

Puffe & Co.
or, Hamlet, Prince of Dry Goods

Comic Opera in Two Acts

Written by J.W. Bengough
**Composed by Clarence Lucas*

**The score, though it contained many
good things, was regarded as on the
whole too heavy. It never passed
out of the Composer's hands.*

Cast of characters:

Prometheus Puffe, head of the House of Puffe & Co. (Bar)
Antonio Puffe, his son, with histrionic aspirations (Bar)
Fernando De Vinton, Floorwalker, an embittered Dove (Bar)
Alan Dale, who “Clerks” for fun (Tenor)
Harry Haberdash, Head Clerk (Tenor)
Brown } composing the wholesale firm, creditors (Bar)
Jones } (Tenor)
Robinson } (Bar)
Timothy Snatchelt, an official assignee
Tommy Tuddle, a junior clerk
Flora, niece of Puffe Sr. (soprano)
Eva } “salesladies” (contralto)
Lily } (soprano)
Hecuba Ann Perkins, Puffe’s Deceased Wife’s sister (mezzo)
Chorus of Clerks

Act I—Scene a Fashionable Dry Goods store

Act II—Scene a lawn adjoining Mr. Puffe’s residence

Puffe & Co.

Act I

Scene—a Fashionable Retail Dry-Goods store.
Clerks arrayed in fancy operatic costumes.
Opening Chorus of Clerks.

No. 1. Another day with sunlight gay
Now bathes the world in glory,
The birds and bees enjoy their ease
To them the world is flowery;
x But we return with every morn
To work—the same old story!

x Tho' gaily dressed we're far from blest,
We've no surcease from working,
Howe'er we yearn this toil to spurn
For us there is no shirking,
And there's no work for Jew or Turk
That's quite so bad as clerking—
Heigho! Heigh O!

Solo—Harry

Believe not in our smiles and smirks
they're all put-ons with dry goods clerks
Beneath their sorrow ever lurks

All. Heigho!

Solo—Eva

Excuse the curt and snappy style
We sometimes have—it is not guile
We really cannot always smile—

Male Clerks

Fair ladies, 'tis not for ourselves,
So much as 'tis for you we feel!

Female Clerks

All. 'Tis sorrow for *your* deeper woes,
And not our own, our sighs reveal
(*embracing sympathizingly*)
If you observe upon this face
A settled look of pain,
If from this heart a sigh wells up

Anon and yet again,
Think not 'tis for myself I mourn,
You wrong me so to do,
'Tis pure, unselfish sympathy,
I sigh alone for you
Heigho!
'Tis all for you, heigho!
For you, heigho, heigho!

[*enter Dale*]

Dale. That's right. I like to see people get to business bright and early.

Harry. But how's this? *You* never by any chance get round before ten o'clock. I only wish *I* could afford to clerk for the fun of the thing.

Dale. Oh, don't deceive yourself. I haven't formally got round this morning yet. Just stepped in as I was passing to enquire if you had seen the firm's announcement in this morning's paper?

Harry. No.

Dale. Listen. (*reads*) "Puffe & Co. the leading dry goods house. Bargains, bargains, bargains. Another step ahead of all competitors. Something hitherto undreamt of in the dry goods business. This morning and henceforth our salespeople will appear in fancy costumes made expressly for this house by Spangle & Co. A blaze of splendour. Call and see the array of beauty and examine our new line of hosiery just opened. Puffe & Co., 20, 22, 24, 26, 28 Hustler St." There, how do you like that?

Ladies. It's hateful!

Harry. It is only one more link in the chain of our thralldom, but the labor market is overstocked and we must submit. But now, to business. Let us forget for the nonce that we are human, let us remember only that we are dry goods salespeople—the employés of the rather too enterprising firm of Puffe & Co.

[*Exeunt clerks*]

Dale. And now to execute a delicate commission for the head of the house, to wit, to drive to the depot and meet the 8 o'clock train by which his niece is to arrive. Miss—er—Miss—where's that card? (*finds card*) Flora Lovelace. What? And I never glanced at the card before. Flora Lovelace. The very name of my own heart's idol! But no, that would be too much luck. Ah, what would I not give if it *were* only *my* Flora, my queen!

Song—Dale

No. 2. There's not a queen on any throne
Of any land beneath the sun
That can with her, my queen, compare
No, not a single one!
To me she's fairest of the fair
The beauty not alone is hers
Her heart, there's not a gem more rare

In all the universe!
Tho pale may grow her blooming cheek
And bent become her queenly form
Truth from her honest eyes will speak
And love brave every storm.

[goes off singing.]
Enter Fernando, the Floorwalker.
He wears the costume of Mephistopheles

Recit—Fernando

No. 3. What's this? a bit of muslin on the floor?
Now cursèd be the Muslin Department!
I'll not put up with this vile, slovenly style
Of doing things while I am head floor walker!
And what's this? Dust? Zounds, as I live, 'tis dust.
'Tis *dust*, upon my life! I shall go mad
With cares like these upon my bursting brow
Or I will be the death of some of them!

Song

Although my aspect stern and wild
Forbids the thought that I am mild,
Although this dress would intimate
A nature boiling o'er with hate:
Although you trembling, menial crew
May perhaps corroborate this view,
You're wrong! in me you see a dove
Embittered, thwarted—crossed in love!

O, let me pour my hapless story
Into your attentive ear,
Let me tell you why you find me
As floor-walker lingering here;
Tell you why I walk the floor,
(An employment I abhor
Scorn and loath, despise, abhor!)

When I spoke my love for Flora
— Love that never can be quenched—
She disdained my ardent passion,
From my clasp her hand she wrenched,
Then in wild despair I tore
Up and down my office floor
Sworn to walk for evermore!

Sworn! Yes sworn! for in my frenzy
Stung by cynic word and look,
I declared I'd walk for ever,
Whereupon I kissed the book;
So my dream of fame was o'er,

I could practice law no more;
I was doomed to walk the floor!

Now perhaps you begin to appreciate the horrors of my situation. I might have been a famous lawyer by this time, but that is past! In an evil moment I sacrificed my career—and all for love—unrequited love! When Teddington, my law partner, stung me with his ill-timed jest that I was wasting good shoe-leather, it was too much. I seized the office bible and swore that I would walk the floor for ever. I had to dissolve the partnership. I must become either a Perjurer or a Floorwalker, and I could not contemplate perjury. Thus was I joined by cruel fate into the dry goods business, and cut off from my chosen profession, and when you come to consider all this and the additional fact that I still burn with a hopeless but unquenchable passion for Flora Lovelace, tho' I never expect to see her on earth again, you will excuse me if I have become a misanthropical, malignant and morbid villain who will stop at nothing. I live only for revenge, but for what and upon whom I neither know nor care.

[Enter Harry

What ho, minion!

Harry. Yes, sir.

Fernando. Where's Dale?

Harry. Do you mean the young gentleman—?

Fernando. I mean the upstart who gives himself the airs of a gentleman but who is—but pshaw! how dare you ask *me* a question? Where is he?

Harry. He hasn't got down to business yet this morning, sir. He rarely comes before noon.

Fernando. No! (*aside*) Curse him! I hate that fellow. I don't know why, but I do. What right has he to be happy and rich, and come here clerking for a vacation lark, while I—but enough! I'll get even with him.

Harry. Do you speak to me, sir?

Fernando. (*thundering*) No; I didn't. But I have a word to say to you now, so step this way.

[Exeunt, Harry trembling with fear.
Re-enter clerks

Chorus—Clerks

No. 4. Time moves along with laggard foot
And trade is very slow,
Which makes a pretty poor look out
For the firm of Puffe & Co.
Heigho!

[Enter Harry, indignant

Recit—Harry

Now by my scissors, this is past endurance,
Another insult from the vile De Vinton!

Clerks

Another insult?

Harry

Yes! that sweeps us all
In one contemptuous breath.
The scowling monster tells me long face
That dry-goods clerking is no work for *men*.

Male Clerks

No work for men?

Harry

He says that no *man* ever was clerk!

Female Clerks

O, fie upon him. Shame!

All

Oh, shame, shame, shame!

Harry

We hurl the slander back!

Clerks

We } do! We } do!
They } They }

Solo—Harry

Tho' ignorance may curl its haughty lip,
 Tho' idleness its addle head may toss,
Tho' flippancy its fingers slim may flip
 And sneers may come from natures vile and gross
Clerks. Sneers only come from nature's vile and gross...
Facts still are facts, Truth crushed to earth will rise
 And nought can change the truth we hold within,
That notwithstanding all mendacious lies
We masculine dry goods clerks are men, are men!

Chorus—All

We } are We're } men!
They } They're }

However they lie they can't deny

That ^{we} } male dry goods clerks are men
 all }

We }
They } are!

Tho' lily white our hands perchance may be
(They must be so to handle costly lace)
Tho' girlish be our air we fail to see
 What harm there is about a girlish grace.

Clerks

Nought can be fairer than a girlish face!
And if they call us molly coddles weak
And jeer at us as womanish, what then?
They only scorn their mothers who so speak
For we male dry goods clerks are men, are men!

[Chorus as before.

During refrain clerks snap their scissors defiantly

Harry. There, that makes us even with the Floorwalker, I fancy!
Eva. Who, after all, is only an understrapper himself, for here comes the head of the house.
Lily. Accompanied as usual by that interesting relic, his deceased wife's sister. It looks very much come as if—
Harry. Order. No gossip allowed. Let us give our esteemed employer his customary welcome.

[Enter Puffe & Hecuba

Chorus—Clerks

No. 5. Hail Mr. Puffe!
 We greet thee with Good morning!
Hail to the Chief,
 The dry goods trade adorning!
Hail, head of House,
 Great merchant Enterprising,
Whose stock is always fresh and new
 and imported direct and sold at
or below cost and whose success
 Is due to advertising!

