

ACT II THE SCHOOL

Ten years later. It is the blue and white room still, but many of Miss Susan's beautiful things have gone, some of them never to return; others are stored upstairs. Their place is taken by grim scholastic furniture: forms, a desk, a globe, a blackboard, heartless maps. It is here that Miss Phoebe keeps school. Miss Susan teaches in the room opening off it, once the spare bedroom, where there is a smaller blackboard (for easier sums) but no globe, as Miss Susan is easily alarmed. Here are the younger pupils unless they have grown defiant, when they are promoted to the blue and white room to be under Miss Phoebe's braver rule. They really frighten Miss Phoebe also, but she does not let her sister know this.

It is noon on a day in August, and through the window we can see that Quality Street is decorated with flags. We also hear at times martial music from another street. Miss Phoebe is giving a dancing lesson to half a dozen pupils, and is doing her very best; now she is at the spinet while they dance, and again she is showing them the new step. We know it is Miss Phoebe because some of her pretty airs and graces still cling to her in a forlorn way, but she is much changed. Her curls are out of sight under a cap, her manner is prim, the light has gone from her eyes and buoyancy from her figure; she looks not ten years older but twenty, and not an easy twenty. When the children are not looking at her we know that she has the headache.

PHOEBE (who is sometimes at the spinet and sometimes dancing). Toes out. So. Chest out. Georgy. Point your toes, Miss Beveridge--so. So--keep in line; and young ladies, remember your toes. (GEORGY in his desire to please has protruded the wrong part of his person. She writes a C on his chest with chalk.) C stands for chest, Georgy. This is S.

(MISS SUSAN darts out of the other room. She is less worn than MISS PHOEBE.)

MISS SUSAN (whispering so that the pupils may not hear). Phoebe, how many are fourteen and seventeen?

PHOEBE (almost instantly). Thirty-one.

MISS SUSAN. I thank you. (She darts off.)

PHOEBE. That will do, ladies and gentlemen. You may go.

(They bow or curtsy, and retire to MISS SUSAN'S room, with the exception of ARTHUR WELLESLEY TOMSON, who is standing in disgrace in a corner with the cap of shame on his head, and ISABELLA, a forbidding-looking, learned little girl . ISABELLA holds up her hand for permission to speak.)

ISABELLA. Please, ma'am, father wishes me to acquire algebra.

PHOEBE (with a sinking). Algebra! It--it is not a very ladylike study, Isabella.

ISABELLA. Father says, will you or won't you?

PHOEBE. And you are thin. It will make you thinner, my dear.

ISABELLA. Father says I am thin but wiry.

PHOEBE. Yes, you are. (With feeling.) You are very wiry, Isabella.

ISABELLA. Father says, either I acquire algebra or I go to Miss Prothero's establishment.

PHOEBE. Very well, I--I will do my best. You may go.

(ISABELLA goes and PHOEBE sits wearily.)

ARTHUR (fingering his cap). Please, ma'am, may I take it off now?

PHOEBE. Certainly not. Unhappy boy---- (ARTHUR grins.) Come here. Are you ashamed of yourself?

ARTHUR (blithely). No, ma'am.

PHOEBE (in a terrible voice). Arthur Wellesley Tomson, fetch me the implement. (ARTHUR goes briskly for the cane, and she hits the desk with it.) Arthur, surely that terrifies you?

ARTHUR. No, ma'am.

PHOEBE. Arthur, why did you fight with that street boy?

ARTHUR. 'Cos he said that when you caned you did not draw blood.

PHOEBE. But I don't, do I?

ARTHUR. No, ma'am.

PHOEBE. Then why fight him? (Remembering how strange boys are.)
Was it for the honour of the school?

ARTHUR. Yes, ma'am.

PHOEBE. Say you are sorry, Arthur, and I won't punish you.

(He bursts into tears.)

ARTHUR. You promised to cane me, and now you are not going to do it.

PHOEBE (incredulous). Do you wish to be caned?

ARTHUR (holding out his hand eagerly). If you please, Miss Phoebe.

PHOEBE. Unnatural boy. (She canes him in a very unprofessional manner.) Poor dear boy.

(She kisses the hand.)

ARTHUR (gloomily). Oh, ma'am, you will never be able to cane if you hold it like that. You should hold it like this, Miss Phoebe, and give it a wriggle like that.

