THE MINOR DRAMAS

W. D. HOWELLS

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WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

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THE PARLOR-CAR.

Scene: A Parlor-Car on the New York Central Railroad. It is late afternoon in the early autumn, with a cloudy sunset threatening rain. The car is unoccupied save by a gentleman, who sits fronting one of the windows, with his feet in another chair; a newspaper lies across his lap; his hat is drawn down over his eyes, and he is apparently asleep. The rear door of the car opens, and the conductor enters with a young lady, heavily veiled, the porter coming after with her wraps and travelling-bags. The lady's air is of mingled anxiety and desperation, with a certain fierceness of movement. She casts a careless glance over the empty chairs.

Conductor: "Here's your ticket, madam. You can have any of the places you like here, or,"—glancing at the unconscious gentleman, and then at the young lady,—"if you prefer, you can go and take that seat in the forward car."

Miss Lucy Galbraith: "Oh, I can't ride backwards. I'll stay here, please. Thank you." The porter places her things in a chair by a window, across the car from the sleeping gentleman, and she throws herself wearily into the next seat, wheels round in it, and lifting her veil gazes absently out at the landscape. Her face, which is very pretty, with a low forehead shadowed by thick blond hair, shows the traces of tears. She makes search in her pocket for her handkerchief, which she presses to her eyes. The conductor, lingering a moment, goes out.

Porter: "I'll be right here, at de end of de cah, if you should happen to want anything, miss,"—making a feint of

arranging the shawls and satchels. “Should you like some dese things hung up? Well, dey’ll be jus’ as well in de chair. We’s pretty late dis afternoon; more’n four hours behin’ time. Ought to been into Albany ‘fore dis. Freight train off de track jus’ dis side o’ Rochester, an’ had to wait. Was you going to stop at Schenectady, miss?”

Miss Galbraith, absently: “At Schenectady?” After a pause, “Yes.”

Porter: “Well, that’s de next station, and den de cahs don’t stop ag’in till dey git to Albany. Anything else I can do for you now, miss?”

Miss Galbraith: “No, no, thank you, nothing.” The Porter hesitates, takes off his cap, and scratches his head with a murmur of embarrassment. Miss Galbraith looks up at him inquiringly and then suddenly takes out her porte-monnaie, and fees him.

Porter: “Thank you, miss, thank you. If you want anything at all, miss, I’m right dere at de end of de cah.” He goes out by the narrow passage-way beside the smaller enclosed parlor. Miss Galbraith looks askance at the sleeping gentleman, and then, rising, goes to the large mirror, to pin her veil, which has become loosened from her hat. She gives a little start at sight of the gentleman in the mirror, but arranges her head-gear, and returning to her place looks out of the window again. After a little while she moves about uneasily in her chair, then leans forward, and tries to raise her window; she lifts it partly up, when the catch slips from her fingers, and the window falls shut again with a crash.

Miss Galbraith: “Oh, dear, how provoking! I suppose I must call the porter.” She rises from her seat, but on attempting to move away she finds that the skirt of her polonaise has been caught in the falling window. She pulls at it, and then tries to lift the window again, but the cloth has wedged it in, and she cannot stir it. “Well, I certainly think this is beyond endurance! Porter! Ah,—Porter! Oh,

he’ll never hear me in the racket that these wheels are making! I wish they’d stop,—I”—The gentleman stirs in his chair, lifts his head, listens, takes his feet down from the other seat, rises abruptly, and comes to Miss Galbraith’s side.

Mr. Allen Richards: “Will you allow me to open the window for you?” Starting back, “Miss Galbraith!”

Miss Galbraith: “Al— Mr. Richards!” There is a silence for some moments, in which they remain looking at each other; then,—

Mr. Richards: “Lucy”—

Miss Galbraith: “I forbid you to address me in that way, Mr. Richards.”

Mr. Richards: “Why, you were just going to call me Allen!”

Miss Galbraith: “That was an accident, you know very well,—an impulse”—

Mr. Richards: “Well, so is this.”

Miss Galbraith: “Of which you ought to be ashamed to take advantage. I wonder at your presumption in speaking to me at all. It’s quite idle, I can assure you. Everything is at an end between us. It seems that I bore with you too long; but I’m thankful that I had the spirit to not at last, and to act in time. And now that chance has thrown us together, I trust that you will not force your conversation upon me. No gentleman would, and I have always given you credit for thinking yourself a gentleman. I request that you will not speak to me.”

Mr. Richards: “You’ve spoken ten words to me for every one of mine to you. But I won’t annoy you. I can’t believe it, Lucy; I can not believe it. It seems like some rascally dream, and if I had had any sleep since it happened, I should think I—”

Miss Galbraith: “Oh! You were sleeping soundly enough when I got into the car!”

Mr. Richards: “I own it; I was perfectly used up, and I had dropped off.”

Miss Galbraith, scornfully: “Then perhaps you have dreamed it.”

Mr. Richards: “I’ll think so till you tell me again that our engagement is broken; that the faithful love of years is to go for nothing; that you dismiss me with cruel insult, without one word of explanation, without a word of intelligible accusation, even. It’s too much! I’ve been thinking it all over and over, and I can’t make head or tail of it. I meant to see you again as soon as we got to town, and implore you to hear me. Come, it’s a mighty serious matter, Lucy. I’m not a man to put on heroics and that; but I believe it’ll play the very deuce with me, Lucy,—that is to say, Miss Galbraith,—I do indeed. It’ll give me a low opinion of woman.”

