

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle Willis  
Baum Henry Nietzsche Hall  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Turgenev Balzac Willis  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whittman Twain  
Darwin Zola Lawrence Plato  
Potter Freud Jowett Stevenson Dickens Scott  
Kant Andersen London Descartes Cervantes Burton Harte  
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Hesse  
Hale James Hastings Cooke  
Bunner Shakespeare Chambers Irving  
Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse  
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# **The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith**

*Arthur Wing, Sir Pinero*

# Imprint

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## THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

AGNES

LUCAS

CLEEVE SYBIL

CLEEVE SIR SANDFORD

CLEEVE DUKE OF ST. OLPHERTS

GERTRUDE

THORPE

REV. AMOS WINTERFIELD

SIR GEORGE BRODRICK

DR. KIRKE FORTUNE

ANTONIO

POPPI

NELLA

HEPHZIBAH

The Scene is laid in Venice—first at the Palazzo Arconati, a lodging house on the Grand Canal; afterwards in an apartment in the Campo S. Bartolomeo.

It is Easter-tide, a week passing between the events of the First and Second Acts.



## THE FIRST ACT

The Scene is a room in the Palazzo Arconati, on the Grand Canal, Venice. The room itself is beautiful in its decayed grandeur, but the furnishings and hangings are either tawdry and meretricious or avowedly modern. The three windows at the back open on to a narrow covered balcony, or loggia, and through them can be seen the west side of the canal. Between recessed double doors on either side of the room is a fireplace out of use and a marble mantelpiece, but a tiled stove is used for a wood fire. Breakfast things are laid on the table. The sun streams into the room.

[ANTONIO POPPI and NELLA, two Venetian servants, with a touch of the picturesque in their attire, are engaged in clearing the breakfast-table.]

NELLA. [Turning her head.] Ascolta! (Listen!)

ANTONIO. Una gondola allo scalo. (A gondola at our steps.) [They open the centre-window, go out on to the balcony, and look down below.] La Signora Thorpe. (The Signora Thorpe.)

NELLO. Con suo fratello. (With her brother.)

ANTONIO. [Calling.] Buon di, Signor Winterfield! Iddio la benedica!

[Good day, Signor Winterfield! The blessing of God be upon you!]

NELLA. [Calling.] Buon di, Signora! La Madonna Passista! (Good day,

Signora! May the Virgin have you in her keeping!)

ANTONIO. [Returning to the room.] Noi siamo in ritardo di tutto questa mattina. (We are behindhand with everything this morning.)

NELLA. [Following him.] E vero. (That is true.)

ANTONIO. [Bustling about.] La stufa! (The stove!)

NELLA. [Throwing wood into the stove.] Che tua sia benedetta per rammentarmelo! Questi Inglesi non si contentono del sole. (Bless you for remembering it. These English are not content with the sun.)

[Leaving only a vase of flowers upon the table, they hurry out with the breakfast things. At the same moment, FORTUNE, a manservant, enters, showing in MRS. THORPE and the REV. AMOS WINTERFIELD. GERTRUDE THORPE is a pretty, frank-looking young woman of about seven and twenty. She is in mourning, and has sorrowful eyes and a complexion that is too delicate, but natural cheerfulness and brightness are seen through all. AMOS is about forty – big, burly, gruff; he is untidily dressed, and has a pipe in his hand. FORTUNE is carrying a pair of freshly-cleaned tan-coloured boots upon boot-trees.]

GERTRUDE. Now, Fortune, you ought to have told us downstairs that Dr.

Kirke is with Mrs. Cleeve.

AMOS. Come away, Gerty. Mrs. Cleeve can't want to be bored with us just now.

FORTUNE. Mrs. Cleeve give 'er ordares she is always to be bored wiz

Madame Thorpe and Mr. Winterfield.

AMOS. Ha, Ha!

GERTRUDE. [Smiling.] Fortune!

FORTUNE. Besides, ze doctares vill go in 'alf a minute, you see.

GERTRUDE. Doctors!

AMOS. What, is there another doctor with Dr. Kirke?

FORTUNE. Ze great physician, Sir Brodrick.

