



ENGAGED.

An Entirely Original Farcical Comedy in Three Acts

Written by W. S. Gilbert

First produced at the Haymarket Theatre, under the management of MR. J. S. CLARKE, Wednesday, 3rd October, 1877.

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

CHEVIOT HILL, *a young man of property*¹

BELVAWNEY, *his friend*

MR. SYMPERSON

ANGUS MACALISTER, *a Lowland peasant lad*

MAJOR MCGILLICUDDY

BELINDA TREHERNE

MINNIE, *Symperson's daughter*

MRS. MACFARLANE, *a Lowland widow*

MAGGIE, HER DAUGHTER, *a Lowland lassie*

PARKER, *Minnie's maid*

ACT I - GARDEN OF A COTTAGE, NEAR GREटना.²

(On the border, between England and Scotland)

**ACTS II & III - DRAWING-ROOM IN SYMPERSON'S HOUSE IN
LONDON.**

Three months' interval is supposed to elapse between Acts I. and II.

Three days' interval is supposed to elapse between Acts II. and III.

¹ The **Cheviot Hills** is a range of rolling hills straddling the England–Scotland border between Northumberland and the Scottish Borders.

² Gretna, more commonly known as Gretna Green, is a village on the border between England and Scotland on the main route from Carlisle to Glasgow. It was notorious as a destination for eloping couples who would be married there by the local blacksmith, using his anvil as an altar.

ACT I.

SCENE. - Garden of a humble but picturesque cottage, near Gretna, on the border between England and Scotland. The whole scene is suggestive of rustic prosperity and content. MAGGIE MACFARLANE, a pretty country girl, is discovered spinning at a wheel, and singing as she spins ANGUS MACALISTER, a good-looking peasant lad, appears on at back, and creeps softly down to MAGGIE as she sings and spins, and places his hands over her eyes.

Angus. Wha is it?

Maggie. Oh, Angus, ye frightened me sae! (*He releases her.*) And see there - the flax is a' knotted and scribbled - and I'll do naething wi' it!

Angus. Meg! My Meg! My ain bonnie Meg!

Maggie. Angus, why, lad, what's wrang wi' e'e? Thou hast tear-drops in thy bonnie blue een.

Angus. Dinna heed them, Meg. It comes fra glowerin' at thy bright beauty. Glowerin' at thee is like glowerin' at the noonday sun!

Maggie. Angus, thou'rt talking fulishly. I'm but a puir brown hill-side lassie. I dinna like to hear sic things from a straight honest lad like thee. It's the way the dandy toun-folk speak to me, and it does na come rightly from the lips of a simple man.

Angus. Forgive me, Meg for I speak honestly to ye. Angus Macalister is not the man to deal in squeaming compliments. Meg, I love thee dearly, as thou well knowest. I'm but a puir lad, and I've little but twa braw arms and a straight hairt to live by, but I've saved a wee bit siller - I've a braw housie and a scrappie of gude garden-land - and it's a' for thee, lassie, if thou'll gie me thy true and tender little hairt!

Maggie. Angus, I'll be fair and straight wi' ee. Thou askest me for my hairt. Why, Angus, thou'rt tall, and fair, and brave. Thou'st a gude, honest face, and a gude, honest hairt, which is mair precious than a' the gold on earth! No man has a word to say against Angus Macalister - no, nor any woman neither. Thou hast strong arms to work wi', and a strong hairt to help thee work. And wha am I that I should say that a' these blessings are not enough for me? If thou, gude, brave, honest man, will be troubled wi' sic a puir little, humble mousie as Maggie Macfarlane, why, she'll just be the proudest and happiest lassie in a' Dumfries!

Angus. My ain darling! (*They embrace.*)

Enter MRS. MACFARLANE from cottage.

Mrs Mac. Why, Angus - Maggie, what's a' this!

Angus. Mistress Macfarlane, dinna be fasht wi' me; dinna think worse o' me than I deserve. I've loved your lass honestly these fifteen years, but I never plucked up the hairt to tell her so until noo; and when she answered fairly, it wasna in human

nature to do aught else but hold her to my hairt and place one kiss on her bonnie cheek.

Mrs Mac. Angus, say nae mair. My hairt is sair at losing my only bairn; but I'm nae fasht wi' ee. Thou'rt a gude lad, and it's been the hope of my widowed auld heart to see you twain one. Thou'lt treat her kindly - I ken that weel. Thou'rt a prosperous, kirk-going man, and my Mag should be a happy lass indeed. Bless thee, Angus; bless thee!

Angus. (*wiping his eyes*). Dinna heed the water in my ee - it will come when I'm ower glad. Yes, I'm a fairly prosperous man. What wi' farmin' a bit land, and gillieing odd times, and a bit o' poachin' now and again; and what wi' my illicit whusky still - and throwin' trains off the line, that the poor distracted passengers may come to my cot, I've mair ways than one of making an honest living - and I'll work them a' nicht and day for my bonnie Meg!

Mrs Mac. D'ye ken, Angus, I sometimes think that thou'rt losing some o' thine auld skill at upsetting railway trains. Thou hast not done sic a thing these sax weeks, and the cottage stands sairly in need of sic chance custom as the poor delayed passengers may bring.

Maggie. Nay, mither, thou wrangest him. Even noo, this very day, has he not placed twa bonnie braw sleepers across the up-line, ready for the express from Glaisgie, which is due in twa minutes or so?

Mrs Mac. Gude lad! Gude thoughtfu' lad! But I hope the unfortunate passengers will na' be much hurt, puir unconscious bodies!

Angus. Fear nought, mither. Lang experience has taught me to do my work deftly. The train will run off the line, and the traffic will just be blocked for half a day, but I'll warrant ye that, wi' a' this, nae mon, woman, or child amang them will get sae much as a bruised head or a broken nose.

Maggie. My ain tender-hearted Angus! He wadna hurt sae much as a blatherin' buzzin' bluebottle flee!

Angus. Nae, Meg, not if takin' care and thought could help the poor dumb thing! (*Wiping his eyes.*) There, see, lass (*looking off*), the train's at a standstill, and there's nae harm done. I'll just go and tell the puir distraught passengers that they may rest them here, in thy cot, gin they will, till the line is cleared again. Mither, get thy rooms ready, and put brose³ i' the pot, for mebbe they'll be hungry, puir souls. Farewell, Meg; I'll be back ere lang, and if I don't bring 'ee a full half-dozen o' well-paying passengers, thou may'st just wed the redheaded exciseman!

Exit ANGUS.

Maggie. Oh, mither, mither, I'm ower happy! I've nae deserved sic a good fortune as to be the wife o' yon brave and honest lad!

³ Brose: a dish made by pouring boiling water or milk on oatmeal or oatcake and seasoned with salt and butter.

Mrs Mac. Meg, thine auld mither's hairt is sair at the thought o' losin' ye, for hitherto she's just been a' the world to 'ee, but now thou'lt cleave to thine Angus, and thou'lt learn to love him better than thy puir auld mither! But it mun be - it mun be!

Maggie. Nay, mither, say not that. A gude girl loves her husband wi' one love and her mither wi' anither. They are not alike, but neither is greater nor less than the ither, and they dwell together in peace and unity. That is how a gude girl loves.

Mrs Mac. And thou art a gude girl, Meg ?

Maggie. I am a varra gude girl indeed, mither - a varra, varra gude girl!

Mrs Mac. I'm richt sure o' that. Well, the puir belated passengers will be here directly, and it is our duty to provide for them sic puir hospitality as our humble roof will afford. It shall never be said o' Janie Macfarlane that she ever turned the weary traveller fainting from her door.

Maggie. My ain gentle-hearted mither!

Exeunt together into cottage.

Enter ANGUS with BELVAWNEY and Miss T. She is in travelling costume, and both are much agitated and alarmed.

Angus. Step in, sir - step in, and sit ye doun for a wee. I'll just send Mistress Macfarlane to ye. She's a gude auld bodie, and will see to your comforts as if she was your ain mither.

Belv. Thank you, my worthy lad, for your kindness at this trying moment. I assure you we shall not forget it.

Angus. Ah, sir, wadna any mon do as muckle? A dry shelter, a bannock and a pan o' parritch is a' we can offer ye, but sic as it is ye're hairtily welcome.

Belv. It is well - we thank you.

Angus. For wha wadna help the unfortunate?

Belv. (*occupied with MISS TREHERNE*). Exactly - every one would.

Angus. Or feed the hungry?

Belv. No doubt.

Angus. It just brings the tear drop to my ee' to think - -

Belv. (*leading him off*). My friend, we would be alone, this maiden and I. Farewell! (*Exit ANGUS, into cottage.*) Belinda - my own - my life! Compose yourself. It was in truth a weird and gruesome accident. The line is blocked - your parasol is broken, and your butterscotch trampled in the dust, but no serious harm is done. Come, be cheerful. We are safe - quite safe.

- Miss T. Safe! Ah, Belvawney, my own own Belvawney - there is, I fear, no safety for us so long as we are liable to be overtaken by that fearful Major to whom I was to have been married this morning!
- Belv. Major McGillicuddy? I confess I do not feel comfortable when I think of Major McGillicuddy.
- Miss T. You know his barbaric nature, and how madly jealous he is. If he should find that I have eloped with you, he will most surely shoot us both!
- Belv. It is an uneasy prospect. (*Suddenly.*) Belinda, do you love me?
- Miss T. With an impetuous passion that I shall carry with me to the tomb!
- Belv. Then be mine to-morrow! We are not far from Gretna, and the thing can be done without delay. Once married, the arm of the law will protect us from this fearful man, and we can defy him to do his worst.
- Miss T. Belvawney, all this is quite true. I love you madly, passionately; I care to live but in your heart, I breathe but for your love; yet, before I actually consent to take the irrevocable step that will place me on the pinnacle of my fondest hopes, you must give me some definite idea of your pecuniary position. I am not mercenary, Heaven knows; but business is business, and I confess I should like a little definite information about the settlements.
- Belv. I often think that it is deeply to be deplored that these grovelling questions of money should alloy the tenderest and most hallowed sentiments that inspire our imperfect natures.
- Miss T. It is unfortunate, no doubt, but at the same time it is absolutely necessary.
- Belv. Belinda, I will be frank with you. My income is £1000 a year, which I hold on certain conditions. You know my friend Cheviot Hill, who is travelling to London in the same train with us, but in the third class?
- Miss T. I believe I know the man you mean.
- Belv. Cheviot, who is a young man of large property, but extremely close-fisted, is cursed with a strangely amatory disposition, as you will admit when I tell you that he has contracted a habit of proposing marriage, as a matter of course, to every woman he meets. His haughty father (who comes of a very old family - the Cheviot Hills had settled in this part of the world centuries before the Conquest) is compelled by his health to reside in Madeira. Knowing that I exercise an all but supernatural influence over his son, and fearing that his affectionate disposition would lead him to contract an undesirable marriage, the old gentleman allows me £1000 a year so long as Cheviot shall live single, but at his death or marriage the money goes over to Cheviot's uncle Symperson, who is now travelling to town with him.
- Miss T. Then so long as your influence over him lasts, so long only will you retain your income?

Belv. That is, I am sorry to say, the state of the case.

Miss T. *(after a pause)*. Belvawney, I love you with an imperishable ardour which mocks the power of words. If I were to begin to tell you now of the force of my indomitable passion for you, the tomb would close over me before I could exhaust the entrancing subject. But, as I said before, business is business, and unless I can see some distinct probability that your income will be permanent, I shall have no alternative but to weep my heart out in all the anguish of maiden solitude - uncared for, unloved, and alone!

Exit MISS TREHERNE into cottage.

Belv. There goes a noble-hearted girl, indeed! Oh, for the gift of Cheviot's airy badinage - oh, for his skill in weaving a net about the hearts of women! If I could but induce her to marry me at once before the dreadful Major learns our flight! Why not? We are in Scotland. Methinks I've heard two loving hearts can wed, in this strange country, by merely making declaration to that effect. I will think out some cunning scheme to lure her into marriage unawares.

