. And the first time that you see me ?

CAPTAIN. Though I should make it a fortnight later, what would either of us gain by that ?

MRS. M. Nothing, assuredly; for I believe not a word of it.

CAPTAIN. Excuse me, madam, but—yes, you do.

MRS. M. I—believe you, sir ?

CAPTAIN. Certainly ; you cannot but know that you are charming, and with an infinite wit, and you do me not the wrong to suppose that I know not how to appreciate those advantages.

SALLY. Do you want me, mum ?

MRS. M. (*pettishly*) I do not know ; this gentleman so occupies me that-----

CAPTAIN. (*to SALLY*) What is your name, if you please ?

SALLY. Sally Goody.

CAPTAIN. (*rising*) Then, Miss Goody, I have nothing to say that you might not hear ; but if you wish to go away, I would not by any means compel you to stop.

MRS. M. (*rising—to SALLY*) When this gentleman sees that I am alone, he will not take advantage of my embarrassment.

SALLY. (*archly*) No, of course, he won't. (*exit D.R.*)

MRS. M. You remain then, sir ?

CAPTAIN. Oh, if you are getting angry-----

MRS. M. No, I prefer to treat it as a jest. But tell me, sir; of what use can be your obstinacy in remaining here ?

CAPTAIN. I dare not believe that it will be of any service to me, but my pleasure is incontestable.

MRS. M. You should a little consult mine.

CAPTAIN. Well, madam, I am so vain as to believe that I amuse you.

MRS. M. Ah ! and you believe, perhaps, that you have already known how to please me ?

CAPTAIN. At any rate, confess it is not impossible that two persons should love each other at first sight?

MRS. M. Although it may not be impossible, I cannot understand that they should avow it to each other.

CAPTAIN. That is, however, very natural. The first look suffices to tell us if we like a person. All that follows is a consequence of that first moment; why, then, wait whole months to be informed of that which was known from the very first day.

MRS. M. Do you talk thus, sir, to all women ?

CAPTAIN. I protest to you—it is the first time.

MRS. M. That is very gracious ; and indeed, to my own imprudence only the more ought I to attribute this light conduct you hold towards me.

CAPTAIN. Hear me, and you will own that I could not have acted otherwise.

MRS. M. That is really delightful! You were bound to be impertinent once in your life, and 'tis to me that you have given the preference!

CAPTAIN. Deign to listen to, and judge me. I know the world—know as well as any other how to assume its manners; but, in following the ordinary rules, I should have been induced to restore to you your book, to salute you gravely and sadly, to withdraw without a hope of ever again beholding you. I had to choose between two evils, and preferred to risk your displeasure rather than lose the only opportunity which could bring me near you.

MRS. M. So that I ought to thank you ?

CAPTAIN. You ought to forgive me, madam.

MRS. M. But, in fine, what hope you from all this ? What are your intentions?

CAPTAIN. To see you the longest time possible.

MRS. M. I have already told you that your proceedings appear to me altogether useless. Now I commence to believe them dangerous.

CAPTAIN. For whom, madam?

MRS. M. Why, of course, for you.

CAPTAIN. Be good enough to explain.

MRS. M. (*laughing*) With a heart so very inflammable you run a very great risk.

CAPTAIN. Of what?

MRS. M. Of falling in love!

CAPTAIN. That is no longer a risk for me.

MRS. M. It is already done ?

CAPTAIN. Absolutely.

MRS. M. I feel inclined to believe you, to increase my amusement.

CAPTAIN. Amuse yourself in perfect safety.

MRS. M. And with your strange ideas concerning the inflammation of hearts, you believe, no doubt, that sympathy is already acting on me.

CAPTAIN. I dare not reply ; my frankness has seemed to displease you.

MRS. M. Oh, be under no restraint; I am getting accustomed to it.

CAPTAIN. That is a good sign.

Mrs. M. You hope, then ?

CAPTAIN. If not, should I be here ?

MRS. M. Pardon me if I laugh.

CAPTAIN. Yes, and the more willingly, that your laugh so greatly becomes you.

MRS. M. But what is the motive of your confidence ?

CAPTAIN. It is that when a man has really and truly the desire to please, he is always certain to make himself loved.

MRS. M. If your receipt be not the best, it is certainly the most original.

CAPTAIN. That is wherefore I hope, madam.

MRS. M. If a man wishes it, he is then certain to be loved ; and you, sir, possessing so many advantages, have surely more confidence than another.

CAPTAIN. That is another probability.

