

## THE ANTIDOTE

Lady Flo: If a man and woman aren't made for one another—

Sir W.: Like you and me. I pointed that out to Jem.

Lady Flo: I'm afraid it didn't affect him as it ought. (With a sentimental sigh.) The only consolation we can derive from the misfortune of our nephew and niece is that we are happier than they!

Sir W.: Clever little woman! (Kisses her.)

Lady Flo: Dear old Will! (Kisses him. Then with a sudden change of tone.) But now I must hear what it was Jem was saying to you when I came in the room! You answered that "of course you wouldn't tell his aunt for the wise world." That must have been a *façon de parler*!

Sir W.: Of course! of course! And you shall know all about it as soon as I have asked Jem's leave. Meanwhile we must attend to the fates of these unhappy young people. We had better first try to show them their grievous fault as gently as possible, and if gentleness does not answer—

Lady Flo: Oh, yes! Gentleness is all very well! But I tell you quite candidly, Will, that before we talk of gentleness I must insist on knowing what it is you told Jem that you would not let me hear.

Sir W.: The fact is, my dear— (Coughs.)

Lady Flo: Tell me what the fact is, and at once, my dear!

Sir W.: The facts are, dear child— (Coughs again.)

Lady Flo (irritated): Don't cough!

Sir W. (continues coughing): Well! it's a long story—

Lady Flo: Haven't you a lozenge?

Sir W.: Never mind the lozenge! The story, I say, is a long one.

Lady Flo: Long or short, I must hear it!

Sir W.: I'll tell it you, later on!

Lady Flo: I begin to suspect you can't tell me all about it, simply—because you can't!

Sir W.: Oh! I can! I could!

Lady Flo: Oh, no, you can't. You couldn't, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself!

Sir W.: You are going just a little bit too far, Florence.

Lady Flo: Oh, no; it was you who went too far. Why, I knew it by the look on your face the instant I came into the room!

Sir W. (aside): She is going very much too far. (Aloud) Nonsense!

Lady Flo: I beg pardon?

Sir W.: I repeat "Nonsense." And ridiculous nonsense!

Lady Flo: Then, how dare you?

Sir W.: You forget yourself strangely.

Lady Flo: Do not attempt to adopt

your nephew's manner to his wife towards me!

Sir W.: It is you, my love, who are unfortunate in your choice of a manner this morning; and although pettishness in a young girl like Kitty has a certain little charm of its own—

Lady Flo: Yes!

Sir W.: When a woman has reached your time of life—

Lady Flo (furious): Yes!!!

Sir W.: Petulance sits remarkably ill upon her—upon you, my dear—

Lady Flo: When a man has reached your time of life and remains as great a fool—

Sir W. (furious): A fool?

Lady Flo: Yes! As great a fool and an idiot as ever—

Sir W.: I was always aware you had

Jem: A raving madman! My uncle Jem!

Lady Flo: Man-like, you side with a man! (With increasing agitation) I have always known your uncle to be a weak, nerveless— (Enter Kitty. Looks around dumbfounded.)

Kitty: Dear aunt! I'm frightened! You can't be well; what does this mean!

Lady Flo: Only that your husband is inciting mine to be abusive.

Kitty: Impossible!

Lady Flo: Woman-like, you side with a man! Let me tell you that your poor uncle is pitiable in his foolishness this morning.

Sir W.: Florence! Once for all, I assert my authority. Be silent this moment, or I shall feel obliged to ask you to return home.

Lady Flo: Without you?



JEM: "WHAT IS THE MATTER?"

the very devil of a temper, Florence, and now, after fifteen years of married life, I make the discovery that you can be excessively—ahem!—unladylike.

Lady Flo: It's highly amusing to hear you express an opinion on the subject of how a lady should behave. When one remembers your sisters, one is inclined to believe you were not, perhaps, brought up in a school of the very highest standard.

Sir W.: You insult my sisters! (becomes much excited and takes her by the arm.) Repeat that again!

(Enter Jem. Stands in amazement.)

Jem: For Heaven's sake, what is the matter?

Sir W.: Ask your Aunt Florence my dear boy.

Lady Flo: I feel positively ashamed that you should come upon us—upon your uncle, I mean—at a moment when he is behaving like a raving madman!

Sir W.: If it pleases you!

Lady Flo: It would suit me remarkably well.

Sir W.: In that case—"Go!"

Lady Flo: I shall, instantly; and when you desire to come home I shall give the servant's orders not to admit you—

Sir W. (turning to Jem): A man not admitted to his own house! That's rather too good, isn't it Jem?

Lady Flo: We shall see! (turns to Kitty) Meanwhile, Kitty, I bid you good-bye!

Kitty: Oh! Aunt! You can't mean that! Pray don't say good-bye!

Lady Flo (dramatically): Yes, I mean "Good-bye"! (Brushes furiously past Sir William, and exit. Kitty makes movement to follow, but returns to Sir William and Jem.)

Sir W. (bitterly): Don't hold her back, Kitty!

Jem.: You are mad!

Sir W.: Less mad than you, when an