

WHITEWASHING JULIA

A play by F. J. Morlock Based on a play of the same name by Henry Arthur Jones

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A play by F. J. Morlock Based on a play of the same name by Henry Arthur Jones C 2001

CHARACTERS:

MR. WILLIAM STILLINGFLEET

MR. SAMWAYS

ELWIN PINKNEY

BEVIS PINKNEY

JULIA WREN

LADY PINKNEY

TRIXIE BLENKINSOP

MRS. FEWING

MRS. BENBOW

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The action takes place at a Church Bazaar, by the refreshment stand run by Lady Pinkney.

MRS. FEWING: (entering) Yes! It was Julia! What shall we do?

LADY PINKNEY: It will be impossible for us to know Julia unless the Berlin scandal is cleared up.

MRS. FEWING: It's awkward for me. Still, she is my sister-in-law, and I can't not know her. And yet, I can't know her can I?

LADY PINKNEY: If we could only learn the truth. Samways is her cousin and her lawyer. And he must know all about it.

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MRS. FEWING: Of course he knows. But he always avoids the subject. When I heard Julia was coming back I told Samways she would place me in a very awkward position.

LADY PINKNEY: What did Samways say?

MRS. FEWING: He asked me what I meant. I said I meant the scandal with the Duke. Then he asked me what I had heard. Then he asked me what everybody else had heard. I said everybody had heard all about the puff box, the dressing bag, and the tortoiseshell comb and wasn't there a lace gown?

LADY PINKNEY: I believe there was. Did Samways offer any explanation?

MRS. FEWING: He said the Duchess was a mad woman and had no doubt placed the articles there herself, on purpose, to make out a case against Julia. In fact, Samways pooh-poohs the whole affair.

LADY PINKNEY: I'm afraid it's just one of those affairs that cannot be pooh-poohed. And now that Bevis has married into the Bishop's family

MRS. FEWING: I'm sure her dress comes from Paris. And she has dared to speak to the Bishop's wife

LADY PINKNEY: And did Mrs. Blenkinsop speak to her?

MRS. FEWING: She was able to pass her to Mrs. Lane, the new school Mistress, who doesn't know Mrs. Wren's history.

LADY PINKNEY: Do any of us know Mrs. Wren's history?

MRS. FEWING: My dear Lady Pinkney, I gave you the whole story just as I had it from my agent. My agent was in Berlin a month after the scandal when everybody was full of it.

LADY PINKNEY: (giving her a telegram) Here's something that may interest you. From my brother.

MRS. FEWING: From Mr. Stillingfleet! Coming to Shanctonbury. Oh, Lady Pinkney, how can it interest me?

LADY PINKNEY: My dear Caroline, I've always felt you were wrong to rebuff Bill.

MRS. FEWING: Perhaps I was but

LADY PINKNEY: Yes. I'm afraid Bill has been a very shocking rascal.

MRS. FEWING: Do you think he has reformed?

LADY PINKNEY: Now or never. He's just forty.

MRS. FEWING: I think I should be more inclined now, then I was, to overlook any little manly weaknesses. Is he making a long stay?

LADY PINKNEY: Until my husband returns from Australia. I shall lose no opportunity of letting Bill know he still has an opportunity of becoming a respectable member of society.

MRS. FEWING: Thank you. I'm sure you won't compromise me.

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(ENTER Bevis and his wife.)

BEVIS: Mother, you will have to take an exceedingly firm attitude with regard to this lady.

MRS. BEVIS PINKNEY: I simply declined to see her. I merely took up a box of handkerchiefs and studied them.

BEVIS: Your behaviour was admirable, Sophia. I will take care, and I'm sure my mother will take care, you are not subjected to such a disagreeable experience in the future.

(ENTER Samways who pokes his head in and is about to withdraw.)

LADY PINKNEY: (seeing him) Ah, Mr. Samways! Don't go! You're just the person we want. So your cousin, Mrs. Wren, is back in town?

SAMWAYS: My second cousin. Yes, poor, dear girl.

BEVIS: Does she intend to remain?

SAMWAYS: For some time.

BEVIS: Not under your advice?

SAMWAYS: Well I'm afraid I'm in some measure responsible. Everybody understands her natural delicacy.