Miss Galbraith, averting her face: “Oh, a very high opinion of woman you have had!”

Mr. Richards, with sentiment: “Well, there was one woman whom I thought a perfect angel.”

Miss Galbraith: “Indeed! May I ask her name?”

Mr. Richards, with a forlorn smile. “I shall be obliged to describe her somewhat formally as—Miss Galbraith.”

Miss Galbraith: “Mr. Richards!”

Mr. Richards: “Why, you’ve just forbidden me to say Lucy! You must tell me, dearest, what I have done to offend you. The worst criminals are not condemned unheard, and I’ve always thought you were merciful if not just. And now I only ask you to be just.”

Miss Galbraith, looking out of the window: “You know very well what you’ve done. You can’t expect me to humiliate myself by putting your offence into words.”

Mr. Richards: “Upon my soul, I don’t know what you mean! I don’t know what I’ve done. When you came at me, last night, with my ring and presents and other little traps, you might have knocked me down with the lightest of the

lot. I was perfectly dazed; I couldn't say anything before you were off, and all I could do was to hope that you'd be more like yourself in the morning. And in the morning, when I came round to Mrs. Philips's, I found you were gone, and I came after you by the next train."

Miss Galbraith: "Mr. Richards, your personal history for the last twenty-four hours is a matter of perfect indifference to me, as it shall be for the next twenty-four hundred years. I see that you are resolved to annoy me, and since you will not leave the car, I must do so." She rises haughtily from her seat, but the imprisoned skirt of her polonaise twitches her abruptly back into her chair. She bursts into tears. "Oh, what shall I do?"

Mr. Richards, dryly: "You shall do whatever you like, Miss Galbraith, when I've set you free; for I see your dress is caught in the window. When it's once out, I'll shut the window, and you can call the porter to raise it." He leans forward over her chair, and while she shrinks back the length of her tether, he tugs at the window-fastening. "I can't get at it. Would you be so good as to stand up,—all you can?" Miss Galbraith stands up, droopingly, and Mr. Richards makes a movement towards her, and then falls back. "No, that won't do. Please sit down again." He goes round her chair and tries to get at the window from that side. "I can't get any purchase on it. Why don't you cut out that piece?" Miss Galbraith stares at him in dumb amazement. "Well, I don't see what we're to do: I'll go and get the porter." He goes to the end of the car, and returns. "I can't find the porter,—he must be in one of the other cars. But"—brightening with the fortunate conception —"I've just thought of something. Will it unbutton?"

Miss Galbraith: "Unbutton?"

Mr. Richards: "Yes; this garment of yours."

Miss Galbraith: "My polonaise?" Inquiringly, "Yes."

Mr. Richards: "Well, then, it's a very simple matter. If you will just take it off I can easily"—

Miss Galbraith, faintly: “I can’t. A polonaise isn’t like an overcoat”—

Mr. Richards, with dismay: “Oh! Well, then”—He remains thinking a moment in hopeless perplexity.

Miss Galbraith, with polite ceremony: “The porter will be back soon. Don’t trouble yourself any further about it, please. I shall do very well.”

Mr. Richards, without heeding her: “If you could kneel on that foot-cushion, and face the window”—

Miss Galbraith, kneeling promptly: “So?”

Mr. Richards: “Yes, and now”—kneeling beside her—“if you’ll allow me to—to get at the window-catch,”—he stretches both arms forward; she shrinks from his right into his left, and then back again,—“and pull while I raise the window”—

Miss Galbraith: “Yes, yes; but do hurry, please. If any one saw us, I don’t know what they would think. It’s perfectly ridiculous!”—pulling. “It’s caught in the corner of the window, between the frame and the sash, and it won’t come! Is my hair troubling you? Is it in your eyes?”

Mr. Richards: “It’s in my eyes, but it isn’t troubling me. Am I inconveniencing you?”

Miss Galbraith: “Oh, not at all.”

Mr. Richards: “Well, now then, pull hard!” He lifts the window with a great effort; the polonaise comes free with a start, and she strikes violently against him. In supporting the shock he cannot forbear catching her for an instant to his heart. She frees herself, and starts indignantly to her feet.

Miss Galbraith: “Oh, what a cowardly—subterfuge!”

Mr. Richards: “Cowardly? You’ve no idea how much courage it took.” Miss Galbraith puts her handkerchief to her face, and sobs. “Oh, don’t cry! Bless my heart,—I’m sorry I did it! But you know how dearly I love you, Lucy, though I do think you’ve been cruelly unjust. I told you I never should love any one else, and I never shall. I couldn’t

help it; upon my soul, I couldn't. Nobody could. Don't let it vex you, my"—He approaches her.

Miss Galbraith: "Please not touch me, sir! You have no longer any right whatever to do so."

Mr. Richards: "You misinterpret a very inoffensive gesture. I have no idea of touching you, but I hope I may be allowed, as a special favor, to—pick up my hat, which you are in the act of stepping on." Miss Galbraith hastily turns, and strikes the hat with her whirling skirts; it rolls to the other side of the parlor, and Mr. Richards, who goes after it, utters an ironical "Thanks!" He brushes it, and puts it on, looking at her where she has again seated herself at the window with her back to him, and continues, "As for any further molestation from me"—

Miss Galbraith: "If you will talk to me"—

Mr. Richards: "Excuse me, I am not talking to you."

