

think. You can all learn your parts this week, next Monday we can have our first rehearsal, and the Monday night following shall be the night big with fate. We will have a rehearsal every morning at ten. Monsieur Longworth you will make an excellent *Captain Absolute*. Mr. Dexter please consider yourself *Captain Absolute's* father, the stormy *Sir Anthony*. Reine, look upon yourself from this hour as the ever charming *Mees Lydia Languish*. Madame Sheldon, who I regret not to see here, will make a most admirable *Lucy*."

If Mrs. Sheldon takes any part," says Reine, slowly and decidedly, "I decline to play."

Without a moment's warning this bomb-shell explodes in the midst of the party. Everybody is stricken mute, everybody stares. Longworth turns and looks at her keenly, Miss Hariott seems astonished, Marie opens her soft, sleepy eyes. Durand alone takes it coolly.

"Ah! well," he says gayly, "a lady's caprice is a thing to be respected, not questioned. We omit the so charming Madame Sheldon from our *corps dramatique*. Madame Beckwith will you condescend to accept the character of the vivacious and sprightly *Lucy*?"

"Is it a good part?" inquires Mrs. Beckwith, not the least pleased at the preference given Mrs. Sheldon. Have I much to say?" Can I wear pretty dresses?"

"One of the principal parts, and you can dress as bewitchingly as you please."

"*Lucy's* only a waiting maid, my dear, and drops out of sight altogether about the second act," chuckles Mr. Beckwith. "You'll have to wear a cap and a duster, a white apron with pockets, and a dress down to your ankles. Chambermaids always dress like that on the stage."

"But the nice proprieties need not be observed in amateurs," interposes Miss Hariott, soothingly. "*Lucy's* is a delightful part, and you may get the coquettish little costume imaginable. Nothing could suit you better. Monsieur Durand, if you do not cast me for *Mrs. Malaprop*, I will never forgive you."

"Mees Hariott consider yourself *Mrs. Malaprop*. I foresee you will electrify us in that role. Marie"—he turns

abruptly, an instantaneous change in tone and face—"you know the play well Will you perform *Julia* to my *Faulkland*?"

"I should spoil the performance. I have no talent whatever. Select someone else," she answers, with a shrug.

"Pardon. Do you forget that I have seen you in private theatricals before? Yes, in that very character. As a favour to me—I do not often ask favours—play *Julia*."

There is a curious silence. Frank Dexter scowls blackly; Reine watches her sister with sudden eagerness, Durand never moves his glance from her face. Marie meets that glance full, a sort of hard defiance in her handsome eyes.

"You need not put it in that earnest way, Monsieur Durand. If you as manager and proprietor, wish it, and no one else objects, I am quite willing to oblige."

"A thousand thanks. You will play *Julia*?"

"I will make the attempt."

"And you are the jealous lover. You select a thankless role, Monsieur Durand," observes Longworth.

"It is one he can perform too, I'll be bound," says Mr. Beckwith. "Dark complexioned men, with black eyes and moustaches, always make first-rate jealous lovers or first murderers. You don't intend to leave me out in the cold, I hope, a looker on in Vienna?"

"By no means. We want a *Bob Acres*. You will be *Bob Acres*."

"Capital, faith," says Mr. O'Sullivan, who has been lounging in the outskirts; "he was made for the character. Are you going to do nothing for me, Mr. Stage Manager?"

"Need you ask? There is *Sir Lucius O'Trigger*. Are you not the very man we want?"

"Better and better. Upon me life, if I'm the success I think I'll be in this my *debut*, I'll retire from pen, ink and paper for ever—sure literature's a pernicious profession, all the world knows—and take to genteel light comedy. "Ah me little friend," says Mr. O'Sullivan turning to Beckwith, and quoting from the part assigned him, "if we had Blunderbuss Hall here, I could show you a range of ancestry in the *O'Trigger* line every one of whom had killed his man—"