Vanity Fair by William Makepeace Thackeray

Chapter 51

"In Which a Charade Is Acted Which May or May Not Puzzle the Reader"

After Becky's appearance at my Lord Steyne's private and select parties, the claims of that estimable woman as regards fashion were settled, and some of the very greatest and tallest doors in the metropolis were speedily opened to her–doors so great and tall that the beloved reader and writer hereof may hope in vain to enter at them. Dear brethren, let us tremble before those august portals. I fancy them guarded by grooms of the chamber with flaming silver forks with which they prong all those who have not the right of the entree. They say the honest newspaper-fellow who sits in the hall and takes down the names of the great ones who are admitted to the feasts dies after a little time. He can't survive the glare of fashion long. It scorches him up, as the presence of Jupiter in full dress wasted that poor imprudent Semele–a giddy moth of a creature who ruined herself by venturing out of her natural atmosphere. Her myth ought to be taken to heart amongst the Tyburnians, the Belgravians–her story, and perhaps Becky's too. Ah, ladies!–ask the Reverend Mr. Thurifer if Belgravia is not a sounding brass and Tyburnia a tinkling cymbal. These are vanities. Even these will pass away. And some day or other (but it will be after our time, thank goodness) Hyde Park Gardens will be no better known than the celebrated horticultural outskirts of Babylon, and Belgrave Square will be as desolate as Baker Street, or Tadmor in the wilderness.

Ladies, are you aware that the great Pitt lived in Baker Street? What would not your grandmothers have given to be asked to Lady Hester's parties in that now decayed mansion? I have dined in it– moi qui vous parle, I peopled the chamber with ghosts of the mighty dead. As we sat soberly drinking claret there with men of to-day, the spirits of the departed came in and took their places round the darksome board. The pilot who weathered the storm tossed off great bumpers of spiritual port; the shade of Dundas did not leave the ghost of a heeltap. Addington sat bowing and smirking in a ghastly manner, and would not be behindhand when the noiseless bottle went round; Scott, from under bushy eyebrows, winked at the apparition of a beeswing; Wilberforce's eyes went up to the ceiling, so that he did not seem to know how his glass

went up full to his mouth and came down empty; up to the ceiling which was above us only yesterday, and which the great of the past days have all looked at. They let the house as a furnished lodging now. Yes, Lady Hester once lived in Baker Street, and lies asleep in the wilderness. Eothen saw her there–not in Baker Street, but in the other solitude.

It is all vanity to be sure, but who will not own to liking a little of it? I should like to know what well-constituted mind, merely because it is transitory, dislikes roast beef? That is a vanity, but may every man who reads this have a wholesome portion of it through life, I beg: aye, though my readers were five hundred thousand. Sit down, gentlemen, and fall to, with a good hearty appetite; the fat, the lean, the gravy, the horse-radish as you like it–don't spare it. Another glass of wine, Jones, my boy–a little bit of the Sunday side. Yes, let us eat our fill of the vain thing and be thankful therefor. And let us make the best of Becky's aristocratic pleasures likewise–for these too, like all other mortal delights, were but transitory.

The upshot of her visit to Lord Steyne was that His Highness the Prince of Peterwaradin took occasion to renew his acquaintance with Colonel Crawley, when they met on the next day at the Club, and to compliment Mrs. Crawley in the Ring of Hyde Park with a profound salute of the hat. She and her husband were invited immediately to one of the Prince's small parties at Levant House, then occupied by His Highness during the temporary absence from England of its noble proprietor. She sang after dinner to a very little comite. The Marquis of Steyne was present, paternally superintending the progress of his pupil.

At Levant House Becky met one of the finest gentlemen and greatest ministers that Europe has produced–the Duc de la Jabotiere, then Ambassador from the Most Christian King, and subsequently Minister to that monarch. I declare I swell with pride as these august names are transcribed by my pen, and I think in what brilliant company my dear Becky is moving. She became a constant guest at the French Embassy, where no party was considered to be complete without the presence of the charming Madame Ravdonn Cravley. Messieurs de Truffigny (of the Perigord family) and Champignac, both attaches of the Embassy, were straightway smitten by the charms of the fair Colonel's wife, and both declared, according to the wont of their nation (for who ever yet met a Frenchman, come out of England, that has not left half a dozen families

miserable, and brought away as many hearts in his pocket-book?), both, I say, declared that they were au mieux with the charming Madame Ravdonn.

