

BANGS JOHN KENDRICK

THE BICYCLERS AND
THREE OTHER FARCES

John Bangs

The Bicyclers and Three Other Farces

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John Kendrick Bangs

The Bicyclers and Three Other Farces

THE BICYCLERS

CHARACTERS:

MR. ROBERT YARDSLEY, *an expert.*

MR. JACK BARLOW, *another.*

MR. THADDEUS PERKINS, *a beginner.*

MR. EDWARD BRADLEY, *a scoffer.*

MRS. THADDEUS PERKINS, *a resistant.*

MRS. EDWARD BRADLEY, *an enthusiast.*

JENNIE, *a maid.*

The scene is laid in the drawing-room of Mr. and Mrs. Thaddeus Perkins, at No. – Gramercy Square. It is late October; the action begins at 8.30 o'clock on a moonlight evening. The curtain rising discloses Mr. and Mrs. Perkins sitting together. At right is large window facing on square. At rear is entrance to drawing-room. Leaning against doorway is a safety bicycle. Perkins is clad in bicycle garb.

Perkins. Well, Bess, I'm in for it now, and no mistake. Bob and Jack are coming to-night to give me my first lesson in biking.

Mrs. Perkins. I'm very glad of it, Thaddeus. I think it will do you a world of good. You've been working too hard of late, and you need relaxation.

Perkins (doubtfully). I know that—but—from what I can gather, learning to ride a wheel isn't the most restful thing in the world. There's a good deal of lying down about it; but it comes with too great suddenness; that is, so Charlie Cheeseborough says. He learned up at the Academy, and he told me that he spent most of his time making dents in the floor with his head.

Mrs. Perkins. Well, I heard differently. Emma Bradley learned there at the same time he did, and she said he spent most of his time making dents in the floor with other people's heads. Why, really, he drove all the ladies to wearing those odious Psyche knots. The time he ran into Emma, if she hadn't worn her back hair that way she'd have fractured her skull.

Perkins. Ha, ha! They all tell the same story. Barlow said he always wore a beaver hat while Cheeseborough was on the floor, so that if Charlie ran into him and he took a header his brain wouldn't suffer.

Mrs. Perkins. Nevertheless, Mr. Cheeseborough learned more quickly than any one else in the class.

Perkins. So Barlow said—because he wasn't eternally in his own way, as he was in every one else's. *(A ring is heard at the front door.)* Ah! I guess that's Bob and Jack.

Enter Jennie.

Jennie. Mr. Bradley, ma'am.

Perkins. Bradley? Wonder what the deuce he's come for? He'll guzzle the life out of me. *(Enter Bradley. He wears a dinner coat.)* Ah, Brad, old chap, how are you? Glad to see you.

Bradley. Good-evening, Mrs. Perkins. This your eldest? *[With a nod at Perkins.]*

Mrs. Perkins. My eldest?

Bradley. Yes—judged from his togs it was your boy. What! Can it be? You! Thaddeus?

Perkins. That's who I am.

Bradley. When did you go into short trousers?

Perkins (with a feeble laugh, glancing at his clothes). Oh, these—ha, ha! I'm taking up the bicycle. Even if it weren't for the exhilaration of riding, it's a luxury to wear these clothes. Old

flannel shirt, old coat, old pair of trousers shortened to the knee, and golf stockings. I've had these golf stockings two years, and never had a chance to wear 'em till now.

Bradley. You've got it bad, haven't you? How many lessons have you had?

Perkins. None yet. Fact is, just got my wheel—that's it over there by the door—pneumatic tires, tool-chest, cyclometer, lamp—all for a hun.

Bradley (with a laugh). How about life-insurance? Do they throw in a policy for that? They ought to.

Perkins. No—but they would if I'd insisted. Competition between makers is so great, they'll give you most anything to induce a bargain. The only thing they really gave me extra is the ki-yi gun.

Mrs. Perkins. The what?

Perkins. Ki-yi gun—it shoots dogs. Dog comes out, catches sight of your leg—

Bradley. Mistakes it for a bone and grabs—eh?

Perkins. Well—I fancy that's about the size of it. You can't very well get off, so you get out your ki-yi gun and shoot ammonia into the beast's face. It doesn't hurt the dog, but it gives him something to think of. I'll show you how the thing works. (*Gets the gun from tool-box.*) This is the deadly weapon, and I'm the rider—see? (*Sits on a chair, with face to back, and works imaginary pedals.*) You're the dog. I'm passing the farm-yard. Bow-wow! out you spring—grab me by the bone—I—ah—I mean the leg. Pouf! I shoot you with ammonia. [*Suits action to the word.*]

Bradley (starting back). Hi, hold on! Don't squirt that infernal stuff at me! My dear boy, get a grip on yourself. I'm not really a ki-yi, and while I don't like bicyclists, their bones are safe from me. I won't bite you.