Miss Galbraith: "What were you doing?"

Mr. Richards: "I was beginning to think aloud. I—I was soliloquizing. I suppose I may be allowed to soliloquize?"

Miss Galbraith, very coldly: "You can do what you like."

Mr. Richards: "Unfortunately that's just what I can't do. If I could do as I liked, I should ask you a single question."

Miss Galbraith, after a moment: "Well, sir, you may ask your question." She remains as before, with her chin in her hand, looking tearfully out of the window; her face is turned from Mr. Richards, who hesitates a moment before he speaks.

Mr. Richards: "I wish to ask you just this, Miss Galbraith: if you couldn't ride backwards in the other car, why do you ride backwards in this?"

Miss Galbraith, burying her face in her handkerchief, and sobbing: "Oh, oh, oh! This is too bad!"

Mr. Richards: "Oh, come now, Lucy. It breaks my heart to hear you going on so, and all for nothing. Be a little merciful to both of us, and listen to me. I've no doubt I can explain everything if I once understand it, but it's pretty

hard explaining a thing if you don’t understand it yourself. Do turn round. I know it makes you sick to ride in that way, and if you don’t want to face me—there!”—wheeling in his chair so as to turn his back upon her—“you needn’t. Though it’s rather trying to a fellow’s politeness, not to mention his other feelings. Now, what in the name”—

Porter, who at this moment enters with his step-ladder, and begins to light the lamps: “Going pretty slow ag’in, sah.”

Mr. Richards: “Yes; what’s the trouble?”

Porter: “Well, I don’t know exactly, sah. Something de matter with de locomotive. We sha’n’t be into Albany much ‘fore eight o’clock.”

Mr. Richards: “What’s the next station?”

Porter: “Schenectady.”

Mr. Richards: “Is the whole train as empty as this car?”

Porter, laughing: “Well, no, sah. Fact is, dis cah don’t belong on dis train. It’s a Pullman that we hitched on when you got in, and we’s taking it along for one of de Eastern roads. We let you in ‘cause de Drawing-rooms was all full. Same with de lady,”—looking sympathetically at her, as he takes his steps to go out. “Can I do anything for you now, miss?”

Miss Galbraith, plaintively: “No, thank you; nothing whatever.” She has turned while Mr. Richards and The Porter have been speaking, and now faces the back of the former, but her veil is drawn closely. The Porter goes out.

Mr. Richards, wheeling round so as to confront her: “I wish you would speak to me half as kindly as you do to that darky, Lucy.”

Miss Galbraith: “He is a gentleman!”

Mr. Richards: “He is an urbane and well-informed nobleman. At any rate, he’s a man and a brother. But so am I.” Miss Galbraith does not reply, and after a pause Mr. Richards resumes. “Talking of gentlemen, I recollect, once, coming up on the day-boat to Poughkeepsie, there was a

poor devil of a tipsy man kept following a young fellow about, and annoying him to death—trying to fight him, as a tipsy man will, and insisting that the young fellow had insulted him. By and by he lost his balance and went overboard, and the other jumped after him and fished him out." Sensation on the part of Miss Galbraith, who stirs uneasily in her chair, looks out of the window, then looks at Mr. Richards, and drops her head. "There was a young lady on board, who had seen the whole thing—a very charming young lady indeed, with pale blond hair growing very thick over her forehead, and dark eyelashes to the sweetest blue eyes in the world. Well, this young lady's papa was amongst those who came up to say civil things to the young fellow when he got aboard again, and to ask the honor—he said the honor—of his acquaintance. And when he came out of his stateroom in dry clothes, this infatuated old gentleman was waiting for him, and took him and introduced him to his wife and daughter; and the daughter said, with tears in her eyes, and a perfectly intoxicating impulsiveness, that it was the grandest and the most heroic and the noblest thing that she had ever seen, and she should always be a better girl for having seen it. Excuse me, Miss Galbraith, for troubling you with these facts of a personal history, which, as you say, is a matter of perfect indifference to you. The young fellow didn't think at the time he had done anything extraordinary; but I don't suppose he did expect to live to have the same girl tell him he was no gentleman."

Miss Galbraith, wildly: "O Allen, Allen! You know I think you are a gentleman, and I always did!"

Mr. Richards, languidly: "Oh, I merely had your word for it, just now, that you didn't." Tenderly, "Will you hear me, Lucy?"

Miss Galbraith, faintly: "Yes."

Mr. Richards: "Well, what is it I've done? Will you tell me if I guess right?"

Miss Galbraith, with dignity: “I am in no humor for jesting, Allen. And I can assure you that though I consent to hear what you have to say, or ask, nothing will change my determination. All is over between us.”

Mr. Richards: “Yes, I understand that, perfectly. I am now asking merely for general information. I do not expect you to relent, and, in fact, I should consider it rather frivolous if you did. No. What I have always admired in your character, Lucy, is a firm, logical consistency; a clearness of mental vision that leaves no side of a subject unsearched; and an unwavering constancy of purpose. You may say that these traits are characteristic of all women; but they are pre-eminently characteristic of you, Lucy.” Miss Galbraith looks askance at him, to make out whether he is in earnest or not; he continues, with a perfectly serious air. “And I know now that if you’re offended with me, it’s for no trivial cause.” She stirs uncomfortably in her chair. “What I have done I can’t imagine, but it must be something monstrous, since it has made life with me appear so impossible that you are ready to fling away your own happiness—for I know you did love me, Lucy—and destroy mine. I will begin with the worst thing I can think of. Was it because I danced so much with Fanny Watervliet?”

