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Act I

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LONDON ASSURANCE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

An ante-room in Sir Harcourt Courtly's house in Belgrave-square.

Enter Cool.

Cool. Half-past nine, and Mr. Charles has not yet returned: I am in a fever of dread. If his father happen to rise earlier than usual on any morning, he is sure to ask first for Mr. Charles. Poor deluded old gentleman—he little thinks how he is deceived.

Enter Martin, lazily.

Well, Martin, he has not come home yet?

Martin. No; and I have not had a wink of sleep all night—I cannot stand this any longer; I shall give warning. This is the fifth night Mr. Courtly has remained out, and I am obliged to stand at the hall window to watch for him.

Cool. You know if Sir Harcourt was aware that we connived at his son's irregularities, we should all be discharged.

Martin. I have used up all my common excuses on his duns—"Call again," "Not at home," and "Send it down to you," won't serve any more; and Mr. Crust, the wine-merchant, swears he will be paid.

Cool. So they all say. Why he has arrests out against him already. I've seen the fellows watching the door—*(loud knock and ring heard)*—there he is, just in time—quick, Martin, for I expect Sir William's bell every moment, *(bell rings)*—and there it is. [*Exit Martin, slowly.*] Thank heaven! he will return to college to-morrow, and this heavy responsibility will be taken off my shoulders. A valet is as difficult a post to fill properly as that of prime minister. [*Exit.*]

Y. Courtly (without). Hollo!

Dazzle (without). Steady!

Enter Young Courtly and Dazzle.

Y. Courtly. Hollo-o-o-

Dazzle. Hush! what are you about, howling like a Hottentot. Sit down there, and thank heaven you are in Belgrave-square, instead of Bow-street.

Y. Courtly. D—D—Damn Bow-street.

Dazzle. Oh, with all my heart!—you have not seen as much of it as I have.

Y. Courtly. I say—let me see—what was I going to say?—oh, look here—*(he pulls out a large assortment of knockers, bell-pulls, &c., from his pocket.)* There! dam'me! I'll puzzle the twopenny-postmen,—I'll deprive them of their right of disturbing the neighbourhood. That black

lion's head did belong to old Vampire, the money-lender; this bell-pull to Miss Stitch, the milliner.

Dazzle. And this brass griffin—

Y. Courtly. That! oh, let me see—I think—I twisted that off our own hall-door as I came in, while you were paying the cab.

Dazzle. What shall I do with them?

Y. Courtly. Pack 'em in a small hamper, and send 'em to the sitting magistrate with my father's compliments; in the mean time come into my room, and I'll astonish you with some Burgundy.

Re-Enter Cool.

Cool. Mr. Charles—

Y. Courtly. Out! out! not at home to any one.

Cool. And drunk—

Y. Courtly. As a lord.

Cool. If Sir Harcourt knew this he would go mad, he would discharge me.

Y. Courtly. You flatter yourself, that would be no proof of his insanity.—(To *Dazzle.*)—This is Cool, sir, Mr. Cool; he is the best liar in London—there is a pungency about his invention, and an originality in his equivocation, that is perfectly refreshing.

Cool. (*Aside.*) Why, Mr. Charles, where did you pick him up?

Y. Courtly. You mistake, he picked *me* up.

(*Bell rings.*)

Cool. Here comes Sir Harcourt—pray do not let him see you in this state.

Y. Courtly. State! what do you mean? I am in a beautiful state.

Cool. I should lose my character.

Y. Courtly. That would be a fortunate epoch in your life, *Cool.*

Cool. Your father would discharge me.

Y. Courtly. *Cool,* my dad is an old ass!

Cool. Retire to your own room, for heaven's sake, Mr. Charles.

Y. Courtly. I'll do so for my own sake. (*To Dazzle.*) I say old fellow, (*staggering*) just hold the door steady while I go in.

Dazzle. This way. Now then!—take care!

(*Helps him into the room.*)

Enter Sir Harcourt Courtly in an elegant dressing-gown, and Greek scull-cap and tassels, &c., &c.

Sir H. *Cool,* is breakfast ready?

Cool. Quite ready, Sir Harcourt.

Sir H. Apropos. I omitted to mention that I expect Squire Harkaway to join us this morning, and you must prepare for my departure to Oak Hall immediately.