Enter MAGGIE, from cottage.

Maggie. Will ye walk in and rest a wee, Maister Belvawney? There's a room ready for ye, kind sir, and ye're heartily welcome to it.

Belv. It is well. Stop! Come hither, maiden.

Maggie. Oh, sir! you do not mean any harm towards a puir, innocent, unprotected cottage lassie?

Belv. Harm! No: of course, I don't. What do you mean?

Maggie. I'm but a puir, humble mountain girl; but let me tell you, sir, that my character's just as dear to me as the richest and proudest lady's in the land. Before I consent to approach ye, swear to me that you mean me no harm.

Belv. Harm? Of course, I don't. Don't be a little fool. Come here.

Maggie. There is something in his manner that reassures me. It is not that of the airy trifler with innocent hairts. *(Aloud.)* What wad ye wi' puir, harmless Maggie MacFarlane, gude sir?

Belv. Can you tell me what constitutes a Scotch marriage?

Maggie. Oh, sir, it's nae use asking me that; for my hairt is not my ain to give. I'm betrothed to the best and noblest lad in a' the bonnie Borderland. Oh, sir, I canna be your bride!

Belv. My girl, you mistake. I do not want you for my bride. Can't you answer a simple question? What constitutes a Scotch marriage?

Maggie. Ye've just to say before twa witnesses, "Maggie Macfarlane is my wife;" and I've just to say, "Maister Belvawney is my husband," and nae mon can set us asunder. But, sir, I canna be your bride; for I am betrothed to the best and noblest - -

Belv. I congratulate you. You can go.

Maggie. Yes, sir.

Exit MAGGIE into cottage.

Belv. It is a simple process; simple, but yet how beautiful! One thing is certain - Cheviot may marry any day, despite my precautions, and then I shall be penniless. He may die, and equally I shall be penniless. Belinda has £500 a year; it is not much, but it would, at least, save me from starvation.

Exit BELVAWNEY.

Enter SYMPERSON and CHEVIOT HILL over bridge. They both show signs of damage - their hats are beaten in and their clothes disordered through the accident.

Symp. Well, here we are at last - -

Cheviot. Yes; here we are at last, and a pretty state I'm in, to be sure.

Symp. My dear nephew, you would travel third class, and this is the consequence. After all, there's not much harm done.

Cheviot. Not much harm? What d'ye call that? (*Showing his hat.*) Ten and ninepence at one operation! My gloves split - one and four! My coat ruined - eighteen and six! It's a coarse and brutal nature that recognizes no harm that don't involve loss of blood. I'm reduced by this accident from a thinking, feeling, reflecting, human being, to a moral pulp - a mash - a poultice. Damme, sir, that's what I am! I'm a poultice!

Symp. Cheviot, my dear boy, at the moment of the accident you were speaking to me on a very interesting subject.

Cheviot. Was I? I forget what it was. The accident has knocked it clean out of my head.

Symp. You were saying that you were a man of good position and fortune; that you derived £2000 a year from your bank; that you thought it was time you settled. You then reminded me that I should come into Belvawney's £1000 a year on your marriage, and I'm not sure, but I rather think you mentioned, casually, that my daughter Minnie is an Angel of Light.

Cheviot. True, and just then we went off the line. To resume - Uncle Symperson, your daughter Minnie is an Angel of Light, a perfect being, as innocent as a new-laid egg.

Symp. Minnie is, indeed, all that you have described her.

Cheviot. Uncle, I'm a man of few words. I feel and I speak. I love that girl, madly, passionately, irresistibly. She is my whole life, my whole soul and body, my Past,

my Present, and my To Come. I have thought for none but her; she fills my mind, sleeping and waking; she is the essence of every hope - the tree upon which the fruit of my heart is growing - my own To Come!

Symp. (*who has sunk overpowered on to stool during this speech*). Cheviot, my dear boy, excuse a father's tears. I won't beat about the bush. You have anticipated my devoutest wish. Cheviot, my dear boy, take her, she is yours!

Cheviot. I have often heard of rapture, but I never knew what it was till now. Uncle Symperson, bearing in mind the fact that your income will date from the day of the wedding, when may this be?

Symp. My boy, the sooner the better! Delicacy would prompt me to give Belvawney a reasonable notice of the impending loss of his income, but should I, for such a mere selfish reason as that, rob my child of one hour of the happiness that you are about to confer upon her? No! Duty to my child is paramount!

Cheviot. On one condition, however, I must insist. This must be kept from Belvawney's knowledge. You know the strange, mysterious influence that his dreadful eyes exercise over me.

Symp. I have remarked it with astonishment.

Cheviot. They are much inflamed just now, and he has to wear green spectacles. While this lasts I am a free agent, but under treatment they may recover. In that case, if he knew that I contemplated matrimony, he would use them to prevent my doing so - and I cannot resist them - I cannot resist them! Therefore, I say, until I am safely and securely tied up, Belvawney must know nothing about it.

Symp. Trust me, Cheviot, he shall know nothing about it from *me*. (*Aside.*) A thousand a year! I have endeavoured, but in vain, to woo Fortune for fifty-six years, but she smiles upon me at last! - she smiles upon me at last!

Exit SYMPERSON into cottage.

Cheviot. At length my hopes are to be crowned! Oh, my own - my own - the hope of my heart - my love - my life!

Enter BELVAWNEY, who has overheard these words.

Belv. Cheviot! Whom are you apostrophizing in those terms? You've been at it again, I see!

Cheviot. Belvawney, that apostrophe was private; I decline to admit you to my confidence.

Belv. Cheviot, what is the reason of this strange tone of defiance? A week ago I had but to express a wish, to have it obeyed as a matter of course.

Cheviot. Belvawney, it may not be denied that there was a time when, owing to the remarkable influence exercised over me by your extraordinary eyes, you could do with me as you would. It would be affectation to deny it; your eyes withered my will; they paralyzed my volition. They were strange and lurid eyes, and I bowed to

them. Those eyes were my Fate - my Destiny - my unerring Must - my inevitable Shall. That time has gone - for ever!

Belv. Alas for the days that are past and the good that came and went with them!

Cheviot. Weep for them if you will. I cannot weep with you, for I loved them not. But, as you say, they are past. The light that lit up those eyes is extinct - their fire has died out - their soul has fled. They are no longer eyes, they are poached eggs. I have not yet sunk so low as to be the slave of two poached eggs.

Belv. Have mercy. If any girl has succeeded in enslaving you - and I know how easily you are enslaved - dismiss her from your thoughts; have no more to say to her; and I will - yes, I will bless you with my latest breath!

Cheviot. Whether a blessing conferred with one's latest breath is a superior article to one conferred in robust health we need not stop to inquire. I decline, as I said before, to admit you to my confidence on any terms whatever. Begone! (*Exit BELVAWNEY.*) Dismiss from my thoughts the only woman I ever loved! Have no more to say to the tree upon which the fruit of my heart is growing! No, Belvawney, I cannot cut off my tree as if it were gas or water. I do not treat women like that. Some men do, but I don't. I am not that sort of man. I respect women; I love women. They are good; they are pure; they are beautiful; at least, many of them are.

Enter MAGGIE from cottage: he is much fascinated.

This one, for example, is very beautiful indeed!

Maggie. If ye'll just walk in, sir, ye'll find a bannock and a pan o' parritch waitin' for ye on the table.

Cheviot. This is one of the loveliest women I ever met in the whole course of my life!

Maggie. (*aside*). What's he glowerin' at ? (*Aloud.*) Oh, sir, ye mean no harm to the poor Lowland lassie?

Cheviot. Pardon me; it's very foolish. I can't account for it - but I am arrested, fascinated.

Maggie. Oh, gude sir, what's fascinated ye?

Cheviot. I don't know; there is something about you that exercises a most remarkable influence over me; it seems to weave a kind of enchantment around me. I can't think what it is. You are a good girl, I am sure. None but a good girl could so powerfully affect me. You *are* a good girl, are you not?

Maggie. I am a varra gude girl indeed, sir.

Cheviot. I was quite sure of it. (*Gets his arm round her waist.*)

Maggie. I am a much better girl than nineteen out of twenty in these pairts. And they are all gude girls too.

Cheviot. My darling! (*Kisses her.*)

Maggie. Oh, kind sir, what's that for?

Cheviot. It is your reward for being a good girl.

Maggie. Oh, sir, I did na look for sic a recompense; you are varra varra kind to puir little Maggie Macfarlane.

Cheviot. I cannot think what it is about you that fascinates me so remarkably.

Maggie. Maybe it's my beauty.

Cheviot. Maybe it is. It is quite possible that it may be, as you say, your beauty.

Maggie. I am remarkably pretty, and I've a varra neat figure.

Cheviot. There is a natural modesty in this guileless appreciation of your own perfection that is, to me, infinitely more charming than the affected ignorance of an artificial town-bred beauty.

Maggie. Oh, sir, can I close my een to the picture that my looking-glass holds up to me twenty times a day? We see the rose on the tree, and we say that it is fair; we see the silver moon sailing in the braw blue heavens, and we say that she is bright; we see the brawling stream purling over the smooth stanes i' the burn, and we say that it is beautiful; and shall we close our een to the fairest of nature's works - a pure and beautiful woman? Why, sir, it wad just be base ingratitude! No, it's best to tell the truth about a' things: I am a varra, varra, beautiful girl!

Cheviot. Maggie MacFarlane, I'm a plain, blunt, straightforward man, and I come quickly to the point. I see more to love in you than I ever saw in any woman in all my life before. I have a large income, which I do not spend recklessly. I love you passionately; you are the essence of every hope; you are the tree upon which the fruit of my heart is growing - my Past, my Present, my Future - you are my own To Come. Tell me, will you be mine - will you join your life with mine?

Enter ANGUS, who listens.

Maggie. Ah, kind sir, I'm sairly grieved to wound sae true and tender a love as yours, but ye're ower late, my love is nae my ain to give ye, it's given ower to the best and bravest lad in a' the bonnie Borderland!

Cheviot. Give me his address that I may go and curse him!

Maggie. (*kneels to CHEVIOT*). Ah, ye must not curse him. Oh, spare him, spare him, for he is good and brave, and he loves me, oh, sae dearly, and I love him, oh, sae dearly too. Oh, sir, kind sir, have mercy on him, and do not - do not curse him, or I shall die! (*Throwing herself at his feet.*)

Cheviot. Will you, or will you not, oblige me by telling me where he is, that I may at once go and curse him?

Angus. (*coming forward*). He is here, sir, but dinna waste your curses on me. Maggie, my bairn (*raising her*), I heard the answer ye gave to this man, my true and gentle lassie! Ye spake well and bravely, Meg - well and bravely! Dinna heed the water in my e'e - it's a tear of joy and gratitude, Meg - a tear of joy and gratitude!

Cheviot. (*touched*). Poor fellow! I will *not* curse him! (*Aloud.*) Young man, I respect your honest emotion. I don't want to distress you, but I cannot help loving this most charming girl. Come, is it reasonable to quarrel with a man because he's of the same way of thinking as yourself?

Angus. Nay, sir, I'm nae fasht, but it just seems to drive a' the bluid back into my hairt when I think that my Meg is loved by anither! Oh, sir, she's a fair and winsome lassie, and I micht as justly be angry wi' ye for loving the blue heavens! She's just as far above us as they are! (*Wiping his eyes and kissing her.*)

Cheviot. (*with decision*). Pardon me, I cannot allow that.

Angus. Eh?

Cheviot. I love that girl madly - passionately - and I cannot possibly allow you to do that - not before my eyes, I beg. You simply torture me.

Maggie. (*to ANGUS*). Leave, off, dear, till the puir gentleman's gone, and then ye can begin again.