Solo—Puffe

Many thanks for your most flattering remarks,
In return I beg to say that you, my clerks,
 Are the most polite and pretty
 The most affable and witty
 And the least stuck up and chitty
 Salespeople in the city
You're a regular lot of blithesome little larks!

All

There's no use talking, it's a patent fact
As every one must know,
That the firm that leads for enterprise and tact
Is the firm of Puffe & Co!

[*Exeunt clerks*]

Recit—Puffe

I trust I've made it plain by my demeanour
Toward the people here in my employment,
That I am not an ordinary merchant!

Hecuba. He's by no means an ordinary merchant.

Song—Puffe

I'm not a common merchant, understand.
My establishment's the finest in the land.
I go in for advertising
In a fashion so surprising
That my rivals are surmising
I am far too enterprising—

Hecuba. But my motto's "When you do it, do it grand."
Yes! his motto's "When you do it, do it grand!"

Observe the fancy costumes of my clerks,
That's the latest of my little business quirks,
I suppose I needn't mention
That the obvious intention
Of this striking new invention
Is to captivate attention

Hecuba. It's an operatic notion, and it works.
Yes! an operatic notion, and it works!
Competition we emphatically defy
For at half the regular rates we always buy
At 'enormous sacrifices'
And a 'slaughtering of prices'
And the 'damaged goods' devices
And the various artifices.

We beat 'em, but we never, never lie!
Hecuba. No! they wouldn't, and they couldn't if they'd try.

Puffe. Yes, Hecuba! I *am* a successful merchant, and I owe no small share of my success to *your* sisterly encouragement.

Hecuba. O, thank you. (*aside*) *Sisterly?* I wish he wouldn't put it in that way.

Puffe. Er—but, by the by, you were saying something about Antonio as we came in.

Hecuba. Yes; I am quite disturbed about your son. He has been acting very queerly of late.

Puffe. *Acting* queerly? Why, of course. They're getting up a play in honor of his birthday—he and the salespeople, and he's going to perform *Hamlet*. I suppose you've caught him rehearsing.

Hecuba. Well, I'm glad the performance is to come off in a day or two. Otherwise, I won't answer for Antonio. He isn't himself half the time; he's Hamlet, or *thinks* he is. Only this morning when the girl asked him if he would have a poached egg for his breakfast he glared at her horribly and said, "There's something rotten in the state of Denmark!" The poor thing was quite frightened.

Puffe. Dear me, is it as bad as that?

Hecuba. Most serious I assure you.

Puffe. I will see him at once. But meanwhile if you'll just slip into the office I'll fix that little investment matter for you.

Hecuba. Thank you, Prometheus. (*aside*) He is so good and kind to a lone woman!

[Exit Hecuba]

Puffe. Hmm! Troubles never come singly. I'm quite upset about Antonio. Just at this moment we both need all our wits, too. It's the dull season, and we're uncomfortably tight at the bank.

[Enter Harry]

Ah, Mr. Haberdash, how is business this morning?

Harry. Very slow, sir, I'm sorry to say. Doing nothing, in fact.

Puffe. That's bad. (*aside*) We'll have to start the boom somehow. (*aloud*) Er—advertise that we'll give a house and lot to the purchaser of every \$10 worth who guesses the number of flies on our gum-paper on the 4th of July.

[Exit Puffe]

Recit—Harry

No. 6. Ah! here's a customer coming now
 Whose pretty face and figure are a treat,
 She's crossing over straight for here, I vow,
 And she's looking up and down the street.
 She's read our ad, her every movement shows
 She's after bargains—that means Puffe & Co.'s.

[During this clerks re-enter and take places behind counters]

Chorus—Clerks

O if it's bargains she would have
 Don't let her go astray,
 Tell her, perhaps she doesn't know
 We're giving things away!
 O, do not let her miss the chance
 We've marked things down so low,

'Twould be unkind to let her pass
The shop of Puffe & Co.

Harry (still at door)

A flash of sapphire from her eye there darted
She saw our sign & straight for here she started.

[*Harry retires*]

Chorale—Clerks

O, little bird that sings at dawn
To welcome back the light
O flowret smiling in thy joy
At skies serene & bright.
We mortal clerks in moments such as this
Can understand thy rapture in a way
For 'tis with joy we greet this coming bliss—
The only customer we've had today!

[*Enter Flora*]

Harry (to clerks)

Politeness and attention is our motto,
No shop in courtesy shall be before us
If she should sing, as I suppose she ought to
Let all politely furnish her a chorus.

Song—Flora

O Cupid, artful boy,
How brave you make the heart,
When once, with aim so coy
You've winged your magic dart;
Some potent spell, thy sweet assaults compel
That make the timid breast with boldness swell.
O, coy young Cupid, say,
What is thy witchery!

Clerks

O Cupid, deign to make polite reply
To this young lady's civil enquiry!

Flora

O Cupid, artful boy,
I feel thy golden chain,
The bondage gives me joy,
There's pleasure in the pain.
Thy potent spell—tho' this I would not tell
Binds me to one whom I've loved long and well
O coy young Cupid say
What is thy witchery?

Clerks

O Cupid, we can't see
Just what this has to do
With dry goods, yet please say
What is thy witchery!

Flora

O, coy young Cupid, say,
What is thy witchery?

Clerks

O say! O say!

Clerks. *(all bending forward attentively over counter)* What can we do for you this morning, miss?

Flora. I came in to see—

Clerks. *(breaking in and speaking rapidly in succession)* Silks? Reps? Muslins? Satins? Grosgrain? Velvet? Cotton? Hosiery? Gloves?

All. No trouble to show goods. *(each taking down samples)* Parasols? Handkerchiefs? Collarettes? Hairpins? Satchels? Hose? Embroidery? Lace? Feathers? Millinery? Dress goods? Toys? Cutlery? Hardware? Boots and shoes? House furnishings?

All. Not the slightest trouble to show goods!

[During this fusillade Flora is frantically endeavoring to explain that she has not come as a customer

Flora. No, *no, no!*

*[She sits down exhausted on counter stove.
The clerks, also utterly exhausted and discouraged, file out.
Enter Dale*

Dale. Well, here I am, and I'm sorry to say that my obliging courtesy in undertaking the delicate mission of escorting Mr. Puffe's expected niece from the depot went for nothing. She didn't come.

Flora. Oh, yes she did!

Dale. What! It *was my* Flora! Oh, this is too much rapture. *(embraces her)* And you never told me you were anybody's niece, and you never let me know you were coming!

Flora. But I have come.

Dale. And I only hope you are half as much delighted as I am that after our separation we meet again. Confess now love, you couldn't endure it any longer!

Flora. *(coyly)* I came to visit my uncle, as you know. I am not obliged to confess anything further.

Dale. Ah, that blush confesses all! This clerking fad of mine ends tonight. I draw the line at fancy costumes.

Flora. Then I may really see something of you?

Dale. I will not leave your side, after the shop closes tonight. We will be free to revise the sweet memories of the past, enjoy a blissful present, and paint the pleasures of a bright future.

Duet—Dale and Flora

Dale

No. 7. Love writes all pleasures past
On memory's dearest page,
While life exists they last,
And flourish green in age;

Both

Such pleasures we have known
Such memories ours may be,
They shrine my love for you,
They tell your love for me.

Flora

Love marks the present blest—
Transforming all that's drear,
Assuaging all unrest
And stilling every fear,

Both

Such bliss we now may know
A pleasure deep and free
That marks my love for you,
And tells your love for me!

[Puffe's voice is heard in office]

Flora. Dear me, there's uncle's voice, which reminds me that I haven't yet greeted him as an affectionate niece ought to.

Dale. Here's metal more attractive—ahem!

Flora. Conceit!

Dale. No; Shakespeare! But au revoir, my darling; I must to business. The scowling monster De Vinton, our Floorwalker, may be here anon.

Flora. *(aside)* De Vinton! Can it be the same? *(aloud)* Pray, don't get into trouble on my account.

Dale. O, it's a regular thing between us, I'm used to it. Let me escort you to the senior partner's office.

*[Exeunt Dale & Flora.
Enter Fernando]*

Fernando. So, ho! Can it be that my eyes deceived me? No! It *is* she! Flora Lovelace, as I live, my own loved and lost Flora. And with *him*! Does *he* know her? Then my hate is intensified a thousand fold! There shall be blood between us!

[Re-enter Dale]

So you've turned up at last, have you? It's nearly noon, sir, and I want you to understand that this sort of thing won't do!

Dale. Calm yourself, sir. I can fully explain. I overslept myself as usual.

Fernando. I saw you in conversation with a lady here a moment ago. Who was she?

Dale. Dear me, I'm not expected to know every customer personally, am I?

Fernando. Well, don't let it happen again!

[Exit Dale]

Curse him! That figure—no! My heart could not deceive me. *(Brightening)* I will see her again! And yet, she rejected me as a lawyer. What would she say to a Floorwalker? It is too much, too much!

*[Exit in an agony of despair.
Enter Puffe, Hecuba & Flora]*

Puffe. Yes, a thousand welcomes, Flora, but I'm truly sorry that Mr. Dale missed you at the Depot. He very kindly undertook the mission at my request.

Flora. It *was* kind of him, wasn't it?

Hecuba. Poor fellow, how much *he* lost, if he could only have known it!

Puffe. But you got here just the same.

Flora. Yes: and I mean to have my usual good time. But where's Antonio? I haven't seen my gallant cousin yet.

Hecuba. Poor boy; he's suffering from a bad attack of *Hamlet*.

Flora. What? is he ill?

Puffe. They're rehearsing a play, you know.

Hecuba. That's his voice now. Judge for yourself. As for me, I really can't stay. When he left home this morning he had his acting costume on. I'm positively frightened of him!

[Exit Hecuba, escorted to the door by Puffe]

Flora. There's a growing tenderness there if I am any judge of amatory matters.

Puffe. *(returning)* Let us go aside and observe him.