But I doubt the correctness of the assertion. Champignac was very fond of ecarte, and made many parties with the Colonel of evenings, while Becky was singing to Lord Steyne in the other room; and as for Truffigny, it is a well-known fact that he dared not go to the Travellers', where he owed money to the waiters, and if he had not had the Embassy as a dining-place, the worthy young gentleman must have starved. I doubt, I say, that Becky would have selected either of these young men as a person on whom she would bestow her special regard. They ran of her messages, purchased her gloves and flowers, went in debt for opera-boxes for her, and made themselves amiable in a thousand ways. And they talked English with adorable simplicity, and to the constant amusement of Becky and my Lord Steyne, she would mimic one or other to his face, and compliment him on his advance in the English language with a gravity which never failed to tickle the Marquis, her sardonic old patron. Truffigny gave Briggs a shawl by way of winning over Becky's confidante, and asked her to take charge of a letter which the simple spinster handed over in public to the person to whom it was addressed, and the composition of which amused everybody who read it greatly. Lord Steyne read it, everybody but honest Rawdon, to whom it was not necessary to tell everything that passed in the little house in May Fair.

Here, before long, Becky received not only "the best" foreigners (as the phrase is in our noble and admirable society slang), but some of the best English people too. I don't mean the most virtuous, or indeed the least virtuous, or the cleverest, or the stupidest, or the richest, or the best born, but "the best,"–in a word, people about whom there is no question–such as the great Lady Fitz-Willis, that Patron Saint of Almack's, the great Lady Slowbore, the great Lady Grizzel Macbeth (she was Lady G. Glowry, daughter of Lord Grey of Glowry), and the like. When the Countess of Fitz-Willis (her Ladyship is of the Kingstreet family, see Debrett and Burke) takes up a person, he or she is safe. There is no question about them any more. Not that my Lady Fitz-Willis is any better than anybody else, being, on the contrary, a faded person, fifty-seven years of age, and neither handsome, nor wealthy, nor entertaining; but it is agreed on all sides that she is of the "best people." Those who

Created for Lit2Go on the web at fcit.usf.edu

go to her are of the best: and from an old grudge probably to Lady Steyne (for whose coronet her ladyship, then the youthful Georgina Frederica, daughter of the Prince of Wales's favourite, the Earl of Portansherry, had once tried), this great and famous leader of the fashion chose to acknowledge Mrs. Rawdon Crawley; made her a most marked curtsey at the assembly over which she presided; and not only encouraged her son, St. Kitts (his lordship got his place through Lord Steyne's interest), to frequent Mrs. Crawley's house, but asked her to her own mansion and spoke to her twice in the most public and condescending manner during dinner. The important fact was known all over London that night. People who had been crying fie about Mrs. Crawley were silent. Wenham, the wit and lawyer, Lord Steyne's right-hand man, went about everywhere praising her: some who had hesitated, came forward at once and welcomed her; little Tom Toady, who had warned Southdown about visiting such an abandoned woman, now besought to be introduced to her. In a word, she was admitted to be among the "best" people. Ah, my beloved readers and brethren, do not envy poor Becky prematurely–glory like this is said to be fugitive. It is currently reported that even in the very inmost circles, they are no happier than the poor wanderers outside the zone; and Becky, who penetrated into the very centre of fashion and saw the great George IV face to face, has owned since that there too was Vanity.

We must be brief in descanting upon this part of her career. As I cannot describe the mysteries of freemasonry, although I have a shrewd idea that it is a humbug, so an uninitiated man cannot take upon himself to portray the great world accurately, and had best keep his opinions to himself, whatever they are.

Becky has often spoken in subsequent years of this season of her life, when she moved among the very greatest circles of the London fashion. Her success excited, elated, and then bored her. At first no occupation was more pleasant than to invent and procure (the latter a work of no small trouble and ingenuity, by the way, in a person of Mrs. Rawdon Crawley's very narrow means)–to procure, we say, the prettiest new dresses and ornaments; to drive to fine dinner parties, where she was welcomed by great people; and from the fine dinner parties to fine assemblies, whither the same people came with whom she had been dining, whom she had met the night before, and would see on the morrow–the young men faultlessly appointed, handsomely cravatted,

Created for Lit2Go on the web at fcit.usf.edu

with the neatest glossy boots and white gloves–the elders portly, brass-buttoned, noble-looking, polite, and prosy–the young ladies blonde, timid, and in pink–the mothers grand, beautiful, sumptuous, solemn, and in diamonds. They talked in English, not in bad French, as they do in the novels. They talked about each others' houses, and characters, and families–just as the Joneses do about the Smiths. Becky's former acquaintances hated and envied her; the poor woman herself was yawning in spirit. "I wish I were out of it," she said to herself. "I would rather be a parson's wife and teach a Sunday school than this; or a sergeant's lady and ride in the regimental waggon; or, oh, how much gayer it would be to wear spangles and trousers and dance before a booth at a fair."

"You would do it very well," said Lord Steyne, laughing. She used to tell the great man her ennuis and perplexities in her artless way– they amused him.

