

THE STEPMOTHER

GERTRUDE

The position of a stepmother is always open to suspicion; and for some time it has been rumored in Louviers that I am the person who throws obstacles in the way of Pauline's marriage.

THE GENERAL

That is merely the idle gossip of little towns. I should like to cut out some of those silly tongues. And to think that they should attack you of all people, Gertrude, who have been a real mother to Pauline—whom you have educated most excellently!

GERTRUDE

It is the way of the world! They will never forgive us for living so close to the town, yet never entering it. The society of the place revenges itself upon us for slighting it. Do you think that our happiness can escape envy? Even our doctor—

THE GENERAL

Do you mean Vernon?—

GERTRUDE

Yes, Vernon is very envious of you; he is vexed to think that he has never been able to inspire any woman with such affection as I have for you. Moreover, he pretends that I am merely playing a part,—as if I could do it for twelve years! Rather unlikely, I should think.

THE GENERAL

No woman could keep up the pretence for twelve years without being found out. The idea is absurd! and Vernon also is—

GERTRUDE

Oh, he is only joking! And so, as I told you before, you had better see Godard. I am astonished that he has not yet