Antonio. *(without, reciting)*

“So let the wounded deer go weep
The hart ungalled play,
For some must watch while others sleep,
So runs the world away!”

Flora. Goodness! He's quoting Shakespeare!

[Puffe and Flora go aside.]

*Enter Antonio in grotesque Hamlet costume with book in hand.
He has a tragic air and a general appearance of over-study*

Antonio. Now I am alone. *(looks around dazed)* Trade flaps in the air with leaden wings, methinks. There is neither customer nor clerk in this department. This is hard—hard. For who would fardels bear, to groan and sweat beneath a weary life when he himself might his quietus make with a bear [*sic*] bodkin! But enough. *(puts book in his girdle)* No more of this. I would

have rest. My head feels buzzy and queer—something between a hawk and a handsaw—a little nor’norwest. I’m going too deep into this. Am I *Hamlet* or am I not? To be or not to be? That’s the question. No, not *Hamlet*, but his counterfeit presentment. Antonio Puffe, of the firm of Puffe & Co. And yet, my good aunt thinks me fantastical. She says I’m off my base. ’Tis a base thought. My head is level. Put me to the test, and I will not gambol from it as madness would.

Song—Antonio

(Local verses may be substituted for these or added to them.)

No. 8.

I know I’m not Hamlet, but plain Mr. Puffe
No Prince, but a dealer in dry goods and stuff
And I know of some actors who rate themselves high
Whose Hamlets are no more Hamlets than I.

Do I seem to be rambling there?

I know that in business it never would pay
To sell below cost in a regular way,
And the placards displayed on our goods as a rule
Are meant to mislead and deceive and befool,

Do I seem to be rambling there?

The legal profession is all very well
but sometimes our lawyers great ‘fictions’ will tell,
Some preachers are frauds and the doctors who blow
Of their skill are usually quackish I know,

Do I seem to be rambling there?

The big politicians all over the land
Are not always honest, I quite understand,
But I think that the people who follow their lead,
Deserve to be robbed by the hoodlers they breed,

Do I seem to be rambling there?

There are plenty more things I could mention to prove
That my brain is still moving along the right groove,
But I will not detain you except just to say
That high hats are a nuisance when worn at a play.

Do I seem to be rambling there?

*[Resumes reading, relapsing into tragic mood.
Seeing milliner’s dummies, he approaches them*

Rest, rest perturbed spirit. So, gentlemen, with all my love I do commend me to you, and what so poor a man as Hamlet is may do to impress his love and friendship to you, God willing, shall not lack. The time is out of joint—o cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right. Hillo, ho, ho, boy! Come, bird, come!

[Enter Puffe and Flora

Puffe. Good morning, Antonio, my boy.

Antonio. Buzz, buzz.

Puffe. (to *Flora*) Is that in the book? (to *Antonio*) Hey? I don't want to buzz you—but don't you see who's here? Where have you been so long?

Antonio. So long? Nay, then, let the devil wear black for I'll have a suit of sables. For O, for O, the hobby horse is forgot!

Flora. (aside to *Puffe*) He *is* queer isn't he? He seems to be having a spasm.

Puffe. I never saw anything like it in my life. It's simply ridiculous! (to *Antonio*) Do you mean to say you don't recognize this young lady?

Flora. Of course he knows his cousin.

Antonio. Cousin? (recovering himself) Hey? Why it's Flo, isn't it? Pray excuse me, I was off at Elsinore, for the moment.

Puffe. (aside) Off his cart, more like.

Antonio. Do I act stupidly?

Flora. Well, no—not stupidly. The acting was very good in its way, but isn't it somewhat premature, this costume?

Antonio. 'Tis but to help me realize the character—no more. 'Tis nothing. These indeed seem, but I have that within which passes show, these but the trapping and the suit of woe.

Puffe. (angrily) Well, of all the confounded, crazy—

Antonio. Nay, do not saw the air too much with your hand thus, but use all gently.

Puffe. Well, I can tell you somebody in this establishment's got to saw the air, or the bank won't use us very gently. Don't you know that we're in a tight place, and can't afford to waste any time on playacting tomfoolery?

Antonio. This quarry cries on havoc!

Puffe. You bet it does! I've got to hustle right off to see about that note of Brown Jones & Robinson's which is due today, do you *understand*, due *today*, and must be renewed in full. And the sooner you get your civilized clothes on and give your attention to your legitimate business—

Flora. But *Hamlet* is legitimate business, you know, uncle.

Puffe. Pshaw! I've no patience with it! Excuse me, I haven't a moment to spare. Shakespeare be jiggered!

[Exit in a passion]

Antonio. Brown Jones & Robinson! You are welcome, masters, welcome all. I am glad to see thee well; welcome, good friends. What, my young lady and mistress! By'r lady, your ladyship is nearer to heaven than when I saw you last, by the altitude of a chopine!

Flora. You *do* know me then. I was afraid you did not remember me.

Antonio. Remember thee! Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat in this distracted globe. (recovering himself) Pardon me, Flora—it's in the play, you know. The play's the thing, and speaking of the play, we must have you for the part of the *Queen*. 'Tis vacant. The jade that was set down for't hath jilted us. What say you?

Flora. On one condition I consent.

Antonio. Condition? Name it.

Flora. That you will drop “Hamlet” completely and be yourself until the curtain rises for the performance. By the way, when is it?

Antonio. This night week. And I agree to your condition.

Flora. You really promise?

Antonio. Come hither, gentlemen, and lay your hand upon my sword. Swear by my sword.

Flora. There! You’re breaking through already.

Antonio. No! by’r lady, no! I promise. If you catch me at it again, pull my coat, for ’pon my honor I don’t know when I am doing it half the time!

Flora. You must be careful; you’ll sink your own identity so far that you can’t pull it up again. Aunt Hecuba is really alarmed about you.

Antonio. She’s not the only one. Eva’s in tears fifty times a day about it.

Flora. Eva? O I remember her—your affianced. Is she here yet?

Antonio. Yes; still at the head of the millinery department. She’s to play “Ophelia.” Would you see her?

Flora. With pleasure. I want to congratulate her on your happy reformation.

Antonio. We’ll go at once. “To the celestial and my soul’s idol, the most beautiful Ophelia.”

[Flora pulls his coat

Thanks! I beg your pardon. This way.

[Exeunt.

*Enter Brown Jones & Robinson, who are dressed alike in melancholy costumes.
After tiptoeing around inspecting the premises they come down*

Trio—Brown Jones & Robinson

No. 9. Three melancholy creditors are we
We’ve just dropped in to see what we can see,
In a casual way and quite informally

[tiptoe business

At the agency we’re rated no. 1
Wholesale dry goods

Brown. Brown
Jones. and Jones
Robinson. and Robinson
All. a, 1.

This firm is in some trouble, it appears,
And rumors round the town have reached our ears,
Adapted to arouse our wholesale fears
We’re cautious, hence we’re rated no. 1
Wholesale dry goods

Brown. Brown
Jones. and Jones
Robinson. and Robinson

All. a, 1.
Our note, that's due today, has not been met,
And that's a sort of thing we never let
Our retail customer, ahem! forget.
We're careful of our rating, no. 1.
Wholesale dry goods

Brown. Brown
Jones. and Jones
Robinson. and Robinson

All. a, 1.
Upon inspection it appears as though
In this department trade is pretty slow
Yet on the whole we've faith in Puffe & Co.
Dun Wiman rates them xyz.4, 1,
Much less than

Brown. Brown
Jones. and Jones
Robinson. and Robinson

All. a, 1.
To borrow trouble's folly, it's far better to be jolly
And to banish melancholy as you go.
So let us all be merry and our grim forebodings bury,
things may not be so very bad, you know.

*[Grotesque dance. Exeunt.
Enter Fernando*

Fernando. I was right! I *knew* it. It was *she*! She is still beneath this roof. And more, she knows, and what is worse *loves* this odious wretch, Dale. My unerring instinct tells me so. What shall I do? I dare not meet her in this menial garb; nor will my overmastering passion permit me to avoid her! (*suddenly*) She is here! Flora!

Flora. Gracious! What vision's this? Can it be possible? Fernando De Vinton!

Fernando. Yes. Fernando De Vinton! The man you rejected; the man whose life you have embittered. (*kneeling*) But I still love you Flora, more madly than ever!

Flora. Sir!

Fernando. Do not despise me! do not reject me, because I have become the paltry dry goods individual you find me. 'Twas through you I did it. Oh Flora, Flora! I –

Flora. Enough of this, sir. Begone! Leave me forever!

Fernando. You cast me off again, then? Weigh your answer well, for I am a desperate man.

Flora. Yes, forever!

Fernando. And for this despicable counter-hopper Dale?

Flora. For no other.

Fernando. Then, look to yourself. Revenge, revenge!
Flora. As I think you remarked on a former occasion.
Fernando. What! Would you dare to mock me?

[rises and strides round furiously]

Duet—Fernando and Flora

No. 10.

Fernando. Revenge, revenge, a dread revenge I'll have!
Flora. He's very bad!
Fernando. A dire revenge, I will not spare nor save!
Flora. He's really mad!
Fernando. O mocking girl when once I hurl
my thunderbolt
Flora. *(terrified)* O spare me!
Fernando. Thy doom is sealed, my heart is steeled
I'll not revolt.
Flora. O leave me!

Flora

O wild and furious man
I pray you go away,
No plot of vengeance plan
'Gainst me or mine, I pray,

Fernando. Humph!

Flora

Tho' love I cannot give
I'll hold you in respect,
I'll rank you while I live
Amongst my friends select.

Fernando. Humph!
I scorn thy friendship without love,
Nought can my horrid purpose move,
My plan is here *(tapping his brow)*, my fiendish plot,
You'll suffer soon—I won't say what!
Revenge, revenge!

[He seizes her. She screams. Exit Fernando hastily]

Flora

O palpating heart, be still
O shattered nerves, O whirling head,
O quaking limbs, O fluttered will,
O horrid man, I'm nearly dead!