(She is too soft-hearted to follow his instructions.)

PHOEBE (almost in tears). Go away.

ARTHUR (remembering that women are strange). Don't cry, ma'am; I love you, Miss Phoebe.

(She seats him on her knee, and he thinks of a way to please her.)

If any boy says you can't cane I will blood him, Miss Phoebe.

(PHOEBE shudders, and MISS SUSAN again darts in. She signs to PHOEBE to send ARTHUR away.)

MISS SUSAN (as soon as ARTHUR has gone). Phoebe, if a herring and a half cost three ha'pence, how many for elevenpence?

PHOEBE (instantly). Eleven.

MISS SUSAN. William Smith says it is fifteen; and he is such a big boy, do you think I ought to contradict him? May I say there are differences of opinion about it? No one can be really sure, Phoebe.

PHOEBE. It is eleven. I once worked it out with real herrings. (Stoutly.) Susan, we must never let the big boys know that we are afraid of them. To awe them, stamp with the foot, speak in a ferocious voice, and look them unflinchingly in the face. (Then she pales.) Oh, Susan, Isabella's father insists on her acquiring algebra.

MISS SUSAN. What is algebra exactly; is it those three cornered things?

PHOEBE. It is x minus y equals z plus y and things like that. And all the time you are saying they are equal, you feel in your heart, why should they be.

(The music of the band swells here, and both ladies put their hands to their ears.)

It is the band for to-night's ball. We must not grudge their rejoicings, Susan. It is not every year that there is a Waterloo to celebrate.

MISS SUSAN. I was not thinking of that. I was thinking that he is to be at the ball to-night; and we have not seen him for ten years.

PHOEBE (calmly). Yes, ten years. We shall be glad to welcome our old friend back, Susan. I am going in to your room now to take the Latin class.

(A soldier with a girl passes--a yokel follows angrily.)

MISS SUSAN. Oh, that weary Latin, I wish I had the whipping of the man who invented it.

(She returns to her room, and the sound of the music dies away . MISS PHOEBE, who is not a very accomplished classical scholar, is taking a final peep at the declensions when MISS SUSAN reappears excitedly.)

PHOEBE. What is it?

MISS SUSAN (tragically). William Smith! Phoebe, I tried to look ferocious, indeed I did, but he saw I was afraid, and before the whole school he put out his tongue at me.

PHOEBE. Susan!

(She is lion-hearted; she remembers ARTHUR'S instructions, and practises with the cane.)

MISS SUSAN (frightened). Phoebe, he is much too big. Let it pass.

PHOEBE. If I let it pass I am a stumbling-block in the way of true education.

MISS SUSAN. Sister.

PHOEBE (grandly). Susan, stand aside.

(Giving the cane ARTHUR'S most telling flick, she marches into the other room. Then, while MISS SUSAN is listening nervously , CAPTAIN VALENTINE BROWN is ushered in by PATTY. He is bronzed and soldierly. He wears the whiskers of the period, and is in uniform. He has lost his left hand, but this is not at first noticeable.)

PATTY. Miss Susan, 'tis Captain Brown!

MISS SUSAN. Captain Brown!

VALENTINE (greeting her warmly). Reports himself at home again.

MISS SUSAN (gratified). You call this home?

VALENTINE. When the other men talked of their homes, Miss Susan, I thought of this room. (Looking about him.) Maps--desks--heigho! But still it is the same dear room. I have often dreamt, Miss Susan, that I came back to it in muddy shoes. (Seeing her alarm.) I have not, you know! Miss Susan, I rejoice to find no change in you; and Miss Phoebe--Miss Phoebe of the ringlets--I hope there be as little change in her?

MISS SUSAN (painfully). Phoebe of the ringlets! Ah, Captain Brown, you need not expect to see her.

VALENTINE. She is not here? I vow it spoils all my home-coming.

(At this moment the door of the other room is flung open and PHOEBE rushes out, followed by WILLIAM SMITH who is brandishing the cane . VALENTINE takes in the situation, and without looking at PHOEBE seizes WILLIAM by the collar and marches him out of the school.)

MISS SUSAN. Phoebe, did you see who it is?

PHOEBE. I saw. (In a sudden tremor.) Susan, I have lost all my looks.