MRS. M. And when shall I begin to realize those inevitable effects ?

CAPTAIN. Immediately, madam.

MRS. M. (*laughing*) Ah, I already love you!

CAPTAIN. I say not that, but my fate is already decided; and, whether in the sequel you shall love or hate me, it will still be a necessary consequence of this first interview.

MRS. M. But you are quite confident that I shall decide for loving you ?

CAPTAIN. Not altogether confident, but I would lay a wager that you do.

MRS. M. You would wager that I shall love you ?

CAPTAIN. Yes, madam.

MRS. M. And within what time, if you please ?

CAPTAIN. You would be astonished, did I tell you how short a period.

MRS. M. Oh, pray do not hesitate.

CAPTAIN. Well then, madam, I should ask just twenty, four hours.

MRS. M. So long as that sir !

CAPTAIN. Should I win sooner, so much the better.

MRS. M. But how would you know if you had won ?

CAPTAIN. At the expiration of the term you would declare your sentiments, and I should rely implicitly on your word.

MRS. M. That confidence is very flattering.

CAPTAIN. It is a calculation.

MRS. M. A calculation!

CAPTAIN. Certainly. Under any other circumstances, though you loved me, certain prejudices would not allow you to tell me so; but should you wager with me, probity would compel you to make an avowal which your delicacy would direct you to withhold.

MRS. M. (*ironically*) I cannot be offended with a calculation so very favourable to me, but would your wager be high?

CAPTAIN. Any amount, large or small, no matter.

MRS. M. Really, I am sorry we are so slightly acquainted, for I should much like to accept the wager, if only to punish you for your presumption.

CAPTAIN. My name, madam, is Digby Daring. I am of an honourable family and a captain in the army.

MRS. M. My name, sir, is Theodora Maisey, the widow of Mr. Maisey; I am here in consequence of a lawsuit, and time has passed most wearily with me.

CAPTAIN. I was sure of it. Well, madam ?

MRS. M. I am tempted, but a scruple withholds me—it is not fair to wager when one is so positively sure to win.

CAPTAIN. I entertain the same scruple, madam, so we may mutually send them to rest. Do you wager ?

MRS. M. (*piqued*) Yes, sir, yes.

CAPTAIN. Seriously ?

MRS. M. Yes, sir, very seriously, indeed. What is the sum?

CAPTAIN. I have at my disposal just now five hundred pounds.

MRS. M. You could not have better touched the exact state of my fortune. I owe five hundred pounds.

CAPTAIN. Take care that you do not owe a thousand.

MRS. M. Beware, lest you pay my debts.

CAPTAIN. If you loved me, we should pay them together.

MRS. M. It is decided then ?

CAPTAIN. I give my word to it.

MRS. M. And I mine. But now I think—you have not, I hope, intended to remain in my house during the twenty-four hours the trial is to last ?

CAPTAIN. Strictly, that ought to be part of the bargain, but I desire to act liberally with you, and so shall ask but for permission to pay you three visits, and this shall count for one.

MRS. M. That is very generous. And at what hours will those visits take place ?

CAPTAIN. In close succession. This shall be the exposition; the second, the trial; and the third, the conclusion—that is to say, the payment-----

MRS. M. Which you will make to me.

CAPTAIN. Which I shall come to receive.

MRS. M. I hold to the wager. Begin then your fascinations.

CAPTAIN. I have commenced them a long while, madam.

MRS. M. I have not perceived it.

CAPTAIN. (*smiling*) Now that the wager has given me the right to present myself again here, I wish not to abuse the advantage that a too prolonged interview would give me.

MRS. M. I advise you not to return.

CAPTAIN. Ah! madam, you are afraid!

MRS. M. Yes, for you.

CAPTAIN. Don't pity me : pity is dangerous.

MRS. M. You deserve to be corrected.

CAPTAIN. 'Twill be very gently done, madam. I leave you to yourself; solitude is a trap that I set for you.

MRS. M. It certainly is possible that I may like you better at a distance.

CAPTAIN. That we shall soon know. (*exit, D. L.*)

MRS. M. How imperturbably cool! There is in his impertinences a certain grace which will not allow you to be seriously angry. But should he return, what ought I to do ? Laugh at him. Oh ! it is impossible that he can hope to gain so mad a wager. Yet, I know not, he thinks well enough of himself to make certain of success. The five hundred pounds that I am sure to win I will give to Sally. Really, I should be quite sorry if he did not return, he is so very amusing.

Enter SALLY, D.R.

Oh, Sally, what you have lost by going away!