[Enter clerks excitedly]

Chorus—Clerks

She's evidently flurried, manifestly worried,
She looks extremely nervous and alarmed
She's greatly agitated, and appears intimidated.
But we hope and trust she isn't really harmed.

Harry. Tho' we haven't had the honor of a formal introduction

All. Tho' we've never, as he says, been introduced;

Harry. Permit us to enquire into this—may I call it ruction

All. He means this little scene that you've produced.

[Enter Dale: Flora falls into his arms

Recit—Dale

I heard a startled cry that smote my heart
And with the wings of love I would have flown
But that a captious purchaser of buttons
Detained me!

Clerks. 'Twas she!

Dale. I knew! No other voice could thrill me!

[Dale & Flora go aside

Chorus—Lady clerks

He says he came on lover's wing.
A very interesting thing!

Male clerks

He openly confessed a thrill
A thing more interesting still!

Ensemble

Female voices

Calm reason discovers
The facts as they are
They're probably lovers
This well-mated pair.

Male voices

Yes, reason discovers
And actions declare
They're certainly lovers
It's perfectly clear.

Recit—Dale

What reason's discovered, we plainly declare.

Duet—Flora and Dale

Long has the blossom of my love
Bloomed fair and sweet within this heart,
And wherever I may rove
Of life 'twill be the sweetest part.
Come weal or woe, our pledges both
We'll cherish true from day to day
Through good or ill our plighted troth
We'll keep as fresh as flowers of May.

[Exeunt

Chorus—Clerks

Their plighted troth from day to day,
They'll keep as fresh as flowers of May.

We're almost sure
They've met before,
For she loves him, and he loves her!

[Enter Antonio]

Antonio. Who speaks of loving? We'll have no more marriages!

Eva. (*distressed*) O! Antonio, you don't really mean that?

Antonio. Peace, fair lady: 'twas but one of my lines. But this commotion. I would learn the cause withal.

Harry. A young lady—probably frightened at a rat.

Antonio. A rate? How now, a rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!

Eva. (*aside*) There he goes again, oh dear!

[Clerks whisper]

Antonio. What means this mystery? Why do you go about to recover the wind of me as if you would drive me into a toil?

Harry. It means, Mr. Puffe—

Antonio. I know him not. Yea, from the book and tablet of my brain I'll wipe away all—Puffe!

Harry. (*to clerks*) It's no use. He's got 'em again. Let's retire.

[Exeunt all but Eva]

Antonio. All gone? No, not all. Soft you now! The fair Ophelia. Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered. (*Eva is annoyed*) Er—I beg pardon. I meant to say—

Eva. That you love me not. Go on, that's in your part too.

Antonio. What! was I rambling again? Truly, I beg a thousand pardons. I didn't know it. But I'm all right now, and I tell you I do love my own dear little Eva. (*kisses her*)

Eva. I can't help doubting you when you take these horrid Shakespeare spasms.

Antonio. Doubt thou the stars are fire
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar
But never doubt I love!

O, dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art to reckon my groans but that I love thee best, oh most best, believe it!

Eva. (*disengaging herself*) How stupid I am! This is all a fraud. (*snatching his book*) Here is your precious avowal, every bit of it, in the part of Polonius. (*bursting into tears*) I thought it was original!

Antonio. No, not original as to words; but genuine all the same, for I feel just as Hamlet did, I'm sure.

Eva. Yes, that's just the difficulty. You've lost your other self, and he was the one I loved! (*renewed weeping*)

Antonio. But you misunderstand me. I'm not really Hamlet. I mean I—

Eva. You promised me to quit studying.

Antonio. I will—I will. (*seizing the book and throwing it away*) From this time forth, my thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth!

Eva. (*sbrinking*) Mercy! I'm afraid of him.

Antonio. Afraid?

Eva. This is getting worse and worse.

Antonio. Thus bad begins but worse remains behind! There, I've gone and alarmed you again, darling. O what a wretch and peasant slave am I!

Eva. It's quite evident you don't love me enough to do as I ask you. You have turned into Hamlet—and Hamlet was mad! (*she weeps*)

Antonio. No. I've studied that point. He was not mad. You or I would do just as he did under similar provocation. Remember his wicked uncle and his father's ghost.

Eva. He was crazy enough to believe in ghosts, however.

Antonio. I don't know. There are more things in heaven and earth Horatio—I mean Eva. I beg pardon. But enough. *I have no wicked uncle.*

Eva. No; but you may shortly have a charming step-ma.

Antonio. Hey? What mean you, little one?

Eva. Aunt Hecuba.

Antonio. Tush! Impossible. She is my father's deceased wife's sister. A truce to foolish men. If I thought for one moment—but no! Impossible!

Eva. (*aside*) By no means impossible, but if it should happen, what *wouldn't* he do?

Antonio. They come. Adieu, sweet Ophelia—I mean Eva. No more scandal, remember. Till we meet, adieu. (*picks up book*) For Hecuba? What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba, that he should weep for her?

[*Exit tragically.*
Enter Harry

Harry. Is he taken again?

Eva. Yes; it comes on in spells.

Harry. Here's a worse spasm coming. The Floorwalker.

[*Exeunt Harry & Eva.*
Enter Fernando

Fernando. I am utterly unfitted for my odious duties today, and were it not for my vow nothing could compel me to remain here. Thwarted, rejected, humiliated, spurned—I would fain hide myself forever from mortal gaze. But I can't do it and I wouldn't if I could, for my whole thought now is of vengeance! I shall remain here and bring this haughty girl to my feet—at whatever cost. Surely my legal brain will stand me in good stead now.

Come then, Machiavellian ingenuity, and suggest some plan, some plot, some scheme, at once appalling and original to bring her low! (*Reflecting. Suddenly startled*) Hist! Who comes here. Dale! She's told him all! I never thought of that! I'm done for now. I'll avoid him!

[*Goes aside. Enter Dale and Flora*]

Dale. But about the cause of your alarm, darling; you promised to tell me, you know.

Flora. (*aside*) I dare not tell him; it would lead to bloodshed. (*aloud*) Didn't I tell you? How strange! But I'm really in a hurry now and must ask to have the matter postponed.

Dale. Tomorrow, then; say at luncheon. You know we're to have a tete-a-tete. Please don't overlook that at half past eleven.

Flora. Till then, au revoir.

[*He kisses her. Exit Flora*]

Dale. And now to find that awe-inspiring dignitary, the Floorwalker, and consult him on a momentous subject, to wit, to find out the technical name of this lace. Ah! here he is!

[*Enter Fernando*]

Fernando. (*trembling*) Were you looking for me, Mr. Dale?

Dale. (*aside*) What's struck him I wonder? I believe he's afraid of me. I'll put him to the test. (*aloud*) Yes; I was looking for you. You're the very man!

Fernando. (*still more alarmed*) M-m-me, Mr. Dale?

Dale. Yes you. I want to see you on a very delicate subject. Do you understand me sir?

Fernando. Mr. Dale, if I have ever spoken harshly to you—

Dale. Oh, I'm not here to talk to you about anything so trifling as that. You'll learn presently that the matter I have *in hand* is—

Fernando. (*piteously*) Don't—please don't say anything about it—not now. I am far from well today.

Dale. (*aside*) I'm getting on famously. (*aloud*) But I *must* have it out with you! I would be unworthy of my standing even as a dry goods clerk if I allowed the matter to wait a moment longer. You *shall* hear me, sir, so prepare yourself.

[*Fernando falls on his knees*]

Fernando. Mercy, mercy! Mr. Dale. Oh spare me! I'm a wretched, miserable man, and I didn't mean to do any harm!

Dale. No; I shall not spare you. I will have it out, and at once.

Fernando. (*aside*) My time has come too soon. My doom is sealed. (*trembling violently*)

Dale. Now, sir, answer me this, don't dare to evade or prevaricate; answer me: What's the shop name for this stuff? (*showing sample*)

Fernando. (*gradually recovering*) Is—is—(*sigh of relief*) is that all?

Dale. Yes; that's all. Isn't it important enough business from a mercantile standpoint?

Fernando. (*aside*) She hasn't told him! Can it be that she loves me after all? (*aloud—and with increasing fury*) That's Duchess lace, you blockhead! How dare you come to me (*rising*) in this bullying manner?

Dale. (*going*) Oh, just for a change. You seemed to appreciate it too, I thought.

Fernando. You scoundrel! I led you on just to see how far your audacity would carry you. You shall pay dearly for this!

Dale. Just as the customer will for *this*—what did you call it? Oh yes, Duchess lace—\$17 per yard. Thanks, tater!

[Exit Dale

Fernando. Curse him! He gave me quite a start! But this only whets my appetite for revenge.

[Enter Harry and clerks

Have you served those customers in the hosiery department?

Harry. (*nervously*) We did our best, sir, but they said they didn't come to buy today—they only came to look at the things.

Fernando. You're a parcel of chumps! It's your business to make people buy!

[Exit

Solo—Harry

No. 11. Now, do you call that square?

Clerks. It's not!

Or rational, or fair?

Clerks. It's not!

And tho' to do our duty we invariably try
We get this sort of usage if the shoppers do not buy.

Clerks. Upon this sort of shoppers we pronounce anathema.

Solo—Harry

There's the elderly maiden, with spectacles laden;
The chit from the college who badly needs knowledge;
The bargaining woman—a haggler inhuman,
And the lady who'll "call in again",
There's the belle of society—shoddy variety;
The critical madam who riles our old Adam,
The dawdling damsel, the epicure mam'selle,
You wait on these creatures in vain!

Clerks

They linger and they dawdle and then sniffle,
h'm and haw
Against them each and several we pronounce
anathema!

Harry

They potter and palter, their fancies they alter,
They feel and they finger, they loiter and linger,
They pause and they ponder, they talk and they maunder
 They sit and they simper and sigh;
We answer their questions, and note their suggestions,
We empty the cases of ribbons and laces
Then find all our trouble repaid with this bubble:
 “Er—thank you—we don’t want to buy”.