(The pupils are crowding in from MISS SUSAN'S room and she orders them back and goes with them . VALENTINE returns, and speaks as he enters, not recognising PHOEBE, whose back is to him.)

VALENTINE. A young reprobate, madam, but I have deposited him on the causeway. I fear--

(He stops, puzzled because the lady has covered her face with her hands.)

PHOEBE. Captain Brown.

VALENTINE. Miss Phoebe, it is you?

(He goes to her, but he cannot help showing that her appearance is a shock to him.)

PHOEBE (without bitterness). Yes, I have changed very much, I have not worn well, Captain Brown.

VALENTINE (awkwardly). We--we are both older, Miss Phoebe.

(He holds out his hand warmly, with affected high spirits.)

PHOEBE (smiling reproachfully). It was both hands when you went away. (He has to show that his left hand is gone; she is overcome.) I did not know. (She presses the empty sleeve in remorse.) You never mentioned it in your letters.

VALENTINE (now grown rather stern). Miss Phoebe, what did you omit from your letters that you had such young blackguards as that to terrify you?

PHOEBE. He is the only one. Most of them are dear children; and this is the last day of the term.

VALENTINE. Ah, ma'am, if only you had invested all your money as you laid out part by my advice. What a monstrous pity you did not.

PHOEBE. We never thought of it.

VALENTINE. You look so tired.

PHOEBE. I have the headache to-day.

VALENTINE. You did not use to have the headache. Curse those dear children.

PHOEBE (bravely). Nay, do not distress yourself about me. Tell me of yourself. We are so proud of the way in which you won your commission. Will you leave the army now?

VALENTINE. Yes; and I have some intention of pursuing again the old life in Quality Street. (He is not a man who has reflected much. He has come back thinking that all the adventures have been his, and that the old life in Quality Street has waited, as in a sleep, to be resumed on the day of his return.) I came here in such high spirits, Miss Phoebe.

PHOEBE (with a wry smile). The change in me depresses you.

VALENTINE. I was in hopes that you and Miss Susan would be going to the ball. I had brought cards for you with me to make sure.

(She is pleased and means to accept. He sighs, and she understands that he thinks her too old.)

PHOEBE. But now you see that my dancing days are done.

VALENTINE (uncomfortably). Ah, no.

PHOEBE (taking care he shall not see that he has hurt her). But you will find many charming partners. Some of them have been my pupils. There was even a pupil of mine who fought at Waterloo.

VALENTINE. Young Blades; I have heard him on it. (She puts her hand wearily to her head). Miss Phoebe--what a dull grey world it is!

(She turns away to hide her emotion, and MISS SUSAN comes in.)

MISS SUSAN. Phoebe, I have said that you will not take the Latin class to-day, and I am dismissing them.

VALENTINE. Latin?

PHOEBE (rather defiantly). I am proud to teach it. (Breaking down.) Susan--his arm--have you seen?

(MISS SUSAN also is overcome, but recovers as the children crowd in.)

MISS SUSAN. Hats off, gentlemen salute, ladies curtsy--to the brave Captain Brown.

(CAPTAIN BROWN salutes them awkwardly, and they cheer him, to his great discomfort, as they pass out.)

VALENTINE (when they have gone). A terrible ordeal, ma'am.

(The old friends look at each other, and there is a silence . VALENTINE feels that all the fine tales and merry jests he has brought back for the ladies have turned into dead things. He wants to go away and think.)

PHOEBE. I wish you very happy at the ball.

VALENTINE (sighing). Miss Susan, cannot we turn all these maps and horrors out till the vacation is over?

MISS SUSAN. Indeed, sir, we always do. By to-morrow this will be my dear blue and white room again, and that my sweet spare bedroom.

PHOEBE. For five weeks!

VALENTINE (making vain belief). And then--the--the dashing Mr. Brown will drop in as of old, and, behold, Miss Susan on her knees once more putting tucks into my little friend the ottoman, and Miss Phoebe---Miss Phoebe----

PHOEBE. Phoebe of the ringlets!

(She goes out quietly.)

VALENTINE (miserably). Miss Susan, what a shame it is.

MISS SUSAN (hotly). Yes, it is a shame.

VALENTINE (suddenly become more of a man). The brave Captain Brown! Good God, ma'am, how much more brave are the ladies who keep a school.