"Rawdon would make a very good Ecuyer–Master of the Ceremonies–what do you call him–the man in the large boots and the uniform, who goes round the ring cracking the whip? He is large, heavy, and of a military figure. I recollect," Becky continued pensively, "my father took me to see a show at Brookgreen Fair when I was a child, and when we came home, I made myself a pair of stilts and danced in the studio to the wonder of all the pupils."

"I should have liked to see it," said Lord Steyne.

"I should like to do it now," Becky continued. "How Lady Blinkey would open her eyes, and Lady Grizzel Macbeth would stare! Hush! silence! there is Pasta beginning to sing." Becky always made a point of being conspicuously polite to the professional ladies and gentlemen who attended at these aristocratic parties–of following them into the corners where they sat in silence, and shaking hands with them, and smiling in the view of all persons. She was an artist herself, as she said very truly; there was a frankness and humility in the manner in which she acknowledged her origin, which provoked, or disarmed, or amused lookers-on, as the case might be. "How cool that woman is," said one; "what airs of independence she assumes, where she ought to sit still and be thankful if anybody speaks to her!" "What an honest and good-natured soul she is!" said another. "What an artful little minx" said a

third. They were all right very likely, but Becky went her own way, and so fascinated the professional personages that they would leave off their sore throats in order to sing at her parties and give her lessons for nothing.

Yes, she gave parties in the little house in Curzon Street. Many scores of carriages, with blazing lamps, blocked up the street, to the disgust of No. 100, who could not rest for the thunder of the knocking, and of 102, who could not sleep for envy. The gigantic footmen who accompanied the vehicles were too big to be contained in Becky's little hall, and were billeted off in the neighbouring public-houses, whence, when they were wanted, call-boys summoned them from their beer. Scores of the great dandies of London squeezed and trod on each other on the little stairs, laughing to find themselves there; and many spotless and severe ladies of ton were seated in the little drawing-room, listening to the professional singers, who were singing according to their wont, and as if they wished to blow the windows down. And the day after, there appeared among the fashionable reunions in the Morning Post a paragraph to the following effect:

"Yesterday, Colonel and Mrs. Crawley entertained a select party at dinner at their house in May Fair. Their Excellencies the Prince and Princess of Peterwaradin, H. E. Papoosh Pasha, the Turkish Ambassador (attended by Kibob Bey, dragoman of the mission), the Marquess of Steyne, Earl of Southdown, Sir Pitt and Lady Jane Crawley, Mr. Wagg, &c. After dinner Mrs. Crawley had an assembly which was attended by the Duchess (Dowager) of Stilton, Duc de la Gruyere, Marchioness of Cheshire, Marchese Alessandro Strachino, Comte de Brie, Baron Schapzuger, Chevalier Tosti, Countess of Slingstone, and Lady F. Macadam, Major-General and Lady G. Macbeth, and (2) Miss Macbeths; Viscount Paddington, Sir Horace Fogey, Hon. Sands Bedwin, Bobachy Bahawder," and an &c., which the reader may fill at his pleasure through a dozen close lines of small type.

And in her commerce with the great our dear friend showed the same frankness which distinguished her transactions with the lowly in station. On one occasion, when out at a very fine house, Rebecca was (perhaps rather ostentatiously) holding a conversation in the French language with a celebrated tenor singer of that nation, while the Lady Grizzel Macbeth looked over her shoulder scowling at the pair.

Created for Lit2Go on the web at fcit.usf.edu

“How very well you speak French,” Lady Grizzel said, who herself spoke the tongue in an Edinburgh accent most remarkable to hear.

“I ought to know it,” Becky modestly said, casting down her eyes. “I taught it in a school, and my mother was a Frenchwoman.”

Lady Grizzel was won by her humility and was mollified towards the little woman. She deplored the fatal levelling tendencies of the age, which admitted persons of all classes into the society of their superiors, but her ladyship owned that this one at least was well behaved and never forgot her place in life. She was a very good woman: good to the poor; stupid, blameless, unsuspicious. It is not her ladyship’s fault that she fancies herself better than you and me. The skirts of her ancestors’ garments have been kissed for centuries; it is a thousand years, they say, since the tartans of the head of the family were embraced by the defunct Duncan’s lords and councillors, when the great ancestor of the House became King of Scotland.

Lady Steyne, after the music scene, succumbed before Becky, and perhaps was not disinclined to her. The younger ladies of the house of Gaunt were also compelled into submission. Once or twice they set people at her, but they failed. The brilliant Lady Stunnington tried a passage of arms with her, but was routed with great slaughter by the intrepid little Becky. When attacked sometimes, Becky had a knack of adopting a demure ingenue air, under which she was most dangerous. She said the wickedest things with the most simple unaffected air when in this mood, and would take care artlessly to apologize for her blunders, so that all the world should know that she had made them.