Clerks

They linger and they dawdle and then sniffle,
 h’m and haw
Against them each and several we pronounce
 anathema!

[Enter Antonio

Antonio. Cheer up good friends. My royal father comes anon, with news of joyful import.

Harry. We’re not averse to a little joy for a change.

[Enter Puffe & Hecuba

Puffe. Ahem! Ladies and gentlemen. (*Clerks bow low*) I am about to do a characteristically generous thing, at the urgent solicitation of my son and junior partner.

[Tommy Toddle goes aside and is engaged in writing an address

Antonio. See what a grace was seated on this brow!
Hyperion’s curls, the front of Jove himself
An eye like Mars to threaten and command
A station like the herald Mercury
New lighted on a heaven kissing hill!

Puffe. What? do you mean me?

Antonio. Nothing; good my lord. Words, words, words.

*[Eva appears startled and swoons in Harry’s arms.
Antonio hastens to her side to assure her*

Puffe. I take occasion to display the generosity I have referred to in connection with the auspicious event of my son’s birthday.

Clerks. Hurrah!

Puffe. Yes; as you know, he’s to come of age shortly, and I hope to see him a merchant of spirit and ambition as I am.

Antonio. Who’s spirit with divine ambition puff’d
Makes mouths at the invisible event
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death and danger dare
Even for an Egg-shell!

[Eva shakes him

Hey? I beg your pardon.

Solo—Puffe

No. 12. You're coming 21 my boy, you've reached
your full majority
And when in due course I retire, you'll
wield here all authority

Clerks & Antonio.

I'll }
He'll } wield here all authority!

Now when you make a start, my boy, you'll
have to mend your ways, you know;
Drop all dramatic art, my boy, and banish
Shakespeare's plays, you know!

Clerks & Antonio.

I'll }
He'll } banish Shakespeare's plays, you know.

Solo—Antonio

I'll give my mind to business contemplation
I'm going to work a mighty transformation

Puffe & Clerks

We'd like to hear about this transformation

Solo—Antonio

I'll retail goods at wholesale prices
I'll laugh to scorn financial crises;
I'll slaughter goods and sacrifice 'em;
I'll mark 'em plain and just one price 'em;
With a hose I'll get up regular floods
For a special boom in damaged goods.

All

His business talent already buds,
With a hose he'll boom his shelf-worn goods!

Antonio

My clerks I'll dress in fashions modish,
Their tone & style will be quite dudish;
I'll have arm-chairs for the sweet sales ladies
And I'll let 'em flirt with the la de da-dies.
My salesman all will be high flyers
And smoke cigarettes while they wait on buyers.

Clerks

We like your scheme, dear Junior Puffe
You're the coming merchant—you're the stuff!

[Antonio relapses into the tragic mood and strides off]

Puffe. Well; I must admit that the ideas are slightly advanced, but perhaps I'm old fashioned. It would be presumptuous for any mere mortal to set bounds to the possibilities of dry goods enterprise. But to return. I think I may safely say that my clerks have always been treated well.

Clerks. We have!

Puffe. Now, to still further endear myself to you, as an indulgent employer, I propose to give you a half holiday so that you may have a dress rehearsal of your play.

Clerks. Very kind, indeed.

Hecuba. The sooner it's over the better for Antonio!

Puffe. We will close the shop this afternoon—about five.

Clerks. We are overwhelmed.

Puffe. Pray don't mention it. My private park is at your service for the purpose.

Tommy. (*coming forward with written address*) "Respected sir: We the employés of the leading dry goods house, an establishment over which you preside with some enterprise, tact, energy and business ability, and although the time at our disposal for getting up this fulsome complimentary address has been limited, we beg to—"

Puffe. (*interrupting*) Not at all. Don't mention it. It is in my nature to be generous.

Hecuba. Indeed it is!

Puffe. Besides this, my confirmed habit of giving tremendous bargains has developed my generosity to an abnormal extent.

Clerks. It has, it has!

Finale—clerks

No. 13. Hail Mr. Puffe, munificent employer!
 Of all our merchants easily top-sawyer!
 Hail head of house, great merchant enterprising
 Whose-stock-is-always-fresh-and-new-
 and-imported-direct-and-sold-at-or-below-
 cost-and-whose-success-is-due-to-advertising!

Solo—Puffe

If the average shoppy-shoppy
 Sort of merchant would but copy
 From the model set before him by
 the head of Puffe & Co.
 He might be a happy chappie
 And his clerks would be more snappy
 For the shoppy shoppy chappie isn't
 generous, you know.

Clerks

Yes! the average shoppy chappie
 Who is very far from happy

Might make his clerks more snappy
If he'd copy Puffe & Co!

[Enter Flora, Dale and Antonio]

Flora

Then sound their praise abroad
For a generous firm are they
Their tender compassion is quite a new fashion
In a dry goods way!

All

Ring out their well-known name
In the corridors of fame,
For where's the firm
That wouldn't squirm
If 'twas asked to do the same!

Solo—Antonio

(coming forward & taking arms of Puffe & Hecuba)

All the papers tomorrow will mention the fact
Of this generous, kindly, unusual act
And this little departure from business ways
Will get a free ad.—so it really pays—
Do I seem to be rambling there?

All

Not at all!
He's not at all rambling there.

*[As the curtain falls Fernando appears at back with the three creditors,
and makes threatening gestures at Puffe]*

Drop Curtain.

Act II

*Scene—Lawn adjoining Puffe's residence.
Statuary, shrubbery etc. a couple of
Milliner's Dummies in the foreground.*

[Enter Flora, dressed as queen

Solo—Flora

No. 14. As lark that sings in summer sky
I laugh my fears away,
As lamb that sports when shepherd's nigh
I'll gambol blithe and gay;
Vain fear begone, my heart is light,
The sky is bright and clear
All clouds vanish from my sight
For ah, my love is near. Tra-la-la.
As flower that blooms in summer vale
Beside the towering tree,
As barque that shelters from the gale
Behind the friendly lee,
My heart shall know no heaviness,
No tremor, and no fear,
But revel in the present bliss
For ah, my love is near. Tra-la-la.

It's all very well to make up one's mind to banish silly fears, but it can't be done by mere force of will. The sillier they are, the more they won't vanish, and I'm quite sure this dread with which that odious fellow De Vinton has inspired me is perfectly absurd. He's too much of a coward to carry out his bombastic threats, and yet I can't feel comfortable. I must tell somebody all about it. I really can't keep it locked up in my solitary bosom any longer.

[Enter Hecuba

(aside) Aunty! the very confidante I would have chosen!

Hecuba. Ah, Flora. You're punctual. The very first at the appointed place of rehearsal. But you look nervous. Not stage fright, is it?

Flora. No, worse. It's fright in real life. Mr. De Vinton has threatened to bring some horrible but unnamed doom upon me because I've refused his hand and heart. There, it's out! I feel better now!

Hecuba. De Vinton? Our Floorwalker? Impossible! I'm amazed. When did this happen?

Flora. This morning at the store. But please don't tell Alan, or there will be murder.

Hecuba. I quite understand about Alan, you sly puss. But De Vinton, the land sakes alive! I want to know. The idea of a perfect stranger—

Flora. No; unfortunately.

Hecuba. Ah! I always thought that man had a past with an incident in it. Fancy a lawyer in fair practice throwing up his position and taking a Floorwalkership!

Flora. And all on account of such a poor little thing as you see before you.

Hecuba. What, you?

Flora. Yes. But I'll tell you all about it some other time. (*nervously*) Do you really think he would dare to do anything terrible? He is certainly very, very wild!

Hecuba. Nonsense, child. He's perfectly harmless I'll be bound. Besides, you can count on Alan's protection, you know, on the grounds of platonic friendship, of course.

Flora. Yes, I *think* he would come to my rescue in an emergency.

Hecuba. And if he doesn't, I will. Dismiss De Vinton and his threats. If he attempts any plot against you I will thwart him.

Flora. Thank you, Auntie. Not a word about it, you know.

Hecuba. Trust me. (*seeing dummies*) Hello! what's the meaning of this?

Flora. Antonio brought them from the shop to practise our nerves on before facing a live audience, he says.

Hecuba. There's method in his madness, I perceive. And talking of perceiving, have you seen Mr. Puffe? I came out to look for him.

Flora. On *business*, of course. Oh Auntie, *you* sly pussy. No: I haven't seen him but if I do I'll send him to you.

[Exit Flora

Hecuba. The mischievous little minx. What can she possibly have meant by that? I wonder if she guesses how near the truth she came?

Song—Hecuba

No. 15. 'Tis not alone my bonds and stocks
 That give my heart these pleasant shocks.
 I know one *bond* for which tho' old,
 I'd quickly barter all my gold.
 'Tis not alone investments good
 That stir my somewhat ancient blood,
 In lover's vows I'd fain invest
 And take uncommon interest.

[Enter Puffe unseen behind

He's only my financial friend
 Advising how my funds to lend
 But when for me he loans my pelf
 I think how *lone* I am myself.

[Puffe slips up and takes her hand

Solo—Puffe

Can I believe my ears, 'tis so
 She loves me, O what bliss to know!

She loves me, here my doubts should end,
I'm more than her financial friend.

Duet

You	}	may believe	your	}	ears, 'tis so
I			my		
I love you	}	oh, what bliss to know.			
She loves me					
I love you	}	here my doubts shall end			
She loves me					
He's	}	more than	my	}	financial friend!
I'm			her		

[*Gavotte*

Puffe. (*patting her arm tenderly*) Take a little stroll, Hecuba. The play actors are coming shortly, and they prefer not to have live auditors at their rehearsal. Besides, I have a proposal to make to you.

Hecuba. A proposal? (*aside*) I have my answer all ready.