Cool. Leave town in the middle of the season, Sir Harcourt? So unprecedented a proceeding.

Sir H. It is. I confess it, there is but one power could effect such a miracle, that is divinity.

Cool. How!

Sir H. In female form of course. *Cool,* I am about to present society with a second Lady Courtly; young—blushing eighteen;—lovely! I have her portrait;—rich! I have her banker's account;—an heiress, and a Venus!

Cool. Lady Courtly could be none other.

Sir H. Ha! ha! *Cool,* your manners are above your station.—Apropos, I shall find no further use for my brocaded dressing gown.

Cool. I thank you, Sir Harcourt; might I ask who the fortunate lady is.

Sir H. Certainly, Miss Grace Harkaway, the niece of my old friend, Max.

Cool. Have you never seen the lady, sir?

Sir H. Never—that is yes—eight years ago. Having been as you know, on the continent for the last seven years, I have not had the opportunity of paying my devoirs—our connexion and betrothal was a very extraordinary one. Her father's estates were contiguous to mine;—being a penurious, miserly, *ugly* old scoundrel, he made a market of my indiscretion, and supplied my extravagance with large sums of money on mortgages, his great desire being to unite the two properties. About seven years ago he died—leaving Grace, a girl, to the guardianship of her uncle, with this will—if on attaining the age of nineteen she would consent to marry me, I should receive those deeds, and all his property as her dowry, if she refused to comply with this condition, they should revert to my heir presumptive or apparent.—She consents.

Cool. Who would not?

Sir H. I consent to receive her 15,000*l.* a year.

Cool. (*Aside.*) Who would not?

Sir H. So prepare, Cool, prepare;—but where is my boy, where is Charles?

Cool. Why—Oh, he is gone out, Sir Harcourt; yes, gone out to take a walk.

Sir H. Poor child! A perfect child in heart—a sober placid mind—the simplicity and verdure of boyhood, kept fresh and unsullied by any contact with society. Tell me, Cool, at what time was he in bed last night?

Cool. Half-past nine, Sir Harcourt.

Sir H. Half-past nine! Beautiful! What an original idea! Reposing in cherub slumbers, while all around him teems with drinking and debauchery! Primitive sweetness of nature! No pilot-coated, bearskinned brawling.

Cool. Oh! Sir Harcourt!

Sir H. No cigar smoking—

Cool. Faints at the smell of one.

Sir H. No brandy and water bibbing—

Cool. Doesn't know the taste of anything stronger than barley-water.

Sir H. No night-parading.

Cool. Never heard the clock strike twelve, except at noon.

Sir H. In fact, he is my son, and became a gentleman by right of paternity. He inherited my manners.

Enter Martin.

Martin. Mr. Harkaway!

Enter Max Harkaway.

Max. Squire Harkaway, fellow, or Max Harkaway, another time.—[*Martin bows, and exit.*] Ah! Ha! Sir Harcourt, I'm devilish glad to see ye. Gi' me your fist. Dang it, but I'm glad to see ye. Let me see. Six—seven—years, or more, since we have met. How quickly they have flown.

Sir H. (*throwing off his studied manner.*) Max, Max. Give me your hand, old boy. (*Aside.*) Ah! he is glad to see me. There is no fawning pretence about that squeeze. Cool, you may retire. [*Exit Cool.*]

Max. Why you are looking quite rosy.

Sir H. Ah! Ah! Rosy! Am I too florid?

Max. Not a bit; not a bit.

Sir H. I thought so. (*Aside.*) Cool said I had put too much on.

Max. How comes it, Courtly, that you manage to retain your youth? See, I'm as grey as an old badger, or a wild rabbit—while you are—are as black as a young rook. I say, whose head grew your hair,—eh?

Sir H. Permit me to remark that all the beauties of my person are of home manufacture. Why should you be surprized at my youth? I have scarcely thrown off the giddiness of a very boy—elasticity of limb—buoyancy of soul. Remark this position (*throws himself into an attitude*). I held that attitude for ten minutes at Lady Acid's last *réunion*, at the express desire of one of our first sculptors, while he was making a sketch of me for the Apollo.

Max. (*Aside.*) Making a butt of thee for their gibes.

Sir H. Lady Sarah Sarcasm started up, and, pointing to my face, ejaculated, "Good gracious! Does not Sir Harcourt remind you of the countenance of Ajax, in the Pompeian portrait?"