Mr. Wagg, the celebrated wit, and a led captain and trencher-man of my Lord Steyne, was caused by the ladies to charge her; and the worthy fellow, leering at his patronesses and giving them a wink, as much as to say, “Now look out for sport,” one evening began an assault upon Becky, who was unsuspiciously eating her dinner. The little woman, attacked on a sudden, but never without arms, lighted up in an instant, parried and riposted with a home-thrust, which made Wagg’s face tingle with shame; then she returned to her soup with the most perfect calm and a quiet smile on her face. Wagg’s great patron, who gave him dinners and lent him a little money sometimes, and whose election, newspaper, and other jobs Wagg did, gave the luckless fellow such a

Created for Lit2Go on the web at fcit.usf.edu

savage glance with the eyes as almost made him sink under the table and burst into tears. He looked piteously at my lord, who never spoke to him during dinner, and at the ladies, who disowned him. At last Becky herself took compassion upon him and tried to engage him in talk. He was not asked to dinner again for six weeks; and Fiche, my lord's confidential man, to whom Wagg naturally paid a good deal of court, was instructed to tell him that if he ever dared to say a rude thing to Mrs. Crawley again, or make her the butt of his stupid jokes, Milor would put every one of his notes of hand into his lawyer's hands and sell him up without mercy. Wagg wept before Fiche and implored his dear friend to intercede for him. He wrote a poem in favour of Mrs. R. C., which appeared in the very next number of the Harum-scarum Magazine, which he conducted. He implored her good-will at parties where he met her. He cringed and coaxed Rawdon at the club. He was allowed to come back to Gaunt House after a while. Becky was always good to him, always amused, never angry.

His lordship's vizier and chief confidential servant (with a seat in parliament and at the dinner table), Mr. Wenham, was much more prudent in his behaviour and opinions than Mr. Wagg. However much he might be disposed to hate all parvenus (Mr. Wenham himself was a staunch old True Blue Tory, and his father a small coal-merchant in the north of England), this aide-de-camp of the Marquis never showed any sort of hostility to the new favourite, but pursued her with stealthy kindnesses and a sly and deferential politeness which somehow made Becky more uneasy than other people's overt hostilities.

How the Crawleys got the money which was spent upon the entertainments with which they treated the polite world was a mystery which gave rise to some conversation at the time, and probably added zest to these little festivities. Some persons averred that Sir Pitt Crawley gave his brother a handsome allowance; if he did, Becky's power over the Baronet must have been extraordinary indeed, and his character greatly changed in his advanced age. Other parties hinted that it was Becky's habit to levy contributions on all her husband's friends: going to this one in tears with an account that there was an execution in the house; falling on her knees to that one and declaring that the whole family must go to gaol or commit suicide unless such and such a bill could be paid. Lord Southdown, it was said, had been induced to give many hundreds through these pathetic representations. Young Feltham,

Created for Lit2Go on the web at fcit.usf.edu

of the –th Dragoons (and son of the firm of Tiler and Feltham, hatters and army accoutrement makers), and whom the Crawleys introduced into fashionable life, was also cited as one of Becky’s victims in the pecuniary way. People declared that she got money from various simply disposed persons, under pretence of getting them confidential appointments under Government. Who knows what stories were or were not told of our dear and innocent friend? Certain it is that if she had had all the money which she was said to have begged or borrowed or stolen, she might have capitalized and been honest for life, whereas,–but this is advancing matters.

The truth is, that by economy and good management–by a sparing use of ready money and by paying scarcely anybody–people can manage, for a time at least, to make a great show with very little means: and it is our belief that Becky’s much-talked-of parties, which were not, after all was said, very numerous, cost this lady very little more than the wax candles which lighted the walls. Stillbrook and Queen’s Crawley supplied her with game and fruit in abundance. Lord Steyne’s cellars were at her disposal, and that excellent nobleman’s famous cooks presided over her little kitchen, or sent by my lord’s order the rarest delicacies from their own. I protest it is quite shameful in the world to abuse a simple creature, as people of her time abuse Becky, and I warn the public against believing one-tenth of the stories against her. If every person is to be banished from society who runs into debt and cannot pay–if we are to be peering into everybody’s private life, speculating upon their income, and cutting them if we don’t approve of their expenditure–why, what a howling wilderness and intolerable dwelling Vanity Fair would be! Every man’s hand would be against his neighbour in this case, my dear sir, and the benefits of civilization would be done away with. We should be quarrelling, abusing, avoiding one another. Our houses would become caverns, and we should go in rags because we cared for nobody. Rents would go down. Parties wouldn’t be given any more. All the tradesmen of the town would be bankrupt. Wine, wax-lights, comestibles, rouge, crinoline-petticoats, diamonds, wigs, Louis-Quatorze gimcracks, and old china, park hacks, and splendid high-stepping carriage horses–all the delights of life, I say,–would go to the deuce, if people did but act upon their silly principles and avoid those whom they dislike and abuse. Whereas, by a little charity and mutual forbearance, things are made to go on pleasantly enough: we may abuse a man as much as we like, and call him the greatest rascal unhanged–but

Created for Lit2Go on the web at fcit.usf.edu

do we wish to hang him therefore? No. We shake hands when we meet. If his cook is good we forgive him and go and dine with him, and we expect he will do the same by us. Thus trade flourishes–civilization advances; peace is kept; new dresses are wanted for new assemblies every week; and the last year's vintage of Lafitte will remunerate the honest proprietor who reared it.