SALLY. I have lost nothing at all, mum, for I have heard every word.

MRS. M. Listening ? For shame, I— But were you not shocked with his insolent presumption ?

SALLY. No, I liked it, it made me laugh.

MRS. M. And what say you to the wager ?

SALLY. I don't like that.

MRS. M. Why ?

SALLY. It is too high.

MRS. M. So much the better ; those who can have the folly to-----

SALLY. You shouldn't have risked it, mum.

MRS. M. Risked it? What do you mean?

SALLY. You have got a very expensive lawsuit on, and five hundred pounds is money.

MRS. M. What! can you really believe then that I shall lose the wager ?

SALLY. If it was me, I wouldn't; I'd keep on shouting out, *I don't love you*, till the time was up.

MRS. M. And you would tell a falsehood to gain five hundred pounds ?

SALLY. I have told a good many for much less than that.

MRS. M. Oh, I have no doubt of it.

SALLY. If the gentleman comes back I will tell him that you don't love him the least bit in the world !

MRS. M. Who charges you with that commission ? Can I not do it myself?

SALLY. No, mum, you are two particular, an' wouldn't like to tell a fib.

MRS. M. She persists. Do not be at all uneasy ; interfere not in the least, and when Captain Daring returns, call me. (*about to take her book.*)

SALLY. Don't touch that book, mum.

MRS. M. Why not ?

SALLY. I believe that it will bring you ill luck.

MRS. M. How silly you are! (*taking the book*) Say to Captain— No, say nothing to him. (*going*) Call me. (*returns*) Suppose, though, you were to say that I am not at home ? No, don't—better not; call me. (*exit, D.R.*)

SALLY. I'd make a wager that missus is greatly afraid of losing her wager, and that she doesn't much want to win it ; and I'll bet a wager that my wager is a good deal better than her wager.

Enter CAPTAIN DARING, D. L.

CAPTAIN. Are you alone, Sally ?

SALLY. I'll go for missus.

CAPTAIN. No, stay ; I want to talk to you.

SALLY. Talk away, sir, for missus is just now very busy, I think.

CAPTAIN. Busy!

SALLY. Yes, particularly engaged—with her looking-glass.

CAPTAIN. Do you really think so ?

SALLY. You'll see if I am wrong.

CAPTAIN. Tell me, Sally, do you love your mistress ?

SALLY. With all my heart.

CAPTAIN. And so do I. How long has she been a widow ?

SALLY. Ever since yesterday twelvemonth.

CAPTAIN. Was she very deeply attached to the departed ?

SALLY. She was decently fond of him, sir.

CAPTAIN. Good. What kind of man was he ?

SALLY. Uncommon disagreeable ; an awful temper at home, harsh with his servants, cold and rough with his wife ; but out of doors, the pleasantest and nicest man in all the world.

CAPTAIN. Ah, there are plenty of his sort. Was your mistress greatly afflicted by the death of her husband ?

SALLY. Yes, sir, she screamed and tore the hair out of her head, and cried right on, as hard as she could, like a woman who wants to get it soon over.

CAPTAIN. Has her grief been long softened ?

SALLY. She has been done with it altogether a good while. Missus looked upon her grief as a debt that she owed, and instead of doling it out by instalments, paid it all off in a lump.

CAPTAIN. But you say that only a year has elapsed since—

SALLY. And don't you think that's long enough ? On the day that a woman finds herself a widow, there are only two ways for her to take : either grief kills her, or else it doesn't. If it kills her, all's over, no more grief; if it lets her live, then she knows what she's got to do; inconsolable for three days, gentle tears for three weeks, and a little melancholy for three months; and then you see there remain nine months of mourning to console herself.

CAPTAIN. You understand it all so well that, no doubt, you would like to see yourself a widow.

SALLY. I should like to see myself married first. But about your wager ?—Do you expect to win it ?

CAPTAIN. What do you think ?

SALLY. I hardly know ; twenty-four hours is such a short time; if you had asked a couple of days, I think you would have been safe. And yet, if I may believe certain signs-----

CAPTAIN. I shall win-----

SALLY. A heart, and five hundred pounds.

CAPTAIN. The first half would content me.

SALLY. Then, sir, give me the other half ?

CAPTAIN. Not unlikely.

SALLY. Do you mean it ?

CAPTAIN. Will you also make a wager with me ?

SALLY. I should be afraid of losing.

CAPTAIN. If I were to give you a young, honest, good-looking husband, I wager that you would refuse him.

