# THE

### A PARLOR PLAY.

By SIR WALTER BESANT and WALTER

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

Lord Avenel, in shooting dress, aged wenty-seven. Lady Avenel, newly married, aged

Charlie Vernon, second lieutenant First Royal Gloucesters, aged twenty-Martin, the butler.

ACT I.

Scene-Breakfast room in Lord Ave-hel's country house. Butler discovered. He arranges chairs, smooths the table cloth, puts newspaper at the back of Lord Avenel's chair. Takes bundle of letters from a tray on the sideboard and lays them before three chairs.

Butler. Here's the lot, and a pretty lot it is. Glad I'm not his lordship's secretary. Answering all these let-ters every day would kill me in a ters every day would kill me in a week. Give me my pantry and the silver and I ask no better lot. For his lordship—one, two—(counts)—twenty-four letters, with a parcel. (Takes up small parcel tied with red tape and sealed, looks at it, feels it, weighs it, presses it.) Marked "Immediate." Looks take as if it had paper inside of it. More reading—more writing. That pore young man, the secretary. Some folks are greatly to be pitied. Now my lady's letters. One, two—here's a scented one ters. One, two-here's a scented one -something sweet from another lady -great ladies love each other a vast egreat ladies love each other a vast deal more than my friends in the servants' hall. Here's a tradesman's bill. I take it. Her ladyship isn't in a hurry to pay her bills but give her time, give her time. What's the use of being a countess, if you can't get time? One, two, (counts) eleven let-ters, mostly invitations. Pleasure is a weary business. Give me my tana weary business. Give me my pan-try and my silver. Hullo! Here's a rummy start! The last letter for my ludy is just exactly in the same hand-writing as the packet for my lord! Odd, ain't it? (Compares them.) Great square hand-same s's; same t's; same-well, it doesn't matter to me. Here's the captain's letters one-that's a woman's handwriting. The captain has a way with him. Another letter-and another and dash my buttons! If this isn't the rum-miest go! Why, this letter is written in the same handwriting as the other two. It must be a hospital letter or a church restoring—or a perma-nent incapable — well — well — (lays down letters before lleutenant's

. (Enter Charlie Vernon.) Vernon. Her ladyship down yet? Butler. Not yet, sir. Your letters, sir. cputs them on tray and hands them. Lieutenant Vernon snatches the letter whose handwriting has astonished the butler, puts the rest in his pocket and tears this one open and reads handwidth.

hurriedly)
Vernon. The devil!
(Butler, with impassive face, goes on smoothing table cloth, setting knives and forks in proper places, pokes fice.)
(Vernon walks up and down the room with properties.) with vexation i

(Butler walks round the table critically, Exit.)
Vernon, (Reads the letter again)

"Since you have given me no answer to my first letter and none to my second, I shall prove to you that I can bite as well as bark. I have sent all the love letters that you have been writing to Lady Avenel to his lord-ship. You will have an opportunity of explaining things to him-I understand that you are his guest. This will make the business all the pleas anter for you." This is a pretty business. Why the devil didn't Isa bel destroy the confounded letter; when we broke it off? This person is working clearly; an uneducated woman elearly; an uneducated woman where is Isabel? Why doesn't she come down in proper time for breakfast? Oh! confound the thing! What am I to say? There's no date, I know there's no date on any of the letters. He will think they were written vesterday!

(Enter Lady Avenet.) Lady A. Good morning, Charlie, Have you got any letters this morning

anything from Clarice? Vernon. I haven't looked—yet. had something else to think about

Lady A. What is the matter, my dear boy? You look worried. Vernon. I am worried, Look here, Isabel-you remember two years when I thought that you were in love

Lady A. (coldly) Well? This is hardthe place for these reminiscences,

Vernon. Yes-I- know - but- There letters. Lady A. What about them? I daresay

Vernon. Where are they? Did you burn them'

Lady A. Burn them? Burn them? I forget-No-1 believe they are where were then-in my old desk-in Vernon. Go and look.

Lady A. (Runs out and returns imme-diately.) They are gone. Vernon. They are stolen. Do you

Anow this handwriting?

ady A. It is a common, illiterate hand; but I think it is the writing of my last maid whom I had to sene

way.
Vernon. Read the letter.
Lady A. (Reads it) Charile! Good
heavens! What does the wretched

woman mean? Vernon. None of my letters have dates She believes and she hopes that Lord Avenel will believe that they were written yesterday. (Looks casually at Isabel's cover where there are her letters) See! Here is a letter for you in the same writing. (Hands it.) Lady A. (Reads) "Madam, I have sent

your lover's letters to your husband for him to read. I hope you will all three be pleased." Vernon. Where is your husband?