Puffe. Er—um—financial, of course. About the Pacific stock I mentioned to you this morning.

Hecuba. Oh: you're always so thoughtful, Prometheus.

[*Exeunt.*
Enter Fernando

Recit—Fernando

No. 16. The plan of my revenge is all complete
And nothing can my direst vengeance cheat,
This very day 'ere they know what's the matter
Financial ruin shall this proud firm shatter;
This house that has for half a century stood
Shall fall today with dull and sickening thud.
Thus shall this haughty girl be humbled low,
She scorns my love; she shall my fury know.
Tho' please to note, in this revenge inhuman
I do not personally harm the woman;
My plot, my plan, my horrid calculations
Involve not her, but only her relations.
I've forged a letter in the firm's handwriting
A meeting of their creditors inviting
And stating with the cruelest refinement
That 'tis their wish today to make assignment,
And that my fiendish plot may surely thrive
I've hired the meanest assignee alive.
Hist! they are here—come on, my dupes, come on
Work out my plan, I will return anon!

[orchestra plays theme of No. 9 Act 1.
Enter Brown Jones & Robinson, who tiptoe about as in that scene

Brown. Well, here we are. Just as I expected. I didn't like the look of things at the shop this morning.

Jones. No more did I. I felt perfectly sure it would come to this.

Robinson. So did I. It's just what I anticipated.

[Produces letter. They all read together

Messrs. Brown Jones & Robinson

Gentlemen. See us at residence this p.m. to arrange matters. We regard you as preferential creditors. We do not see anything for it but an assignment and have retained the services of Mr. Snatchett, the assignee.

Yours with esteem and regret
Puffe & Co.

Brown. Yes. Ours with esteem and regret, especially regret.

Jones. But where's the assignee? I don't like Snatchett.

Jones. Snatchett! We're surely done for—and so are Puffe & Co. He's the crookedest stick in the profession.

Robinson. Snatchett! He's a wolf in hyena's clothing.

Brown. Worse—he's *(Enter Snatchett)* er—a gentleman!

Snatchett. Aw, gentlemen, glad—I mean sorry to meet you under these circumstances. It always pains me deeply to take part in these distressing proceedings. *(hands his card)*

B. J. & R. *(aside)* He lies. *(They read)* Timothy Snatchett, Professional Assignee.

Snatchett. I scarcely need an introduction I suppose. I'm so well known in business circles.

B. J. & R. You are.

Song—Snatchett

No. 17. I'm a Professional Assignee
Well versed in Insolvency
At the top of the ladder they give me a place

B. J. & R. *(aside)* (As the cleverest rascal we have in the place—ahem!)

For ability, knowledge and grace!

It gives me distress, I declare,
Of business troubles to hear,
I always go straight to the debtor and say

B. J. & R. *(aside)* (How much can I make in my usual way—ahem!)

You have my professional sym-pa-thy!

The creditors I also soothe,
And their troubles endeavor to smooth
I act as their friend, and they always remark

B. J. & R. *(aside)* (That they never encountered so much of a shark—ahem!)

That I never keep anything dark!

I'm here to attend a bad case
Please note the sad look on my face
My tears of distress you must surely observe

B. J. & R. (*aside*) (And also please notice his cheek and his nerve—ahem!)
Yet ne'er from my duty I'll swerve!

Snatchett. And you gentlemen are creditors, I presume? You look it.

Brown. (*handing card*) We are.

B. J. & R. Brown Jones & Robinson, Wholesale Dry Goods, A1.

Snatchett. I am specially retained in this matter by direct engagement of the debtors.
[Displays letter—Fernando appears at back, pleased]
You, of course, are agreeable to this choice?

B. J. & R. Oh, certainly. We wouldn't have any other assignee.

Snatchett. Thanks. Excuse my being a trifle late. I was detained at Podger's. Assignment, you know. Had a hand-to-hand fight with the bailiffs, who objected to my carrying away the safe. But I did it. (*aside*) And appropriated the contents as my fee. (*aloud*) And here I am. (*seeing dummies*) Gentlemen, this looks bad; attempt to carry off the stock and fixtures, apparently. But don't despair. The shop is closed, but there are signs of life about the home. The old gent has suspended, but we needn't keep him in suspense. Follow me! Cheer up, you may get one hundred cents on the dollar!

Brown. Yes, partners, let us keep up our spirits.
*[Grotesque dance, assignee beating time. Exeunt to house.
Fernando crosses, rubbing his hands, & exit.
Enter Eva & Lily attired as Ophelia and Court Page]*

Lily. Why, there's nobody here yet! Say, how do I look in this costume?

Eva. Oh, ever so nice. But I wish *I* didn't have to play the part of *Ophelia*. I don't like these straws in my hair—they tickle my nose.

Lily. Oh, you look charming in that dress. I'm sure you'll play the part to perfection.

Eva. (*sadly*) Well, I *ought* to, for I feel just as miserable as *Ophelia* ever did.

Lily. Yes, I know *why*. But cheer up. Antonio *does* love you, as you'll see after this performance is over. I'm sure he loves you, even if he is above you in rank. Still, you are a first class saleslady, and he's only a junior partner, after all.

Eva. But he acts so strangely. I hardly know –

Lily. Don't mind that. *No* tragedian acts like a rational being when he is performing. It wouldn't be *art*, you know.

Eva. But I've asked him over and over to think of my feelings, and he won't. I would just like to pay him off for it in some way.

Lily. Goodness! just look at those things. (*Pointing to the dummies*) I see. The Floorwalker, odious thing, has put them here as a mean insinuation.

Eva. How?

Lily. Why—that they’re members of the company—sticks, you know.
(Brightening suddenly) Oh, I have it!

Eva. What?

Lily. The trick you want for Antonio. The very thing.

Eva. *(interested)* What is it?

Lily. Let’s conceal ourselves under the skirts of these dummies, and when *Hamlet* comes on to do his soliloquy, we scare him into fits by playing the ghost.

Eva. Capital. That *ought* to bring him to his senses. Make haste, then, for they’re coming now.

*[Each conceals herself under a dummy. Music.
 Enter Puffe from house, excitedly]*

Recit—Puffe

No. 18. This is the most extraordinary thing—
 The most astounding!
 But yesterday I was a merchant prince
 Now I’m a pauper.
 At least they tell me so: I fail to comprehend it.
 What shall I do? My creditors are here
 And call for an assignment!

[Hecuba rushes in]

Duet—Puffe & Hecuba

Hecuba. I beg of you no longer spurn my offer,
 Take all my gold—I cast it at thy feet!

Puffe. Nay, Hecuba, I must reject thy proffer,
 Since ruin’s come, why, let it be complete!

Hecuba. But think, oh think, of failure dead and flat,
 A crowd, a dirty flag, an auction sale!!

Puffe. But I’ve observed that sometimes, after that,
 Things seem to flourish with some folks who fail!

Hecuba. Oh, do no jest—I love thee—take my gold
 And save yourself this cruel financial blow!

Puffe. Nay, Hecuba, my thanks can not be told,
 Yet I could never think of doing so!

Hecuba. These men are obdurate!

Puffe. I’m ruined! I’m ruined!

Hecuba. Avert this cruel fate! *(faints)*

Puffe. She’s swooned! She’s swooned!

[He kisses her and she revives at once]

Hecuba. Take all my gold, I pray. There is no other way.

Puffe. Again I say thee nay, I’ll find another way.

Both

Whate'er betide, we'll never part, oh never!
Come weal or woe, we'll sink or swim together!

Puffe. Come; I'll make one more appeal to them for a compromise. I cannot think of endangering the funds of an unprotected female, especially when she's an angel as you are Hecuba! Come!

[Exeunt to house]

Eva. *(under skirts)* Hist, Lily! did you hear that interesting conversation?

Lily. I did, and greatly fear it indicates financial tribulation!
Sh-h! Here they come!

[Enter Fernando, who appeared at the back during the scene between Puffe & Hecuba]

Song—Fernando *(chuckling)*

No. 19. Not mine in vain a fertile brain
Trained in the subtle arts of law;
My plot is lain with judgment keen
And seems to work without a flaw.
Ho ho! my hidden poison works.
Deep ruin yawns for Puffe and all his clerks,
Yes, ruin deep, deep, deep!

Eva & Lily. *(in sepulchral voice)* Deep, deep, deep.

Fernando. *(startled)* I heard a noise, a human voice
At least it so appeared to me,
But my grim plan unknown to man
I've hatched, and can't suspected be
Ho ho, my hidden poison works
And neither Puffe nor any of his clerks
Think I'm so deep, deep, deep.

Eva & Lily. *(echoing)* Deep, deep, deep!

Fernando. *(startled again)* There's an unpleasant echo hereabouts, and besides I hear footsteps approaching. I will retire.

[Exit.]

Enter Antonio & Clerks, attired for Hamlet

Toddle. The actors are come hither, me lord?

Antonio. That doesn't come in your part. You play first gravedigger.

Toddle. Yes, so I do. 'Alas, poor Yorick—I knew him like a book—we used to play marbles together. A fellow of infinite wit; a paragrapher on the daily paper.' O, I know my lines. But I need an empty skull, you know.

Antonio. Tush, varlet; thou hast one on thy shoulders. Look you, let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them. But where's the Queen and where's Horatio.

[Enter Flora & Dale]

Lucy. Here, good my lord.

Antonio. Thrice welcome both to Elsinore. And yet *(referring to paper)* two are lagging, as I note, *Ophelia* and another.

One of the Ladies. Why, they came on ahead of us, didn't they?

Antonio. An it please you, we'll have a trial of our prologue. I look to see this prologue well applauded. it is in form an invocation to Shakespeare from the Dry Goods Trade. The prologue, I pray you.

Sextette—Dale, Antonio, Harry, Flora & 2 ladies

No. 20. Immortal bard of Avon, Prince of all
The Singers who have won undying fame,
Accept e'en from the Dry Goods trade a small
But well earned tribute to thy mighty name;
If we come short in doing thy great play
On our heads be the blame, not thine, we pray.
With all the commentators we agree
In praising thee—Will Shakespeare!