GERTRUDE. Sir George Brodrick? Amos!

AMOS. Doesn't Mr. Cleeve feel so well?

FORTUNE. Oh, yes. But Mrs. Cleeve 'appen to read in a newspaper zat  
Sir George Brodrick vas in Florence for ze Paque – ze Eastare. Sir  
Brodrick vas Mr. Cleeve's doctor in London, Mrs. Cleeve tell me,  
so'e  
is acquainted wiz Mr. Cleeve's inside.

AMOS. Ho, ho!

GERTRUDE. Mr. Cleeve's constitution, Fortune.

FORTUNE. Excuse, madame. Zerefore Mrs. Cleeve she telegraph  
for Sir  
Brodrick to come to Venise.

AMOS. To consult with Dr. Kirke, I suppose.

FORTUNE. [Listening.] 'Ere is ze doctares.

[DR. KIRKE enters, followed by SIR GEORGE BRODRICK. KIRKE is a shabby, snuff-taking old gentleman – blunt but kind; SIR GEORGE, on the contrary, is scrupulously neat in his dress, and has a suave, professional manner. FORTUNE withdraws]

KIRKE. Good morning, Mr. Winterfield. [To GERTRUDE.] How do you do, my dear? You're getting some colour into your pretty face, I'm glad to see. [To SIR GEORGE.] Mr. Winterfield – Sir George Brodrick. [SIR GEORGE and AMOS shake hands.]

KIRKE. [To SIR GEORGE.] Mrs. Thorpe. [SIR GEORGE shakes hands with GERTRUDE.] Sir George and I started life together in London years ago; now he finds me here in Venice. Well we can't all win the race – eh?

SIR GEORGE. My dear old friend! [To GERTRUDE.] Mr Cleeve has been telling me, Mrs. Thorpe, how exceedingly kind you and your brother have been to him during his illness.

GERTRUDE. Oh, Mr. Cleeve exaggerates our little services.

AMOS. I've done nothing.

GERTRUDE. Nor I.

DR. KIRKE. Now, my dear!

GERTRUDE. Dr Kirke, you weren't in Florence with us; you're only a tale-bearer.

DR. KIRKE. Well, I've excellent authority for my story of a young woman who volunteered to share the nursing of an invalid at a time when she herself stood greatly in need of being nursed.

GERTRUDE. Nonsense! [To SIR GEORGE.] You know, Amos—my big brother over there—Amos and I struck up an acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Cleeve at Florence, at the Hotel d'Italie, and occasionally one of us would give Mr Cleeve his dose while Poor Mrs. Cleeve took a little rest or drive—but positively that's all.

DR KIRKE. You don't tell us—

GERTRUDE. I've nothing more to tell, except that I'm awfully fond of Mrs. Cleeve—

AMOS. Oh, if you once get my sister on the subject of Mrs. Cleeve— [Taking up a newspaper.]

GERTRUDE. [To SIR GEORGE.] Yes, I always say that if I were a man searching for a wife, I should be inclined to base my ideal on Mrs. Cleeve.

SIR GEORGE. [Edging away towards KIRKE, with a surprised uncomfortable smile.] Eh? Really?

GERTRUDE. You conceive a different ideal, Sir George?

SIR GEORGE. Oh—well—

GERTRUDE. Well, Sir George?

AMOS. Perhaps Sir George has heard that Mrs. Cleeve holds regrettable opinions on some points. If so, he may feel surprised that a parson's sister—

GERTRUDE. Oh, I don't share all Mrs. Cleeve's views, or sympathise with them, of course. But they succeed only in making me sad and sorry. Mrs. Cleeve's opinions don't stop me from loving the gentle, sweet woman; admiring her for her patient, absorbing devotion to her husband; wondering at the beautiful stillness with which she seems to glide through life—!

AMOS. [Putting down the newspaper, to SIR GEORGE and KIRKE.] I told you so! [To GERTRUDE.] Gertrude, I'm sure Sir George and Dr. Kirke want to be left together for a few minutes.

GERTRUDE. [Going up to the window.] I'll sun myself on the balcony.