Lady A. I suppose he is dressing What are we to do? Vernon. There isn't much left to do, is there? I must explain the whole truth-secret engagement-found it to be a mistake—if he will only be-lieve it. How long is it since the last letter was written?

hast letter was written?

Lady A. Two years—a year before I was married.

Verfnon. They were rather strongly-worded letters, Isabel—I remember that I thought myself madly in love with you. It was because I had known you from childhood, I supposes

pose. Lady A. I suppose so. Otherwise it would have been impossible, of course, Vernon, Isabel! As if I could mean that—But it was a mistake, wasn't it? And I've been in love several

times since then-Lady A. And I've been in love once— and only once—in my life—and it

and only once—in my life—and it isn't with you, my dear boy.
Vernon. And now we've got to pay the piper. Avenel is a fiery man—isabel—and perhaps he's a jealous man—it's all very well to explain, but it's a thing that may rankle.

thing that may rankle.

Lady A. I have been wrong—Charlie—It is all my fault. I ought to have explained long ago. But—I—I was ashamed. I could not bear to think that even a mistake had been made. I ought to have destroyed the letters and told him everything. Then, if he chose—he might have—sent me away—Oh! I was so foolish—so

ernon. It was a thousand pities, Isabel, that you did not burn those letters, Lady A. I forgot them. They were



WHAT DOES THE WRETCHED WOMAN MEAN?

that I forgot them. I never looked at What do they matter to me-

Nothing - nothing - as you Vernon. say. Yet—a thousand pities.— Lady A. And then that detestable woman found them and—and—I wonder if my husband has those let-

vender it my harvants that the very yet.

Vernon. There are his letters of the day—(turns them over) And, Isabel, there is her hand writing—(Takes up packet) See—the packet. There are

Lady A. Let me see (Takes the packet) Yes—It is her handwriting. There is no doubt The packet contains the letters. (She holds the packet in her hand. They look at each other in Vernon. What is in your thoughts, Isa-

Ludy A. Tell me.

Vernon. If this packet were dropped in the fire; if it were taken quietly away—in my pocket—
Lady A. Hush! Charlie! Hush!
Vernon. (Takes the packet out of her hands) These letters are mine, really, because I wrote them. Let me have them back, Isabel. Then no harm can basishie was the back.

can possibly come to you. It is for your own sake, Isabel. Lady A. No-no-Vernon. They are stolen letters. They were stolen from your desk by that

accursed woman your maid. Put them back in your desk-and in the fire afterwards. (Offers her the pack-Lady A. No-no. That was my tempt-

ation—those were my most worthy thoughts. Charlie—my friend-my old playfellow-my brother—would you help me to deceive my husband again?

that he ought to have known. And pow he is to find out-to be told by a woman who will give the thing all the coloring that belongs to her deprayed imagination. ! have deceived him. But I will not deceive him any more.

it among his letters. Then farewell to your happiness, Isabel. Think! A revengeful woman seeks to injure you in that point which you will feel the most keenly—the point of honor -All you have to do is to put that

packet in the fire.
Lady A. I will not, then. Whatever happens, I will not deceive my husband again. (Enter Martin.)

Butler. My lord have sent for his let-ters, my lady. By your leave, my lady. (Sweeps them on to a tray



"I SHALL TELL HIM EVERY-THING."

looks about). I beg your ladyship's pardon—There was a sealed packet— I noticed it among the letters—I don't Lady A. It is this packet that you are

looking for. Butler, Thank you, my lady, (Stoops and picks it up. (Aside) It's the packet as has the same writing as her letters and his. (Exit Martin.) Vernon. Well—The die is cast. He has

now got the letters. Lady A. Yes-He has got the letters. will learn for the first time that his wife has received love letters from another, man.

ernon. A pleasing discovery. What shall you do, Isabel? Lady A. I shall tell him everythingconfess all that there is to confess, ernon. Come—there—isn't much, really—Boy and girl business, at the Vernon, Come-there worst. We thought we were in love and we wrote burning letters—pity they were quite so burning—pity women can't burn things (pettishly). Heavens! What a heap of mischief would be saved if women would burn

things! to burn these letters, I have a pleasant quarter of an hour before me. Now, Charlie, it's no good getting savage. Leave me for a few minutes my husband. Go away. You have got a telegram to send, or a letter to nost or something-You have gone to the stables-Go now. Come

back in a quarter of an hour. Vernon. And then?
Lady A. You will be guided by circumstances. Above all things, remember that you have nothing to conceal and nothing to be ashamed of. Vernon. And you, Isabel—have you nothing to be afraid of? (Exit Ver-