At the time whereof we are writing, though the Great George was on the throne and ladies wore gigots and large combs like tortoise-shell shovels in their hair, instead of the simple sleeves and lovely wreaths which are actually in fashion, the manners of the very polite world were not, I take it, essentially different from those of the present day: and their amusements pretty similar. To us, from the outside, gazing over the policeman's shoulders at the bewildering beauties as they pass into Court or ball, they may seem beings of unearthly splendour and in the enjoyment of an exquisite happiness by us unattainable. It is to console some of these dissatisfied beings that we are narrating our dear Becky's struggles, and triumphs, and disappointments, of all of which, indeed, as is the case with all persons of merit, she had her share.

At this time the amiable amusement of acting charades had come among us from France, and was considerably in vogue in this country, enabling the many ladies amongst us who had beauty to display their charms, and the fewer number who had cleverness to exhibit their wit. My Lord Steyne was incited by Becky, who perhaps believed herself endowed with both the above qualifications, to give an entertainment at Gaunt House, which should include some of these little dramas–and we must take leave to introduce the reader to this brilliant reunion, and, with a melancholy welcome too, for it will be among the very last of the fashionable entertainments to which it will be our fortune to conduct him.

A portion of that splendid room, the picture gallery of Gaunt House, was arranged as the charade theatre. It had been so used when George III was king; and a picture of the Marquis of Gaunt is still extant, with his hair in powder and a pink ribbon, in a Roman shape, as it was called, enacting the part of Cato in Mr. Addison's tragedy of that name, performed before their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales, the Bishop of Osnaburgh, and Prince William Henry, then children like the actor. One or two of the old properties were drawn out of the garrets,

Created for Lit2Go on the web at fcit.usf.edu

where they had lain ever since, and furbished up anew for the present festivities.

Young Bedwin Sands, then an elegant dandy and Eastern traveller, was manager of the revels. An Eastern traveller was somebody in those days, and the adventurous Bedwin, who had published his quarto and passed some months under the tents in the desert, was a personage of no small importance. In his volume there were several pictures of Sands in various oriental costumes; and he travelled about with a black attendant of most unprepossessing appearance, just like another Brian de Bois Guilbert. Bedwin, his costumes, and black man, were hailed at Gaunt House as very valuable acquisitions.

He led off the first charade. A Turkish officer with an immense plume of feathers (the Janizaries were supposed to be still in existence, and the tarboosh had not as yet displaced the ancient and majestic head-dress of the true believers) was seen couched on a divan, and making believe to puff at a narghile, in which, however, for the sake of the ladies, only a fragrant pastille was allowed to smoke. The Turkish dignitary yawns and expresses signs of weariness and idleness. He claps his hands and Mesrour the Nubian appears, with bare arms, bangles, yataghans, and every Eastern ornament– gaunt, tall, and hideous. He makes a salaam before my lord the Aga.

A thrill of terror and delight runs through the assembly. The ladies whisper to one another. The black slave was given to Bedwin Sands by an Egyptian pasha in exchange for three dozen of Maraschino. He has sewn up ever so many odalisques in sacks and tilted them into the Nile.

“Bid the slave-merchant enter,” says the Turkish voluptuary with a wave of his hand. Mesrour conducts the slave-merchant into my lord’s presence; he brings a veiled female with him. He removes the veil. A thrill of applause bursts through the house. It is Mrs. Winkworth (she was a Miss Absolom) with the beautiful eyes and hair. She is in a gorgeous oriental costume; the black braided locks are twined with innumerable jewels; her dress is covered over with gold piastres. The odious Mahometan expresses himself charmed by her beauty. She falls down on her knees and entreats him to restore her to the mountains where she was born, and where her Circassian lover is still deploring the absence of his Zuleikah. No entreaties will move the obdurate Hassan.

Created for Lit2Go on the web at fcit.usf.edu

He laughs at the notion of the Circassian bridegroom. Zuleikah covers her face with her hands and drops down in an attitude of the most beautiful despair. There seems to be no hope for her, when–when the Kislar Aga appears.

The Kislar Aga brings a letter from the Sultan. Hassan receives and places on his head the dread firman. A ghastly terror seizes him, while on the Negro's face (it is Mesrour again in another costume) appears a ghastly joy. “Mercy! mercy!” cries the Pasha: while the Kislar Aga, grinning horribly, pulls out–a bow-string.