Mrs. Perkins. Really—I think that's a very ingenious arrangement; don't you, Mr. Bradley?

Bradley. I do, indeed. But, as long as we're talking about it, I must say I think what Thaddeus really needs is a motormangun, to squirt ammonia, or even beer, into the faces of these cable-car fellows. They're more likely to interfere with him than dogs—don't you think?

Perkins. It's a first-rate idea, Brad. I'll suggest it to my agent.

Bradley. Your what?

Perkins (apologetically). Well, I call him my agent, although really I've only bought this one wheel from him. He represents the Czar Manufacturing Company.

Bradley. They make Czars, do they?

Perkins (with dignity). They make wheels. The man who owns the company is named Czar. I refer to him as my agent, because from the moment he learned I thought of buying a wheel he came and lived with me. I couldn't get rid of him, and finally in self-defence I bought this wheel. It was the only way I could get rid of him.

Bradley. Aha! That's the milk in the cocoanut. eh? Hadn't force of mind to get rid of the agent. Couldn't say no. Humph! I wondered why you, a man of sense, a man of dignity, a gentleman, should take up with this—

Perkins (angrily). See here, Brad, I like you very much, but I must say—

Mrs. Perkins (foreseeing a quarrel). Thaddeus! 'Sh! Ah, by-the-way, Mr. Bradley, where is Emma this evening? I never knew you to be separated before.

Bradley (sorrowfully). This is the first time, Mrs. Perkins. Fact is, we'd intended calling on you to-night, and I dressed as you see me. Emma was in proper garb too, but when she saw what a beautiful night it was, she told me to go ahead, and she—By Jove! it almost makes me weep!

Perkins. She wasn't taken ill?

Bradley. No—worse. She said: "You go down on the 'L.' I'll bike. It's such a splendid night." Fine piece of business this! To have a bicycle come between man and wife is a pretty hard fate, I think—for the one who doesn't ride.

Mrs. Perkins. Then Emma is coming here?

Bradley. That's the idea, on her wheel—coming down the Boulevard, across Seventy-second Street, through the Park, down Madison, across Twenty-third, down Fourth to Twenty-first, then here.

Perkins. Bully ride that.

Mrs. Perkins. Alone?

Bradley (sadly). I hope so—but these bicyclists have a way of flocking together. For all I know, my beloved Emma may now be coasting down Murray Hill escorted by some bicycle club from Jersey City.

Mrs. Perkins. Oh dear—Mr. Bradley!

Bradley. Oh, it's all right, I assure you, Mrs. Perkins. Perfectly right and proper. It's merely part of the exercise, don't you know. There's a hail-fellow-well-metness about enthusiastic bicyclists, and Emma is intensely enthusiastic. It gives her a chance, you know, and Emma has always wanted a chance. Independence is a thing she's been after ever since she got her freedom, and now, thanks to the wheel, she's got it again, and even I must admit it's harmless. Funny she doesn't get here though (*looking at his watch*); she's had time to come down twice.

[*Bicycle bells are heard ringing without.*

Mrs. Perkins. Maybe that is she now. Go and see, will you, Thaddeus? [*Exit Perkins.*

Perkins (without), That you, Mrs. Bradley?

[*Mrs. Perkins and Bradley listen intently.*

Two Male Voices. No; it's us, Perk. Got your wheel?

Bradley and Mrs. Perkins. Where can she be?

Enter Perkins with Barlow and Yardsley.

They both greet Mrs. Perkins.

Yardsley. Hullo, Brad! You going to have a lesson too?

Barlow. Dressed for it, aren't you, by Jove! Nothing like a dinner coat for a bicycle ride. Your coat-tails don't catch in the gear.

Bradley (severely). I haven't taken it up—fact is, I don't care for fads. Have you seen my wife?

Yardsley. Yes—saw her the other night at the academy. Rides mighty well, too, Brad. Don't wonder you don't take it up. Contrast, you know—eh, Perk? Fearful thing for a man to have the world see how much smarter his wife is than he is.

Perkins (turning to his wheel). Bradley's a little worried about the non-arrival of Mrs. Bradley. She was coming here on her wheel, and started about the same time he did.

Barlow. Oh, that's all right, Ned. She knows her wheel as well as you know your business.

Can't come down quite as fast as the "L," particularly these nights just before election. She may have fallen in with some political parade, and is waiting to get across the street.