Antonio. Good! Excellent well rendered! And now to the Tragedy. Stay, first of all I will do my soliloquy. Perchance the laggards will be here anon. Do you all retire until I call you.

Flora. (*aside to Dale*) Did you say the Floorwalker had gone out of town?

Dale. So I understood. But why do you appear so much interested in him? I'll be getting jealous.

Flora. If you only knew how I fear and hate—er—I mean—

Antonio. (*interrupting*) Good my lord, will you see the players well bestowed?

Dale. I beg pardon, really. Come The stage manager orders us all off.

[Exeunt all but Antonio

Antonio. (*recites*) 'Now I am alone,
Oh, what a rogue & peasant slave am I,
Is it not monstrous that these players here
But in a fiction—in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from his working all his visage wann'd
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit. And all for nothing.
For Hecuba! What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba
That he should weep for her.
This is most base, that I, the son of a dear
father murdered—'

Eva & Lily. (*in monotone*) Not_murdered_but_in_trouble!

Antonio. (*terribly startled*) Whence came that voice? (*calling off*) I pray you, speak gently there; you break the concord of my recitation. (*resumes*)
'That I, the son of a dear father murdered—'

Eva & Lily. Not_murdered_but_in_trouble!

Antonio. (*starting wildly*)
Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain, Breaks my pate across,

Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,
Fie upon it, foh! About my brain!
I have heard—

Eva & Lily. (*moving the dummy heads round slowly*) Your_father_is_in_trouble!

Antonio. (*drawing sword & facing wildly from one dummy to the other*)
Haste me to know it,
That I with wings as swift as meditation
or the thoughts of love, may sweep to my revenge!

Eva & Lily. (*monotone*)
We_are_but_blocks_of_wood_and_so_can_speak_but_as_we_are_
inspired_Your_father_is_in_trouble!

Antonio. Hold, hold my heart!
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old
But bear me stiffly up.

Eva & Lily. Your_father_is_in_trouble!

Antonio. Save me & hover o'er me with your wings
Ye heavenly guards! What would your gracious figure!

Eva & Lily. Your_father!

Antonio. My father's spirit in arms—all is not well—
I doubt some foul play; would the night were come.
Till then sit still my soul: foul deeds will rise
Tho' all the earth o'erwhelm them to men's eyes!

*[Exit Hamlet in a frenzy. Eva & Lily scream with laughter.
Enter Flora & Dale, startled*

Dale. He's gone!

[Flora screams. Enter clerks

Chorus—clerks

No. 21. Teeth a-chatter, hearts-a-patter
Tell, oh tell us, what's the matter?

Dale & Flora

Nerves a scatter, mad as hatter,
Hamlet's gone, we've lost the latter!

[Enter Puffe, Hecuba, Snatch & creditors

Puffe & Hecuba

What's the matter, why this clatter?
Why this wild affrighted chatter?

Clerks (to them)

Pray tell us, if you can, the cause of this ado.

Puffe & Hecuba

Why, that's the very thing we came to ask of you!

Ensemble

Puffe, et al.

Our assignee matter
We left in a batter
And hither did scatter
But if they will clatter
This meaningless patter
Why let 'em just chatter
away

Dale & Flora

As mad as a hatter
with brains all asscatter
Some trivial matter
A dog or a cat or
Most likely the latter
Has frightened our
Hamlet away!

Clerks

Teeth a chatter
Hearts a patter
Tell oh tell us
What's the matter
&c. &c

Snatchett. Hold! There's nothing like legal procedure for getting at the facts of a case. Let's get at this in proper order. A mystery seems to enshroud the origin and source of a certain shrill scream, which appears to have alarmed everybody. Now, we're ready to hear evidence. Take the stand, somebody, and proceed.

Flora. The scream was mine.

Snatchett. Ah! Publication admitted. Well?

Hecuba. (*aside*) Yours dear? Has De Vinton been—

Snatchett. And now, as to the cause thereof?

Dale. The sudden announcement of the instant and mysterious disappearance of our *Hamlet*.

Puffe. What? Antonio?

Hecuba. I *knew* something would happen!

Snatchett. Now we're getting at it. Any reason to be assigned for this peculiar conduct?

Eva & Lily. (*monotone*) Yes.

Snatchett. (*to Dale*) Well, sir, what?

Dale. I didn't speak.

Snatchett. Well, who did? Somebody said "yes." But evidently the party meant "no." The evidence is all in, and this mystery must remain.

Dale. Unless *you* can throw some light on it.

Snatchett. Not a spark, I'm afraid. When this alarm was given we were in the midst of an important business transaction—

Clerks. (*anxiously*) A business transaction?

Snatchett. A business transaction. I'll explain.

Song—Snatchett

No. 22. I am an official assignee.

Clerks. Indeed?

And there are sad-eyed creditors three.

Clerks. Indeed?

'Twill perhaps astonish you to learn,
If you for information yearn,
We came to wind up this concern.

Clerks. Indeed?
Hecuba, Puffe & Creditors. Yes, indeed!

Snatchett

We found the firm was going to bust
Clerks. Indeed?
So Mr. Puffe's assigned in trust
Clerks. Indeed?
To spare him this calamity
His late wife's sister—this is she
Has offered money generously
Clerks. Indeed?
Hecuba, Puffe & Creditors. Yes, indeed!

Snatchett

But he'd not take a single cent
Clerks. Indeed?
Upon destruction he seemed bent
Clerks. Indeed?
When all at once occurred to me
A plan to which they both agree
They *marry* at the hour of three.
Clerks. Indeed?
Hecuba, Puffe & Creditors. Yes, indeed!

[Enter Antonio]

Puffe. Here's the dear boy now to speak for himself. Congratulate me, my son!
Antonio. Congratulations! (*astonished*) Nay, rather *lamentations*, unless the spirits do lie.
Speak, father, Royal Dane! They tell me you're in trouble.
Snatchett. He *was*, but he's safely out of it, thanks to me.
Puffe. Right you are, sir.

[Shakes hands with Snatchett]

Antonio. O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt
Thaw & resolve itself into a dew—
I'm going to bathe my head!

[Exit]

Dale. (*to Flora*) Come o hear his explanation.

[Exeunt]

Snatchett. Well, all ends happily, it seems!
Harry. (*who has been consulting with clerks during the scene*) I am deputed, Sir, to offer
you the united congratulations of your devoted salespeople.
Puffe. Thanks. Excuse a speech. I'm too happy for utterance.
Hecuba. Me too.

Snatchett. As these gents (*indicating creditors*) will be at the auspicious hour of three.

Glee—All

No. 23. Today, today at the hour of three
They're joined in holy union
Two hearts with but one thought, two souls,
In rapturous communion.

[Clerks dance round

Puffe & Hecuba

The heart that flutters now within this olden breast
At sixty minutes after two will know a peaceful rest.

Clerks

Today, today at the hour of three etc.

[Clerks dance off escorting Puffe and Hecuba

Snatchett

With interest I await
The auspicious hour of three
Which settles this estate
And brings me quite a fee.

[Dances off

Brown Jones & Robinson

Today, today at the hour of three
What's due to us we'll collar;
At three today they're going to pay
One hundred on the dollar.

[Dance

Brown. Till then, dear partners, let us banish care

[Dance

Jones. This wedding is a picnic, I declare!

[Dance

Robinson. At three today precisely we'll be there!

[Dance

All. This most auspicious wedding, its happy influence spreading
On us is surely shedding golden beams.
Then banish melancholy, despairing is but folly,
We've reason to be jolly—so it seems!

[They dance off. Enter Antonio with wet cloth on his head

Antonio. Yes; my head feels much easier. Queer idea that, though, wasn't it? Freak
of an overwrought imagination. I believe Shakespeare's really infurious,
except in very mild doses. I positively thought I heard those dummies say
something about—

Eva & Lily. Your_father_is_in_trouble.

Antonio. Angels and ministers of Grace defend us!

Duet—Eva & Lily (*singing mournfully*)

To spare him this calamity
His late wife's sister Hecubee,
Doth with his creditors agree
To marry him today at three.

Antonio. Indeed?

Eva & Lily. Yes, indeed!

Antonio. Speak to me! (*becoming terribly tragical again*) Say you my father is to be married to his deceased wife's sister?

Eva & Lily. At_the_hour_of_three.

Antonio. O horror, horror!
The world is out of joint, o cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right!

[As he exits, meets Flora coming on

Where is that wretch, my father!

Flora. Good gracious!

Antonio. Again I ask, *where* is my perjured father!

Flora. Why, Antonio, how—

Antonio. What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba—

Flora. She's to be his wife presently, that's all. Didn't you understand—

Antonio. Yea, this solidity and compound mass
With trustful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at this act!

[She tries to stop him

Unhand me gentlemen. By heaven
I'll make a ghost of him that lets me!

[Exit furiously.

As he rushes out he meets Dale whom he rudely pushes aside

Dale. (*to Flora*) What's struck him now?

Flora. Follow him quickly. He's gone to forbid the banns!

Dale. The deuce he has!

[Exit hastily.

Enter clerks

Flora. I'm afraid our rehearsal is off. *Hamlet's* got another spasm.

Toddle. Seems to have seen a sure enough ghost.

Flora. He couldn't have been more distracted if he had.

Ladies. Bah! who believes in ghosts?

Gents. Bosh! nobody does.

Flora. Of course not but—

Eva & Lily. (*monotone*) Beware!

[The clerks are petrified with astonishment and horror, which increases to a frenzy when the dummies start moving slowly. Clerks exeunt in terrified confusion, while Eva & Lily execute a grotesque dance and then throw the Dummies off. Flora remains during this

Flora. I thought as much.

Eva & Lily. Oh, you should have seen *Hamlet* when we played the ghost!