SALLY. Down with the money, sir, you've lost.

CAPTAIN. Wait a little, you will lose nothing by that. But listen, when your mistress talks to you about me, I wish you to say of me all the ill you can imagine.

SALLY. Speak ill of you ? Missus would be angry with me.

CAPTAIN. I hope so.

SALLY. Ah ! to be sure, now I see. I didn't though at first. Well, am I to go now and tell missus you are here ?

CAPTAIN. When you please—but, by-the-bye—your mistress has a lawsuit?

SALLY. Worse luck.

CAPTAIN. A part of her fortune depends on it?

SALLY. How did you know that?

CAPTAIN. I know many things of which I appear to be ignorant.

SALLY. And do you know-----

CAPTAIN. Yes, I do. I know even that your mistress, too proud to have recourse to her friends, prefers to risk the loss of her suit rather than afford them the pleasure of rendering her a service.

SALLY. Well, now I'll go to missus, (*aside*) With that man one can play at "Whoever Loses Wins." (*exit, D.R.*)

CAPTAIN. Yes, charming woman, I will serve you in spite of yourself. If the means that I employ are odd and peculiar, you will, one day, know that the only object of my folly was to be useful to you. Let me, then, in order to lose the wager, do all that another would to gain it.

Enter MRS. MAISEY, D.R., her toilet improved.

MRS. M. So then, sir, here you are ? Pray forgive me, but I was hoping to see no more of you.

CAPTAIN. You think better of me, madam ? You were very sure that I should not fail to return.

MRS. M. This folly is so astounding that I cannot understand how I could lend myself to it.

CAPTAIN. The result will astonish you still more.

MRS. M. Must we still jest on ?

CAPTAIN. Would that we might do so, but, unhappily, that is no longer possible.

MRS. M. Mercy on us! how sad and serious all of a sudden!

CAPTAIN. I have but too good reason, madam.

MRS. M. Ah, I understand. You have tried gaiety, and are now about to see what the sentimental will do for you.

CAPTAIN. No, madam, I am serious because I cannot help it.

MRS. M. Then I am sorry for you. Melancholy does not interest me; it tires me to death. I am generous, you see, and would not have you employ useless weapons.

CAPTAIN. My sadness will not appear to you a stratagem when I shall tell you, that on quitting your house a little ago, I heard news which compels me to leave London immediately.

Mrs. M. I pity you, sir; to resign the game is to lose it.

CAPTAIN. You go too fast, madam: I do not leave before the twenty-four hours, and the game will be won.

MRS. M. Won!

CAPTAIN. 'Tis that which afflicts me. You may judge of my grief at seeing myself compelled to separate from you just when you are about to make me happy.

MRS. M. To spare you such regrets I annul the wager, and allow you to depart in doubt concerning the sentiments I entertain for you.

CAPTAIN. To resign the game is to lose it, madam; and I see with grief that you will pay the expenses of my journey.

MRS. M. It is a comfort to me to find that your sadness deprives you not of your presence of mind.

CAPTAIN. No, madam, enough of it is left to enable me to make you a reproach.

MRS. M. A reproach sir?

CAPTAIN. In accepting the wager you did not tell me that your heart was pre-engaged, and that it was no longer possible to you to dispose of it in my favour.

MRS. M. Who has told you that?

CAPTAIN. Unfortunately, I know it but too well.

MRS. M. Another artifice—you are jealous, sir! That is not the way to please me—my husband was so.

CAPTAIN. It is not through jealousy, madam. But you will feel how great my disadvantage in the wager if you already loved. I have had the hope that I might touch a

free heart, but have never entertained the insulting belief that I would render you unfaithful.

MRS. M. Whether it be a pretext, or simple curiosity on your part, I wish entirely to satisfy you on that point. I declare to you that I am not in the least engaged, that my heart is absolutely free ; excuse me if I add that it is free even with respect to you.