Bradley (aside). Well, I like that!

Mrs. Perkins (aside). Why—it's awful!

Yardsley. Or she may possibly have punctured her tire—that would delay her fifteen or twenty minutes. Don't worry, my dear boy. I showed her how to fix a punctured tire all right. It's simple enough—you take the rubber thing they give you and fasten it in that metal thingumbob, glue it up, poke it in, pull it out, pump her up, and there you are.

Bradley (scornfully). You told her that, did you?

Yardsley. I did.

Bradley (with a mock sigh of relief). You don't know what a load you've taken off my mind.

Barlow (looking at his watch). H'm! Thaddeus, it's nine o'clock. I move we go out and have the lesson. Eh? The moon is just right.

Yardsley. Yes—we can't begin too soon. Wheel all right?

Perkins. Guess so—I'm ready.

Bradley. I'll go out to the corner and see if there's any sign of Mrs. Bradley. [*Exit.*

Mrs. Perkins (who has been gazing out of window for some moments). I do wish Emma would come. I can't understand how women can do these things. Riding down here all alone at night! It is perfectly ridiculous!

Yardsley (rolling Perkins's wheel into middle of room). Czar wheel, eh?

Perkins (meekly). Yes—best going—they tell me.

Barlow. Can't compare with the Alberta. Has a way of going to pieces like the "one-hoss shay"—eh, Bob?

Yardsley. Exactly—when you least expect it, too—though the Alberta isn't much better. You get coasting on either of 'em, and half-way down, bang! the front wheel collapses, hind wheel flies up and hits you in the neck, handle-bar turns just in time to stab you in the chest; and there you are, miles from home, a physical, moral, bicycle wreck. But the Arena wheel is different. In fact, I may say that the only safe wheel is the Arena. That's the one I ride. However, at fifty dollars this one isn't extravagant.

Perkins. I paid a hundred.

Yardsley. A wha—a—at?

Perkins. Hundred.

Barlow. Well you are a—a—good fellow. It's a pretty wheel, anyhow. Eh, Bob?

Yardsley. Simple beauty. Is she pumped up?

Perkins. Beg your pardon?

Yardsley. Pumped up, tires full and tight—ready for action—support an elephant?

Perkins. Guess so—my—I mean, the agent said it was perfect.

Yardsley. Extra nuts?

Perkins. What?

Yardsley. Extra nuts—nuts extra. Suppose you lose a nut, and your pedal comes off; what you going to do—get a tow?

Barlow. Guess Perkins thinks this is like going to sleep.

Perkins. I don't know anything about it. What I'm after is information; only, I give you warning, I will not ride so as to get round shoulders.

Yardsley. Then where's your wrench? Screw up your bar, hoist your handles, elevate your saddle, and you're O.K. What saddle have you?

Perkins (tapping it). This.

Barlow. Humph! Not very good—but we'll try it. Come on. It's getting late.

[They go out. Perkins reluctantly. In a moment he returns alone, and, rushing to Mrs. Perkins, kisses her affectionately.]

Perkins. Good-bye, dearest.

Mrs. Perkins. Good-bye. Don't hurt yourself, Thaddeus. *[Exit Perkins.]*

Mrs. Perkins (leaving window and looking at clock on mantel). Ten minutes past nine and Emma not here yet. It does seem too bad that she should worry Ed so much just for independence' sake. I am quite sure I should never want to ride a wheel anyhow, and even if I did—

Enter Yardsley hurriedly, with a piece of flannel in his hand.

Yardsley. I beg pardon, Mrs. Perkins, but have you a shawl-strap in the house?

Mrs. Perkins (tragically). What is that you have in your hand, Mr. Yardsley?

Yardsley (with a glance at the piece of flannel). That? Oh—ha-ha—that—that's a—ah—a piece of flannel.

Mrs. Perkins (snatching the flannel from Yardsley's hand). But Teddy—isn't that a piece of Teddy's—Teddy's shirt?

Yardsley. More than that, Mrs. Perkins. It's the greater part of Teddy's shirt. That's why we want the shawl-strap. When we started him off, you know, he took his coat off. Jack held on to the wheel, and I took Teddy in the fulness of his shirt. One—two—three! Teddy put on steam—

Barlow let go—Teddy went off—I held on—this is what remained. It ruined the shirt, but Teddy is safe. (*Aside.*) Barring about sixty or seventy bruises.

Mrs. Perkins (with a faint smile). And the shawl-strap?