The curtain draws just as he is going to use that awful weapon. Hassan from within bawls out, “First two syllables”–and Mrs. Rawdon Crawley, who is going to act in the charade, comes forward and compliments Mrs. Winkworth on the admirable taste and beauty of her costume.

The second part of the charade takes place. It is still an Eastern scene. Hassan, in another dress, is in an attitude by Zuleikah, who is perfectly reconciled to him. The Kislar Aga has become a peaceful black slave. It is sunrise on the desert, and the Turks turn their heads eastwards and bow to the sand. As there are no dromedaries at hand, the band facetiously plays “The Camels are coming.” An enormous Egyptian head figures in the scene. It is a musical one– and, to the surprise of the oriental travellers, sings a comic song, composed by Mr. Wagg. The Eastern voyagers go off dancing, like Papageno and the Moorish King in The Magic Flute. “Last two syllables,” roars the head.

The last act opens. It is a Grecian tent this time. A tall and stalwart man reposes on a couch there. Above him hang his helmet and shield. There is no need for them now. Ilium is down. Iphigenia is slain. Cassandra is a prisoner in his outer halls. The king of men (it is Colonel Crawley, who, indeed, has no notion about the sack of Ilium or the conquest of Cassandra), the anax andron is asleep in his chamber at Argos. A lamp casts the broad shadow of the sleeping warrior flickering on the wall–the sword and shield of Troy glitter in its light. The band plays the awful music of Don Juan, before the statue enters.

Aegisthus steals in pale and on tiptoe. What is that ghastly face looking out balefully after him from behind the arras? He raises his dagger to strike the sleeper, who turns in his bed, and opens his broad chest as if

for the blow. He cannot strike the noble slumbering chieftain. Clytemnestra glides swiftly into the room like an apparition–her arms are bare and white–her tawny hair floats down her shoulders–her face is deadly pale–and her eyes are lighted up with a smile so ghastly that people quake as they look at her.

A tremor ran through the room. “Good God!” somebody said, “it’s Mrs. Rawdon Crawley.”

Scornfully she snatches the dagger out of Aegisthus’s hand and advances to the bed. You see it shining over her head in the glimmer of the lamp, and–and the lamp goes out, with a groan, and all is dark.

The darkness and the scene frightened people. Rebecca performed her part so well, and with such ghastly truth, that the spectators were all dumb, until, with a burst, all the lamps of the hall blazed out again, when everybody began to shout applause. “Brava! brava!” old Steyne’s strident voice was heard roaring over all the rest. “By–, she’d do it too,” he said between his teeth. The performers were called by the whole house, which sounded with cries of “Manager! Clytemnestra!” Agamemnon could not be got to show in his classical tunic, but stood in the background with Aegisthus and others of the performers of the little play. Mr. Bedwin Sands led on Zuleikah and Clytemnestra. A great personage insisted on being presented to the charming Clytemnestra. “Heigh ha? Run him through the body. Marry somebody else, hay?” was the apposite remark made by His Royal Highness.

“Mrs. Rawdon Crawley was quite killing in the part,” said Lord Steyne. Becky laughed, gay and saucy looking, and swept the prettiest little curtsey ever seen.

Servants brought in salvers covered with numerous cool dainties, and the performers disappeared to get ready for the second charade-tableau.

The three syllables of this charade were to be depicted in pantomime, and the performance took place in the following wise:

First syllable. Colonel Rawdon Crawley, C.B., with a slouched hat and a staff, a great-coat, and a lantern borrowed from the stables, passed across the stage bawling out, as if warning the inhabitants of the hour. In

the lower window are seen two bagmen playing apparently at the game of cribbage, over which they yawn much. To them enters one looking like Boots (the Honourable G. Ringwood), which character the young gentleman performed to perfection, and divests them of their lower coverings; and presently Chambermaid (the Right Honourable Lord Southdown) with two candlesticks, and a warming-pan. She ascends to the upper apartment and warms the bed. She uses the warming-pan as a weapon wherewith she wards off the attention of the bagmen. She exits. They put on their night-caps and pull down the blinds. Boots comes out and closes the shutters of the ground-floor chamber. You hear him bolting and chaining the door within. All the lights go out. The music plays Dormez, dormez, chers Amours. A voice from behind the curtain says, “First syllable.”

Second syllable. The lamps are lighted up all of a sudden. The music plays the old air from John of Paris, Ah quel plaisir d’etre en voyage. It is the same scene. Between the first and second floors of the house represented, you behold a sign on which the Steyne arms are painted. All the bells are ringing all over the house. In the lower apartment you see a man with a long slip of paper presenting it to another, who shakes his fists, threatens and vows that it is monstrous. “Ostler, bring round my gig,” cries another at the door. He chucks Chambermaid (the Right Honourable Lord Southdown) under the chin; she seems to deplore his absence, as Calypso did that of that other eminent traveller Ulysses. Boots (the Honourable G. Ringwood) passes with a wooden box, containing silver flagons, and cries “Pots” with such exquisite humour and naturalness that the whole house rings with applause, and a bouquet is thrown to him. Crack, crack, crack, go the whips. Landlord, chambermaid, waiter rush to the door, but just as some distinguished guest is arriving, the curtains close, and the invisible theatrical manager cries out “Second syllable.”