Flora. Yes; that explains it. You've given *him* the finishing touch. Don't be surprised if it ends in a wholesale murder!

Eva & Lily. Gracious sakes! I never thought of *that*. Let us go and undo the mischief at once.

[Exeunt.

Enter Fernando

Fernando. Thwarted by this old woman's moneybags! I never reckoned on that. It's too bad! (*a noise*) Ha! this proud girl approaches. I know her footfall. I will conceal myself, and if I am obliged to use force I will not hesitate, for I am a desperate man!

[He goes aside.

Enter Flora

Flora. I'm afraid those girls with their highly original ghost effects have quite settled the case of my unfortunate cousin. He's lost his identity in his part now for good. He rushed to the church and is even now dragging his poor old parent here by main force. Oh, dear!—

Fernando. (*aside*) Then I must act at once.

[Springs out and seizes Flora

Duet—Fernando and Flora

No. 24. Now, not a word, upon your precious life!
I've got you fast, and *you must be my wife!*
With proud disdain you've scorned my loving suit
(*producing pistol*) Now, yield to force—come on, or I will shoot.

Flora. Oh, help!

Fernando. My heart recoils from spilling thy sweet blood

Flora. Oh, help!

Fernando. But if my love you only understood.

Flora. Oh, help!

Fernando. You'd come along, and so prevent a crime.

Flora. Oh, help!

Fernando. Come, get a move on, I am pressed for time!

Flora. Oh, help!

[During this they are struggling. He drags her off.

Enter Antonio dragging his father by the collar.

The scene which follows is a travesty on the chamber scene in Hamlet

Puffe. Didn't I hear a cry for help in a female voice? What was it? I must go and see.

Antonio. Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge. You go not till I set you up a glass where you may see the inmost part of you.

Puffe. (*aside*) This playacting has turned the boy's head. (*to Antonio*) Going to set up a glass, are you? Don't set 'em up on my account. You're clear crazy, Antonio, my son!

Antonio. Lay not the flattering unction to your soul, that not your trespass but my madness speaks.—

Puffe. There you go again. But this foolishness has got to end right here. If you've anything particular to say to me, say it now, and say it so I can understand it. If I catch your drift, you object to my marrying Miss Perkins. If so, why?

Antonio. Such an act that blurs the grace and blush of modesty; calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose from the fair forehead of—

[Enter Eva excitedly]

Eva. (*interrupting*) Oh, Antonio; *here* you are. I've been searching all over for you. I want to explain that it was all a foolish lark—a trick to pay you off for—

Antonio. (*gloomily*) Wormwood—wormwood.

Eva. Mercy! he's got another spasm!

Puffe. What trick? And what does he want of wormwood?

Eva. I—er—I—oh dear!

Antonio. Get thee to a nunnery! Go—farewell.

Eva. Oh, I might have known this!

Puffe. Don't you do it: you stay right in the dry goods business!

Antonio. To a nunnery! Go to, I'll no more on't. It hath made me mad.

[Exit Eva, weeping]

Puffe. There, you've made her cry. And I hear somebody coming. The creditors, I'll bet, to find out what's the meaning of this delay.

*[He rises. Antonio pulls him back.
Enter Snatchett & creditor. Antonio draws sword and faces them]*

Antonio. Now could I drink hot blood, and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on!

Song—Snatchett & creditors

No. 25.

Snatchett. Pray excuse this bold intrusion,
But as we suspect collusion
 We've returned.

Brown. We've returned.

Jones. We've returned.

Robinson. We've returned.

Snatchett. Just to say if you're devising
Any scheme of compromising
 'Twill be spurned.

Brown. 'Twill be spurned.

Jones. 'Twill be spurned.

Robinson. 'Twill be spurned.

Snatchett. To the plan that I presented
All concerned have quite consented
 All agree.

Brown. I agree.

Jones. I agree.

Robinson. I agree.

Snatchett. So give up all tactics shady
You're to wed this charming lady
 prompt at three.

Puffe. *(to Antonio)* Don't you see?
I'm to wed this charming lady prompt at 3.

Snatchett & creditors. Prompt at three.

Puffe. You're quite mistaken gentlemen. I've no notion of going back on my
written bond. Quite the contrary, but my son here seems to—

Snatchett. Object, hey? We cannot entertain any legal technicalities at this stage. I'll
note the objection *(does so)* but the wedding must go on all the same. Here's
your bond, sir, and the hour of three is at hand. Come on!

[A great confusion. Noise heard

Puffe. Stay—what's all this?

Antonio. O villainy—Ho! let the door be locked. Search it out!

[Enter clerks with Fernando in custody

Toddle. We caught him red handed in the act of abducting your fair young niece,
sir!

Harry. And he has confessed, sir, that it was he who brought the creditors down
on you with a forged letter.

Puffe. Oh villain, villain!

Snatchett. Too late. The estate is in liquidation.

[Flourishes bond

Puffe. My trusted Floorwalker. Wretch, what have I done to deserve this?

Fernando. Nothing. Personally, nothing.

Antonio. Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool!

Clerks. *(threatening De Vinton)* Lynch him, Lynch him!

Chorus—Clerks

(During this Fernando groans with terror. He is on his knees.)

No. 26. Hang him fifty cubits high

Let the base abductor die
Heed not his despairing groan
Forgery he's had to own;
Long we've hankered for this hour,
Now we have him in our power!
Hang him fifty cubits high,
Let the plotting rascal die!

Recit—Fernando

(He grovels in abject fear.)

O, do not hang me fifty cubits high,
I do not like a strangling sensation.
Besides, I'm not at all prepared to die—
Pray hear me while I make an explanation.

Song

(To Puffe)
Your charming niece I learned to love
But loved, alas, in vain.
To frenzy her refusal drove
A heart distraught by pain.
'Twas then, 'mid broodings dark and grim
On my unhappy lot,
I took the most peculiar whim
To hatch this wicked plot!

Puffe

Love as a motive is inspired by heaven.
Since this arose from love—you are forgiven.

[Enter Flora & Dale

Duet—Flora & Dale

Love as a motive is inspired by heaven.
Unhappy mortal—let him be forgiven.

Clerks

From love this plot arose
And love's inspired by heaven—
So all scot-free he goes
Poor fellow, he's forgiven!

*[The clerks tenderly escort Fernando off, with every manifestation of sympathy.
Dale & Flora remain*

Snatchett. This episode is interesting in itself, but permit me to remind you gentlemen that it is all aside from our business, which is urgent.

Creditors. Precisely!

Snatchett. Miss Perkins is at the vestry. The parson is waiting. *(Looking at watch)* We have barely time to get there so as to fulfill the conditions of this bond. It is five minutes to three.

Antonio. 'Tis now the very witching time of night when graveyards yawn and hell itself breathes out contagion to this world—!

[*Growing furious*]

Dale. (*Flora is arguing with Antonio during this*) I understand the ground of your son's objections, sir, and think it would be well to respect them.

Puffe. But I can't help myself. The bond, you know!

Dale. Then let me help you. (*to Snatchett*) What is the amount of your claim?

Snatchett. Come over here. (*Takes him aside*) Fifty thousand dollars would give us 99½ cents on the dollar. We'll compromise at that.

Dale. You shall have my cheque for that amount at once. (*to Puffe*) Not a word, please.

Antonio. (*overjoyed*) Well spoke! A combination and a form indeed, where every god did seem to set his seal and give the world assurance of a man!

Snatchett. That settles it. To the four winds of heaven, this document we scatter (*tearing up bond*) and with it disappears this very painful matter!

[*Enter Hecuba, fuming, with clerks*]

Hecuba. Prometheus Puffe, what does this delay mean? Surely you are not going to play me false at the last moment?

Antonio. Fie, woman! Get thee to a nunnery!

Hecuba. Sir? You keep still. Puffe, answer me!

Puffe. Hecuba, my dear, the fact is—

Snatchett. This young gent has advanced the money, ma'am, and the bond is cancelled. The marriage isn't necessary now, so far as *we're* concerned.

Antonio. Fie, fie, woman!

Puffe. Antonio has interfered, my dear.

Dale. Because you're his deceased wife's sister.

Hecuba. I'm nothing of the sort, sir!

Antonio. What!

[*All intensely interested*]

Hecuba. The late Mrs. Puffe was my sister only by adoption.

Puffe. Bless me, that's a fact. I'd quite forgotten *that!*

Hecuba. Oh Puffe, Puffe!

[*Drops into his arms*]

Antonio. Not_his_deceased_wife's_sister_. Then the ghosts *did* lie! Aunty, forgive me! You may get married as soon as you like!

Eva. And as for me?

Antonio. My poor, little, ill used darling. Come to my arms. Shakespeare's a fraud. I'm done with *Hamlet* for ever.

[*Throws away sword and book and embraces Eva*]

Finale—chorus

No. 27.

Now let the wedding march peal out
Let nuptial bells ring glad & gay
See all our troubles put to rout—
In happiness so ends the day!
Ding, Dong!

Puffe

The clergyman is waiting
In the vestry, waiting
Proceed then with the nuptials, I implore

Dale (taking Flora)

No longer keep us waiting
Our loving bond belating
Attend us to the happy vestry door.

Antonio

We'll go in pairs if hearts & hearts agree
And make a regular matrimonial bee.

[Clerks pair off]

Snatchett

(to creditors) I never knew a failure end so sweetly.
We'll go as guests & do the thing completely.

Creditors

But please remember us when in biz
you re-engage
We solicit a continuance of your
patronage!

Puffe, Antonio, Hecuba & Eva

Tho' you've pressed us pretty hard
We forgive you, and engage
To extend to you as heretofore
Our patronage!
And to the general pub.
We would say before they go,
For solid satisfaction go to Puffe & Co.

Chorus—All

There's no use talking, it's a patent fact,
As everyone should know,
That the firm that leads for enterprise & tact
Is the firm of Puffe & Co!

[Dance

CURTAIN