Yardsley. I want to fasten it around Teddy's waist, grab hold of the handle, and so hold him up. He's all right, so don't you worry. (*Exit Mrs. Perkins in search of shawl-strap.*) Guess I'd better not say anything about the Pond's Extract he told me to bring—doesn't need it, anyhow. Man's got to get used to leaving pieces of his ankle-bone on the curb-stone if he wants to learn to ride a wheel.

Only worry her if I asked her for it—won't hurt him to suffer a week.

Enter Bradley.

Bradley. Has she come yet?

Yardsley. No—just gone up-stairs for a shawl-strap.

Bradley. Shawl-strap? Who?

Perkins (outside). Hurry up with that Pond's Extract, will you?

Yardsley. All right—coming. Who? Who what?

Bradley. Who has gone up-stairs after shawl-strap—my wife?

Yardsley. No, no, no. Hasn't she got here yet? It's Mrs. Perkins. Perk fell off just now and broke in two. We want to fasten him together.

Barlow (outside). Bring out that pump. His wheel's flabby.

Enter Mrs. Perkins with shawl-strap.

Mrs. Perkins. Here it is. What did I hear about Pond's Extract? Didn't somebody call for it?

Yardsley. No—oh no—not a bit of it! What you heard was shawl-strap—sounds like extract—very much like it. In fact—

Bradley. But you did say you wanted—

Yardsley (aside to Bradley). Shut up! Thaddeus banged his ankle, but he'll get over it in a minute. She'd only worry. The best bicyclers in the world are all the time falling off, taking headers, and banging their ankles.

Bradley. Poor Emma!

Enter Barlow.

Barlow. Where the deuce is that Ex—

Yardsley (grasping him by the arm and pushing him out). Here it is; this is the ex-strap, just what we wanted. (*Aside to Bradley.*) Go down to the drug-store and get a bottle of Pond's, will you? [*Exit.*

Mrs. Perkins (walking to window). She can't be long in coming now.

Bradley. I guess I'll go out to the corner again. (*Aside.*) Best bicyclers always smashing ankles, falling off, taking headers! If I ever get hold of Emma again, I'll see whether she'll ride that—[*Rushes out.*

Mrs. Perkins. It seems to have made these men crazy. I never saw such strange behavior in all my life. (*The telephone-bell rings.*) What can that be? (*Goes to 'phone, which stands just outside parlor door.*) Hello! What? Yes, this is 1181—yes. Who are you? What? Emma? Oh dear, I'm so glad! Are you alive? Where are you? What? *Where? The police-station!* (*Turning from telephone.*)

Thaddeus, Mr. Barlow, Mr. Yardsley. (*Into telephone.*) Hello! What for? What? Riding without a lamp! Arrested at Forty-second Street! Want to be bailed out? (*Drops receiver. Rushes into parlor and throws herself on sofa.*) To think of it—Emma Bradley! (*Telephone-bell rings violently again; Mrs. Perkins goes to it.*) Hello! Yes. Tell Ed what? To ask for Mrs. Willoughby Hawkins. Who's she? What, you! (*Drops the receiver; runs to window.*) Thaddeus! Mr. Yardsley! Mr. Barlow!—all of you come here, quick.

[*They rush in. Perkins with shawl-strap about his waist—limping. Barlow has large air-pump in his hand. Mrs. Perkins grows faint.*

Perkins. Great heavens! What's the matter?

Barlow. Get some water—quick!

[Yardsley runs for water.

Mrs. Perkins. Air! Give me air!

Perkins (grabbing pump from Barlow's hand). Don't stand there like an idiot! Act! She wants air!

[Places pump on floor and begins to pump air at her.

Barlow. Who's the idiot now? Wheel her over to the window. She's not a bicycle.

They do so. Mrs. Perkins revives.

Perkins. What is the matter?

Mrs. Perkins. Mrs. Willoughby Hawkins—arrested—Forty-second Street—no lamp—bailed out. Oh, dear me, dear me! It'll all be in the papers!

Perkins. What's that got to do with us? Who's Mrs. Willoughby Hawkins?

Mrs. Perkins. Emma! Assumed name.

Barlow. Good Lord! Mrs. Bradley in jail?

Perkins. This is a nice piece of—ow—my ankle, my ankle!

[Enter Bradley and Yardsley at same time, Bradley with bottle of Pond's Extract, Yardsley with glass of water.

Bradley. Where the deuce did you fellows go to? I've been wandering all over the square looking for you.

Perkins. Your wife—

Bradley (dropping bottle). What? What about her—hurt?

Mrs. Perkins. Worse! [Sobs.

Bradley. Killed?