“I think it must be â€˜Hotel,’” says Captain Grigg of the Life Guards; there is a general laugh at the Captain’s cleverness. He is not very far from the mark.

While the third syllable is in preparation, the band begins a nautical medley–”All in the Downs,” “Cease Rude Boreas,” “Rule Britannia,” “In the Bay of Biscay O!”–some maritime event is about to take place. A ben is heard ringing as the curtain draws aside. “Now, gents, for the

shore!" a voice exclaims. People take leave of each other. They point anxiously as if towards the clouds, which are represented by a dark curtain, and they nod their heads in fear. Lady Squeams (the Right Honourable Lord Southdown), her lap-dog, her bags, reticules, and husband sit down, and cling hold of some ropes. It is evidently a ship.

The Captain (Colonel Crawley, C.B.), with a cocked hat and a telescope, comes in, holding his hat on his head, and looks out; his coat tails fly about as if in the wind. When he leaves go of his hat to use his telescope, his hat flies off, with immense applause. It is blowing fresh. The music rises and whistles louder and louder; the mariners go across the stage staggering, as if the ship was in severe motion. The Steward (the Honourable G. Ringwood) passes reeling by, holding six basins. He puts one rapidly by Lord Squeams–Lady Squeams, giving a pinch to her dog, which begins to howl piteously, puts her pocket-handkerchief to her face, and rushes away as for the cabin. The music rises up to the wildest pitch of stormy excitement, and the third syllable is concluded.

There was a little ballet, "Le Rossignol," in which Montessu and Noblet used to be famous in those days, and which Mr. Wagg transferred to the English stage as an opera, putting his verse, of which he was a skilful writer, to the pretty airs of the ballet. It was dressed in old French costume, and little Lord Southdown now appeared admirably attired in the disguise of an old woman hobbling about the stage with a faultless crooked stick.

Trills of melody were heard behind the scenes, and gurgling from a sweet pasteboard cottage covered with roses and trellis work. "Philomele, Philomele," cries the old woman, and Philomele comes out.

More applause–it is Mrs. Rawdon Crawley in powder and patches, the most ravissante little Marquise in the world.

She comes in laughing, humming, and frisks about the stage with all the innocence of theatrical youth–she makes a curtsey. Mamma says "Why, child, you are always laughing and singing," and away she goes, with–

The Rose Upon My Balcony

The rose upon my balcony the morning air perfuming Was leafless all

Created for Lit2Go on the web at fcit.usf.edu

the winter time and pining for the spring; You ask me why her breath is sweet and why her cheek is blooming, It is because the sun is out and birds begin to sing.

The nightingale, whose melody is through the greenwood ringing, Was silent when the boughs were bare and winds were blowing keen: And if, Mamma, you ask of me the reason of his singing, It is because the sun is out and all the leaves are green.

Thus each performs his part, Mamma, the birds have found their voices, The blowing rose a flush, Mamma, her bonny cheek to dye; And there's sunshine in my heart, Mamma, which wakens and rejoices, And so I sing and blush, Mamma, and that's the reason why.

During the intervals of the stanzas of this ditty, the good-natured personage addressed as Mamma by the singer, and whose large whiskers appeared under her cap, seemed very anxious to exhibit her maternal affection by embracing the innocent creature who performed the daughter's part. Every caress was received with loud acclamations of laughter by the sympathizing audience. At its conclusion (while the music was performing a symphony as if ever so many birds were warbling) the whole house was unanimous for an encore: and applause and bouquets without end were showered upon the Nightingale of the evening. Lord Steyne's voice of applause was loudest of all. Becky, the nightingale, took the flowers which he threw to her and pressed them to her heart with the air of a consummate comedian. Lord Steyne was frantic with delight. His guests' enthusiasm harmonized with his own. Where was the beautiful black-eyed Houri whose appearance in the first charade had caused such delight? She was twice as handsome as Becky, but the brilliancy of the latter had quite eclipsed her. All voices were for her. Stephens, Caradori, Ronzi de Begnis, people compared her to one or the other, and agreed with good reason, very likely, that had she been an actress none on the stage could have surpassed her. She had reached her culmination: her voice rose trilling and bright over the storm of applause, and soared as high and joyful as her triumph. There was a ball after the dramatic entertainments, and everybody pressed round Becky as the great point of attraction of the evening. The Royal Personage declared with an oath that she was perfection, and engaged her again and again in conversation. Little Becky's soul swelled with pride and delight at these honours; she saw fortune, fame, fashion before her. Lord Steyne