Cheviot. Angus, listen to me. You love this girl?

Angus. I love her, sir, a'most as weel as I love mysel'!

Cheviot. Then reflect how you are standing in the way of her prosperity. I am a rich man. I have money, position, and education. I am a much more intellectual and generally agreeable companion for her than you can ever hope to be. I am full of anecdote, and all my anecdotes are in the best possible taste. I will tell you some of them some of these days, and you can judge for yourself. Maggie, if she married me, would live in a nice house in a good square. She would have wine - occasionally. She would be kept beautifully clean. Now, if you really love this girl almost as well as you love yourself, are you doing wisely or kindly in standing in the way of her getting all these good things? As to compensation - why, I've had heavy expenses of late - but if - yes, if thirty shillings - -

Angus. (*hotly*). Sir, I'm puir in pocket, but I've a rich hairt. It is rich in a pure and overflowing love, and he that hath love hath all. You canna ken what true love is, or you wadna dare to insult a puir but honest lad by offering to buy his treasure for money. (*CHEVIOT retires up.*)

Maggie. My ain true darling! (*They embrace.*)

Cheviot. Now, I'll not have it! Understand me, I'll not have it. It's simple agony to me. Angus, I respect your indignation, but you are too hasty. I do not offer to buy your treasure for money. You love her; it will naturally cause you pain to part with her, and I prescribe thirty shillings, not as a cure, but as a temporary solace. If thirty shillings is not enough, why, I don't mind making it two pounds.

Angus. Nae, sir, it's useless, and we ken it weel, do we not, my brave lassie? Our hearts are one as our bodies will be some day; and the man is na born, and the gold is na coined, that can set us twain asunder!

Maggie. Angus, dear, I'm varra proud o' sae staunch and true a love; it's like your ain true self, an' I can say nae more for it than that. But dinna act wi'out prudence and forethought, dear. In these hard times twa pound is twa pound, and I'm nae sure that ye're acting richtly in refusing sae large a sum. I love you varra dearly - ye ken that right weel - an' if ye'll be troubled wi' sic a poor little mousie I'll mak' ye a true an' loving wife, but I doubt whether, wi' a' my love, I'll ever be worth as much to ye as twa pound. Dinna act in haste, dear; tak' time to think before ye refuse this kind gentleman's offer.

Angus. Oh, sir, is not this rare modesty? Could ye match it amang your toun-bred fine ladies? I think not! Meg, it shall be as you say. I'll tak' the siller, but it'll be wi' a sair and broken hairt! (*CHEVIOT gives ANGUS money.*) Fare thee weel, my love - my childhood's - boyhood's - manhood's love! Ye're ganging fra my hairt to anither, who'll gie thee mair o' the gude things o' this world than I could ever gie 'ee, except love, an' o' that my hairt is full indeed! But it's a' for the best; ye'll be happier wi' him - and twa pound is twa pound. Meg, mak' him a gude wife, be true to him, and love him as ye loved me. Oh, Meg, my poor bruised hairt is well nigh like to break!

Exit into cottage, in great agony.

Maggie. (*looking wistfully after him*). Puir laddie, puir laddie! Oh, I did na ken till noo how weel he loved me!

Cheviot. Maggie, I'm almost sorry I - poor lad, poor fellow! He has a generous heart. I am glad I did not curse him. (*Aside.*) This is weakness! (*Aloud.*) Maggie my own - ever and for always my own, we will be very happy, will we not?

Maggie. Oh, sir, I dinna ken, but in truth I hope so. Oh, sir, my happiness is in your hands noo; be kind to the puir cottage lassie who loves ye sae weel; my hairt is a' your ain, and if ye forsake me my lot will be a sair one indeed!

Exit, weeping, into cottage.

Cheviot. Poor little Lowland lassie! That's my idea of a wife. No ridiculous extravagance; no expensive tastes. Knows how to dress like a lady on £5 a year; ah, and does it too! No pretence there of being blind to her own beauties; she knows that she is beautiful, and scorns to lie about it. In that respect she resembles Symperson's dear daughter, Minnie. My darling Minnie. (*Looks at miniature.*) My own darling Minnie. Minnie is fair, Maggie is dark. Maggie loves me! That excellent and perfect country creature loves me! She is to be the light of my life, my own to come! In some respects she is even prettier than Minnie - my darling Minnie, Symperson's dear daughter, the tree upon which the fruit of my heart is growing; my Past, my Present, and my Future, my own To Come! But this tendency to reverie is growing on me; I must shake it off.

(Enter MISS TREHERNE.)

Heaven and earth, what a singularly lovely girl!

Miss T. A stranger! Pardon me, I will withdraw! -

Cheviot. A stranger indeed, in one sense, inasmuch as he never had the happiness of meeting you before - but, in that he has a heart that can sympathize with another's misfortune, he trusts he may claim to be regarded almost as a friend.

Miss T. May I ask, sir, to what misfortunes you allude?

Cheviot. I - a - do not know their precise nature, but that perception would indeed be dull, and that heart would be indeed flinty, that did not at once perceive that you are very very unhappy. Accept, madam, my deepest and most respectful sympathy.

Miss T. You have guessed rightly, sir! I am indeed a most unhappy woman.

Cheviot. I am delighted to hear it - a - I mean I feel a pleasure, a melancholy and chastened pleasure, in reflecting that, if your distress is not of a pecuniary nature, it may perchance lay in my power to alleviate your sorrow.

Miss T. Impossible, sir, though I thank you for your respectful sympathy.

Cheviot. How many women would forego twenty years of their lives to be as beautiful as yourself, little dreaming that extraordinary loveliness can co-exist with the most poignant anguish of mind! But so, too often, we find it, do we not, dear lady?

Miss T. Sir! this tone of address, from a complete stranger!

Cheviot. Nay, be not unreasonably severe upon an impassioned and impulsive man, whose tongue is but the too faithful herald of his heart. We see the rose on the tree, and we say that it is fair, we see the bonnie brooks purling over the smooth stanes - I should say stones - in the burn, and we say that it is beautiful, and shall we close our eyes to the fairest of nature's works, a pure and beautiful woman? Why, it would be base ingratitude, indeed!

Miss T. I cannot deny that there is much truth in the sentiments you so beautifully express, but I am, unhappily, too well aware that, whatever advantages I may possess, personal beauty is not among their number.

Cheviot. How exquisitely modest is this chaste insensibility to your own singular loveliness! How infinitely more winning than the bold-faced self-appreciation of under-bred country girls!

Miss T. I am glad, sir, that you are pleased with my modesty. It has often been admired.

Cheviot. Pleased! I am more than pleased - that's a very weak word. I am enchanted. Madam, I am a man of quick impulse and energetic action. I feel and I speak - I cannot help it. Madam, be not surprised when I tell you that I cannot resist the conviction that you are the light of my future life, the essence of every hope, the tree upon which the fruit of my heart is growing - my Past, my Present, my Future, my own To Come! Do not extinguish that light, do not disperse that essence, do not blight that tree! I am well off; I'm a bachelor; I'm thirty-two; and I

love you, madam, humbly, truly, trustfully, patiently. Paralyzed with admiration, I wait anxiously, and yet hopefully, for your reply.

Miss T. Sir, that heart would indeed be cold that did not feel grateful for so much earnest, single-hearted devotion. I am deeply grieved to have to say one word to cause pain to one who expresses himself in such well-chosen terms of respectful esteem; but, alas! I have already yielded up my heart to one who, if I mistake not, is a dear personal friend of your own.

Cheviot. Am I to understand that you are the young lady of property whom Belvawney hopes to marry?

Miss T. I am, indeed, that unhappy woman!

Cheviot. And is it possible that you love him?

Miss T. With a rapture that thrills every fibre of my heart - with a devotion that entralls my very soul! But there's some difficulty about his settlements.

Cheviot. A difficulty! I should think there was. Why, on my marrying, his entire income goes over to Symperson! I could reduce him to penury to-morrow. As it happens, I *am* engaged, I recollect, to Symperson's daughter; and if Belvawney dares to interpose between you and me, by George, I'll do it!

Miss T. Oh, spare him, sir! You say that you love me? Then, for my sake, remain single for ever - it is all I ask, it is not much. Promise me that you will never, never marry, and we will both bless you with our latest breath!

Cheviot. There seems to be a special importance attached to a blessing conferred with one's latest breath that I entirely fail to grasp. It seems to me to convey no definite advantage of any kind whatever

Miss T. Cruel, cruel man!

Enter BELVAWNEY, in great alarm.

Belv. We are lost! - we are lost!

Miss T. What do you mean?

Cheviot. Who has lost you?

Belv. Major McGillicuddy discovered your flight, and followed in the next train. The line is blocked through our accident, and his train has pulled up within a few yards of our own. He is now making his way to this very cottage! What do you say to that?

Miss T. I agree with you, we are lost!

Cheviot. I disagree with you; I should say you are found.

Belv. This man is a reckless fire-eater; he is jealous of me. He will assuredly shoot us both if he sees us here together. I am no coward - but - I confess I am uneasy.

Miss T. *(to CHEVIOT)*. Oh, sir, you have a ready wit; help us out of this difficulty, and we will both bless you - -

Belv. With our latest breath!

Cheviot. That decides me. Madam, remain here with me. Belvawney, withdraw. *(BELVAWNEY retires.)* I will deal with this maniac alone. All I ask is, that if I find it necessary to make a statement that is not consistent with strict truth, you, madam, will unhesitatingly endorse it?

Miss T. I will stake my very existence on its veracity, whatever it may be.

Cheviot. Good. He is at hand. Belvawney, go.

Exit BELVAWNEY.

Now, madam, repose upon my shoulders, place your arms around me so - is that comfortable?

Miss T. It is luxurious.

Cheviot. Good.

Miss T. You are sure it does not inconvenience you?

Cheviot. Not at all. Go back, I like it. Now we are ready for him.

Enter MCGILLICUDDY with two friends dressed as for a wedding, with white favours. MCGILLICUDDY has pistols. All greatly excited.

Mcgill. Where is the villain? I'll swear he is concealed somewhere. Search every tree, every bush, every geranium. Ha! they are here. Perjured woman! I've found you at last.

Miss T. *(to CHEVIOT)*. Save me!

BELVAWNEY appears at back, listening.

Mcgill. Who is the unsightly scoundrel with whom you have flown - the unpleasant-looking scamp whom you have dared to prefer to me? Uncurl yourself from around the plain villain at once, unless you would share his fate.

MAGGIE and ANGUS appear from cottage.

Miss T. Major, spare him!

Cheviot. Now, sir, perhaps you will be so good as to explain who the deuce you are, and what you want with this lady?

Mcgill. I don't know who you may be, but I'm McGillicuddy. I am betrothed to this lady; we were to have been married this morning. I waited for her at the church from ten till four, then I began to get impatient.

Cheviot. I really think you must be labouring under some delusion.

Mcgill. Delusion? Ha! ha! *(Two friends produce large wedding cake.)* Here's the cake!

Cheviot. Still I think there's a mistake somewhere. This lady is my wife.

Mcgill. What! Belinda! oh, Belinda! Tell me that this unattractive man lies; tell me that you are mine and only mine, now and for ever!

Miss T. I cannot say that. This gentleman is my husband!

*MCGILLICUDDY falls sobbing on seat; BELVAWNEY tears his hair in despair;
MAGGIE sobs on ANGUS's shoulder.*

End of Act I

ACT II.

SCENE. - Double Drawing-room in SYMPERSON's House. Indications that a wedding is about to take place. A plate of tarts and a bottle of wine on table.

Enter MINNIE SYMPERSON, in wedding dress, followed by PARKER, her maid, holding her train.

Minnie. Take care, Parker - that's right. There! How do I look?

Parker. Beautiful, miss; quite beautiful.

Minnie. (*earnestly*). Oh, Parker, am I really beautiful? Really, *really* beautiful, you know?