Mrs. Perkins. Worse—I-lol-locked up—in jail—no bail—wants to be lamped out.

Bradley. Great heavens! Where?—when? What next? Where's my hat?—what'll the baby say? I must go to her at once.

Yardsley. Hold on, old man. Let me go up. You're too excited. I know the police captain.

You stay here, and I'll run up and fix it with him. If you go, he'll find out who Mrs. Hawkins is; you'll get mad, and things will be worse than ever.

Bradley. But—

Barlow. No buts, my dear boy. You just stay where you are. Yardsley's right. It would be an awful grind on you if this ever became known. Bob can fix it up in two minutes with the captain, and Mrs. Bradley can come right back with him. Besides, he can get there in five minutes on his wheel. It will take you twenty on the cars.

Yardsley. Precisely. Meanwhile, Brad, you'd better learn to ride the wheel, so that Mrs. B. won't have to ride alone. This ought to be a lesson to you.

Perkins. Bully idea (rubbing his ankle). You can use my wheel to-night—I—I think I've had enough for the present. (Aside.) The pavements aren't soft enough for me; and, O Lord! what a stony curb that was!

Bradley. I never thought I'd get so low.

Yardsley. Well, it seems to me that a man with a wife in jail needn't be too stuck up to ride a bicycle. But—by-by—I'm off. [Exit.

Mrs. Perkins. Poor Emma—out for freedom, and lands in jail. What horrid things policemen are, to arrest a woman!

Bradley (indignantly). Served her right! If women won't obey the law they ought to be arrested, the same as men. If she wasn't my wife, I'd like to see her sent up for ten years or even twenty years.

Women have got no business—

Barlow. Don't get mad, Brad. If you knew the fascination of the wheel you wouldn't blame her a bit.

Bradley (calming down). Well—I suppose it has some fascination.

Perkins (anxious to escape further lessons). Oh, indeed, it's a most exhilarating sensation: you seem to be flying like a bird over the high-ways. Try it, Ned. Go on, right away. You don't know how that little ride I had braced me up.

Barlow (wish a laugh). There! Hear that! There's a man who's ridden only eight inches in all his life—and he says he felt like a bird!

Perkins (aside). Yes—like a spring chicken split open for broiling. Next time I ride a wheel it'll be four wheels, with a horse fastened in front. Oh my! oh my! I believe I've broken my back too. [*Lies down.*

Bradley. You seem to be exhilarated, Thaddeus.

Perkins (bracing up). Oh, I am, I am. Never felt worse—that is, better.

Barlow. Come on, Brad. I'll show you the trick in two jiffies—it'll relieve your worry about madam, too.

Bradley. Very well—I suppose there's no way out of it. Only let me know as soon as Emma arrives, will you?

Mrs. Perkins. Yes—we will.

[*They go out. As they disappear through the door Thaddeus groans aloud.*

Mrs. Perkins. Why—what is the matter, dear? Are you hurt?

Perkins. Oh no—not at all, my love. I was only thinking of Mr. Jarley's indignation to-morrow when he sees the hole I made in his curb-stone with my ankle—oh!—ow!—and as for my back, while I don't think the whole spine is gone, I shouldn't be surprised if it had come through in sections.

Mrs. Perkins. Why, you poor thing—why didn't you say—

Perkins (savagely). Why didn't I say? My heavens, Bess, what did you think I wanted the Pond's Extract for—to drink, or to water the street with? O Lord! (*holding up his arm*). There aren't any ribs sticking out, are there?

Barlow (outside). The other way—there—that's it—you've got it.

Bradley (outside). Why, it *is* easy, isn't it?

Perkins (scornfully). Easy! That fellow'd find comfort in—

Barlow (outside). Now you're off—not too fast.

Mrs. Perkins (walking to window). Why, Thaddeus, he's going like the wind down the street!

Perkins. Heaven help him when he comes to the river!

Barlow (rushing in). Here we are in trouble again. Brad's gone off on my wheel. Bob's taken his, and your tire's punctured. He doesn't know the first thing about turning or stopping, and I can't run fast enough to catch him. One member of the family is in jail—the other on a runaway wheel!

[*Yardsley appears at door. Assumes attitude of butler announcing guest.*

Yardsley. Missus Willerby 'Awkins!

Enter Mrs. Bradley, hysterical.

Mrs. Bradley. Oh, Edward!

[*Throws herself into Barlow's arms.*

Barlow (quietly). Excuse me—ah—Mrs. Hawkins—ah—Bradley—but I'm not—I'm not your husband.

Mrs. Bradley (looking up, tragically). Where's Edward?