(PATTY shows in two visitors, MISS CHARLOTTE PARRATT and ENSIGN BLADES. CHARLOTTE is a pretty minx who we are glad to say does not reside in Quality Street, and BLADES is a callow youth, inviting admiration.)

CHARLOTTE (as they salute). But I did not know you had company, Miss Susan.

MISS SUSAN. 'Tis Captain Brown--Miss Charlotte Parratt.

CHARLOTTE (gushing). The heroic Brown?

VALENTINE. Alas, no, ma'am, the other one.

CHARLOTTE. Miss Susan, do you see who accompanies me?

MISS SUSAN. I cannot quite recall----

BLADES. A few years ago, ma'am, there sat in this room a scrubby, inky little boy--I was that boy.

MISS SUSAN. Can it be our old pupil--Ensign Blades?

(She thinks him very fine, and he bows, well pleased.)

BLADES. Once a little boy and now your most obedient, ma'am.

MISS SUSAN. You have come to recall old memories?

BLADES. Not precisely; I--Charlotte, explain.

CHARLOTTE. Ensign Blades wishes me to say that it must seem highly romantic to you to have had a pupil who has fought at Waterloo.

MISS SUSAN. Not exactly romantic. I trust, sir, that when you speak of having been our pupil you are also so obliging as to mention that it was during our first year. Otherwise it makes us seem so elderly.

(He bows again, in what he believes to be a quizzical manner.)

CHARLOTTE. Ensign Blades would be pleased to hear, Miss Susan, what you think of him as a whole.

MISS SUSAN. Indeed, sir, I think you are monstrous fine. (Innocently.) It quite awes me to remember that we used to whip him.

VALENTINE (delighted). Whipped him, Miss Susan! (In solemn burlesque of CHARLOTTE.) Ensign Blades wishes to indicate that it was more than Buonaparte could do. We shall meet again, bright boy.

(He makes his adieux and goes.)

BLADES. Do you think he was quizzing me?

MISS SUSAN (simply). I cannot think so.

BLADES. He said 'bright boy,' ma'am.

MISS SUSAN. I am sure, sir, he did not mean it.

(PHOEBE returns.)

PHOEBE. Charlotte, I am happy to see you. You look delicious, my dear--so young and fresh.

CHARLOTTE. La! Do you think so, Miss Phoebe?

BLADES. Miss Phoebe, your obedient.

PHOEBE. It is Ensign Blades! But how kind of you, sir, to revisit the old school. Please to sit down.

CHARLOTTE. Ensign Blades has a favour to ask of you, Miss Phoebe.

BLADES. I learn, ma'am, that Captain Brown has obtained a card for you for the ball, and I am here to solicit for the honour of standing up with you.

(For the moment PHOEBE is flattered. Here, she believes, is some one who does not think her too old for the dance. Then she perceives a meaning smile pass between CHARLOTTE and the ENSIGN.)

PHOEBE (paling). Is it that you desire to make sport of me?

BLADES (honestly distressed). Oh no, ma'am, I vow--but I--I am such a quiz, ma'am.

MISS SUSAN. Sister!

PHOEBE. I am sorry, sir, to have to deprive you of some entertainment, but I am not going to the ball.

MISS SUSAN (haughtily). Ensign Blades, I bid you my adieu.

BLADES (ashamed). If I have hurt Miss Phoebe's feelings I beg to apologise.

MISS SUSAN. If you have hurt them. Oh, sir, how is it possible for any one to be as silly as you seem to be.

BLADES (who cannot find the answer). Charlotte--explain.

(But CHARLOTTE considers that their visit has not been sufficiently esteemed and departs with a cold curtsy, taking him with her.)

(MISS SUSAN turns sympathetically to PHOEBE, but PHOEBE, fighting with her pain, sits down at the spinet and plays at first excitedly a gay tune, then slowly, then comes to a stop with her head bowed. Soon she jumps up courageously, brushes away her distress, gets an algebra book from the desk and sits down to study it . MISS SUSAN is at the window, where ladies and gentlemen are now seen passing in ball attire.)

MISS SUSAN. What book is it, Phoebe?

PHOEBE. It is an algebra.

MISS SUSAN. They are going by to the ball. (In anger.) My Phoebe should be going to the ball, too.