CAPTAIN. Why should I dissimulate ? I will not prolong a pleasure to me which is wearisome to you. Know then the man whom you accuse of lightness, presumption, and impertinence ! Living opposite to you, I have watched for the moment when I should see you appear at that window. Concealed behind a curtain, I have contemplated you without being seen. When you sang your every accent penetrated to my heart; I have made myself acquainted with all that concerns you; and that which troubles you causes me the greatest pain. To-day, only the most happy chance has furnished me with a pretext to enter your house. The strange manner in which I have conducted myself was commanded by the fear that I might not find an opportunity to return to it. Oh ! what care I for the wager? I cannot lose by it, since it has procured me the inestimable pleasure of better knowing you; I cannot lose by it if you will grant that this interview may not be our last. And at the risk of not obtaining your confidence, I will add that my father commands me to marry a woman who possesses not your attractions, and who will not have my love, since you, you alone reign within my soul. I will do my best to efface the unfavourable impression I can but have made upon you, and you shall soon know that if I merit not your love, I have a claim upon your friendship. *(exit, D. L.)*

MRS. M. Gone—he is gone ! I am all astonishment! Is that the man so light and heedless ? How he talks ! What fire ! All that he has said appears so probable that— Can it be the completion of his stratagem? Would artifice be able so well to imitate the accents of truth ? Ah ! either he is a very amiable man, or a very dangerous monster. He is right, he is not to be met with indifference; one must either love or hate him.

Enter SALLY, D. R.

What have you been doing to Captain Daring, mum ? I was looking out of window as he left the house, and he seemed ready to cry.

MRS. M. Sally !

SALLY. Yes mum ?

MRS. M. I am greatly embarrassed.

SALLY. You look, too, as if you wanted to cry. Gracious ! perhaps you have both of you lost the wager ?

MRS. M. Sally, the captain knows me; has seen me a good while.

SALLY. To be sure he has, he has spoke to me of your lawsuit; knows all about it.

MRS. M. Well, you know, that greatly alters matters.

SALLY. Of course, it makes all the difference in the world.

MRS. M. Assist me, Sally; advise me. Is the captain sporting with me, or does he love me ? Is what he said an artifice to gain that mad wager, or has the wager been but an ingenious and original means to declare to me his love ?

SALLY. I lean towards the favourable side. Besides, he is such an amiable gentleman.

MRS. M. Do you then think a man amiable who talks such silly nonsense, and who is so conceited and presumptuous ?

SALLY. True, I had forgot that. Yes, he is very free-and easy, quite impertinent, I may say.

MRS. M. You don't know what you are talking about, Sally. In all that he has said, he has never forgotten the respect due to a lady.

SALLY. Yes, to be sure, I remarked that he was very respectful, and said to myself—there's a polite gentleman, if you like.

MRS. M. How simple you are. A polite man does not propose so ridiculous and almost insulting a wager.

SALLY. You are quite right again, mum ; it is a piece of insolence to bet with a woman that you will turn her head.

MRS. M. You can't know what you are saying, Sally. It is not insolence, because without that wager he would not have been able to return here ; for certainly I should not have invited him to do that.

SALLY. Quite right again, mum ; nobody could have behaved better.

MRS. M. You have not a grain of sense, Sally. The wager is excusable, but the term of twenty-four hours is an impertinence.

SALLY. That's just what I was going to say, mum ; you have been very wrong to accept that horrid wager.

MRS. M. No, I have done right, because without that he would not have returned, and it is possible that he may be a very honest man.

SALLY. Oh, yes, I am quite sure he is an honest man.

MRS. M. How can you be sure of that, Sally? How ridiculously you talk ; men are all false.

SALLY. You are quite right again, mum; they're all deceivers—not one of them to be trusted.

MRS. M. Not one! Go away—you take a delight in contradicting me.

SALLY. (*aside—going*) I think that in the twenty-four hours there'll be twenty-three too many. (*exit, D. L.*)

MRS. M. What a plague servants are! Because I am easy, and weak enough to allow that girl a certain familiarity, she takes upon herself to contradict me in everything I say—goes so far as to read my thoughts. But will Captain Daring return ? What ought I to think of him? what does he think of me ? He has seen me for a long time—I know it; I, also, have seen him. He says that he is about to depart! I ought to wish it, and I know not how it is that I don't wish it at all. Will he speak of the wager ? That would perplex me, for I don't want to lose it, and I think that I ought not to win it.

SALLY. (*entering D. L.*) Two letters, mum.

MRS. M. Two?

SALLY. In different handwriting.

MRS. M. Ah, this one is from my lawyer, (*reads*) " Your suit is at this moment before the court. You owe this promptitude to the earnest solicitations of Captain Daring, who, for a long time, has interested himself in the affair." He spoke truly, then ! " He has not added to the goodness of your cause, which could not be better, but he has considerably accelerated its decision." It is now three o'clock. Sally, my fate is decided, and I shall soon receive the news, (*looking at second letter*) This is from Daring. (*reads*) " The second interview proved to me that I had lost the wager. I enclose a check for the agreed on amount. The third trial has become unnecessary. I shall show myself to you again, only to bid you farewell. I entreat that you will not hope nor attempt to make me annul the wager. If I had won it I should have received the prize.