Max. Ajax!—humbug!

Sir H. You are complimentary.

Max. I'm a plain man, and always speak my mind. What's in a face or figure? Does a Grecian nose entail a good temper? Does a waspish waist indicate a good heart? or, do oily perfumed locks necessarily thatch a well-furnished brain?

Sir H. It's an undeniable fact, *plain* people always praise the beauties of the *mind*.

Max. Excuse the insinuation; I had thought the first Lady Courtly had surfeited you with beauty.

Sir H. No; she lived fourteen months with me, and then eloped with an intimate friend. Etiquette compelled me to challenge the seducer; so I received satisfaction, and a bullet in my shoulder at the same time. However, I had the consolation of knowing that he was the handsomest man of the age. She did not insult me, by running away with a d——d ill-looking scoundrel.

Max. That certainly was flattering.

Sir H. I felt so, as I pocketed the ten thousand pounds damages.

Max. That must have been a great balm to your sore honour.

Sir H. It was—Max, my honour would have died without it; for on that year the wrong horse won the Derby—by some mistake. It was one of the luckiest chances,—a thing that does not happen twice in a man's life,—the opportunity of getting rid of his wife and his debts at the same time.

Max. Tell the truth, Courtly! Did you not feel a little frayed in your delicacy?—your honour, now? Eh?

Sir H. Not a whit. Why should I? I married *money*, and I received it,—*virgin gold*! My delicacy and honour had nothing to do with hers. The world pities the bereaved husband, when it should congratulate. No,—the affair made a sensation, and I was the object. Besides, it is vulgar to make a parade of one's feelings, however acute they may be: impenetrability of countenance is the sure sign of your highly-bred man of fashion.

Max. So, a man must, therefore, lose his wife and his money with a smile,—in fact, everything he possesses but his temper.

Sir H. Exactly,—and greet ruin with *vive la bagatelle!* For example,—your modish beauty never discomposes the shape of her features with convulsive laughter. A smile

rewards the *bon mot*, and also shows the whiteness of her teeth. She never weeps impromptu,—tears might destroy the economy of her cheek. Scenes are vulgar,—hysterics obsolete: she exhibits a calm, placid, impenetrable lake, whose surface is reflexion, but of unfathomable depth,—a statue, whose life is hypothetical, and not a *primâ facie* fact.

Max. Well, give me the girl that will fly at your eyes in an argument, and stick to her point like a fox to his own tail.

Sir H. But etiquette! Max,—remember etiquette!

Max. Damn etiquette! I have seen a man who thought it sacrilege to eat fish with a knife, that would not scruple to rise up and rob his brother of his birthright in a gambling-house. Your thorough-bred, well-blooded heart, will seldom kick over the traces of good feeling. That's my opinion, and I don't care who knows it.

Sir H. Pardon me,—etiquette is the pulse of society, by regulating which the body politic is retained in health. I consider myself one of the faculty in the art.

Max. Well, well; you are a living libel upon common sense, for you are old enough to know better.

Sir H. Old enough! What do you mean? Old! I still retain all my little juvenile indiscretions, which your niece's beauties must teach me to discard. I have not sown my wild oats yet.

Max. Time you did, at sixty-three.

Sir H. Sixty-three! Good God!—forty,—'pon my life! forty, next March.

Max. Why, you are older than I am.

Sir H. Oh! you are old enough to be my father.

Max. Well,—if I am, I am; that's etiquette, I suppose. Poor Grace! how often I have pitied her fate! That a young and beautiful creature should be driven into wretched splendour, or miserable poverty!

Sir H. Wretched! Wherefore? Lady Courtly wretched! Impossible!

Max. Will she not be compelled to marry you, whether she likes you or not?—a choice between you and poverty. (*Aside.*) And hang me if it isn't a tie! But why do you not introduce your son Charles to me? I have not seen him since he was a child. You would never permit him to accept any of my invitations to spend his vacation at Oak Hall,—of course, we shall have the pleasure of his company now.

Sir H. He is not fit to enter society yet. He is a studious, sober boy.

Max. Boy! Why, he's five-and-twenty.

Sir H. Good gracious! Max,—you will permit me to know my own son's age,—he is not twenty.

Max. I'm dumb.

Sir W. You will excuse me while I indulge in the process of dressing—Cool!