Mrs. Perkins. Sit down, dear—you must be completely worn out.

Mrs. Bradley (in alarm). Where is he?

Perkins (rising and standing on one leg). Fact is, Mrs. Bradley—we don't know. He disappeared ten minutes ago.

Yardsley. What do you mean?

Mrs. Bradley. Disappeared?

Barlow. Yes. He went east—at the rate of about a mile a minute.

Mrs. Bradley. My husband—went east? Mile a minute?

Perkins. Yes, on a bike. Yardsley, take me by the shawl-strap, will you, and help me over to that chair; my back hurts so I can't lie down.

Mrs. Bradley. Ned—on a wheel? Why, he can't ride!

Barlow. Oh yes, he can. What I'm afraid of is that he can't stop riding.

Bradley (outside). Hi—Barlow—help!

Mrs. Bradley. That's his voice—he called for help.

Yardsley (rushing to window). Hi—Brad—stop! Your wife's here.

Bradley (in distance). Can't stop—don't know how—

Barlow (leaning out of window). By Jove! he's turned the corner all right. If he keeps on around, we can catch him next time he passes.

Mrs. Bradley. Oh, do, do stop him. I'm so afraid he'll be hurt.

Mrs. Perkins (looking out). I can just see him on the other side of the square—and, oh dear me!—his lamp is out.

Mrs. Bradley. Oh, Mr. Yardsley—Mr. Barlow—Mr. Perkins—do stop him!

[*By this time all are gazing out of window, except Perkins, who is nursing his ankle.*]

Perkins. I guess not. I'm not going to lie down in the road, or sit in the road, or stand in the road to stop him or anybody else. I don't believe I've got a sound bone left; but if I have, I'm going to save it, if Bradley kills himself. If his lamp's out the police will stop him. Why not be satisfied with that?

Bradley (passing the window). For Heaven's sake! one of you fellows stop me.

Yardsley. Put on the brake.

Barlow. Fall off. It hasn't got a brake.

Bradley (despairingly, in distance). Can't.

Mrs. Perkins. This is frightful.

Perkins (with a grimace at his ankle). Yes; but there are other fearful things in this world.

Mrs. Bradley. I shall go crazy if he isn't stopped. He'll kill himself.

Yardsley (leaving window hurriedly). I have it. Got a length of clothes-line, Mrs. Perkins?

Barlow. What the dickens—

Mrs. Perkins. Yes.

[*She rushes from the room.*]

Mrs. Bradley. What for?

Yardsley. I'll lasso him, next time he comes around.

Perkins (with a grin). There'll be two of us! We can start a hospital on the top floor.

Mrs. Perkins (returning). Here—here's the line.

[*Yardsley takes it hurriedly, and, tying it into a noose, hastens out.*]

Perkins (rising). If I never walk again, I must see this. [*Limps to window.*]

Mrs. Bradley. He's coming, Mr. Yardsley; don't miss him.

Barlow. Steady, Bob; get in the light.

Mrs. Perkins. Suppose it catches his neck?

Perkins. This beats the Wild West Show.

[*A crash.*]

All. He's got him.

[*All rush out, except Perkins.*]

Perkins. Oh yes; he learned in a minute, he did. Easy! Ha, ha! Gad! it almost makes me forget my pain.

Enter all, asking. "Is he hurt? How do you feel?" etc. *Yardsley has rope-end in right hand; noose is tied about Bradley's body, his coat and clothing are much the worse for wear.*

Mrs. Bradley. Poor, dear Edward!

Bradley (weakly kissing her). Don't m-mind me. I—I'm all right—only a little exhilarated—and somewhat—er—somewhat breathless. Feel like a bird—on toast. Yardsley, you're a brick. But

that pavement—that was a pile of 'em, and the hardest I ever encountered. I always thought asphalt was soft—who said asphalt was soft?

Perkins. Easy to learn, though, eh?

Bradley. Too easy. I'd have gone on—er—forever—er—if it hadn't been for Bob.

Mrs. Bradley. I'll give it up, Ned dear, if you say so.

Mrs. Perkins (affectionately). That's sweet of you, Emma.

Bradley. No, indeed, you won't, for—er—I—I rather like it while it's going on, and when I learn to get off—

Yardsley. Which you will very shortly.

Barlow. You bet! he's a dandy. I taught him.

Bradley. I think I'll adore it.

Perkins. Buy a Czar wheel, Brad. Best in the market; weighs only twenty pounds. I've got one with a ki-yi pump and a pneumatic gun you can have for ten dollars.