AMOS. And I'll go and buy some tobacco. [To GERTRUDE.] Don't be long, Gerty. [Nodding to SIR GEORGE and KIRKE] Good morning. [They return his nod; and he goes out.]

GERTRUDE. [On the balcony.] Dr. Kirke, I've heard what doctors' consultations consist of. After looking at the pictures, you talk about whist. [She closes the windows and sits outside.]

KIRKE. [Producing his snuff-box.] Ha, ha!

SIR GEORGE. Why this lady and her brother evidently haven't any suspicion of the actual truth, my dear Kirke!

KIRKE. [Taking snuff.] Not the slightest.

SIR GEORGE. The woman made a point of being extremely explicit with you, you tell me?

KIRKE. Yes, she was plain enough with me. At our first meeting, she said: "Doctor, I want you to know so-and-so, and so-and-so, and so-and-so."

SIR GEORGE. Really? Well it certainly isn't fair of Cleeve and his— his associate to trick decent people like Mrs Thorpe and her brother. Good gracious, the brother is a clergyman too!

KIRKE. The rector of some dull hole in the north of England.

SIR GEORGE. Really!

KIRKE. A bachelor; this Mrs Thorpe keeps house for him. She's a widow.

SIR GEORGE. Really?

KIRKE. Widow of a captain in the army. Poor thing! She's lately lost her only child and can't get over it.

SIR GEORGE. Indeed, really, really? . . . but about Cleeve, now – he had Roman fever of rather a severe type?

KIRKE. In November. And then that fool of a Bickerstaff at Rome allowed the woman to move him to Florence too soon, and there he had a relapse. However, when she brought him on here the man was practically well.

SIR GEORGE. The difficulty being to convince him of the fact, eh? A highly-strung, emotional creature?

KIRKE. You've hit him.

SIR GEORGE. I've known him from his childhood. Are you still giving him anything?

KIRKE. A little quinine, to humour him.

SIR GEORGE. Exactly. [Looking at his watch.] Where is she? Where is she? I've promised to take my wife shopping in the Merceria this morning. By the bye, Kirke – I must talk scandal, I find – this is rather an odd circumstance. Whom do you think I got a bow from as I passed through the hall of the Danieli last night? [Kirke grunts and shakes his head.] The Duke of St Olpherts.

KIRKE. [Taking snuff.] Ah! I suppose you're in with a lot of swells now, Brodrick.

SIR GEORGE. No, no; you don't understand me. The Duke is this young fellow's uncle by marriage. His Grace married a sister of Lady Cleeve's – of Cleeve's mother, you know.

KIRKE. Oh! This looks as if the family are trying to put a finger in the pie.

SIR GEORGE. The Duke may be here by mere chance. Still, as you say, it does look – [Lowering his voice as KIRKE eyes an opening door.] Who's that?

KIRKE. The woman.

[AGNES enters. She moves firmly but noiselessly—a placid woman, with a sweet, low voice. Her dress is plain to the verge of coarseness; her face, which has little colour, is, at the first glance almost wholly unattractive.]

AGNES. [Looking from one to the other.] I thought you would send for me, perhaps. [To SIR GEORGE.] What do you say about him?

KIRKE. One moment. [Pointing to the balcony.] Mrs. Thorpe—

AGNES. Excuse me. [She goes to the window and opens it.]

GERTRUDE. Oh, Mrs Cleeve! [Entering the room.] Am I in the way?

AGNES. You are never that, my dear. Run along to my room; I'll call you in a minute or two. [GERTRUDE nods, and goes to the door.] Take off your hat and sit with me for a while.

GERTRUDE. I'll stay for a bit, but this hat doesn't take off. [She goes out]

AGNES. [To SIR GEORGE and KIRKE.] Yes?

SIR GEORGE. We are glad to be able to give a most favourable report. I may say that Mr Cleeve has never appeared to be in better health.

AGNES. [Drawing a deep breath.] He will be very much cheered by what you say.

SIR GEORGE. [Bowing stiffly.] I'm glad—

AGNES. His illness left him with a morbid, irrational impression that he would never be his former self again.

SIR GEORGE. A nervous man recovering from a scare. I've helped remove that impression I believe.