PHOEBE. You jest, Susan. (MISS SUSAN watches her read . PHOEBE has to wipe away a tear; soon she rises and gives way to the emotion she has been suppressing ever since the entrance of VALENTINE.) Susan, I hate him. Oh, Susan, I could hate him if it were not for his poor hand.

MISS SUSAN. My dear.

PHOEBE. He thought I was old, because I am weary, and he should not have forgotten. I am only thirty. Susan, why does thirty seem so much more than twenty-nine? (As if VALENTINE were present.) Oh, sir, how dare you look so pityingly at me? Because I have had to work so hard,--is it a crime when a woman works? Because I have tried to be courageous--have I been courageous, Susan?

MISS SUSAN. God knows you have.

PHOEBE. But it has given me the headache, it has tired my eyes. Alas, Miss Phoebe, all your charm has gone, for you have the headache, and your eyes are tired. He is dancing with Charlotte Parratt now, Susan. 'I vow, Miss Charlotte, you are selfish and silly, but you are sweet eighteen.' 'Oh la, Captain Brown, what a quiz you are.' That delights him, Susan; see how he waggles his silly head.

MISS SUSAN. Charlotte Parratt is a goose.

PHOEBE. 'Tis what gentlemen prefer. If there were a sufficient number of geese to go round, Susan, no woman of sense would ever get a husband. 'Charming Miss Charlotte, you are like a garden; Miss Phoebe was like a garden once, but 'tis a faded garden now.'

MISS SUSAN. If to be ladylike----

PHOEBE. Susan, I am tired of being ladylike. I am a young woman still, and to be ladylike is not enough. I wish to be bright and thoughtless and merry. It is every woman's birthright to be petted and admired; I wish to be petted and admired. Was I born to be confined within these four walls? Are they the world, Susan, or is there anything beyond them? I want to know. My eyes are tired because for ten years they have seen nothing but maps and desks. Ten years! Ten years ago I went to bed a young girl and I woke with this cap on my head. It is not fair. This is not me, Susan, this is some other person, I want to be myself.

MISS SUSAN. Phoebe, Phoebe, you who have always been so patient!

PHOEBE. Oh no, not always. If you only knew how I have rebelled at times, you would turn from me in horror. Susan, I have a picture of myself as I used to be; I sometimes look at it. I sometimes kiss it, and say, 'Poor girl, they have all forgotten you. But I remember.'

MISS SUSAN. I cannot recall it.

PHOEBE. I keep it locked away in my room. Would you like to see it? I shall bring it down. My room! Oh, Susan, it is there that the Phoebe you think so patient has the hardest fight with herself, for there I have seemed to hear and see the Phoebe of whom this (looking at herself) is but an image in a distorted glass. I have heard her singing as if she thought she was still a girl. I have heard her weeping; perhaps it was only I who was weeping; but she seemed to cry to me, 'Let me out of this prison, give me back the years you have taken from me. Oh, where are my pretty curls?' she cried. 'Where is my youth, my youth.'

(She goes out, leaving MISS SUSAN woeful. Presently SUSAN takes up the algebra book and reads.)

MISS SUSAN. 'A stroke B multiplied by B stroke C equal AB stroke a little 2; stroke AC add BC. "Poor Phoebe!" Multiply by C stroke A and we get-- Poor Phoebe! C a B stroke a little 2 stroke AC little 2 add BC. "Oh, I cannot believe it!" Stroke a little 2 again, add AB little 2 add a little 2C stroke a BC.'

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(PATTY comes in with the lamp.)

PATTY. Hurting your poor eyes reading without a lamp. Think shame, Miss Susan.

MISS SUSAN (with spirit). Patty, I will not be dictated to. (PATTY looks out at window.) Draw the curtains at once. I cannot allow you to stand gazing at the foolish creatures who crowd to a ball.

PATTY (closing curtains). I am not gazing at them, ma'am; I am gazing at my sweetheart.

MISS SUSAN. Your sweetheart? (Softly.) I did not know you had one.

PATTY. Nor have I, ma'am, as yet. But I looks out, and thinks I to myself, at any moment he may turn the corner. I ha' been looking out at windows waiting for him to oblige by turning the corner this fifteen years.