Enter Cool.

Prepare my toilet. [*Exit Cool.*] That is a ceremony which, with me, supersedes all others. I consider it a duty which every gentleman owes to society—to render himself as agreeable an object as possible—and the least compliment a mortal can pay to nature, when she honours him by bestowing extra care in the manufacture of his person, is to display her taste to the best possible advantage; and so, *au revoir*. [*Exit.*

Max. That's a good soul—he has his faults, and who has not? Forty years of age! Oh, monstrous!—but he does look uncommonly young for sixty, spite of his foreign locks and complexion.

Enter Dazzle.

Dazzle. Who's my friend, with the stick and gaiters, I wonder—one of the family—the governor maybe.

Max. Who's this? Oh, Charles—is that you, my boy? How are you? (*Aside.*) This is the boy.

Dazzle. He knows me—he is too respectable for a bailiff. (*Aloud.*) How are you?

Max. Your father has just left me.

Dazzle. (*Aside.*) The devil he has, he's been dead these ten years. Oh! I see, he thinks I'm young Courtly. (*Aloud.*) The honour you would confer on me, I must unwillingly disclaim,—I am not Mr. Courtly.

Max. I beg pardon—a friend, I suppose.

Dazzle. Oh, a most intimate friend—a friend of years—distantly related to the family—one of my ancestors married one of his. (*Aside.*) Adam and Eve.

Max. Are you on a visit here?

Dazzle. Yes. Oh! yes. (*Aside.*) Rather a short one, I'm afraid.

Max. (*Aside.*) This appears a dashing kind of fellow—as he is a friend of Sir Harcourt's, I'll invite him to the wedding. (*Aloud.*) Sir, if you are not otherwise engaged, I shall feel honoured by your company at my house, Oak Hall, Gloucestershire.

Dazzle. Your name is—

Max. Harkaway—Max Harkaway.

Dazzle. Harkaway—let me see—I ought to be related to the Harkaways, somehow.

Max. A wedding is about to come off—will you take a part on the occasion?

Dazzle. With pleasure! any part, but that of the husband.

Max. Have you any previous engagement?

Dazzle. I was thinking—eh! Why, let me see. (*Aside.*) Promised to meet my tailor and his account to-morrow; nowever, I'll postpone that. (*Aloud.*) Have you good shooting.

Max. Shooting! Why, there's no shooting at this time of the year.

Dazzle. Oh! I'm in no hurry—I can wait till the season, of course. I was only speaking precautionally—you have good shooting?

Max. The best in the country.

Dazzle. Make yourself comfortable!—Say no more—I'm your man—wait till you see how I'll murder your preserves.

Max. Do you hunt?

Dazzle. Pardon me—but will you repeat that? (*Aside.*) Delicious and expensive idea.

Max. You ride?

Dazzle. Anything! Everything! From a blood to a broomstick. Only catch me a flash of lightning, and let me get on the back of it, and dam'me if I wouldn't astonish the elements.

Max. Ha! ha!

Dazzle. I'd put a girdle round about the earth, in very considerably less than forty minutes.

Max. Ah! ha! We'll show old Fiddlestrings how to spend the day. He imagines that Nature, at the earnest request of Fashion, made summer days long for him to saunter in the Park, and winter nights, that he might have good time to get cleared out at hazard or at whist. Give me the yelping of a pack of hounds before the shuffling of a pack of cards. What state can match the chase in full cry, each vying with his fellow which shall be most happy? A thousand deaths fly by unheeded in that one hour's life of extasy. Time is outrun, and Nature seems to grudge our bliss by making the day so short.

Dazzle. No, for then rises up the idol of my great adoration.

Max. Who's that?

Dazzle. The bottle—that lends a lustre to the soul, when the world puts on its nightcap and extinguishes the sun—then comes the bottle! Oh mighty wine! Don't ask me to apostrophise. Wine and love are the only two indescribable things in nature; but I prefer the wine, because its consequences are not entailed, and are more easily got rid of.

Max. How so?

Dazzle. Love ends in matrimony, wine in soda water.

Max. Well, I can promise you as fine a bottle as ever was cracked.

Dazzle. Never mind the bottle, give me the wine. Say no more, but, when I arrive, just shake one of my hands, and put the key of the cellar into the other, and if I don't make myself intimately acquainted with its internal organization—well, I say nothing, time will show.