Parker. Oh, miss, there's no question about it. Oh, I do so hope you and Mr. Cheviot Hill will be happy.

Minnie. Oh, I'm sure we shall, Parker. He has often told me that I am the tree upon which the fruit of his heart is growing; and one couldn't wish to be more than *that*. And he tells me that his greatest happiness is to see me happy. So it will be my duty - my *duty*, Parker - to devote my life, my whole life, to making myself as happy as I possibly can.

Enter SYMPERSON, dressed for wedding.

Symp. So, my little lamb is ready for the sacrifice. You can go, Parker. And I am to lose my pet at last; my little dickey-bird is to be married to-day! Well, well, it's for her good. I must try and bear it - I must try and bear it.

Minnie. And as my dear old papa comes into £1000 a year by it, I hope he won't allow it to distress him too much. He must try and bear up. He mustn't fret.

Symp. My child, I will not deny that £1000 a year is a consolation. It's quite a fortune. I hardly know what I shall do with it.

Minnie. I think, dear papa, you will spend a good deal of it on brandy, and a good deal more on billiards, and a good deal more on betting.

Symp. It may be so: I don't say it won't. We shall see, Minnie, we shall see. These simple pleasures would certainly tend to soothe your poor old father's declining years. And my darling has not done badly either, has she?

Minnie. No, dear papa; only fancy! Cheviot has £2000 a year from shares in the Royal Indestructible Bank.

Symp. And don't spend £200. By-the-bye, I'm sorry that my little bird has not contrived to induce him to settle anything on her; that, I think, was remiss in my tom-tit.

Minnie. Dear papa, Cheviot is the very soul of honour; he's a fine, noble, manly, spirited fellow, but if he *has* a fault, it is that he is very, oh very, *very* stingy. He would

rather lose his heart's blood than part with a shilling unnecessarily. He's a noble fellow, but he's like that.

Symp. Still I can't help feeling that if my robin had worked him judiciously - -

Minnie. Papa, dear, Cheviot is an all but perfect character, the very type of knightly chivalry; but he *has* faults, and among other things he's one of the worst tempered men I ever met in all my little life. Poor, simple, little Minnie, thought the matter over very carefully in her silly childish way, and she came to the conclusion, in her foolish little noddle, that, on the whole, perhaps she could work it better after marriage, than before.

Symp. Well, well, perhaps my wren is right. (*Rises.*)

Minnie. Don't laugh at my silly little thoughts, dear papa, when I say I'm sure she is.

Symp. Minnie, my dear daughter, take a father's advice, the last he will ever be entitled to give you. If you would be truly happy in the married state, be sure you have your own way in everything. Brook no contradictions. Never yield to outside pressure. Give in to no argument. Admit no appeal. However wrong you may be, maintain a firm, resolute, and determined front. These were your angel mother's principles through life, and she was a happy woman indeed. I neglected those principles, and while she lived I was a miserable wretch.

Minnie. Papa dear, I have thought over the matter very carefully in my little baby-noddle, and I have come to the conclusion - don't laugh at me, dear papa - that it is my duty - my *duty* - to fall in with Cheviot's views in everything *before* marriage, and Cheviot's duty to fall into my views in everything *after* marriage. I think that is only fair, don't you?

Symp. Yes, I dare say it will come to that.

Minnie. Don't think me a very silly little goose when I say I'm sure it will. Quite, quite sure, dear papa. Quite.

Exit Minnie.

Symp. Dear child - dear child! I sometimes fancy I can see traces of her angel mother's disposition in her. Yes, I think - I *think* she will be happy. But, poor Cheviot! Oh, lor, poor Cheviot! Dear me, it won't bear thinking of!

Enter MISS TREHERNE, unobserved. She is dressed in stately and funereal black.

Miss T. Come here, man-servant. Approach. I'm not going to bite you. Can I see the fair young thing they call Minnie Symperson?

Symp. Well really, I can hardly say. There's nothing wrong, I hope?

Miss T. Nothing wrong? Oh, thoughtless, frivolous, light-hearted creature! Oh, reckless old butterfly! Nothing wrong! You've eyes in your head, a nose on your face, ears on each side of it, a brain of some sort in your skull, haven't you, butler?

Symp. Undoubtedly, but I beg to observe I'm not the - -

Miss T. Have you or have you not the gift of simple apprehension? Can you or can you not draw conclusions? Go to, go to, you offend me.

Symp. (*aside*). There *is* something wrong, and it's *here* (*touching his forehead*). I'll tell her you're here. Whom shall I say?

Miss T. Say that one on whose devoted head the black sorrows of a long lifetime have fallen, even as a funeral pall, craves a minute's interview with a dear old friend. Do you think you can recollect that message, butler?

Symp. I'll try, but I beg, I *beg* to observe, I'm not the butler. (*Aside.*) This is a most surprising young person!

Exit.

Miss T. At last I'm in my darling's home, the home of the bright blythe carolling thing that lit, as with a ray of heaven's sunlight, the murky gloom of my miserable school-days. But what do I see? Tarts? Ginger wine? There are rejoicings of some kind afoot. Alas, I am out of place here. What have I in common with tarts? Oh, I am ill-attuned to scenes of revelry! (*Takes a tart and eats it.*)

Enter MINNIE.

Minnie. Belinda! (*They rush to each other's arms.*)

Miss T. Minnie! My own long-lost lamb! This is the first gleam of joy that has lighted my darksome course this many and many a day! And in spite of the change that time and misery have brought upon me, you knew me at once! (*Eating the tart all this time.*)

Minnie. Oh, I felt sure it was you, from the message.

Miss T. How wondrously fair you have grown! And this dress! Why, it is surely a bridal dress! Those tarts - that wine! Surely this is not your wedding-day?

Minnie. Yes, dear, I shall be married in half an hour.

Miss T. Oh, strange chance! Oh, unheard-of coincidence! Married! And to whom?

Minnie. Oh, to the dearest love - My cousin, Mr. Cheviot Hill. Perhaps you know the name?

Miss T. I have heard of the Cheviot Hills,⁴ somewhere. Happy - strangely happy girl! You, at least, know your husband's name.

Minnie. Oh yes, it's on all his pocket-handkerchiefs.

Miss T. It is much to know. I do not know mine.

⁴ The **Cheviot Hills** is a range of rolling hills straddling the England–Scotland border between Northumberland and the Scottish Borders.

- Minnie. Have you forgotten it?
- Miss T. No, I never knew it. It is a dark mystery. It may not be unfathomed. It is buried in the fathomless gulf of the Eternal Past. There let it lie.
- Minnie. Oh, tell me all about it, dear.
- Miss T. It is a lurid tale. Three months since I fled from a hated one, who was to have married me. He pursued me. I confided my distress to a young and wealthy stranger. Acting on his advice, I declared myself to be his wife; he declared himself to be my husband. We were parted immediately afterwards, and we have never met since. But this took place in Scotland; and by the law of that remarkable country we are man and wife, though I didn't know it at the time.
- Minnie. What fun!
- Miss T. Fun! Say, rather, horror - distraction - chaos! I am rent with conflicting doubts! Perhaps he was already married; in that case, I am a bigamist. Maybe he is dead; in that case, I am a widow. Maybe he is alive; in that case I am a wife. What am I? Am I single? Am I married? Am I a widow? Can I marry? Have I married? May I marry? Who am I? Where am I? What am I? - What is my name? What is my condition in life? If I am married, to whom am I married? If I am a widow, how came I to be a widow, and whose widow came I to be? Why am I his widow? What did he die of? Did he leave me anything? if anything, how much, and is it saddled with conditions? - Can I marry again without forfeiting it? Have I a mother-in-law? Have I a family of step-children, and if so, how many, and what are their ages, sexes, sizes, names and dispositions? These are questions that rack me night and day, and until they are settled, peace and I are not on terms!
- Minnie. Poor dear thing!
- Miss T. But enough of my selfish sorrows. (*Goes up to table and takes a tart. MINNIE is annoyed at this.*) Tell me about the noble boy who is about to make you his. Has he any dross?
- Minnie. I don't know. (*Secretly removes tarts to another table close to door.*) I never thought of asking - I'm such a goose. But papa knows.
- Miss T. Have those base and servile things called settlements been satisfactorily adjusted? (*Eating.*)
- Minnie. I don't know. It never occurred to me to inquire. But papa can tell you.
- Miss T. The same artless little soul!
- Minnie. (*standing so as to conceal tarts from MISS TREHERNE*). Yes, I am quite artless - quite, quite artless. But now that you are here you will stay and see me married.
- Miss T. I would willingly be a witness to my darling's joy, but this attire is, perhaps, scarcely in harmony with a scene of revelry.
- Minnie. Well, dear, you're not a cheerful object, and that's the truth.

Miss T. And yet these charnel-house rags may serve to remind the thoughtless banquetters that they are but mortal.

Minnie. I don't think it will be necessary to do that, dear. Papa's sherry will make that quite clear to them.

Miss T. Then I will hie me home, and array me in garments of less sombre hue.

Minnie. I think it would be better, dear. Those are the very things for a funeral, but this is a wedding.

Miss T. I see very little difference between them. But it shall be as you wish, though I have worn nothing but black since my miserable marriage. There is breakfast, I suppose?

Minnie. Yes, at dear Cheviot's house.

Miss T. That is well. I shall return in time for it. Thank heaven I can still eat! (*Takes a tart from table, and exit, followed by Minnie.*)

Enter CHEVIOT HILL. He is dressed as for a wedding.

Cheviot. Here I am at last - quite flurried and hot after the usual row with the cabman, just when I wanted to be particularly calm and self-contained. I got the best of it though. Dear me, this is a great day for me - a great day. Where's Minnie, I wonder? Arraying herself for the sacrifice, no doubt. Pouf! This is a very nervous occasion. I wonder if I'm taking a prudent step. Marriage is a very risky thing; it's like Chancery, once in it you can't get out of it, and the costs are enormous. There you are - fixed. Fifty years hence, if we're both alive, there we shall both be - fixed. That's the devil of it. It's an unreasonably long time to be responsible for another person's expenses. I don't see the use of making it for as long as that. It seems greedy to take up half a century of another person's attention. Besides - one never knows - one might come across somebody else one liked better - that uncommonly nice girl I met in Scotland, for instance. No, no, I shall be true to my Minnie - quite true. I am quite determined that nothing shall shake my constancy to Minnie.

Enter PARKER.

What a devilish pretty girl!

Parker. (*aside*). He's a mean young man, but he ought to be good for half-a-crown to-day.

Cheviot. Come here, my dear; a - How do I look?

Parker. Very nice indeed, sir.

Cheviot. What, really?

Parker. Really.

Cheviot. What, tempting, eh?

Parker. Very tempting indeed.

Cheviot. Hah! The married state is an enviable state, Parker.

Parker. *Is it, sir? I hope it may be. It depends.*

Cheviot. What do you mean by "it depends?" You're a member of the Church of England, I trust? Then don't you know that in saying "it depends" you are flying in the face of the marriage service? Don't go and throw cold water on the married state, Parker. I know what you're going to say - it's expensive. So it is, at first, very expensive, but with economy you soon retrench that. By a beautiful provision of Nature, what's enough for one is enough for two. This phenomenon points directly to the married state as our natural state.

Parker. Oh, for that matter, sir, a tigress would get on with you. You're so liberal, so gentle, so - there's only one word for it - dove-like.

Cheviot. What, you've remarked that, eh? Ha! ha! But dove-like as I am, Parker, in some respects, yet (*getting his arm round her*) in other respects - (*aside*), deuced pretty girl! - in other respects I am a man, Parker, of a strangely impetuous and headstrong nature. I don't beat about the bush; I come quickly to the point. Shall I tell you a secret? There's something about you, I don't know what it is, that - in other words, you are the tree upon which - no, no, damn it, Cheviot - not to-day, not to-day.