Miss Galbraith, indignantly: “How can you insult me by supposing that I could be jealous of such a perfect little goose as that? No, Allen! Whatever I think of you, I still respect you too much for that.”

Mr. Richards: “I’m glad to hear that there are yet depths to which you think me incapable of descending, and that Miss Watervliet is one of them. I will now take a little higher ground. Perhaps you think I flirted with Mrs. Dawes. I thought, myself, that the thing might begin to have that appearance, but I give you my word of honor that as soon as the idea occurred to me, I dropped her—rather rudely, too. The trouble was, don’t you know, that I felt so perfectly safe with a married friend of yours. I couldn’t be hanging

about you all the time, and I was afraid I might vex you if I went with the other girls; and I didn't know what to do."

Miss Galbraith: "I think you behaved rather silly, giggling so much with her. But"—

Mr. Richards: "I own it, I know it was silly. But"—

Miss Galbraith: "It wasn't that; it wasn't that!"

Mr. Richards: "Was it my forgetting to bring you those things from your mother?"

Miss Galbraith: "No!"

Mr. Richards: "Was it because I hadn't given up smoking yet?"

Miss Galbraith: "You know I never asked you to give up smoking. It was entirely your own proposition."

Mr. Richards: "That's true. That's what made me so easy about it. I knew I could leave it off any time. Well, I will not disturb you any longer, Miss Galbraith." He throws his overcoat across his arm, and takes up his travelling-bag. "I have failed to guess your fatal—conundrum; and I have no longer any excuse for remaining. I am going into the smoking-car. Shall I send the porter to you for anything?"

Miss Galbraith: "No, thanks." She puts up her handkerchief to her face.

Mr. Richards: "Lucy, do you send me away?"

Miss Galbraith, behind her handkerchief: "You were going, yourself."

Mr. Richards, over his shoulder: "Shall I come back?"

Miss Galbraith: "I have no right to drive you from the car."

Mr. Richards, coming back, and sitting down in the chair nearest her: "Lucy, dearest, tell me what's the matter."

Miss Galbraith: "O Allen! your not knowing makes it all the more hopeless and killing. It shows me that we must part; that you would go on, breaking my heart, and grinding me into the dust as long as we lived." She sobs. "It shows me that you never understood me, and you never will. I know you're good and kind and all that, but that only

makes your not understanding me so much the worse. I do it quite as much for your sake as my own, Allen."

Mr. Richards: "I'd much rather you wouldn't put yourself out on my account."

Miss Galbraith, without regarding him: "If you could mortify me before a whole roomful of people, as you did last night, what could I expect after marriage but continual insult?"

Mr. Richards, in amazement: "How did I mortify you? I thought that I treated you with all the tenderness and affection that a decent regard for the feelings of others would allow. I was ashamed to find I couldn't keep away from you."

Miss Galbraith: "Oh, you were attentive enough, Allen; nobody denies that. Attentive enough in non-essentials. Oh, yes!"

Mr. Richards: "Well, what vital matters did I fail in? I'm sure I can't remember."

Miss Galbraith: "I dare say! I dare say they won't appear vital to you, Allen. Nothing does. And if I had told you, I should have been met with ridicule, I suppose. But I knew better than to tell; I respected myself too much."

Mr. Richards: "But now you mustn't respect yourself quite so much, dearest. And I promise you I won't laugh at the most serious thing. I'm in no humor for it. If it were a matter of life and death, even, I can assure you that it wouldn't bring a smile to my countenance. No, indeed! If you expect me to laugh, now, you must say something particularly funny."

Miss Galbraith: "I was not going to say anything funny, as you call it, and I will say nothing at all, if you talk in that way."

Mr. Richards: "Well, I won't, then. But do you know what I suspect, Lucy? I wouldn't mention it to everybody, but I will to you—in strict confidence: I suspect that you're

rather ashamed of your grievance, if you have any. I suspect it's nothing at all."

Miss Galbraith, very sternly at first, with a rising hysterical inflection: "Nothing, Allen! Do you call it nothing, to have Mrs. Dawes come out with all that about your accident on your way up the river, and ask me if it didn't frighten me terribly to hear of it, even after it was all over; and I had to say you hadn't told me a word of it? 'Why, Lucy!'"—angrily mimicking Mrs. Dawes,—"'you must teach him better than that. I make Mr. Dawes tell me everything.' Little simpleton! And then to have them all laugh—Oh, dear, it's too much!"

Mr. Richards: "Why, my dear Lucy"—

Miss Galbraith, interrupting him: "I saw just how it was going to be, and I'm thankful, thankful that it happened. I saw that you didn't care enough for me to take me into your whole life; that you despised and distrusted me, and that it would get worse and worse to the end of our days; that we should grow farther and farther apart, and I should be left moping at home, while you ran about making confidantes of other women whom you considered worthy of your confidence. It all flashed upon me in an instant; and I resolved to break with you, then and there; and I did, just as soon as ever I could go to my room for your things, and I'm glad,—yes,—Oh, hu, hu, hu, hu, hu!—so glad I did it!"