AGNES. Thank you. We have a troublesome, perhaps a hard time before us; we both need all our health and spirits. [Turning her head, listening.] Lucas?

[LUCAS enters the room. He is a handsome, intellectual-looking young man of about eight-and-twenty.]

LUCAS. [To AGNES, excitedly.] Have you heard what they say of me?

AGNES. [Smiling.] Yes.

LUCAS. How good of you, Sir George, to break up your little holiday for the sake of an anxious, fidgety fellow. [To Agnes.] Isn't it?

AGNES. Sir George has rendered us a great service.

LUCAS. [Going to KIRKE, brightly.] Yes, and proved how ungrateful I've been to you, doctor.

KIRKE. Don't apologise. People who don't know when they're well are the mainstay of my profession. [Offering snuff-box.] Here— [LUCAS takes a pinch of snuff, laughingly.]

AGNES. [In a low voice to SIR GEORGE.] He has been terribly hipped at times. [Taking up the vase of flowers from the table.] Your visit will have made him another man. [She goes to a table, puts down the vase upon the tray, and commences to cut and arrange the fresh flowers she finds there.]

LUCAS. [Seeing that AGNES is out of hearing.] Excuse me, Kirke—just for one moment. [To SIR GEORGE.] Sir George— [KIRKE joins AGNES.] You still go frequently to Great Cumberland Place?

SIR GEORGE. Your mother's gout has been rather stubborn lately.

LUCAS. Very likely she and my brother Sandford will get to hear of your visit to me here; in that case you'll be questioned pretty closely, naturally.

SIR GEORGE. My position is certainly a little delicate.

LUCAS. Oh you may be perfectly open with my people as to my present mode of life. Only— [He motions SIR GEORGE to be seated; they sit facing each other.] Only I want you hear me declare again plainly [looking towards AGNES] that but for the care and devotion of that good woman over there, but for the solace of that woman's companionship, I should have been dead months ago—I should have died raving in my awful bedroom on the ground floor of that foul Roman hotel. Malarial fever, of course! Doctors don't admit—

do they?—that it's possible for strong men to die of miserable marriages. And yet I was dying in Rome, I truly believe, from my bitter, crushing disappointment, from the consciousness of my wretched, irretrievable—[FORTUNE enters, carrying LUCAS' hat, gloves, overcoat, and silk wrap, and upon a salver, a bottle of medicine and a glass.]

LUCAS. [Sharply.] Qu'y a-t-il, Fortune?

FORTUNE. Sir, you have an appointment.

LUCAS. [Rising.] At the Danieli at eleven. Is it so late? [FORTUNE places the things upon the table. LUCAS puts the wrap around his throat; AGNES goes to him and arranges it for him solicitously.]

SIR GEORGE. [Rising.] I have to meet Lady Brodrick at the Piazzetta.

Let me take you in my gondola.

LUCAS. Thanks—delighted.

AGNES. [To SIR GEORGE.] I would rather Lucas went in the house gondola;  
I know its cushions are dry. May he take you to the Piazzetta?

SIR GEORGE. [A little stiffly.] Certainly.

AGNES. [To FORTUNE.] Mettez les coussins dans la gondole.

FORTUNE. Bien, madame.

[FORTUNE goes out. AGNES begins to measure a dose of medicine.]

SIR GEORGE. [To AGNES.] Er—I—ah—

LUCAS. [Putting on his gloves.] Agnes, Sir George—

AGNES. [Turning to SIR GEORGE, the bottle and glass in her hands.] Yes?

SIR GEORGE. [Constrainedly.] We always make a point of acknowledging the importance of nursing as an aid to medical treatment. I—I am sure Mr. Cleeve owes you much in that respect.

AGNES. Thank you.

SIR GEORGE. [To LUCAS.] I have to discharge my gondola; you'll find me at the steps, Cleeve. [AGNES shifts the medicine bottle from one hand to the other so that her right hand may be free, but SIR GEORGE simply bows in a formal way and moves towards the door.] You are coming with us, Kirke?

KIRKE. Yes.

SIR GEORGE. Do you mind seeing that I'm not robbed by my gondolier? [He goes out.]