Jennie (at the door). Supper is served ma'am. [*Exit.*]

Mrs. Perkins. Let us go out and restore our nerves. Come, Emma.

[*She and Mrs. Bradley walk out.*]

Yardsley (aside). I say, Brad, you owe me five.

Bradley. What for?

Yardsley. Bail.

Barlow. Cheap too.

Yardsley. Very. I think he ought to open a bottle besides.

Perkins. I'll attend to the bottles. We'll have three.

Barlow. Two will be enough.

Perkins. Three—two of fizz for you and Bob and the ladies, and if Bradley will agree, I'll split a quart of Pond's Extract with him.

Bradley. I'll go you. I think I could take care of the whole quart myself.

Perkins. Then we'll make it four bottles.

Mrs. Perkins (appearing at door with her arm about Mrs. Bradley). Aren't you coming?

Perkins (rising with difficulty). As fast as we can, my dear. We've been taking lessons, you know, and can't move as rapidly as the rest of you. We're a trifle—ah—a trifle tired. Yardsley, you tow Bradley into the dining room; and, Barlow, kindly pretend I'm a shawl, will you, and carry me in.

Bradley. I'll buy a wheel to-morrow.

Perkins. Don't, Brad. I—I'll give you mine. Fact is, old man, I don't exactly like feeling like a bird.

[*They go out, and as the last, Perkins and Bradley, disappear stiffly through the portières, the curtain falls.*]

A DRAMATIC EVENING

CHARACTERS:

MR. THADDEUS PERKINS, a victim.

MR. EDWARD BRADLEY, a friend in disguise.

MR. ROBERT YARDSLEY, an amiable villain.

MR. JOHN BARLOW, the amiable villain's assistant.

MRS. THADDEUS PERKINS, a martyr.

MRS. EDWARD BRADLEY, a woman of executive ability.

JENNIE, a housemaid.

The scene is placed in the drawing-room of Mr. and Mrs. Thaddeus Perkins, of New York. The time is a Saturday evening in the early spring, and the hour is approaching eight. The curtain, rising, discovers Perkins, in evening dress, reading a newspaper by the light of a lamp on the table. Mrs. Perkins is seated on the other side of the table, buttoning her gloves. Her wrap is on a chair near at hand. The room is gracefully over-furnished.

Mrs. Perkins. Where are the seats, Thaddeus?

Perkins. Third row; and, by Jove! Bess (*looking at his watch*), we must hurry. It is getting on towards eight now. The curtain rises at 8.15.

Mrs. Perkins. The carriage hasn't come yet. It isn't more than a ten minutes' drive to the theatre.

Perkins. That's true, but there are so many carriage-folk going to see Irving that if we don't start early we'll find ourselves on the end of the line, and the first act will be half over before we can reach our seats.

Mrs. Perkins. I'm so glad we've got good seats—down near the front. I despise opera-glasses, and seats under the galleries are so oppressive.

Perkins. Well, I don't know. For *The Lyons Mail* I think a seat in the front row of the top gallery, where you can cheer virtue and hiss villany without making yourself conspicuous, is the best.

Mrs. Perkins. You don't mean to say that you'd like to sit up with those odious gallery gods?

Perkins. For a melodrama, I do. What's the use of clapping your gloved hands together at a melodrama? That doesn't express your feelings. I always want to put two fingers in my mouth and pierce the atmosphere with a regular gallery-god whistle when I see the villain laid low by the tow-headed idiot in the last act—but it wouldn't do in the orchestra. You might as well expect the people in the boxes to eat peanuts as expect an orchestra-chair patron to whistle on his fingers.

Mrs. Perkins. I should die of mortification if you ever should do such a vulgar thing, Thaddeus.

Perkins. Then you needn't be afraid, my dear. I'm too fond of you to sacrifice you to my love for whistling. (*The front-door bell rings.*) Ah, there is the carriage at last. I'll go and get my coat.

[*Mrs. Perkins rises, and is about to don her wrap as Mr. Perkins goes towards the door.*

Enter Mr. and Mrs. Bradley. Perkins staggers backward in surprise. Mrs. Perkins lets her wrap fall to the floor, an expression of dismay on her face.

Mrs. Perkins (aside). Dear me! I'd forgotten all about it. *This is the night the club is to meet here!*

Bradley. Ah, Perkins, how d' y' do? Glad to see me? Gad! you don't look it.

Perkins. Glad is a word which scarcely expresses my feelings, Bradley. I—I'm simply delighted. (*Aside to Mrs. Perkins, who has been greeting Mrs. Bradley.*) Here's a kettle of fish. We must get rid of them, or we'll miss *The Lyons Mail*.