Parker. What a way you have with you, sir!

Cheviot. What, you've noticed that, have you? Ha! ha! yes, I have a way, no doubt; it's been remarked before. Whenever I see a pretty girl (and you are a very pretty girl) I can't help putting my arm like that (*putting it round her waist.*) Now, pleasant as this sort of thing is, and you find it pleasant, don't you? (*PARKER nods.*) Yes, you find it pleasant - pleasant as it is, it is decidedly wrong.

Parker. It is decidedly wrong in a married man.

Cheviot. It is decidedly wrong in a married man. In a married man it's abominable, and I shall be a married man in half an hour. So, Parker, it will become necessary to conquer this tendency, to struggle with it, and subdue it - in half an hour (*getting more affectionate*). Not that there's any real harm in putting your arm round a girl's waist. Highly respectable people do it, when they waltz.

Parker. Yes, sir, but then a band's playing.

Cheviot. True, and when a band's playing it don't matter, but when a band is *not* playing, why it's dangerous, you see. You begin with this, and you go on from one thing to another, getting more and more affectionate, until you reach *this* stage (*kissing her*). Not that there's any real harm in kissing, either; for you see fathers and mothers, who ought to set a good example, kissing their children every day.

Parker. Lor, sir, kissing's nothing; everybody does that.

Cheviot. That is your experience, is it? It tallies with my own. Take it that I am your father, you are my daughter - or take it even that I am merely your husband, and you my wife, and it would be expected of me. (*Kissing her.*)

Parker. But I'm not your wife, sir.

Cheviot. No, not yet, that's very true, and, of course, makes a difference. That's why I say I must subdue this tendency; I must struggle with it; I must conquer it - in half-an-hour.

Minnie. (*without*). Parker, where's Mr. Cheviot?

Cheviot. There is your mistress, my dear - she's coming. Will you excuse me? (*Releasing her.*) Thank you. Good day, Parker.

Parker. (*disgusted*). Not so much as a shilling; and that man's worth thousands!

Exit PARKER.

Enter MINNIE.

Cheviot. My darling Minnie - my own, own To Come! (*Kissing her.*)

Minnie. Oh, you mustn't crush me, Cheviot, you'll spoil my dress. How do you like it?

Cheviot. It's lovely. It's a beautiful material.

Minnie. Yes; dear papa's been going it.

Cheviot. Oh, but you're indebted to me for that beautiful dress.

Minnie. To you! Oh, thank you - thank you!

Cheviot. Yes. I said to your papa, "Now do for once let the girl have a nice dress; be liberal; buy the very best that money will procure, you'll never miss it." So, thanks to me, he bought you a beauty. Seventeen and six a yard if it's a penny. Dear me! To think that in half-an-hour this magnificent dress will be *my* property!

Minnie. Yes. Dear papa said that as you had offered to give the breakfast at your house, he would give me the best dress that money could procure.

Cheviot. Yes, I *did* offer to provide the breakfast in a reckless moment; that's so like me. It was a rash offer, but I've made it, and I've stuck to it. Oh, then, there's the cake.

Minnie. Oh, tell me all about the cake.

Cheviot. It's a very pretty cake. Very little cake is eaten at a wedding breakfast, so I've ordered what's known in the trade as the three-quarter article.

Minnie. I see; three-quarters cake, and the rest wood.

Cheviot. No; three-quarters wood, the rest cake. Be sure, my dear, you don't cut into the wood, for it has to be returned to the pastrycook to be filled up with cake for

another occasion. *I* thought at first of ordering a seven-eighths article; but one isn't married every day - it's only once a year - I mean it's only now and then. So I said, "Hang the expense; let's do the thing well." And so it's a three-quarters.

Minnie. How good you are to me! We shall be very happy, shall we not? ⁵

Cheviot. I - I hope so - yes. *I hope* so. Playfully happy, like two little kittens.

Minnie. That will be delightful.

Cheviot. Economically happy, like two sensible people.

Minnie. Oh, we must be very economical.

Cheviot. No vulgar display; no pandering to a jaded appetite. A refined and economical elegance; that is what we must aim at. A simple mutton chop, nicely broiled, for you; and *two* simple mutton chops, *very* nicely broiled, for me -

Minnie. And some flowery potatoes -

Cheviot. A loaf of nice household bread -

Minnie. A stick of celery -

Cheviot. And a bit of cheese, and you've a dinner fit for a monarch.

Minnie. Then how shall we spend our evenings?

Cheviot. We'll have pleasant little fireside games. Are you fond of fireside games?

Minnie. Oh, they're great fun.

Cheviot. Then we'll play at tailoring.

Minnie. Tailoring? I don't think I know that game.

Cheviot. It's a very good game. You shall be the clever little jobbing tailor, and I'll be the particular customer who brings his own materials to be made up. You shall take my measure, cut out the cloth (real cloth, you know), stitch it together, and try it on; and then I'll find fault like a real customer, and you shall alter it until it fits, and when it fits beautifully that counts one to you.

Minnie. Delightful!

Cheviot. Then there's another little fireside game which is great fun. We each take a bit of paper and a pencil and try who can jot down the nicest dinner for ninepence, and the next day we have it.

Minnie. Oh, Cheviot, what a paradise you hold open to me!

⁵ The following scene laying out the economic lifestyle to be followed by Cheviot and Minnie is the forerunner of a similar scene between Grand Duke Rudolph and the Baroness von Krakenfeldt in Act One of THE GRAND DUKE 19 years later in 1896.

Cheviot. Yes. How's papa?

Minnie. He's very well and very happy. He's going to increase his establishment on the strength of the £1000 a year, and keep a manservant.

Cheviot. I know. I've been looking after some servants for him; they'll be here in the course of the morning. A cook, a housemaid, and a footman. I found them through an advertisement. They're country people, and will come very cheap.

Minnie. How kind and thoughtful you are! Oh, Cheviot, I'm a very lucky girl!

Exit MINNIE.

Cheviot. Yes, I think so too, if I can only repress my tendency to think of that tall girl I met in Scotland! Cheviot, my boy, you must make an effort; you are going to be married, and the tall girl is nothing to you!

Enter PARKER.

Parker. Please, sir, here's a gentleman to see you.

Cheviot. Oh, my solicitor, no doubt. Show him up.

Parker. And please, some persons have called to see you about an advertisement.

Cheviot. Oh, Symperson's servants. To be sure. Show up the gentleman, and tell the others to wait.

Exit PARKER.

Enter BELVAWNEY. He looks very miserable.

Cheviot. Belvawney! This is unexpected. (*Much confused.*)

Belv. Yes, Cheviot. At last we meet. Don't, oh don't, frown upon a heartbroken wretch.

Cheviot. Belvawney, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I will not disguise from you that, not having seen you for three months, I was in hopes that I had got rid of you for ever.

Belv. Oh, Cheviot, don't say that, I am so unhappy. And you have it in your power to make me comfortable. Do this, and I will bless you with my latest breath!

Cheviot. It is a tempting offer; I am not proof against it. We all have our price, and that is mine. Proceed.

Belv. Miss Treherne - Belinda - whom I love so dearly, won't have anything to say to me.

Cheviot. It does her credit. She's a very superior girl.

Belv. It's all through you, Cheviot. She declares that the mutual declaration you made to protect her from McGillicuddy amounts to a Scotch marriage.

Cheviot. What!!!

Belv. She declares she is your wife. She professes to love me as fondly as ever; but a stern sense of duty to you forbids her to hold any communication with me.

Cheviot. Oh, but this is absurd, you know!

Belv. Of course it is; but what's to be done? You left with Symperson immediately after making the declaration. As soon as she found you were gone she implored me to tell her your name and address. Of course I refused, and she quitted me, telling me that she would devote her life to finding you out.

Cheviot. But this is simple madness. I can't have it! This day, too, of all others! If she'd claimed me last week, or even yesterday, I wouldn't have minded, for she's a devilish fine woman; but if she were to turn up now - ! (*Aloud.*) Belvawney, my dear friend, tell me what to do - I'll do anything.

Belv. It seems that there's some doubt whether this cottage, which is just on the border, is in England or Scotland. If it is in England, she has no case; if it is in Scotland, I'm afraid she has. I've written to the owner of the property to ascertain, and if, in the mean time, she claims you, you must absolutely decline to recognize this marriage for a moment.

Cheviot. Not for one moment!

Belv. It was a mere artifice to enable her to escape from McGillicuddy.

Cheviot. Nothing more!

Belv. It's monstrous - perfectly monstrous - that that should constitute a marriage. It's disgraceful - it's abominable. Damme, Cheviot, it's immoral.

Cheviot. So it is - it's immoral. That settles it in *my* mind. It's immoral.

Belv. You're quite sure you'll be resolute, Cheviot?

Cheviot. Resolute? I should think so! Why, hang it all, man, I'm going to be married in twenty minutes to Minnie Symperson!

Belv. What!

Cheviot. (*confused at having let this out*). Didn't I tell you? I believe you're right; I did *not* tell you. It escaped me. Oh, yes, this is my wedding-day.

Belv. Cheviot, you're joking - you don't mean this! Why, I shall lose £1000 a year by it, every penny I have in the world! Oh, it can't be - it's nonsense!

Cheviot. What do you mean by nonsense? The married state is an honourable estate, I believe? A man is not looked upon as utterly lost to all sense of decency because he's got married, I'm given to understand! People have been married before this, and have not been irretrievably tabooed in consequence, unless I'm grossly

misinformed? Then what the dickens do you mean by saying "nonsense" when I tell you that I'm going to be married?

Belv. Cheviot, be careful how you take this step. Beware how you involve an innocent and helpless girl in social destruction.

Cheviot. What do you mean, sir?

Belv. You cannot marry; you are a married man.

Cheviot. Come, come, Belvawney, this is trifling.

Belv. You are married to Miss Treherne. I was present, and can depose to the fact.

Cheviot. Oh, you're not serious.

Belv. Never more serious in my life.

Cheviot. But, as you very properly said just now, it was a mere artifice - we didn't mean anything. It would be monstrous to regard that as a marriage. Damme, Belvawney, it would be immoral!

Belv. I may deplore the state of the law, but I cannot stand tamely by and see it deliberately violated before my eyes.

Cheviot. (*wildly*). But, Belvawney, my dear friend, reflect; everything is prepared for my marriage, at a great expense. I love Minnie deeply, devotedly. She is the actual tree upon which the fruit of my heart is growing. There's no mistake about it. She is my own To Come. I love her madly - rapturously. (*Going on his knees to BELVAWNEY.*) I have prepared a wedding breakfast at a great expense to do her honour. I have ordered four flys for the wedding party. I have taken two second-class Cook's tourists' tickets for Ilfracombe, Devon, Exeter, Cornwall, Westward Ho! and Bideford Bay. ⁶ The whole thing has cost me some twenty or twenty-five pounds, and all this will be wasted - utterly wasted - if you interfere. Oh, Belvawney, dear Belvawney, let the recollection of our long and dear friendship operate to prevent your shipwrecking my future life. (*Sobbing hysterically.*)

Belv. I have a duty to do. I must do it.

Cheviot. But reflect, dear Belvawney; if I am married to Miss Treherne, you lose your income as much as if I married Minnie Symperson.

Belv. No doubt, if you could prove your marriage to Miss Treherne. But you can't - - (*With melodramatic intensity.*)

Cheviot. Those eyes!

Belv. You don't know where she is - - (*With fiendish exultation.*)

⁶ This device of a list of place names has an expanded parallel in Gilbert's later comedy FOGGERTY'S FAIRY in which Foggerty and Malvina de Vere list various location they have passed through in London during a chase. Ilfracombe, Westward Ho! and Bideford are all towns in the county of Devon in the South-West of England.

Cheviot. Oh, those eyes!

Belv. The cottage has been pulled down, and the cottagers have emigrated to Patagonia -
-

Cheviot. Oh, those eyes!