Lady A. Nothing to be afraid of? Yes everything. He will learn that the girl he thought innocent of so much as a flirtation had received love letas a fliritation had received love letters—written love letters—with another man—had gone through all the business—before he appeared on the scene at all. Nothing to be afraid of? Everything—everything. If 1 lose his respect what will remain of his love? Love dies without respect. To lose his love—to become that miserable thing, a wife unloved—it is a hard price to pay for a girl's mistake. And I might have destroyed the packet! No—no—never!—It was a cowardly thought—a base and unworthy thought. Oh! Here he is—(Enter Lord Avenel.)

thought. Oh! Here he is—
(Enter Lord Avenel.)
Lord A. Good morning, my dear.
(Kisses her kindly. Throws his letters, including the packet, carelessly on the table.) Where is Vernon?
Lody A. He was here five minutes ago.
Gone to the stables, I believe—or something else. Let us have up breakfast. (Rings bell.) We needn't wait for Charlie. wait for Charlie.

(Enter Martin with tray, places it on table. They sit down. Martin takes off covers.) Lady A. You need not stay, Martin-1 will wait on his lordship. (Exit

Martin.)
Lord A. You mean, my dear, that I am to wait on you. But why send away the faithful Martin?
Lady A. He can come back presently.

perhaps. I have something to say to you, first, Guy-in his absence, Lord A. Is it something very terrible? You look, my dear, as grave as Rhadamanthus. Lady A. It is a confession, Every con-

fession is terrible. Lord A. Then, my dear, don't make it (Gets up and leans over her.) What is the matter, Isabel? You look quite pale and anxious. Lady A. It is the confession— Lord A. Then, I say, don't make it—I

don't want your confessions, my Lady A. You must hear me. Sit down and listen— Lord A. Well—you have your own way always. Is Vernon to have the con-

fession as well? Lady A. You shall answer that ques-tion for yourself. Oh! Guy,—how shall I begin? Lord A. Better begin somewhere nea

the end—so as to get it over. That's the best way, always, with confes-sions. Come. Isabel, my dear, one would think you had committed some kind of a crime. Lady A. I believe it is a crime. But you shall hear. It's the confession of

a situation.

Lord A. A situation? Well, let us have the situation. In a play, they tell me, the situation is everything. Lady A. There was once a boy and

girl-Lord A. Not uncommon. The world is very much made that way. Lady A. Oh! Guy, believe me—it is very, very serious. Lord A. Go on, dear-with the boy and

Lady A. They were very much to-gether when they were children. When the boy went to school they wrote to each other-Lord A. Dear me? This is very rare and wonderful.

Lady A. They continued to write to each other—

Lord A. Did they, really?

Lady A. Please do not mock, Guy. It is very, very serious. How can I



"GUY! WHAT DO YOU MEAN?" go on? Well, they wrote to each other after the girl had come out, when they ought not, you know-

it was a secret engagement-because they thought they were in love with each other. Lord A. Lots of young people write to each other because they fancy they

are in love. It is a common hallocina It is not generally known, but the private houses in this country are private lunatic asylums in consequence, Lady A. Guy—I am so miserable and

you will not be serious. Lord A. Let me take a kidney, my dearest wife, and a cup of tea and then I will listen. Sorry Charlle is not here while the kidneys are hot not here while the kidneys are not. Will you take one? or an egg? Nothing? A little buttered toast—there now—silence for a brief space. (Eats

(Lays her head in her hand and sighs.) Lord A. (Looks up.) Dear child (Finds and takes her hand and kisses it) you don't look well enough to go on with the story. Suppose I finish it for you—(Pushes chair round. takes up newspaper and makes a kind of fan with it to hide his wife's face—plays with it as he speaks) Yes, I think I can finish that story. They wrote to each other, this pair of semi-attached lovers for some time. Their letters became ardent, as becomes young lovers. As for the young gentleman, Romeo himself was not a more extravagant lover. Of course I have never seen his letters. because, you see, my dear, this girl was the most lovely girl in the world, and the sweetest and the best—quite the best-my dear-(Kisses her hand again)—quite the best, I say. (Rises and kisses her forehead.)