Max. I foresee some happy days.

Dazzle. And I some glorious nights.

Max. It mus'nt be a flying visit.

Dazzle. I despise the word—I'll stop a month with you.

Max. Or a year or two.

Dazzle. I'll live and die with you.

Max. Ha! ha! Remember, Max Harkaway, Oak Hall, Gloucestershire.

Dazzle. I'll remember—fare ye well. (*Max is going.*)
I say, holloa!—Tallyho—o—o—o!

Max. Yoicks!—Tallyho—o—o—o! [*Exit.*]

Dazzle. There I am—quartered for a couple of years at the least. The old boy wants somebody to ride his horses, shoot his game, and keep a restraint on the morals of the parish: I'm eligible. What a lucky accident to meet young Courtly last night! Who could have thought it?—yesterday, I could not make certain of a dinner, except at my own proper peril; to-day, I would flirt with a banquet.

Enter Young Courtly.

Young Courtly. What infernal row was that? Why, (*seeing Dazzle*) are you here still?

Dazzle. Yes. Ain't you delighted? I'll ring and send the servant for my luggage.

Y. Courtly. The devil you will! Why, you don't mean to say you seriously intend to take up a permanent residence here? (*He rings bell.*)

Dazzle. Now, that's a most inhospitable insinuation.

Y. Courtly. Might I ask your name?

Dazzle. With a deal of pleasure—Richard Dazzle, late of the Unattached Volunteers, vulgarly entitled the Dirty Buffs.

Enter Martin.

Y. Courtly. Then, Mr. Richard Dazzle, I have the honour of wishing you a very good morning. Martin, show this gentleman the door.

Dazzle. If he does, I'll kick Martin out of it.—No offence. [*Exit servant.*] Now, sir, permit me to place a dioramic view of your conduct before you. After bringing you safely home this morning—after indulgently waiting whenever you took a passing fancy to a knocker or bell-pull, after conducting a retreat that would have reflected honour on Napoleon—you would kick me into the street, like a mangy cur: and that's what you call gratitude. Now, to show you how superior I am to petty malice, I give you an unlimited invitation to my house—my country house—to remain as long as you please.

Y. Courtly. Your house!

Dazzle. Oak Hall, Gloucestershire—fine old place—for further particulars see road book; that is, it *nomi-*
nally belongs to my old friend and relation, Max Hark-
away; but I'm privileged—capital old fellow—say, shall we be honoured?

Y. Courtly. Sir, permit me to hesitate a moment
(*Aside*) Let me see—I go back to college to-morrow, so
I shall not be missing; tradesmen begin to dun.

Enter Cool.

I hear thunder; here is shelter ready for me.

Cool. Oh, Mr. Charles, Mr. Solomon Isaacs is in the
hall, and swears he will remain till he has arrested you!

Y. Courtly. Does he!—sorry he is so obstinate—take
him my compliments, and I will bet him five to one he
will not.

Dazzle. Double or quits, with my kind regards.

Cool. But, sir, he has discovered the house in Curzon-
street; he says, he is aware the furniture, at least, belongs
to you, and he will put a man in immediately.

Y. Courtly. That's awkward—what's to be done?

Dazzle. Ask him whether he couldn't make it a
woman?

Y. Courtly. I must trust that to fate.

Dazzle. I will give you my acceptance, if it will be of
any use to you; it is of none to me.

Y. Courtly. No, sir; but in reply to your most gene-
rous and kind invitation, if you be in earnest, I shall feel
delighted to accept it.

Dazzle. Certainly.

Y. Courtly. Then, off we go—through the stables—
down the mews, and so slip through my friend's fingers.

Dazzle. But, stay, you must do the polite; say fare-
well to him before you part. Damn it, don't cut him.

Y. Courtly. You jest!

Dazzle. Here, lend me a card, (*Courtly gives him one*).
Now, then, (*writes*) “Our respects to Mr. Isaacs—sorry
to have been prevented from seeing him.”—Ha! ha!

Y. Courtly. Ha! ha!

Dazzle. We'll send him up some game.

Y. Courtly. Don't let my father see him. [*Exeunt.*

Cool. What's this?—"Mr. Charles Courtly, P.P.C.,
returns thanks for obliging inquiries." [*Exit.*

END OF ACT I.