Belv. I'm the only witness left. *I can prove your marriage if I like; but you can't. Ha! ha! ha! ha! (with Satanic laugh.)* It's a most painful and unfortunate situation for you; and, believe me, dear Cheviot, you have my deepest and most respectful sympathy.

Exit BELVAWNEY.

Cheviot. This is appalling; simply appalling! The cup of happiness dashed from my lips just as I was about to drink a lifelong draught. The ladder kicked from under my feet just as I was about to pick the fruit of my heart from the tree upon which it has been growing so long. I'm a married man! More than that, my honeymoon's past, and I never knew it! Stop a moment, though. The bride can't be found; the cottage is pulled down, and the cottagers have emigrated; what proof is there that such a marriage ever took place? There's only Belvawney, and Belvawney isn't a proof. Corroborated by the three cottagers, his word might be worth something; uncorroborated, it is worthless. I'll risk it. He can do nothing; the bride is nowhere; the cottagers are in Patagonia, and - -

At this moment MRS. MACFARLANE, MAGGIE, and ANGUS appear at the back. They stand bobbing and curtsy in rustic fashion to CHEVIOT (whom they do not recognize). He stares aghast at them for a moment, then staggers back to sofa.

Cheviot. The man, the woman, and the girl, by all that's infernal!

Mrs Mac. Gude day, sir. We've just ca'd to see ye about the advertisement. *(Producing paper.)*

Cheviot. I don't know you - I don't know you. Go away.

CHEVIOT buries his head in a newspaper, and pretends to read on sofa.

Maggie. Ah, sir, ye said that we were to ca' on ye this day at eleven o'clock, and sae we've coom a' the way fra Dumfries to see ye.

Cheviot. I tell you I don't know you. Go away. I'm not at all well. I'm very ill, and it's infectious.

Angus. We fear no illness, sir. This is Mistress Macfarlane, the gude auld mither, who'll cook the brose and boil the parrich, and sit wi' ye, and nurse ye through your illness till the sad day ye dee! *(Wiping his eye.)*

CHEVIOT pokes a hole with his finger through newspaper, and reconnoitres unobserved.

Mrs Mac. And this is Meg, my ain lass Meg!

Cheviot. (*aside*). Attractive girl, very. I remember her perfectly.

Mrs Mac. And this is Angus Macalister, who's going to marry her, and who'll be mair than a son to me!

Angus. Oh, mither, mither, dinna say it, for ye bring the tear drop to my ee; an' it's no canny for a strong man to be blithering and souging like a poor weak lassie!
(*Wiping his eye.*)

ANGUS and MRS. MACFARLANE sit. MAGGIE advances to hole in newspaper and peeps through.

Maggie. Oh, mither, mither! (*Staggers back into ANGUS's arms.*)

Mrs Mac. What is it, Meg?

Angus. Meg, my weel lo'ed Meg, my wee wifie that is to be, tell me what's wrang wi' 'ee?

Maggie. Oh, mither, it's him; the noble gentleman I plighted my troth to three weary months ago! The gallant Englishman who gave Angus twa golden pound to give me up!

Angus. It's the coward Sassenach who well nigh broke our Meg's heart!

Mrs Mac. My lass, my lass, dinna greet, maybe he'll marry ye yet.

Cheviot. (*desperately*). Here's another! Does anybody else want to marry me? Don't be shy. You, ma'am (*to MRS. MACFARLANE*) *you're* a fine woman - perhaps *you* would like to try your luck? ⁷

Maggie. Ah, sir! I dinna ken your name, but your bonnie face has lived in my twa een, sleeping and waking, three weary, weary months! Oh, sir, ye should na' ha' deceived a trusting, simple Lowland lassie. 'Twas na' weel done - 'twas na' weel done! (*Weeping on his shoulder; he puts his arm round her waist.*)

Cheviot. (*softening*). My good girl, what do you wish me to do? I remember you now perfectly. I *did* admire you very much - in fact, I do still; you're a very charming girl. Let us talk this over, calmly and quietly. (*MAGGIE moves away.*) No, you needn't go; you can stop there if you like. There, there, my dear! don't fret. (*Aside.*) She *is* a very charming girl. I almost wish I - I really begin to think I - no, no! damn it, Cheviot! not to-day.

Maggie. Oh! mither, he told me he loved me!

Cheviot. So I did. The fact is, when I fell in love with you - don't go my pretty bird - I quite forgot that I was engaged. There, there! I thought at the time that you were the tree upon which the fruit of my heart was growing; but I was mistaken. Don't go; you needn't go on that account. It was another tree -

Maggie. Oh, mither, it was anither tree! (*Weeping on CHEVIOT's shoulder.*)

⁷ Another foretaste of THE GRAND DUKE.

Mrs Mac. Angus, it was anither tree! (*Weeping on ANGUS's shoulder.*)

Angus. Dinna, mither, dinna; I canna bear it! (*Weeps.*)

Cheviot. Yes, it was another tree - you can remain there for the present - in point of fact, it was growing on both trees. I don't know how it is, but it seems to grow on a great many trees - a perfect orchard - and you are one of them, my dear. Come, come, don't fret, you are one of them!

Enter MINNIE and SYMPERSON.

Minnie. Cheviot!

Symp. What is all this?

Cheviot. (*rapidly referring to piece of paper given to him by MRS. MACFARLANE, as if going over a washerwoman's bill.*) "Twenty-four pairs socks, two shirts, thirty-seven collars, one sheet, forty-four nightshirts, twenty-two flannel waistcoats, one white tie." Ridiculous - quite ridiculous - I won't pay it.

Minnie. Cheviot, who is this person who was found hanging on your neck? Say she is somebody - for instance, your sister or your aunt. Oh, Cheviot, say she is your aunt, I implore you! (*The three cottagers curtsy and bow to MINNIE.*)

Symp. Cheviot, say she is your aunt, I command you.

Cheviot. Oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't see you. These ladies are - are my washerwomen. Allow me to introduce them. They have come - they have come for their small account. (*MAGGIE, who has been sobbing through this, throws herself hysterically on to CHEVIOT's bosom.*) There's a discrepancy in the items - twenty-two flannel waistcoats are ridiculous, and, in short, some washerwomen are like this when they're contradicted - they can't help it - it's something in the suds: it undermines their constitution.

Symp. (*sternly*). Cheviot, I should like to believe you, but it seems scarcely credible.

Maggie. Oh, sir, he's na telling ye truly. I'm the puir Lowland lassie that he stole the hairt out of, three months ago, and promised to marry; and I love him sae weel - sae weel, and now he's married to anither!

Cheviot. Nothing of the kind. I -

Symp. You are mistaken, and so is your mith - mother. He is not yet married to anith - nother.

Maggie. Why, sir, it took place before my very ain eyes, before us a', to a beautiful lady, three months since.

Minnie. Cheviot, say that this is not true. Say that the beautiful lady was somebody - for instance, your aunt. Oh, say she was your aunt, I implore you!

Symp. (*sternly*). Cheviot say she was your aunt, I command you!

Cheviot. Minnie, Symperson, don't believe them - it was no marriage. I don't even know the lady's name - I never saw her before - I've never seen her since. It's ridiculous - I couldn't have married her without knowing it - it's out of the question!

Symp. Cheviot, let's know exactly where we are. I don't much care whom you marry, so that you marry someone - that's enough for me. But please be explicit, for this is business, and mustn't be trifled with. Tell me all about it.

Cheviot. (*in despair*). I cannot!

Enter BELVAWNEY.

Belv. I can.

Symp. Belvawney!

Belv. I was present when Cheviot and a certain lady declared themselves to be man and wife. This took place in a cottage on the Border - in the presence of these worthy people.

Symp. That's enough for me. It's a Scotch marriage! Minnie, my child, we must find you someone else. Cheviot's married. Belvawney, I am sorry to say, I deprive you of your income.

Belv. I beg your pardon, not yet.

Symp. Why not?

Belv. In the first place, it's not certain whether the cottage was in England or in Scotland; in the second place, the bride can't be found.

Symp. But she *shall* be found. What is her name?

Belv. That I decline to state.

Symp. But you shall be made to state. I insist upon knowing the young lady's name.

Enter MISS TREHERNE, in a light and cheerful dress.

Belv. (*amazed*). Belinda Treherne!

Miss T. (*rushing to MINNIE*). Minnie, my own old friend!

Cheviot. 'Tis she!

Miss T. (*turns and recognizes CHEVIOT*). My husband!

Cheviot. My wife!

MISS TREHERNE throws herself at CHEVIOT's feet, kissing his hands rapturously. BELVAWNEY staggers back. MINNIE faints in her father's arms. MAGGIE sobs on ANGUS's breast.

ACT III.

SCENE, same as Act II.

BELVAWNEY discovered with MISS TREHERNE and MINNIE. He is singing to them. MISS TREHERNE is leaning romantically on piano. MINNIE is seated on a stool.

Belv. (*sings*) "Says the old Obadiah to the young Obadiah,
I am drier, Obadiah, I am drier."

Chorus. "I am drier."

Belv. "Says the young Obadiah to the old Obadiah,
I'm on fire, Obadiah, I'm on fire."

Chorus. "I'm on fire."

Minnie. Oh, thank you, Mr. Belvawney. How sweetly pretty that is. Where can I get it?

Miss T. How marvellous is the power of melody over the soul that is fretted and harassed by anxiety and doubt. I can understand how valuable must have been the troubadours of old, in the troublous times of anarchy. Your song has soothed me, sir.

Belv. I am indeed glad to think that I have comforted you a little, dear ladies.

Minnie. Dear Mr. Belvawney, I don't know what we should have done without you. What with your sweet songs, your amusing riddles, and your clever conjuring tricks, the weary days of waiting have passed like a delightful dream.

Miss T. It is impossible to be dull in the society of one who can charm the soul with plaintive ballads one moment, and the next roll a rabbit and a guinea-pig into one.

Belv. You make me indeed happy, dear ladies. But my joy will be of brief duration, for Cheviot may return at any moment with the news that the fatal cottage was in Scotland, and then - Oh, Belinda, what is to become of me?

Miss T. How many issues depend on that momentous question? Has Belvawney a thousand a year, or is he ruined? Has your father that convenient addition to his income, or has he not? May Maggie marry Angus, or will her claim on Cheviot be satisfied? Are you to be his cherished bride, or are you destined to a life of solitary maidenhood? Am I Cheviot's honoured wife, or am I but a broken-hearted and desolate spinster? Who can tell! Who can tell!

Crosses to MINNIE.

Belv. (*goes to window in second drawing-room*). Here is a cab with luggage - it is Cheviot! He has returned with the news! Ladies - one word before I go. One of you will be claimed by Cheviot, that is very clear. To that one (whichever it may be) ⁸ I do not address myself - but to the other (whichever it may be), I say, I love you

⁸ This speech foreshadows that given by the Duke of Plaza-Toro to Marco and Giuseppe in Act Two of THE GONDOLIERS (1889).

(whichever you are) with a fervour which I cannot describe in words. If you (whichever you are) will consent to cast your lot with mine, I will devote my life to proving that I love you and you only (whichever it may be) with a single-hearted and devoted passion, which precludes the possibility of my ever entertaining the slightest regard for any other woman in the whole world. I thought I would just mention it. Good morning!

Exit BELVAWNEY.

Miss T. How beautifully he expresses himself. He is indeed a rare and radiant being.

Minnie. (*nervously*). Oh, Belinda, the terrible moment is at hand.

Miss T. Minnie, if dear Cheviot should prove to be my husband, swear to me that that will not prevent your coming to stop with us - with dear Cheviot and me - whenever you can.

Minnie. Indeed I will. And if it should turn out that dear Cheviot is at liberty to marry me, promise me that that will not prevent you looking on our house - on dear Cheviot's and mine - as your home.