SALLY. I see through it all, mum. The captain has invented that wager to oblige you in spite of yourself.

MRS. M. Yes, Sally, yes, that is it; now you are talking sense. The captain is so amiable and engaging, and that

wager was too extravagant to have been seriously made by him.

SALLY. And would you, mum, have the cruelty to win it?

MRS. M. That would be frightful, Sally. And shall I confess it to you?—Neither the wager nor the winning of my lawsuit have any charm, beyond that they prove to me that I have been loved for a long time, and that that man, seemingly so thoughtless, was occupying himself with my happiness at the moment when I was judging him so unfavourably.

SALLY. You are quite right again, mum.
MR. M. It he is about to depart; a wife has been chosen for him.

SALLY. Oh, that's awful!

Enter DARING, D. L., dressed for travelling.

MRS. M. Ah! sir, it is then to you that I owe the zeal which has been employed to bring that unhappy lawsuit to a termination.

CAPTAIN. It is so simple a thing, madam, that I see not wherefore you should have been informed of it.

MRS. M. And without doubt I shall soon know what has been the result of your generous exertions.

CAPTAIN. The trial is over, madam, and you have gained your cause.

MRS. M. It is to you that I owe that happiness, and it is through you that I received the tidings of it. But—you are about to depart.

CAPTAIN. My carriage is waiting for me at your door.

MRS. M. But tell me, that marriage, this departure, are they so very indispensable?

CAPTAIN. The marriage?

MRS. M. Yes, sir, the marriage—I am very curious, I confess it.

CAPTAIN. It is true that a marriage has been prepared for me—but I am left free to choose

MRS. M. Free to choose? And the departure ----

CAPTAIN. Would be quite unnecessary if I had gained the wager; but losing it, there is no longer anything to detain me in London.

MRS. M. In that case, you decidedly go?

CAPTAIN. Most positively.

MRS. M. It is painful to me, sir, that I am compelled to mingle a reproach with my farewell.

CAPTAIN. A reproach ?

MRS. M. You have treated seriously that mad wager, Which I intended but as a jest, and really-----

CAPTAIN. It was seriously made by me, and I consider it no joke that I have lost it.

MRS. M. I know the motive of the wager, and am obliged to you for it; but your letter and its contents would be an affront should you still further insist.

CAPTAIN. Pray answer me, madam, was there a possibility that I might win ?

MRS. M. Strictly speaking, yes, it was possible.

CAPTAIN. It ought then to be possible that I lose.

MRS. M. Have it as you will, but you pass on me an affront.

CAPTAIN. At least, you will tell me why you refuse.

MRS. M. Because I—I ought not, in conscience, to accept.

CAPTAIN. But, why, madam, why ?

MRS. M. Why ? you drive me to desperation-----

CAPTAIN. Then tell me, why ?

MRS. M. Why, why—why because I ought not to accept as won, a wager that-----

CAPTAIN. Say on, charming Theodora, say on.

MRS. M. A wager—that I have lost.

CAPTAIN. Lost! O heaven !

MRS. M. Yes, lost, lost! I know not if there is a fatality in it, but I cannot defend myself ; and I blush in thinking how very sure you were of your empire.

CAPTAIN. Blush not, dear Theodora, to make happy a man who adores you. I have as you know long worshipped you, and you crown a love born on the first day I had the delight of beholding you.

MRS. M. After the avowal I have made, why should I hesitate to say that I have long known your love for me. My eyes have encountered yours, my looks have pierced through the curtain of which you made yourself a rampart. That window became agreeable to me; you have not once passed that I have not seen you, and if to-day that book fell from my hands-----

CAPTAIN. Yes-----

MRS. M. It was—that I held it very loosely.

SALLY. (*aside*) Blest if I didn't think so.

CAPTAIN. Charming Theodora, I am the happiest of men!

MRS. M. But your journey ?

CAPTAIN. I have returned from it.

SALLY. How about the wager ? (*advancing, L.*)

CAPTAIN. 'Tis you who have won it.

SALLY. And *I* shan't make any bother about taking the money.

MRS. M. (*giving her check from letter*) And you may as well receive it at once.

SALLY. You are quite right again, mum.

MRS. M. Daring, The Romance, after all, has lasted but an Hour.

CAPTAIN. True, but in that hour I have won a wife, and happiness which will endure for all my life.

R. MRS. M. CAPTAIN. SALLY. L.

CURTAIN.