Mrs. Bradley. You two are always so formal. The idea of your putting on your dress suit, Thaddeus! It'll be ruined before we are half through this evening.

Bradley. Certainly, Perkins. Why, man, when you've been moving furniture and taking up carpets and ripping out fireplaces for an hour or two that coat of yours will be a rag—a veritable rag that the ragman himself would be dubious about buying.

Perkins (aside). Are these folk crazy? Or am I? (*Aloud.*) Pulling up fireplaces? Moving out furniture? Am I to be dispossessed?

Mrs. Bradley. Not by your landlord, but *you* know what amateur dramatics are.

Bradley. I doubt it. He wouldn't have let us have 'em here if he had known.

Perkins. Amateur—amateur dramatics?

Mrs. Perkins. Certainly, Thaddeus. You know we offered our parlor for the performance. The audience are to sit out in the hall.

Perkins. Oh—ah! Why, of course! Certainly! It had slipped my mind; and—ah—what else?

Bradley. Why, we're here to-night to arrange the scene. Don't tell us you didn't know it. Bob Yardsley's coming, and Barlow. Yardsley's a great man for amateur dramatics; he bosses things so pleasantly that you don't know you're being ordered about like a slave. I believe he could persuade a man to hammer nails into his piano-case if he wanted it done, he's so insinuatingly lovely about it all.

Perkins (absently). I'll get a hammer. [*Exit.*]

Mrs. Perkins (aside). I must explain to Thaddeus. He'll never forgive me. (*Aloud.*) Thaddeus is so forgetful that I don't believe he can find that hammer, so if you'll excuse me I'll go help him. [*Exit.*]

Bradley. Wonder what's up? They don't quarrel, do they?

Mrs. Bradley. I don't believe any one could quarrel with Bessie Perkins—not even a man.

Bradley. Well, they're queer. Acted as if they weren't glad to see us.

Mrs. Bradley. Oh, that's all your imagination. (*Looks about the room.*) That table will have to be taken out, and all these chairs and cabinets; and the rug will never do.

Bradley. Why not? I think the rug will look first-rate.

Mrs. Bradley. A rug like that in a conservatory? [*A ring at the front-door bell is heard.*]

Bradley. Ah! maybe that's Yardsley. I hope so. If Perkins and his wife are out of sorts we want to hurry up and get through.

Mrs. Bradley. Oh, we'll be through by twelve o'clock.

Enter Yardsley and Barlow.

Yardsley. Ah! here we are at last. The wreckers have arrove. Where's Perkins?

Barlow. Taken to the woods, I fancy. I say, Bob, don't you think before we begin we'd better give Perkins ether? He'll suffer dreadful agony.

Enter Mrs. Perkins, wiping her eyes.

Mrs. Perkins. How do you do, Mr. Barlow? and you, Mr. Yardsley? So glad to see you. Thaddeus will be down in a minute. He—ah—he forgot about the—the meeting here to-night, and he—he put on his dress-coat.

Yardsley. Bad thing to lift a piano in. Better be without any coat. But I say we begin—eh? If you don't mind, Mrs. Perkins. We've got a great deal to do, and unfortunately hours are limited in length as well as in number. Ah! that fireplace must be covered up. Wouldn't do to have a fireplace in a conservatory. Wilt all the flowers in ten minutes.

Mrs. Perkins (meekly). You needn't have the fire lit, need you?

Barlow. No—but—a fireplace without fire in it seems sort of—of bald, don't you think?

Yardsley. Bald? Splendid word applied to a fireplace. So few fireplaces have hair.

Mrs. Bradley. Oh, it could be covered up without any trouble, Bessie. Can't we have those dining-room portières to hang in front of it?

Yardsley. Just the thing. Dining-room portières always look well, whether they're in a conservatory or a street scene. (*Enter Perkins.*) Hello, Thaddeus! How d' y'? Got your overalls on?

Perkins (trying to appear serene). Yes. I'm ready for anything. Anything I can do?

Bradley. Yes—look pleasant. You look as if you were going to have your picture taken, or a tooth pulled. Haven't you a smile you don't need that you can give us? This isn't a funeral.

Perkins (assuming a grin). How'll that do?

Barlow. First-rate. We'll have to make you act next. That's the most villanous grin I ever saw.

Yardsley. I'll write a tragedy to go with it. But I say, Thad, we want those dining-room portières of yours. Get 'em down for us, will you?

Perkins. Dining-room portières! What for?

Mrs. Perkins. They all think the fireplace would better be hid, Thaddeus, dear. It wouldn't look well in a conservatory.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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