

*Exeunt Village Girls.*

PIETRO. Humph! Not a remunerative lot, I fancy. But if the Duke, who is a mad enthusiast in the matter of automata, should take a fancy to our Hamlet and Ophelia, he'll buy them, and our fortune's made! By-the-by, where's Beppo with the figures?

NITA. Bless you, he couldn't be here yet — all uphill.

PIETRO. True. Nita!

NITA. Well. (*She is talking to BARTOLO.*)

PIETRO. Not quite so near Bartolo, please.

NITA. Oh, I forgot — force of habit.

PIETRO. You must recollect that you are no longer engaged to be married to him. That's over. You are engaged to be married to *me*, now. Try and remember it — *were* to him, *are* to me. It's quite easy, if you put it like that. Thank you. (*Leads donkey off.*)

NITA. Yes, but it's *not* so easy. A girl who's been deeply in love with a gentleman for the last six months may be forgiven if she forgets, now and then, that she doesn't care a bit for him any more.

BARTOLO (*gloomily*). We were happy!

NITA. Very. (*Sighing.*)

BARTOLO. How we carried on!

NITA. Didn't we?

BARTOLO. Do you remember when I used to go like *that* to you?

NITA. Don't I! (*Sighing.*)

BARTOLO. Does *he* ever go like that to you?

NITA. Not he — he doesn't know how.

BARTOLO. And yet we have a School Board! How you loved me!

NITA. Yes; but when I loved you you told me you were a leading tragedian. But a clown — I really don't see how I *could* love a clown.

BARTOLO. I didn't deceive you. I've played the first acts — and the first alone — of all our tragedies. No human eye has ever seen me in the second act of anything! My last appearance was three months ago. I played the moody Dane. As no one else has ever played him, so I played that Dane. Gods! how they laughed! I see them now — I hear their ribald roars. The whole house rocked with laughter! I've as soul that cannot brook contempt. "Laugh on!" I said; "laugh on, and laugh your fill — you laugh your last! No man shall ever laugh at me again — I'll be a clown!" I kept my word — they laugh at me no more.

*Enter BEPPO, running and meeting PIETRO.*

BEPPO (*breathless*). Oh, master! Here's a misfortune — here's a calamity!

PIETRO. Eh? What's the matter? Where are the figures?

BEPPO. They're at Palermo!

PIETRO, BARTOLO, *and* NITA. What!

BEPPPO. It's no fault of mine. They've been detained by the police because they hadn't any passports.

NITA. That's because they're so life-like. After all, it's a compliment.

PIETRO. A compliment! Yes, but we can't dine on cold compliments. (*To BEPPPO.*) Didn't you open the figures and show their clockwork insides?

BEPPPO. Yes; but the police said that was no rule, they may be foreigners.

PIETRO. Very true — so they might.

BARTOLO. Chock-full of eccentric wheels — might almost be English. What's to be done?

*Enter ELVINO and ULTRICE.*

ELVINO. Here's a misfortune!

ULTRICE. Here's a calamity!

PIETRO. What, another!

ELVINO. We're ruined — ruined!

BARTOLO. What is the matter with the licensed victualler?

ULTRICE. The Alchemist — it's all over — he's gone! The last explosion did it!

ELVINO. And this (*producing halfpence*) is all I've been paid for six weeks' board, lodging, and medical attendance!

PIETRO. It seems cheap. But you can seize his effects.

ELVINO. I've seized 'em! Here they are (*producing medicine phial with label.*) — all he possessed in the world — a bottle of medicine with a label on it!

PIETRO. What's this?

ELVINO. Read it — our education's not what it was.

PIETRO (*pretending to read*). "Two tablespoonfuls, at bed-time."

ELVINO. Is that all?

PIETRO. Here's a greedy fellow!

ELVINO. But I say — it takes a lot of writing to say that.

PIETRO. Well, it's a very strong medicine.

ELVINO. Oh, I see.

ULTRICE (*aside*). I don't.

PIETRO (*returning it.*) Take it.

ELVINO. Thankye; take it yourself — it will do you good.

*Exit ELVINO; ULTRICE remains listening unobserved.*

PIETRO (*changing his manners*). Has he gone? Come here; there's more in this than meets the eye!

NITA. What, more than two tablespoons?

PIETRO. More than two fiddlesticks! Listen to this. (*Reads.*) "Man is a hypocrite, and invariably affects to be better and wiser than he really is."

*This liquid, which should be freely diluted, has the effect of making every one who drinks it exactly what he pretends to be. The hypocrite becomes a man of piety; the swindler, a man of honour; the quack, a man of learning; and the braggart, a man of war."*

ULTRICE (*aside*). I thought as much — this may be useful.

*Exit* ULTRICE.

PIETRO. Now the question is — what's to be done with it?

NITA. Give some to Bartolo, and make him funny!

BARTOLO. Naughty sly-boots!

PIETRO. Give some to Bartolo? Yes, and give some to Nita, too. Don't you understand?

NITA. Candidly, no.

PIETRO. Why, the Duke and Duchess want to buy the figures, and the figures are missing. What's to be done? Why, it's obvious. You and Bartolo dress and make up as the two figures — when dressed, you drink a few drops of the potion, diluted with wine. (*Tasting the cork and shuddering.*) It's — it's not at all nasty — and you will not only look like the two figures, but you'll actually *be* the two figures — clockwork and all!

NITA. Whew! (*Whistles.*)

BARTOLO. What! I become a doll — a dandled doll? A mere conglomerate of whizzing wheels, salad of springs and hotch-potch of escapements! Exchange all the beautiful things I've got inside here for a handful of common clockwork? It's a large order. Perish the thought and he who uttered it!

PIETRO. Come, come! The figures are our joint property, and we are all equally interested in selling them.

NITA. That's true. Well. I've no objection. Besides, it will be fun.

PIETRO. Good girl! The potion must be diluted, so I'll pour it into this wine-skin and we can draw it off as we want it. (*Does so.*)

NITA. But stop a bit! I don't want to be clockwork all my life! How are we to get back again?

PIETRO. I never thought of that!

NITA. It wouldn't do at all.

PIETRO. Oh, not at all. Perhaps it says. (*Refers to label.*) Yes! (*Reads.*) "*If the charm has been misapplied, matters can be restored to their original condition by burning this label.*" There you are — nothing could be simpler.

NITA. I say — don't lose that,

PIETRO. Not if I know it. (*Puts it in his pocket-book, which he places in his pocket.*) I shall be back in a minute, and in the mean time, try and wheedle him into joining us.

*Exit* PIETRO.

BARTOLO (*who has been fuming in silence.*) I protest! It's an indignity! I have a soul that cannot brook an indignity!

NITA. An indignity? Nonsense — just think — you'll appear as Hamlet, your favourite character, before the Duke — complete dress — scene from the second act, too —

BARTOLO. Ha!

NITA. I shall be desperately in love with you — and you with me — we shall bill, and we shall coo, and we shall be as happy as two little birds.

BARTOLO. Can clockwork coo? A nice point.

NITA. Ah! There *was* a time when you wouldn't refuse me anything.

BARTOLO. Yes, but then you used to coax me. I have a soul that can do nothing unless it's coaxed.

NITA. Then sit down, and I'll coax you.

BARTOLO. Coax me hard.

NITA. Oh, very hard! (*Business.*)

BARTOLO. Oh, coax me harder than that!

NITA. Will *that* do? (*Business.*)

BARTOLO. That sort of thing, prolonged indefinitely, will do.

*During this* PIETRO *has been occupied in hanging up the posters on each side of the inn door.*