Mr. Richards, grimly: "Your joy is obvious. May I ask"—

Miss Galbraith: "Oh, it wasn't the first proof you had given me how little you really cared for me, but I was determined it should be the last. I dare say you've forgotten them! I dare say you don't remember telling Mamie Morris that you didn't like embroidered cigar-cases, when you'd just told me that you did, and let me be such a fool as to commence one for you; but I'm thankful to say that went into the fire,—oh, yes, instantly! And I dare say you've forgotten that you didn't tell me your brother's engagement was to be kept, and let me come out with it that night at

the Rudges', and then looked perfectly aghast, so that everybody thought I had been blabbing! Time and again, Allen, you have made me suffer agonies, yes, agonies; but your power to do so is at an end. I am free and happy at last." She weeps bitterly.

Mr. Richards, quietly: "Yes, I had forgotten those crimes, and I suppose many similar atrocities. I own it, I am forgetful and careless. I was wrong about those things. I ought to have told you why I said that to Miss Morris: I was afraid she was going to work me one. As to that accident I told Mrs. Dawes of, it wasn't worth mentioning. Our boat simply walked over a sloop in the night, and nobody was hurt. I shouldn't have thought twice about it, if she hadn't happened to brag of their passing close to an iceberg on their way home from Europe; then I trotted out my pretty-near disaster as a match for hers,—confound her! I wish the iceberg had sunk them! Only it wouldn't have sunk her,—she's so light; she'd have gone bobbing about all over the Atlantic Ocean, like a cork; she's got a perfect life-preserver in that mind of hers." Miss Galbraith gives a little laugh, and then a little moan. "But since you are happy, I will not repine, Miss Galbraith. I don't pretend to be very happy myself, but then, I don't deserve it. Since you are ready to let an absolutely unconscious offence on my part cancel all the past; since you let my devoted love weigh as nothing against the momentary pique that a malicious little rattle-pate—she was vexed at my leaving her—could make you feel, and choose to gratify a wicked resentment at the cost of any suffering to me, why, I can be glad and happy too." With rising anger, "Yes, Miss Galbraith. All is over between us. You can go! I renounce you!"

Miss Galbraith, springing fiercely to her feet: "Go, indeed! Renounce me! Be so good as to remember that you haven't got me to renounce!"

Mr. Richards: "Well, it's all the same thing. I'd renounce you if I had. Good-evening, Miss Galbraith. I will send back

your presents as soon as I get to town; it won't be necessary to acknowledge them. I hope we may never meet again." He goes out of the door towards the front of the ear, but returns directly, and glances uneasily at Miss Galbraith, who remains with her handkerchief pressed to her eyes. "Ah—a—that is—I shall be obliged to intrude upon you again. The fact is"—

Miss Galbraith, anxiously: "Why, the cars have stopped! Are we at Schenectady?"

Mr. Richards: "Well, no; not exactly; not stopped exactly at Schenectady"—

Miss Galbraith: "Then what station is this? Have they carried me by?" Observing his embarrassment, "Allen, what is the matter? What has happened? Tell me instantly! Are we off the track? Have we run into another train? Have we broken through a bridge? Shall we be burnt alive? Tell me, Allen, tell me,—I can bear it!—are we telescoped?" She wrings her hands in terror.

Mr. Richards, unsympathetically: "Nothing of the kind has happened. This car has simply come uncoupled, and the rest of the train has gone on ahead, and left us standing on the track, nowhere in particular." He leans back in his chair, and wheels it round from her.

Miss Galbraith, mortified, yet anxious: "Well?"

Mr. Richards: "Well, until they miss us, and run back to pick us up, I shall be obliged to ask your indulgence. I will try not to disturb you; I would go out and stand on the platform, but it's raining."

Miss Galbraith, listening to the rain-fall on the roof: "Why, so it is!" Timidly, "Did you notice when the car stopped?"

Mr. Richards: "No." He rises and goes out at the rear door, comes back, and sits down again.

Miss Galbraith, rises, and goes to the large mirror to wipe away her tears. She glances at Mr. Richards, who does not move. She sits down in a seat nearer him than the

chair she has left. After some faint murmurs and hesitations, she asks, “Will you please tell me why you went out just now?”

Mr. Richards, with indifference: “Yes. I went to see if the rear signal was out.”

Miss Galbraith, after another hesitation: “Why?”

Mr. Richards: “Because, if it wasn’t out, some train might run into us from that direction.”

Miss Galbraith, tremulously: “Oh! And was it?”

Mr. Richards, dryly: “Yes.”

Miss Galbraith returns to her former place, with a wounded air, and for a moment neither speaks. Finally she asks very meekly, “And there’s no danger from the front?”

Mr. Richards, coldly: “No.”

Miss Galbraith, after some little noises and movements meant to catch Mr. Richards’s attention: “Of course, I never meant to imply that you were intentionally careless or forgetful.”

Mr. Richards, still very coldly: “Thank you.”

Miss Galbraith: “I always did justice to your good-heartedness, Allen; you’re perfectly lovely that way; and I know that you would be sorry if you knew you had wounded my feelings, however accidentally.” She droops her head so as to catch a sidelong glimpse of his face, and sighs, while she nervously pinches the top of her parasol, resting the point on the floor. Mr. Richards makes no answer. “That about the cigar-case might have been a mistake; I saw that myself, and, as you explain it, why, it was certainly very kind and very creditable to—to your thoughtfulness. It was thoughtful!”