AGNES. [Giving the medicine to LUCAS, undisturbed.] Here, dear.

KIRKE. [To AGNES.] May I pop in tonight for my game of chess?

AGNES. Do, doctor; I shall be very pleased.

KIRKE. [Shaking her hand in a marked way.] Thank you. [He follows SIR GEORGE.]

AGNES. [Looking after him.] Liberal little man.

[She has LUCAS' overcoat in her hand: a small pen-and-ink drawing of a woman's hand drops from one of the pockets. They pick it up together.]

AGNES. Isn't that the sketch you made of me in Florence?

LUCAS. [Replacing it in the coat-pocket.] Yes.

AGNES. You are carrying it about with you?

LUCAS. I slipped it into my pocket, thinking it might interest the Duke.

AGNES. [Assisting him with his overcoat.] Surely I am too obnoxious in the abstract for your uncle to entertain such a detail as a portrait.

LUCAS. It struck me that it might serve to correct certain preconceived notions of my people's.

AGNES. Images of a beautiful temptress with peach-blossomed cheeks and stained hair?

LUCAS. That's what I mean; they suspect a decline of taste on my part, of that sort. Good-bye, dear.

AGNES. Is this mission of the Duke of St Olpherts the final attempt to part us, I wonder? [Angrily, her voice hardening.] Why should they harass and disturb you as they do?

LUCAS. [Kissing her.] Nothing disturbs me now that I know I am strong and well. Besides, everybody will soon tire of being shocked. Even conventional morality must grow breathless in the chase. [He leaves her. She opens the other door and calls.]

AGNES. Mrs. Thorpe! I'm alone now. [She goes on to the balcony, through the centre window, and looks down below. GERTRUDE enters, and joins her on the balcony.]

GERTRUDE. How well your husband is looking!

AGNES. Sir George Brodrick pronounces him quite recovered.

GERTRUDE. Isn't that splendid! [Waving her hand and calling.] Buon giorno, Signor Cleve! Come molto meglio voi state! [Leaving the balcony, laughing.] Ha, ha! My Italian! [AGNES waves finally to the gondola below, returns to the room, and slips her arm through GERTRUDE'S.]

AGNES. Two whole days since I've seen you.

GERTRUDE. They've been two of my bad days, dear.

AGNES. [Looking into her face.] All right now?

GERTRUDE. Oh, "God's in his heaven" this morning! When the sun's out I feel that my little boy's bed in Ketherick Cemetery is warm and cosy.

AGNES. [Patting GERTRUDE'S hand] Ah!—

GERTRUDE. The weather's the same all over Europe, according to the papers. Do you think it's really going to last? To me these chilly, showery nights are terrible. You know, I still tuck my child up at night-time; still have my last peep at him before going to my own bed; and it is awful to listen to these cold rains—drip, drip,

upon that little green coverlet of his! [She goes and stands by the window silently.]

AGNES. This isn't strong of you, dear Mrs. Thorpe. You mustn't—you mustn't. [AGNES brings the tray with the cut flowers to the nearer table; calmly and methodically she resumes trimming the stalks.]

GETRUDE. You're quite right. That's over. Now, then, I'm going to gabble for five minutes gaily. [Settling herself comfortably in an armchair.] What jolly flowers you've got there! What have you been doing with yourself? Amos took me to the Caffè Quadri yesterday to late breakfast, to cheer me up. Oh, I've something to say to you! At the Caffè, at the next table to ours, there were three English people—two men and a girl—home from India, I gathered. One of the men was looking out of the window, quizzing the folks walking in the Piazza, and suddenly he caught sight of your husband. [AGNES' hands pause in their work.] "I do believe that's Lucas Cleeve," he said. And then the girl had a peep, and said "Certainly it is." And the man said: "I must find out where he's stopping; If Minerva is with him, you must call." "Who's Minerva?" said the second man. "Minerva is Mrs. Lucas Cleeve," the girl said, "it's a pet name—he married a chum of mine, a daughter of Sir John Steyning's a year or so after I went out." Excuse me, dear. Do these people really know you and your husband, or were they talking nonsense?