MISS SUSAN. Fifteen years, and still you are hopeful?

PATTY. There is not a more hopeful woman in all the king's dominions.

MISS SUSAN. You who are so much older than Miss Phoebe.

PATTY. Yes, ma'am, I ha' the advantage of her by ten years.

MISS SUSAN. It would be idle to pretend that you are specially comely.

PATTY. That may be, but my face is my own, and the more I see it in the glass the more it pleases me. I never look at it but I say to myself, 'Who is to be the lucky man?'

MISS SUSAN. 'Tis wonderful.

PATTY. This will be a great year for females, ma'am. Think how many of the men that marched away strutting to the wars have come back limping. Who is to take off their wooden legs of an evening, Miss Susan? You, ma'am, or me?

MISS SUSAN. Patty!

PATTY (doggedly). Or Miss Phoebe? (With feeling.) The pretty thing that she was, Miss Susan.

MISS SUSAN. Do you remember, Patty? I think there is no other person who remembers unless it be the Misses Willoughby and Miss Henrietta.

PATTY (eagerly). Give her a chance, ma'am, and take her to the balls. There be three of them this week, and the last ball will be the best, for 'tis to be at the barracks, and you will need a carriage to take you there, and there will be the packing of you into it by gallant squires and the unpacking of you out, and other devilries.

MISS SUSAN. Patty!

PATTY. If Miss Phoebe were to dress young again and put candles in her eyes that used to be so bright, and coax back her curls--

(PHOEBE returns, and a great change has come over her. She is young and pretty again. She is wearing the wedding-gown of ACT I., her ringlets are glorious, her figure youthful, her face flushed and animated . PATTY is the first to see her, and is astonished . PHOEBE signs to her to go.)

PHOEBE (when PATTY has gone). Susan. (MISS SUSAN sees and is speechless.) Susan, this is the picture of my old self that I keep locked

away in my room, and sometimes take out of its box to look at. This is the girl who kisses herself in the glass and sings and dances with glee until I put her away frightened lest you should hear her.

MISS SUSAN. How marvellous! Oh, Phoebe.

PHOEBE. Perhaps I should not do it, but it is so easy. I have but to put on the old wedding-gown and tumble my curls out of the cap. (Passionately.) Sister, am I as changed as he says I am?

MISS SUSAN. You almost frighten me.

(The band is heard.)

PHOEBE. The music is calling to us. Susan, I will celebrate Waterloo in a little ball of my own. See, my curls have begun to dance, they are so anxious to dance. One dance, Susan, to Phoebe of the ringlets, and then I will put her away in her box and never look at her again. Ma'am, may I have the honour? Nay, then I shall dance alone. (She dances.) Oh, Susan, I almost wish I were a goose.

(Presently PATTY returns. She gazes at MISS PHOEBE dancing.)

PATTY. Miss Phoebe!

PHOEBE (still dancing). Not Miss Phoebe, Patty. I am not myself to-night, I am--let me see, I am my niece.

PATTY (in a whisper to SUSAN). But Miss Susan, 'tis Captain Brown.

MISS SUSAN. Oh, stop, Phoebe, stop!

PATTY. Nay, let him see her!

(MISS SUSAN hurries scandalised into the other room as VALENTINE enters.)

VALENTINE. I ventured to come back because---- (PHOEBE turns to him-- he stops abruptly, bewildered.) I beg your pardon, madam, I thought it was Miss Susan or Miss Phoebe.

(His mistake surprises her, but she is in a wild mood and curtsies, then turns away and smiles. He stares as if half-convinced.)

PATTY (with an inspiration). 'Tis my mistresses' niece, sir; she is on a visit here.

(He is deceived. He bows gallantly, then remembers the object of his visit. He produces a bottle of medicine.)

VALENTINE. Patty, I obtained this at the apothecary's for Miss Phoebe's headache. It should be taken at once.

PATTY. Miss Phoebe is lying down, sir.

VALENTINE. Is she asleep?

PATTY (demurely). No, sir, I think she be wide awake.

VALENTINE. It may soothe her.

PHOEBE. Patty, take it to Aunt Phoebe at once.

(PATTY goes out sedately with the medicine.)

VALENTINE (after a little awkwardness, which PHOEBE enjoys). Perhaps I may venture to present myself, Miss--Miss----?