Mr. Richards: “I am grateful for your good opinion.”

Miss Galbraith: “But do you think it was exactly—it was quite—nice, not to tell me that your brother’s engagement was to be kept, when you know, Allen, I can’t bear to blunder in such things?” Tenderly, “Do you? You can’t say it was?”

Mr. Richards: “I never said it was.”

Miss Galbraith, plaintively: “No, Allen. That’s what I always admired in your character. You always owned up. Don’t you think it’s easier for men to own up than it is for women?”

Mr. Richards: “I don’t know. I never knew any woman to do it.”

Miss Galbraith: “Oh, yes, Allen! You know I often own up.”

Mr. Richards: “No, I don’t.”

Miss Galbraith: “Oh, how can you bear to say so? When I’m rash, or anything of that kind, you know I acknowledge it.”

Mr. Richards: “Do you acknowledge it now?”

Miss Galbraith: “Why, how can I, when I haven’t been rash? What have I been rash”—

Mr. Richards: “About the cigar-case, for example.”

Miss Galbraith: “Oh! that! That was a great while ago! I thought you meant something quite recent.” A sound as of the approaching tram is heard in the distance. She gives a start, and then leaves her chair again for one a little nearer his. “I thought perhaps you meant about—last night.”

Mr. Richards: “Well.”

Miss Galbraith, very judicially: “I don’t think it was rash, exactly. No, not rash. It might not have been very kind not to—to—trust you more, when I knew that you didn’t mean anything; but—No, I took the only course I could. Nobody could have done differently under the circumstances. But if I caused you any pain, I’m very sorry; oh, yes, very sorry indeed. But I was not precipitate, and I know I did right. At least I tried to act for the best. Don’t you believe I did?”

Mr. Richards: “Why, if you have no doubt upon the subject, my opinion is of no consequence.”

Miss Galbraith: “Yes. But what do you think? If you think differently, and can make me see it differently, oughtn’t you to do so?”

Mr. Richards: “I don’t see why. As you say, all is over between us.”

Miss Galbraith: “Yes.” After a pause, “I should suppose you would care enough for yourself to wish me to look at the matter from the right point of view.”

Mr. Richards: “I don’t.”

Miss Galbraith, becoming more and more uneasy as the noise of the approaching train grows louder: “I think you have been very quick with me at times, quite as quick as I could have been with you last night.” The noise is more distinctly heard. “I’m sure that if I could once see it as you do, no one would be more willing to do anything in their power to atone for their rashness. Of course I know that everything is over.”

Mr. Richards: “As to that, I have your word; and, in view of the fact, perhaps this analysis of motive, of character, however interesting on general grounds, is a little”—

Miss Galbraith, with sudden violence: “Say it, and take your revenge! I have put myself at your feet, and you do right to trample on me! Oh, this is what women may expect when they trust to men’s generosity! Well, it is over now, and I’m thankful, thankful! Cruel, suspicious, vindictive, you’re all alike, and I’m glad that I’m no longer subject to your heartless caprices. And I don’t care what happens after this, I shall always—Oh! You’re sure it’s from the front, Allen? Are you sure the rear signal is out?”

Mr. Richards, relenting: “Yes, but if it will ease your mind, I’ll go and look again.” He rises, and starts towards the rear door.

Miss Galbraith, quickly: “Oh, no! Don’t go! I can’t bear to be left alone!” The sound of the approaching train continually increases in volume. “Oh, isn’t it coming very, very, very fast?”

Mr. Richards: “No, no! Don’t be frightened.”

Miss Galbraith, running towards the rear door. “Oh, I must get out! It will kill me, I know it will. Come with me!

Do, do!” He runs after her, and her voice is heard at the rear of the car. “Oh, the outside door is locked, and we are trapped, trapped, trapped! Oh, quick! Let’s try the door at the other end.” They re-enter the parlor, and the roar of the train announces that it is upon them. “No, no! It’s too late, it’s too late! I’m a wicked, wicked girl, and this is all to punish me! Oh, it’s coming, it’s coming at full speed!” He remains bewildered, confronting her. She utters a wild cry, and as the train strikes the car with a violent concussion, she flings herself into his arms. “There, there! Forgive me, Allen! Let us die together, my own, own love!” She hangs fainting on his breast. Voices are heard without, and after a little delay The Porter comes in with a lantern.

Porter: “Rather more of a jah than we meant to give you, sah! We had to run down pretty quick after we missed you, and the rain made the track a little slippery. Lady much frightened?”

Miss Galbraith, disengaging herself: “Oh, not at all! Not in the least. We thought it was a train coming from behind, and going to run into us, and so—we—I”—

Porter: “Not quite so bad as that. We’ll be into Schenectady in a few minutes, miss. I’ll come for your things.” He goes out at the other door.

Miss Galbraith, in a fearful whisper: “Allen! What will he ever think of us? I’m sure he saw us!”

Mr. Richards: “I don’t know what he’ll think now. He did think you were frightened; but you told him you were not. However, it isn’t important what he thinks. Probably he thinks I’m your long-lost brother. It had a kind of family look.”

Miss Galbraith: “Ridiculous!”

Mr. Richards: “Why, he’d never suppose that I was a jilted lover of yours!”

Miss Galbraith, ruefully: “No.”