Miss T. I swear it. We will be like dear, dear sisters.

Enter CHEVIOT, as from journey, with bag and rug.

Miss T. Cheviot, tell me at once - are you my own - husband?

Minnie. Cheviot, speak - is poor, little, simple Minnie to be your bride?

Cheviot. Minnie, the hope of my heart, my pet fruit tree! Belinda, my Past, my Present, and my To Come! I have sorry news, sorry news.

Miss T. (*aside*). Sorry news! Then I am *not* his wife.

Minnie. (*aside*). Sorry news! Then she *is* his wife.

Cheviot. My dear girls - my very dear girls, my journey has been fruitless - I have no information.

Miss T and Minnie. No information!

Cheviot. None. The McQuibbigaskie has gone abroad!

Both ladies fall weeping.

Miss T. More weary waiting! more weary waiting!

Minnie. Oh, my breaking heart; oh, my poor bruised and breaking heart!

Cheviot. We must be patient, dear Belinda. Minnie, my own, we must be patient. After all, is the situation so very terrible? Each of you has an even chance of becoming my wife, and in the mean time I look upon myself as engaged to both of you. I shall make no distinction. I shall love you both, fondly, and you shall both love me. My

affection shall be divided equally between you, and we will be as happy as three little birds.

Miss T. (*wiping her eyes*). You are very kind and thoughtful, dear Cheviot.

Minnie. I believe, in my simple little way, that you are the very best man in the whole world!

Cheviot. (*deprecatingly*). No, no.

Minnie. Ah, but do let me think so: it makes me so happy to think so!

Cheviot. Does it? Well, well, be it so. Perhaps I am! And now tell me, how has the time passed since I left? Have my darlings been dull?

Miss T. We should have been dull indeed but for the airy Belvawney. The sprightly creature has done his best to make the lagging hours fly. He is an entertaining rattlesnake - I should say, rattletrap.

Cheviot. (*jealous*). Oh, *is* he so? Belvawney has been making the hours fly, has he? I'll make *him* fly, when I catch him!

Minnie. His conjuring tricks are wonderful!

Cheviot. Confound his conjuring tricks!

Minnie. Have you seen him bring a live hen, two hair brushes, and a pound and a half of fresh butter out of his pocket-handkerchief!

Cheviot. No, I have not had that advantage!

Miss T. It is a thrilling sight.

Cheviot. So I should be disposed to imagine! Pretty goings on in my absence! you seem to forget that you two girls are engaged to be married to *me*!

Miss T. Ah, Cheviot! do not judge us harshly. We love you with a reckless fervour that thrills us to the very marrow - don't we, darling? But the hours crept heavily without you, and when, to lighten the gloom in which we were plunged, the kindly creature swallowed a live rabbit and brought it out, smothered in onions, from his left boot, we could not choose but smile. The good soul has promised to teach *me* the trick.

Cheviot. Has he? That's his confounded impudence. Now once for all, I'll have nothing of this kind. One of you will be my wife, and until I know which, I will permit no Belvawneying of any kind whatever, or anything approaching thereto. When that is settled, the other may Belvawney until she is black in the face.

Miss T. And how long have we to wait before we shall know which of us may begin Belvawneying?

Cheviot. I can't say. It may be some time. The McQuibbigaskie has gone to Central Africa. No post can reach him, and he will not return for six years.

Miss T. Six years! Oh, I cannot wait six years! Why in six years I shall be eight-and-twenty!

Minnie. Six years! Why, in six years the Statute of Limitations will come in, and he can renounce us both.

Miss T. True; you are quite right. *(To Cheviot.)* Cheviot, I have loved you madly, desperately, as other woman never loved other man. This poor inexperienced child, who clings to me as the ivy clings to the oak, also loves you as woman never loved before. Even that poor cottage maiden, whose rustic heart you so recklessly enslaved, worships you with a devotion that has no parallel in the annals of the heart. In return for all this unalloyed affection, all we ask of you is that you will recommend us to a respectable solicitor.

Cheviot. But, my dear children, reflect - I can't marry all three. I am most willing to consider myself engaged to all three, and that's as much as the law will allow. You see I do all I can. I'd marry all three of you with pleasure, if I might; but, as our laws stand at present, I'm sorry to say - I'm very sorry to say - it's out of the question.

Exit CHEVIOT.

Miss T. Poor fellow. He has my tenderest sympathy; but we have no alternative but to place ourselves under the protecting aegis of a jury of our countrymen!

Enter SYMPERSON, with two letters.

Symp. Minnie - Miss Treherne - the post has just brought me two letters; one of them bears a Marseilles post-mark, and is, I doubt not, from the McQuibbigaskie! He must have written just before starting for Central Africa!

Minnie. From the McQuibbigaskie? Oh, read, read!

Miss T. Oh, sir! how can you torture us by this delay? Have you no curiosity?

Symp. Well, my dear, very little on this point; you see it don't much matter to me whom Cheviot marries. So that he marries some one, that's enough for me. But, however, *your* anxiety is natural, and I will gratify it. *(Opens letter and reads.)* "Sir, - In reply to your letter, I have to inform you that Evan Cottage is certainly in England. The deeds relating to the property place this beyond all question."

Minnie. In England!

Miss T. *(sinking into a chair)* This blow is indeed a crusher. Against such a blow I cannot stand up! *(Faints.)*

Minnie. *(on her knees.)* My poor Belinda - my darling sister - love - oh forgive me - oh forgive me! Don't look like that! Speak to me, dearest - oh speak to me - speak to me.

Miss T. (*suddenly springing up*). Speak to you? Yes, I'll speak to you! All is *not* yet lost! True, he is not married to me, but why should he not be? I am as young as you! I am as beautiful as you! I have more money than you! I will try - oh how hard will I try!

Minnie. Do, darling; and I wish - oh how I wish you may get him!

Miss T. Minnie, if you were not the dearest little friend I have in the world I could pinch you!

Exit MISS TREHERNE.

Symp. (*who has been reading the other letter*). Dear me - how terrible!

Minnie. What is terrible, dear papa?

Symp. Belvawney writes to tell me the Indestructible Bank stopped payment yesterday, and Cheviot's shares are waste paper.

Minnie. Well, upon my word. There's an end of him!

Symp. An end of him. What do you mean? You are not going to throw him over?

Minnie. Dear papa, I am sorry to disappoint you, but unless your tom-tit is very much mistaken, the Indestructible was not registered under the Joint-Stock Companies Act of Sixty-two,⁹ and in that case the shareholders are jointly and severally liable to the whole extent of their available capital. Poor little Minnie don't pretend to have a business head; but she's not quite such a little donkey as that, dear papa.

Symp. You decline to marry him? Do I hear rightly?

Minnie. I don't know, papa, whether your hearing is as good as it was, but from your excited manner, I should say you heard me perfectly.

Exit MINNIE.

Symp. This is a pretty business! Done out of a thousand a year; and by my own daughter! What a terrible thing is this incessant craving after money! Upon my word, some people seem to think that they're sent into the world for no other purpose but to acquire wealth; and, by Jove, they'll sacrifice their nearest and dearest relations to get it. It's most humiliating - most humiliating!

Enter CHEVIOT, in low spirits.

Cheviot. (*throwing himself into a chair, sobs aloud*). Oh Uncle Symperson, have you heard the news?

Symp. (*angrily*). Yes, I *have* heard the news; and a pretty man of business *you* are to invest all your property in an unregistered company!

⁹ A foretaste here of UTOPIA, (LIMITED) 1893

Cheviot. Uncle, don't *you* turn against me! Belinda is not my wife! I'm a ruined man; and my darlings - my three darlings, whom I love with a fidelity, which, in these easy-going days, is simply Quixotic - will have nothing to say to me. Minnie, your daughter, declines to accompany me to the altar. Belinda, I feel sure will revert to Belvawney, and Maggie is at this present moment hanging round that Scotch idiot's neck, although she knows that in doing so she simply tortures me. Symperson, I never loved three girls as I loved those three - never! never! and now they'll all three slip through my fingers - I'm sure they will!

Symp. Pooh, pooh, sir. Do you think nobody loses but you? Why, I'm done out of a thousand a year by it.

Cheviot. (*moodily*). For that matter, Symperson, I've a very vivid idea that you won't have to wait long for the money.

Symp. What d'you mean? Oh - of course - I understand.

Cheviot. Eh?

Symp. Mrs. Macfarlane! I have thought of her myself. A very fine woman for her years; a majestic ruin, beautiful in decay. My dear boy, my very dear boy, I congratulate you.

Cheviot. Don't be absurd. I'm not going to marry anybody.

Symp. Eh? Why, then how - ? I don't think I quite follow you.

Cheviot. There is another contingency on which you come into the money. My death.

Symp. To be sure! I never thought of that! And, as you say, a man can die but once.

Cheviot. I beg your pardon. I didn't say anything of the kind - you said it; but it's true, for all that.

Symp. I'm very sorry; but, of course, if you have made up your mind to it - -

Cheviot. Why, when a man's lost everything, what has he to live for?

Symp. True, true. Nothing whatever. Still - -

Cheviot. His money gone, his credit gone, the three girls he's engaged to gone.

Symp. I cannot deny it. It is a hopeless situation. Hopeless, quite hopeless.

Cheviot. His happiness wrecked, his hopes blighted; the three trees upon which the fruit of his heart was growing - all cut down. What is left but suicide?

Symp. True, true! You're quite right. Farewell. (*Going.*)

Cheviot. Symperson, you seem to think I *want* to kill myself. I don't want to do anything of the kind. I'd much rather live - upon my soul I would - if I could think of any reason for living. Symperson, can't you think of *something* to check the heroic

impulse which is at this moment urging me to a tremendous act of self-destruction?

Symp. Something! Of course I can! Say that you throw yourself into the Serpentine - which is handy. Well, it's an easy way of going out of the world, I'm told - rather pleasant than otherwise, I believe - quite an agreeable sensation, I'm given to understand. But you - you get wet through; and your - your clothes are absolutely ruined!

Cheviot. (*mournfully*). For that matter, I could take off my clothes before I went in.

Symp. True, so you could. I never thought of that. You could take them off before you go in - there's no reason why you shouldn't, if you do it in the dark - and *that* objection falls to the ground. Cheviot, my lion-hearted boy, it's impossible to resist your arguments, they are absolutely convincing. (*Shakes his hand.*)

Exit.

Cheviot. Good fellow, Symperson - I like a man who's open to conviction! But it's no use - all my attractions are gone - and I can *not* live unless I feel I'm fascinating. Still, there's one chance left - Belinda! I haven't tried her. Perhaps, after all, she loved me for myself alone! It isn't likely - but it's barely possible.

Enter BELVAWNEY, who has overheard these words.

Belv. Out of the question; you are too late! I represented to her that you are never likely to induce any one to marry you now that you are penniless. She felt that my income was secure, and she gave me her hand and her heart.

Cheviot. Then all is lost; my last chance is gone, and the irrevocable die is cast! Be happy with her, Belvawney; be happy with her!

Belv. Happy! You shall dine with us after our honeymoon and judge for yourself.

Cheviot. No, I shall not do that; long before you return I shall be beyond the reach of dinners.

Belv. I understand - you are going abroad. Well, I don't think you could do better than try another country.

Cheviot. (*tragically*). Belvawney, I'm going to try another world! (*Drawing a pistol from his pocket.*)

Belv. (*alarmed*). What do you mean?

Cheviot. In two minutes I die!

Belv. You're joking, of course?

Cheviot. Do I look like a man who jokes? Is my frame of mind one in which a man indulges in trivialities?

Belv. (*in great terror*). But my dear Cheviot, reflect - -

Cheviot. Why should it concern you? You will be happy with Belinda. You will not be well off, but Symperson will, and I dare say he will give you a meal now and then. It will not be a nice meal, but still it will be a meal.

Belv. Cheviot, you mustn't do this; pray reflect; there are interests of magnitude depending on your existence.