Created for Lit2Go on the web at fcit.usf.edu

was her slave, followed her everywhere, and scarcely spoke to any one in the room beside, and paid her the most marked compliments and attention. She still appeared in her Marquise costume and danced a minuet with Monsieur de Truffigny, Monsieur Le Duc de la Jabotiere's attache; and the Duke, who had all the traditions of the ancient court, pronounced that Madame Crawley was worthy to have been a pupil of Vestris, or to have figured at Versailles. Only a feeling of dignity, the gout, and the strongest sense of duty and personal sacrifice prevented his Excellency from dancing with her himself, and he declared in public that a lady who could talk and dance like Mrs. Rawdon was fit to be ambassadress at any court in Europe. He was only consoled when he heard that she was half a Frenchwoman by birth. "None but a compatriot," his Excellency declared, "could have performed that majestic dance in such a way."

Then she figured in a waltz with Monsieur de Klingenspohr, the Prince of Peterwaradin's cousin and attache. The delighted Prince, having less retenue than his French diplomatic colleague, insisted upon taking a turn with the charming creature, and twirled round the ball-room with her, scattering the diamonds out of his boot-tassels and hussar jacket until his Highness was fairly out of breath. Papoosh Pasha himself would have liked to dance with her if that amusement had been the custom of his country. The company made a circle round her and applauded as wildly as if she had been a Noblet or a Taglioni. Everybody was in ecstacy; and Becky too, you may be sure. She passed by Lady Stunnington with a look of scorn. She patronized Lady Gaunt and her astonished and mortified sister-in-law–she ecrased all rival charmers. As for poor Mrs. Winkworth, and her long hair and great eyes, which had made such an effect at the commencement of the evening–where was she now? Nowhere in the race. She might tear her long hair and cry her great eyes out, but there was not a person to heed or to deplore the discomfiture.

The greatest triumph of all was at supper time. She was placed at the grand exclusive table with his Royal Highness the exalted personage before mentioned, and the rest of the great guests. She was served on gold plate. She might have had pearls melted into her champagne if she liked–another Cleopatra–and the potentate of Peterwaradin would have given half the brilliants off his jacket for a kind glance from those dazzling eyes. Jabotiere wrote home about her to his government. The ladies at the other tables, who supped off mere silver and marked Lord

Steyne's constant attention to her, vowed it was a monstrous infatuation, a gross insult to ladies of rank. If sarcasm could have killed, Lady Stunnington would have slain her on the spot.

Rawdon Crawley was scared at these triumphs. They seemed to separate his wife farther than ever from him somehow. He thought with a feeling very like pain how immeasurably she was his superior.

When the hour of departure came, a crowd of young men followed her to her carriage, for which the people without bawled, the cry being caught up by the link-men who were stationed outside the tall gates of Gaunt House, congratulating each person who issued from the gate and hoping his Lordship had enjoyed this noble party.

Mrs. Rawdon Crawley's carriage, coming up to the gate after due shouting, rattled into the illuminated court-yard and drove up to the covered way. Rawdon put his wife into the carriage, which drove off. Mr. Wenham had proposed to him to walk home, and offered the Colonel the refreshment of a cigar.

They lighted their cigars by the lamp of one of the many link-boys outside, and Rawdon walked on with his friend Wenham. Two persons separated from the crowd and followed the two gentlemen; and when they had walked down Gaunt Square a few score of paces, one of the men came up and, touching Rawdon on the shoulder, said, "Beg your pardon, Colonel, I vish to speak to you most particular." This gentleman's acquaintance gave a loud whistle as the latter spoke, at which signal a cab came clattering up from those stationed at the gate of Gaunt House–and the aide-de-camp ran round and placed himself in front of Colonel Crawley.

That gallant officer at once knew what had befallen him. He was in the hands of the bailiffs. He started back, falling against the man who had first touched him.

"We're three on us–it's no use bolting," the man behind said.

"It's you, Moss, is it?" said the Colonel, who appeared to know his interlocutor. "How much is it?"

Created for Lit2Go on the web at fcit.usf.edu

“Only a small thing,” whispered Mr. Moss, of Cursitor Street, Chancery Lane, and assistant officer to the Sheriff of Middlesex– “One hundred and sixty-six, six and eight-pence, at the suit of Mr. Nathan.”

“Lend me a hundred, Wenham, for God’s sake,” poor Rawdon said–”I’ve got seventy at home.”

“I’ve not got ten pounds in the world,” said poor Mr. Wenham–”Good night, my dear fellow.”

“Good night,” said Rawdon ruefully. And Wenham walked away–and Rawdon Crawley finished his cigar as the cab drove under Temple Bar.

Created for Lit2Go on the web at fcit.usf.edu