Mr. Richards: “Come, Lucy,”—taking her hand,—“you wished to die with me, a moment ago. Don’t you think you

can make one more effort to live with me? I won't take advantage of words spoken in mortal peril, but I suppose you were in earnest when you called me your own—own"—Her head droops; he folds her in his arms a moment, then she starts away from him, as if something had suddenly occurred to her.

Miss Galbraith: "Allen, where are you going?"

Mr. Richards: "Going? Upon my soul, I haven't the least idea."

Miss Galbraith: "Where were you going?"

Mr. Richards: "Oh, I was going to Albany."

Miss Galbraith: "Well, don't! Aunt Mary is expecting me here at Schenectady,—I telegraphed her,—and I want you to stop here, too, and we'll refer the whole matter to her. She's such a wise old head. I'm not sure"—

Mr. Richards: "What?"

Miss Galbraith, demurely: "That I'm good enough for you."

Mr. Richards, starting, in burlesque of her movement, as if a thought had struck him: "Lucy! how came you on this train when you left Syracuse on the morning express?"

Miss Galbraith, faintly: "I waited over a train at Utica." She sinks into a chair, and averts her face.

Mr. Richards: "May I ask why?"

Miss Galbraith, more faintly still: "I don't like to tell. I"—

Mr. Richards, coming and standing in front of her, with his hands in his pockets: "Look me in the eye, Lucy!" She drops her veil over her face, and looks up at him. "Did you —did you expect to find me on this train?"

Miss Galbraith: "I was afraid it never would get along,—it was so late!"

Mr. Richards: "Don't—tergiversate."

Miss Galbraith: "Don't what?"

Mr. Richards: "Fib."

Miss Galbraith: "Not for worlds!"

Mr. Richards: "How did you know I was in this car?"

Miss Galbraith: “Must I? I thought I saw you through the window; and then I made sure it was you when I went to pin my veil on,—I saw you in the mirror.”

Mr. Richards, after a little silence: “Miss Galbraith, do you want to know what you are?”

Miss Galbraith, softly: “Yes, Allen.”

Mr. Richards: “You’re a humbug!”

Miss Galbraith, springing from her seat, and confronting him. “So are you! You pretended to be asleep!”

Mr. Richards: “I—I—I was taken by surprise. I had to take time to think.”

Miss Galbraith: “So did I.”

Mr. Richards: “And you thought it would be a good plan to get your polonaise caught in the window?”

Miss Galbraith, hiding her face on his shoulder: “No, no, Allen! That I never will admit. No woman would!”

Mr. Richards: “Oh, I dare say!” After a pause: “Well, I am a poor, weak, helpless man, with no one to advise me or counsel me, and I have been cruelly deceived. How could you, Lucy, how could you? I can never get over this.” He drops his head upon her shoulder.

Miss Galbraith, starting away again, and looking about the car: “Allen, I have an idea! Do you suppose Mr. Pullman could be induced to sell this car?”

Mr. Richards: “Why?”

Miss Galbraith: “Why, because I think it’s perfectly lovely, and I should like to live in it always. It could be fitted up for a sort of summer-house, don’t you know, and we could have it in the garden, and you could smoke in it.”

Mr. Richards: “Admirable! It would look just like a travelling photographic saloon. No, Lucy, we won’t buy it; we will simply keep it as a precious souvenir, a sacred memory, a beautiful dream,—and let it go on fulfilling its destiny all the same.”

Porter, entering, and gathering up Miss Galbraith’s things: “Be at Schenectady in half a minute, miss. Won’t

have much time.”

Miss Galbraith, rising, and adjusting her dress, and then looking about the car, while she passes her hand through her lover’s arm: “Oh, I do hate to leave it. Farewell, you dear, kind, good, lovely car! May you never have another accident!” She kisses her hand to the car, upon which they both look back as they slowly leave it.

Mr. Richards, kissing his hand in the like manner: “Good-by, sweet chariot! May you never carry any but bridal couples!”

Miss Galbraith: “Or engaged ones!”

Mr. Richards: “Or husbands going home to their wives!”

Miss Galbraith: “Or wives hastening to their husbands.”

Mr. Richards: “Or young ladies who have waited one train over, so as to be with the young men they hate.”

Miss Galbraith: “Or young men who are so indifferent that they pretend to be asleep when the young ladies come in!” They pause at the door and look back again. “‘And must I leave thee, Paradise?’” They both kiss their hands to the car again, and, their faces being very close together, they impulsively kiss each other. Then Miss Galbraith throws back her head, and solemnly confronts him. “Only think, Allen! If this car hadn’t broken its engagement, we might never have mended ours.”

THE SLEEPING CAR

I.

SCENE: One side of a sleeping-car on the Boston and Albany Road. The curtains are drawn before most of the berths; from the hooks and rods hang hats, bonnets, bags, bandboxes, umbrellas, and other travelling gear; on the floor are boots of both sexes, set out for THE PORTER to black. THE PORTER is making up the beds in the upper and lower berths adjoining the seats on which a young mother, slender and pretty, with a baby asleep on the seat beside her, and a stout old lady, sit confronting each other —MRS. AGNES ROBERTS and her aunt MARY.

MRS. ROBERTS. Do you always take down your back hair, aunty?

AUNT MARY. No, never, child; at least not since I had such a fright about it once, coming on from New York. It's all well enough to take down your back hair if it is yours; but if it isn't, your head's the best place for it. Now, as I buy mine of Madame Pierrot—

MRS. ROBERTS. Don't you wish she wouldn't advertise it as human hair? It sounds so pokerish—like human flesh, you know.