Lord A. I am finishing the story for Lady A. But-but-that is my story except that the girl was nothing of the kind. She was capable, though

Lady A. Guy-what do you mean?

she didn't know it, of the vilest de ception.

Lord A. Don't interrupt, if you please Lady Avenel let me see Oh! yes-they went on writing to each other until somehow-some day-I really don't know how, they came to the conclusion that they had only beer playing at love and they didn't mean it in the least.

Lady A. It was his exaggeration-h protested too much—So that the girl began to ask herself—and she found Lord A. Yes-She found out? Come

I've given you a good lift-new you can go on. Lady A. She found out that I—I mean she did not love the young man at all. And I-I mean, she told him she had made a great mistake and I begged his forgiveness-

Lady A. And he wrote back to say that he too, had made a mistake and we-I mean-they were to remain good friends alway and nothing more was all over. Lord A. Happily, All over-else what

Lady A. What do you mean? Lord A. Well: there was another man wasn't there? Lady A. Ye-yes-There was anothe

Lord A. You see I am always rightady A. She was ashamed of this stupid love passage—and she told him nothing about it.

Curtain. Lord A. After all, a boy and girl business. What did it matter?

Lady A. She ought to have told you



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Not to tell him was cowardice. He thought the girl was fresh and inno-cent and had never heard any words of love. Lord A. You think he had that opin-

Lady A. I am sure of it.

Lord A. I find I must finish the story,
my dear, after all. It is your turn to
listen. This girl did not tell her real lover that she had made a mistake. But as it was off with the old love before it was on with the new, and as there never had been more than a boy and girl fancy, there was no reason why she should tell him anything un-less she chose. Her new lover neither expected nor desired any such con-fession—He knew that he had the affections of the girl; he trusted her altogether; and if he had known this thing it would not have made him trust her the less—

ady A. But she ought to have told Lord A. I doubt it. But it is a knotty We will argue it another time. point. We will argue it amounts Well-they were married-these two-and they lived happy ever after-

Lady A. No-they cannot. Lord A. Ever afterwards, I tell you. Meantime the girl had left some of the letters in her desk; forgotten them, I suppose. These were found by a maid whom she dismissed and

stolen.

Lady A. (Springs to her feet) Guyyou know everything, then:

Lord A. This woman took the letters
and, I suppose—one knows her kind -she tried to get money on them from the man who had written them. She failed; she then threatened to play her last card. She wrote to the lady's husband and offered to sell him the letters. When she got no an-swer she waited awhile, then tried once more to extort money from the writer of the letters, and when that failed, she sen; them to the lady's husband. Is that your story, Isabel? ady A. Yes yes yes! But-Guy-How did you know about Charlie? Lord A. My dear, do you suppose that when people in our position get en-



I CAN NEVER FORGIVE YOU, ISA-

against either of us? I was told of your boy and girl business before our engagement had been made known

engagement had been made known four and twenty hours. Yet you both thought it was a secret. My child, everybody knew.

Lady A. Oh! Guy—and I was always afraid to tell you.

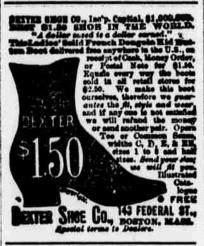
Lord A. My dear, I have known it all along, and as for these letters (Takes up packet). Yes—this is the handwriting of the creature—could you believe, my dear, that I would stoop believe, my dear, that I would stoop to read them? Could you really think that your husband had so little respect for you that he would conde scend to open such a packet. Lady A. Guy—you are too noble! Say only that you forgive me. Lord A. No. For that would mean

that my wife had done something blameworthy. Forgive you, Isabel? (Takes both her hands and kisses her.) Never. I can never forgive you—believe me. (Lady Avenel sinks into a chair and overs her face with her hands.) Enter Vernon-looks around-hest-

Lord A. Ah! Charlie? My wife and I were just talking about you, and won-dering what you would advise in a particular matter. But the fact is, I have made up my mind— Vernon. As to what? Lord A. Why, as to a certain packet of

letters which some one has tried to misuse. We need not talk about them. Here they are, and (throwing them into fire) there they are. And now for breakfast. Lady A. (Aside) Guy-I adore you.



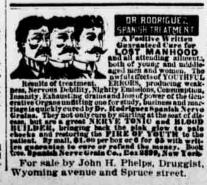




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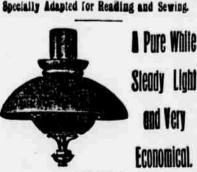
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