Cheviot. My mind is made up. (*Cocking the pistol.*)

Belv. (*wildly*). But I shall be ruined!

Cheviot. There is Belinda's fortune.

Belv. She won't have me if I'm ruined! Dear Cheviot, don't do it - it's culpable - it's wrong!

Cheviot. Life is valueless to me without Belinda. (*Pointing the pistol to his head.*)

Belv. (*desperately*). You shall have Belinda; she is much - very much to me, but she is not everything. Your life is very dear to me; and when I think of our old friendship - -! Cheviot, you shall have anything you like, if you'll only consent to live!

Cheviot. If I thought you were in earnest; but no - no. (*Putting pistol to head.*)

Belv. In earnest? of course I'm in earnest! Why what's the use of Belinda to me if I'm ruined? Why she wouldn't look at me.

Cheviot. But perhaps if I'm ruined, she wouldn't look at *me*.

Belv. Cheviot, I'll confess all, if you'll only live. You - you are *not* ruined!

Cheviot. Not ruined?

Belv. Not ruined. I - I invented the statement.

Cheviot. (*in great delight*). You invented the statement? My dear friend! My very dear friend! I'm very much obliged to you! Oh, thank you, thank you a thousand times! Oh, Belvawney, you have made me very, very happy! (*Sobbing on his shoulder, then suddenly springing up.*) But what the devil did you mean by circulating such a report about me? How dare you do it, sir? Answer me that, sir.

Belv. I did it to gain Belinda's love. I knew that the unselfish creature loved you for your wealth alone.

Cheviot. It was a liberty, sir; it was a liberty. To put it mildly, it was a liberty.

Belv. It was. You're quite right - that's the word for it - it was a liberty. But I'll go and undeceive her at once.

Exit BELVAWNEY.

Cheviot. Well, as I've recovered my fortune, and with it my tree, I'm about the happiest fellow in the world. My money, my mistress, and my mistress's money, all my own. I believe I could go mad with joy!

Enter SYMPERSON, in deep black; he walks pensively, with a white handkerchief to his mouth.

Cheviot. What's the matter?

Symp. Hallo! You're still alive?

Cheviot. Alive? Yes; why (*noticing his dress*), is anything wrong?

Symp. No, no, my dear young friend, these clothes are symbolical; they represent my state of mind. After your terrible threat, which I cannot doubt you intend to put at once into execution - -

Cheviot. My dear uncle, this is very touching; this unmans me. But, cheer up, dear old friend, I have good news for you.

Symp. (*alarmed*). Good news? What do you mean?

Cheviot. I am about to remove the weight of sorrow which hangs so heavily at your heart. Resume your fancy check trousers - I have consented to live.

Symp. Consented to live? Why, sir, this is confounded trifling. I don't understand this line of conduct at all; you threaten to commit suicide; your friends are dreadfully shocked at first, but eventually their minds become reconciled to the prospect of losing you, they become resigned, even cheerful; and when they have brought themselves to this Christian state of mind, you coolly inform them that you have changed your mind and mean to live. It's not business, sir - it's not business.

Cheviot. But, my dear uncle, I've nothing to commit suicide for; I'm a rich man, and Belinda will, no doubt, accept me with joy and gratitude.

Symp. Belinda will do nothing of the kind. She has just left the house with Belvawney, in a cab, and under the most affectionate circumstances.

Cheviot. (*alarmed*). Left with Belvawney? Where have they gone?

Symp. I don't know. Very likely to get married.

Cheviot. Married?

Symp. Yes, before the registrar.

Cheviot. I've been sold! I see that now! Belvawney has done me! But I'm not the kind of man who stands such treatment quietly. Belvawney has found his match. Symper-son, they may get married, but, they shall not be happy; I'll be revenged on them both before they're twenty-four hours older. She marries him because she thinks his income is secure. I'll show her she's wrong; I won't blow out my brains; I'll do worse.

Symp. What?

Cheviot. I'll marry.

Symp. Marry?

Cheviot. Anybody. I don't care who it is.

Symp. Will Minnie do?

Cheviot. Minnie will do; send her here.

Symp. In one moment, my dear boy - in one moment!

Exit SYMPERSON, hurriedly.

Cheviot. Belinda alone in a cab with Belvawney! It's maddening to think of it! He's got his arm round her waist at this moment, if I know anything of human nature! I can't stand it - I cannot and I will not stand it! I'll write at once to the registrar and tell him she's married (*sits at writing table and prepares to write*). Oh, why am I constant by disposition? Why is it that when I love a girl I can think of no other girl but that girl, whereas, when a girl loves me she seems to entertain the same degree of affection for mankind at large? I'll never be constant again; henceforth I fascinate but to deceive!

Enter MINNIE.

Minnie. Mr. Cheviot Hill, papa tells me that you wish to speak to me.

Cheviot. (*hurriedly - writing at table*). I do. Miss Symperson, I have no time to beat about the bush; I must come to the point at once. You rejected me a short time since - I will not pretend that I am pleased with you for rejecting me - on the contrary, I think it was in the worst taste. However, let bygones be bygones. Unforeseen circumstances render it necessary that I should marry at once, and you'll do. An early answer will be esteemed, as this is business. (*Resumes his writing.*)

Minnie. Mr. Hill, dear papa assures me that the report about the loss of your money is incorrect. I hope this may be the case, but I cannot forget that the information comes from dear papa. Now dear papa is the best and dearest papa in the whole world, but he has a lively imagination, and when he wants to accomplish his purpose, he does not hesitate to invent - I am not quite sure of the word, but I think it is "bouncers."

Cheviot. (*writing*). You are quite right, the word is bouncers. Bouncers or bangers - either will do.

Minnie. Then forgive my little silly fancies, Mr. Hill; but, before I listen to your suggestion, I must have the very clearest proof that your position is, in every way, fully assured.

Cheviot. Mercenary little donkey! I will not condescend to proof. I renounce her altogether. (*Rings bell.*)

Enter MAGGIE with ANGUS and MRS. MACFARLANE. ANGUS has his arm round her waist.

Cheviot. (*suddenly seeing her*). Maggie, come here. Angus, do take your arm from round that girl's waist. Stand back, and don't you listen. Maggie, three months ago I told you that I loved you passionately; to-day I tell you that I love you as passionately as ever; I may add that I am still a rich man. Can you oblige me with a postage-stamp? (*MAGGIE gives him a stamp from her pocket - he sticks it on to his letter.*) What do you say? I must trouble you for an immediate answer, as this is not pleasure - it's business.

Maggie. Oh, sir, ye're ower late. Oh, Maister Cheviot, if I'd only ken'd it before! Oh, sir, I love ye right weel; the bluid o' my hairt is nae sae dear to me as thou. (*Sobbing on his shoulder.*) Oh, Cheviot, my ain auld love! my ain auld love!

Angus. (*aside*). Puir lassie, it just dra's the water from my ee to hear her. Oh, mither, mither! my hairt is just breaking. (*Sobs on MRS. MACFARLANE'S shoulder.*)

Cheviot. But why is it too late? You say that you love me. I offer to marry you. My station in life is at least equal to your own. What is to prevent our union?

Maggie. (*wiping her eyes*). Oh, sir, ye're unco guid to puir little Maggie, but ye're too late; for she's placed the matter in her solicitor's hands, and he tells her that an action for breach will just bring damages to the tune of a thousand pound. There's a laddie waiting outside noo, to serve the bonnie writ on ye! (*Turns affectionately to ANGUS.*)

Cheviot. (*falling sobbing on to sofa*). No one will marry me. There is a curse upon me - a curse upon me. No one will marry me - no, not one!

Mrs Mac. Dinna say that, sir. There's mony a woman - nae young, soft, foolish lassie, neither; but grown women o' sober age, who'd be mair a mither than a wife to ye; and that's what ye want, puir laddie, for ye're no equal to takin' care o' yersel'.

Cheviot. Mrs. Macfarlane, you are right. I am a man of quick impulse. I see, I feel, I speak. I - you are the tree upon which - that is to say - no, no, d - n it, I can't; I can't! One must draw the line somewhere. (*Turning from her with disgust.*)

Mrs Mac. But you needn't draw the line at me. ¹⁰

Enter MISS TREHERNE and BELVAWNEY. They are followed by SYMPERSON and MINNIE.

Cheviot. Belinda! Can I believe my eyes? You have returned to me, you have not gone off with Belvawney after all? Thank heaven, thank heaven!

Miss T. I thought that, as I came in, I heard you say something about a tree.

¹⁰ This line is present only in the published French's Acting Edition.

Cheviot. You are right. As you entered I was remarking that I am a man of quick impulse. I see, I feel, I speak. I have two thousand a year, and I love you passionately. I lay my hand, my heart, and my income, all together, in one lot, at your feet!

Miss T. Cheviot, I love you with an irresistible fervour, that seems to parch my very existence. I love you as I never loved man before, and as I can never hope to love man again. But, in the belief that you were ruined, I went with my own adored Belvawney before the registrar, and that registrar has just made us one! (*Turns affectionately to BELVAWNEY.*)

Belv. (*embraces MISS TREHERNE*). Bless him for it - bless him for it!

Cheviot. (*deadly calm*). One word. I have not yet seen the letter that blights my earthly hopes. For form's sake, I trust I may be permitted to cast my eye over that document? As a matter of business - that's all.

Belv. Certainly. Here it is. You will find the situation of the cottage described in unmistakable terms. (*Hands the letter to CHEVIOT.*)

Cheviot. (*reads*). "In reply to your letter I have to inform you that Evan Cottage is certainly in England. The deeds relating to the property place this beyond all question." Thank you; I am satisfied. (*Takes out pistol.*)

Belv. Now, sir, perhaps you will kindly release that young lady. She is my wife! (*CHEVIOT's arm has crept mechanically round MISS TREHERNE's waist.*)

Miss T. Oh, Cheviot! kindly release me - I am his wife!

Cheviot. Crushed! Crushed! Crushed! ¹¹

Symp. (*looking over his shoulder at letter, reads*). "Turn over."

Cheviot. (*despairingly*). Why should I? What good would it do? Oh! I see. I beg your pardon! (*Turns over the page.*) Halloa! (*Rises.*)

All. What?

Cheviot. (*reads*). "P.S. - I may add that the border line runs through the property. The cottage is undoubtedly in England, though the garden is in Scotland."

Miss T. And we were married in the garden!

Cheviot. Belinda, we were married in the garden!

MISS TREHERNE leaves BELVAWNEY, and turns affectionately to CHEVIOT, who embraces her.

Belv. Belinda, stop a bit! don't leave me like this!

¹¹ "Crushed, crushed, crushed!" first used by Gilbert for Cousin Hebe in discarded dialogue from Act Two of HMS PINAFORE 1878, is more readily associated with Lady Jane in PATIENCE 1881.

Miss T. (*crosses to BELVAWNEY*). Belvawney, I love you with an intensity of devotion that I firmly believe will last while I live. But dear Cheviot is my husband now; he has a claim upon me which it would be impossible - nay, criminal - to resist. Farewell, Belvawney; Minnie may yet be yours! (*BELVAWNEY turns sobbing to MINNIE, who comforts him; MISS TREHERNE crosses back to CHEVIOT.*) Cheviot - my husband - my own old love - if the devotion of a lifetime can atone for the misery of the last few days, it is yours, with every wifely sentiment of pride, gratitude, admiration, and love.

Cheviot. (*embracing her*). My own! my own! Tender blossom of my budding hopes! Star of my life! Essence of happiness! Tree upon which the fruit of my heart is growing! My Past, my Present, my To Come!

PICTURE. - CHEVIOT embracing MISS TREHERNE. BELVAWNEY is being comforted by MINNIE. ANGUS is solacing MAGGIE, and MRS. MACFARLANE is reposing on MR. SYMPERSON's bosom.)