AUNT MARY. Why, she couldn't call it inhuman hair, my dear.

MRS. ROBERTS (thoughtfully). No—just hair.

AUNT MARY. Then people might think it was for mattresses. But, as I was saying, I took it off that night, and tucked it safely away, as I supposed, in my pocket, and I slept sweetly till about midnight, when I happened to open my eyes, and saw something long and black crawl off my bed and slip under the berth. Such a shriek as I gave, my dear! “A snake! a snake! oh, a snake!” And everybody began talking at once, and some of the gentlemen swearing, and the porter came running with the poker to kill it; and all the while it was that ridiculous switch of mine, that had worked out of my pocket. And glad enough I was to grab it up before anybody saw it, and say I must have been dreaming.

MRS. ROBERTS. Why, aunty, how funny! How could you suppose a serpent could get on board a sleeping-car, of all places in the world!

AUNT MARY. That was the perfect absurdity of it.

THE PORTER. Berths ready now, ladies.

MRS. ROBERTS (to THE PORTER, who walks away to the end of the car, and sits down near the door). Oh, thank you. Aunty, do you feel nervous the least bit?

AUNT MARY. Nervous? No. Why?

MRS. ROBERTS. Well, I don’t know. I suppose I’ve been worked up a little about meeting Willis, and wondering how he’ll look, and all. We can’t know each other, of course. It doesn’t stand to reason that if he’s been out there for twelve years, ever since I was a child, though we’ve corresponded regularly—at least I have—that he could recognize me; not at the first glance, you know. He’ll have a full beard; and then I’ve got married, and here’s the baby. Oh, no! he’ll never guess who it is in the world. Photographs really amount to nothing in such a case. I wish we were at home, and it was all over. I wish he had written some particulars, instead of telegraphing from Ogden, “Be with you on the 7 A.M., Wednesday.”

AUNT MARY. Californians always telegraph, my dear; they never think of writing. It isn't expensive enough, and it doesn't make your blood run cold enough to get a letter, and so they send you one of those miserable yellow despatches whenever they can—those printed in a long string, if possible, so that you'll be sure to die before you get to the end of it. I suppose your brother has fallen into all those ways, and says "reckon" and "ornary" and "which the same," just like one of Mr. Bret Harte's characters.

MRS. ROBERTS. But it isn't exactly our not knowing each other, aunty, that's worrying me; that's something that could be got over in time. What is simply driving me distracted is Willis and Edward meeting there when I'm away from home. Oh, how could I be away! and why couldn't Willis have given us fair warning? I would have hurried from the ends of the earth to meet him. I don't believe poor Edward ever saw a Californian; and he's so quiet and preoccupied, I'm sure he'd never get on with Willis. And if Willis is the least loud, he wouldn't like Edward. Not that I suppose he is loud; but I don't believe he knows anything about literary men. But you can see, aunty, can't you, how very anxious I must be? Don't you see that I ought to have been there when Willis and Edward met, so as to—to—well, to break them to each other, don't you know?

AUNT MARY. Oh, you needn't be troubled about that, Agnes. I dare say they've got on perfectly well together. Very likely they're sitting down to the unwholesomest hot supper this instant that the ingenuity of man could invent.

MRS. ROBERTS. Oh, do you think they are, aunty? Oh, if I could only believe they were sitting down to a hot supper together now, I should be so happy! They'd be sure to get on if they were. There's nothing like eating to make men friendly with each other. Don't you know, at receptions, how they never have anything to say to each other till the escalloped oysters and the chicken salad appear; and then

how sweet they are as soon as they've helped the ladies to ice? Oh, thank you, thank you, aunty, for thinking of the hot supper. It's such a relief to my mind! You can understand, can't you, aunty dear, how anxious I must have been to have my only brother and my only—my husband—get on nicely together? My life would be a wreck, simply a wreck, if they didn't. And Willis and I not having seen each other since I was a child makes it all the worse. I do hope they're sitting down to a hot supper.

AN ANGRY VOICE from the next berth but one. I wish people in sleeping-cars—

A VOICE from the berth beyond that. You're mistaken in your premises, sir. This is a waking-car. Ladies, go on, and oblige an eager listener.

[Sensation, and smothered laughter from the other berths.]

MRS. ROBERTS (after a space of terrified silence, in a loud whisper to her AUNT.) What horrid things! But now we really must go to bed. It was too bad to keep talking. I'd no idea my voice was getting so loud. Which berth will you have, aunty? I'd better take the upper one, because—

AUNT MARY (whispering). No, no; I must take that, so that you can be with the baby below.

MRS. ROBERTS. Oh, how good you are, Aunt Mary! It's too bad; it is really. I can't let you.

AUNT MARY. Well, then, you must; that's all. You know how that child tosses and kicks about in the night. You never can tell where his head's going to be in the morning, but you'll probably find it at the foot of the bed. I couldn't sleep an instant, my dear, if I thought that boy was in the upper berth; for I'd be sure of his tumbling out over you. Here, let me lay him down. [She lays the baby in the lower berth.] There! Now get in, Agnes—do, and leave me to my struggle with the attraction of gravitation.

MRS. ROBERTS. Oh, poor aunty, how will you ever manage it? I must help you up.