PHOEBE. Miss--Livvy, sir.

VALENTINE. I am Captain Brown, Miss Livvy, an old friend of both your aunts.

PHOEBE (curtsying). I have heard them speak of a dashing Mr. Brown. But I think it cannot be the same.

VALENTINE (a little chagrined). Why not, ma'am?

PHOEBE. I ask your pardon, sir.

VALENTINE, I was sure you must be related. Indeed, for a moment the likeness--even the voice----

PHOEBE (pouting). La, sir, you mean I am like Aunt Phoebe. Every one says so--and indeed 'tis no compliment.

VALENTINE. 'Twould have been a compliment once. You must be a daughter of the excellent Mr. James Throssel who used to reside at Great Buckland.

PHOEBE. He is still there.

VALENTINE. A tedious twenty miles from here, as I remember.

PHOEBE. La! I have found the journey a monstrous quick one, sir.

(The band is again heard. She runs to the window to peep between the curtains, and his eyes follow her admiringly.)

VALENTINE (eagerly). Miss Livvy, you go to the ball?

PHOEBE. Alas, sir, I have no card.

VALENTINE. I have two cards for your aunts. As Miss Phoebe has the headache, your Aunt Susan must take you to the ball.

PHOEBE. Oh, oh! (Her feet move to the music.) Sir, I cannot control my feet.

VALENTINE. They are already at the ball, ma'am; you must follow them.

PHOEBE (with all the pent-up mischief of ten years). Oh, sir, do you think some pretty gentleman might be partial to me at the ball?

VALENTINE. If that is your wish----

PHOEBE. I should love, sir, to inspire frenzy in the breast of the male. (With sudden collapse.) I dare not go--I dare not.

VALENTINE. Miss Livvy, I vow----

(He turns eagerly to MISS SUSAN, who enters.)

I have ventured, Miss Susan, to introduce myself to your charming niece.

(MISS SUSAN would like to run away again, but the wicked MISS PHOEBE is determined to have her help.)

PHOEBE. Aunt Susan, do not be angry with your Livvy--your Livvy, Aunt Susan. This gentleman says he is the dashing Mr. Brown, he has cards for us for the ball, Auntie. Of course we cannot go--we dare not go. Oh, Auntie, hasten into your bombazine.

MISS SUSAN (staggered). Phoebe----

PHOEBE. Aunt Phoebe wants me to go. If I say she does you know she does!

MISS SUSAN. But my dear, my dear.

PHOEBE. Oh, Auntie, why do you talk so much. Come, come.

VALENTINE. I shall see to it, Miss Susan, that your niece has a charming ball.

PHOEBE. He means he will find me sweet partners.

VALENTINE. Nay, ma'am, I mean I shall be your partner.

PHOEBE (who is not an angel). Aunt Susan, he still dances!

VALENTINE. Still , ma'am?

PHOEBE. Oh, sir, you are indeed dashing. Nay, sir, please not to scowl, I could not avoid noticing them.

VALENTINE. Noticing what, Miss Livvy?

PHOEBE. The grey hairs, sir.

VALENTINE. I vow, ma'am, there is not one in my head.

PHOEBE. He is such a quiz. I so love a quiz.

VALENTINE. Then, ma'am, I shall do nothing but quiz you at the ball. Miss Susan, I begyou--

MISS SUSAN. Oh, sir, dissuade her.

VALENTINE. Nay, I entreat.

PHOEBE. Auntie!

MISS SUSAN. Think, my dear, think, we dare not.

PHOEBE (shuddering). No, we dare not, I cannot go.

VALENTINE. Indeed, ma'am.

PHOEBE. 'Tis impossible.

(She really means it, and had not the music here taken an unfair advantage of her it is certain that MISS PHOEBE would never have gone to the ball. In after years she and MISS SUSAN would have talked together of the monstrous evening when she nearly lost her head, but regained it before it could fall off. But suddenly the music swells so alluringly that it is a thousand fingers beckoning her to all the balls she has missed, and in a transport she whirls MISS SUSAN from the blue and white room to the bed-chamber where is the bombazine . VALENTINE awaits their return like a conqueror, until MISS LIVVY'S words about his hair return to trouble him. He is stooping, gazing intently into a small mirror, extracting the grey hairs one by one, when PATTY ushers in the sisters WILLOUGHBY and

MISS HENRIETTA. MISS HENRIETTA is wearing the new veil, which opens or closes like curtains when she pulls a string. She opens it now to see what he is doing, and the slight sound brings him to his feet.)