[AGNES takes the vase of faded flowers, goes onto the balcony, and empties the contents of the vase into the canal. Then she stands by the window, her back towards GERTRUDE.]

AGNES. No, they evidently know Mr. Cleeve.

GERTRUDE. Your husband never calls you by that pet-name of yours. Why is it you haven't told me you're a daughter of Admiral Steyning's?

AGNES. Mrs Thorpe—

GERTRUDE. [Warmly.] Oh, I must say what I mean! I have often pulled myself up short in my gossips with you, conscious of a sort of wall between us. [AGNES comes slowly from the window.] Somehow, I feel now that you haven't in the least made a friend of me. I'm hurt. It's stupid of me; I can't help it.

AGNES. [After a moment's pause.] I am not the lady these people were speaking of yesterday.

GERTRUDE. Not—?

AGNES. Mr. Cleeve is no longer with his wife; he has left her.

GERTRUDE. Left—his wife!

AGNES. Like yourself, I am a widow. I don't know whether you've ever heard my name—Ebbsmith. [GERTRUDE stares at her blankly.] I beg your pardon sincerely. I never meant to conceal my true position; such a course is opposed to every true principle of mind. But I grew so attached to you in Florence and—well, it was contemptibly weak; I'll never do such a thing again. [She goes back to the table and commences to refill the vase with the fresh flowers.]

GERTRUDE. When you say that Mr. Cleeve has left his wife, I suppose you mean to tell me that you have taken her place?

AGNES. Yes, I mean that.

[GERTRUDE rises and walks to the door.]

GERTRUDE [At the door.] You knew that I could not speak to you after hearing this?

AGNES. I thought it almost certain that you would not.

[After a moment's irresolution, GERTRUDE returns, and stands by the settee.]

GERTRUDE. I can hardly believe you.

AGNES. I should like you to hear more than just the bare fact.

GERTRUDE. [Drumming on the back of the settee.] Why don't you tell me more?

AGNES. You were going, you know.

GERTRUDE. [Sitting.] I won't go quite like that. Please tell me.

AGNES. [Calmly.] Well—did you ever read of John Thorold—"Jack Thorold, the demagogue?" [GERTRUDE shakes her head.] I daresay not. John Thorold, once a schoolmaster, was my father. In my time he used to write for the two or three, so-called, inflammatory journals, and hold forth in small lecture-halls, occasionally

even from the top of a wooden stool in the Park, upon trade and labour questions, division of wealth, and the rest of it. He believed in nothing that people who go to church are credited with believing in, Mrs. Thorpe; his scheme for the readjustment of things was Force; his pet doctrine, the ultimate healthy healing that follows the surgery of Revolution. But to me he was the gentlest creature imaginable; and I was very fond of him, in spite of his—as I then thought—strange ideas. Strange ideas! Ha! Many of 'em luckily don't sound quite so irrational today!

GERTRUDE. [Under her breath.] Oh!

AGNES. My home was a wretched one. If dad was violent out of the house, mother was violent enough in it; with her it was rage, sulk, storm, from morning till night; till one day father turned a deaf ear to mother and died in his bed. That was my first intimate experience of the horrible curse that falls upon so many.

GERTRUDE. Curse?

AGNES. The curse of unhappy marriage. Though really I'd looked on little else all my life. Most of our married friends were cursed in a like way; and I remember taking an oath, when I was a mere child, that nothing should ever push me over into the choked-up, seething pit. Fool! When I was nineteen I was gazing like a pet sheep into a man's eyes; and one morning I was married, at St. Andrew's Church in Holborn, to Mr. Ebbsmith, a barrister.

GERTRUDE. In church?

AGNES. Yes, in church—in church. In spite of father's unbelief and mother's indifference, at the time I married I was as simple—ay, in my heart, as devout—as any girl in a parsonage. The other thing hadn't soaked into me. Whenever I could escape from our stifling rooms at home, and slam the front door behind me, the air blew away uncertainty and scepticism; I seemed only to have to take a long, deep breath to be full of hope and faith. And it was like this till that man married me.

GERTRUDE. Of course, I guess your marriage was an unfortunate one.