MISS HENRIETTA. 'Tis but the new veil, sir; there is no cause for alarm.

(They have already learned from PATTY, we may be sure, that he is in the house, but they express genteel surprise.)

MISS FANNY. Mary, surely we are addressing the gallant Captain Brown!

VALENTINE. It is the Misses Willoughby and Miss Henrietta. 'Tis indeed a gratification to renew acquaintance with such elegant and respectable females.

(The greetings are elaborate.)

MISS WILLOUGHBY. You have seen Miss Phoebe, sir?

VALENTINE. I have had the honour. Miss Phoebe, I regret to say, is now lying down with the headache. (The ladies are too delicately minded to exchange glances before a man, but they are privately of opinion that this meeting after ten years with the dazzling BROWN has laid MISS PHOEBE low. They are in a twitter of sympathy with her, and yearning to see MISS SUSAN alone, so that they may draw from her an account of the exciting meeting.) You do not favour the ball to-night?

MISS FANNY. I confess balls are distasteful to me.

MISS HENRIETTA. 'Twill be a mixed assembly. I am credibly informed that the woollen draper's daughter has obtained a card.

VALENTINE (gravely). Good God, ma'am, is it possible?

MISS WILLOUGHBY. We shall probably spend the evening here with Miss Susan at the card table.

VALENTINE. But Miss Susan goes with me to the ball, ma'am.

(This is scarcely less exciting to them than the overthrow of the Corsican.)

VALENTINE. Nay, I hope there be no impropriety. Miss Livvy will accompany her.

MISS WILLOUGHBY (bewildered). Miss Livvy?

VALENTINE. Their charming niece.

(The ladies repeat the word in a daze.)

MISS FANNY. They had not apprised us that they have a visitor.

(They think this reticence unfriendly, and are wondering whether they ought not to retire hurt, when MISS SUSAN enters in her bombazine, wraps, and bonnet. She starts at sight of them, and has the bearing of a guilty person.)

MISS WILLOUGHBY (stiffly). We have but now been advertised of your intention for this evening, Susan.

MISS HENRIETTA. We deeply regret our intrusion.

MISS SUSAN (wistfully). Please not to be piqued, Mary. 'Twas so--sudden.

MISS WILLOUGHBY. I cannot remember, Susan, that your estimable brother had a daughter. I thought all the three were sons.

MISS SUSAN (with deplorable readiness). Three sons and a daughter. Surely you remember little Livvy, Mary?

MISS WILLOUGHBY (bluntly). No, Susan, I do not.

MISS SUSAN. I--I must go. I hear Livvy calling.

MISS FANNY (tartly). I hear nothing but the band. We are not to see your niece?

MISS SUSAN. Another time--to-morrow. Pray rest a little before you depart, Mary. I--I--Phoebe Livvy--the headache----

(But before she can go another lady enters gaily.)

VALENTINE. Ah, here is Miss Livvy.

(The true culprit is more cunning than MISS SUSAN, and before they can see her she quickly pulls the strings of her bonnet, which is like MISS HENRIETTA'S, and it obscures her face.)

MISS SUSAN. This--this is my niece, Livvy--Miss Willoughby, Miss Henrietta, Miss Fanny Willoughby.

VALENTINE. Ladies, excuse my impatience, but--

MISS WILLOUGHBY. One moment, sir. May I ask, Miss Livvy, how many brothers you have.

PHOEBE. Two.

MISS WILLOUGHBY. I thank you.

(She looks strangely at MISS SUSAN, and MISS PHOEBE knows that she has blundered.)

PHOEBE (at a venture). Excluding the unhappy Thomas.

MISS SUSAN (clever for the only moment in her life). We never mention him.

(They are swept away on the arms of the impatient CAPTAIN.)

MISS WILLOUGHBY, MISS HENRIETTA, AND MISS FANNY. What has Thomas done?

(They have no suspicion as yet of what MISS PHOEBE has done; but they believe there is a scandal in the Throssel family, and they will not sleep happily until they know what it is.)

End of Act II.