BEVIS: Delicacy?!!

SAMWAYS: In staying away. But nobody believes these stories.

MRS. BEVIS: Nobody?!

SAMWAYS: Nobody who knows the circumstances.

LADY PINKNEY: But, who does know the circumstances?

BEVIS: Has Mrs. Wren Julia taken any steps to refute these stories?

SAMWAYS: No, no. On my advice. Her reputation is sufficient answer.

MRS. FEWING:: Nobody's reputation could be sufficient to answer the puff-box.

SAMWAYS: Oh, Mrs. Fewing, I'm sure your reputation would be

LADY PINKNEY: Then you honestly believe those stories against Mrs. Wren are false?

SAMWAYS: I can only say that were any defamatory story circulated against you or any lady present, I should defend you all with the same conviction. Eh! The weather seems a little threatening.

LADY PINKNEY: But Samways you must see it is impossible for us to receive Mrs. Wren until this business is put to rest.

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SAMWAYS: Certainly. And if I can be of any assistance.

LADY PINKNEY: Are you engaged for dinner tonight?

SAMWAYS: No, but

LADY PINKNEY: We shall expect you at eight, and you shall give us the correct version of the whole affair so that we shall be able to take this very dear and much injured lady to our hearts and homes again. At eight precisely.

SAMWAYS: Delighted, delighted.

(EXIT Samways.)

MRS. FEWING: Samways means to help her wriggle out of it.

BEVIS: We must take care she doesn't. We must insist upon evidence.

MRS. BEVIS: I really don't see the need for evidence when one has already made up one's mind.

MRS. FEWING: Quite so. Evidence merely confuses and unsettles one. It's so much better to have a firm steady conviction from the first and never change it.

LADY PINKNEY: I wonder where Teddy is?

BEVIS: We may be sure, mother, that wherever Teddy is, it is somewhere he ought not to be, and whatever he is doing, it is something he ought not to be doing.

MRS. BEVIS: A pity he's the older brother. Come along, Bevis.

BEVIS: You see it will be necessary to take a very firm attitude with Mrs. Wren.

(EXIT Bevis and Mrs. Bevis.)

(ENTER Julia.)

JULIA: I beg your pardon. How d'ye do, Lady Pinkney?

LADY PINKNEY: (bowing stiffly) How d'ye do?

JULIA: Ah, Georgina.

MRS. FEWING: (coldly) Hello, Julia.

JULIA: I thought I could get a cup of tea. Perhaps I'm too late?

LADY PINKNEY: No. There's still a little left.

MRS. FEWING: It's nearly cold.

JULIA: I prefer it not too warm.

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MRS. FEWING: And very strong.

JULIA: I like it rather strong.

MRS. FEWING: It's really quite stewed.

JULIA: I'm so thirsty, I don't mind if it's been stewed.

MRS. FEWING: There's no cream and that's all the milk.

JULIA: Thank you.

LADY PINKNEY: I'll leave you to finish up here. (to Mrs. Fewing)

MRS. FEWING: Very well. I'm coming in a moment.

LADY PINKNEY: (to Julia) I hope you will have pleasant weather for your short stay in Shanctonbury.

(EXIT Lady Pinkney.)

JULIA: You're looking wonderfully well, Georgina. I've been here a week and you haven't called?

MRS. FEWING: My dear Julia, how could I? (curtly) More tea?

JULIA: No.

MRS. FEWING: If you want anything more, please help yourself.

JULIA: Is anything the matter?

MRS. FEWING: Matter? I warned you if you came back the whole town would cut you. You cannot imagine how embarrassing it is for me.

JULIA: My dear Georgina, if it's embarrassing for you, what must it be for me?

MRS. FEWING: But why have you come?

JULIA: Nowhere else to go. I cannot afford to live overseas any more.

MRS. FEWING: It isn't that I'm straight-laced. We were all willing to shut our eyes before. That was before the puff box. Especially as he was a royal!

JULIA: But since the puff box

MRS. FEWING: My dear Julia!

(EXIT Mrs. Fewing. Julia puts the tea down with distaste. ENTER Trixie Blenkinsop.)

TRIXIE: Ah, there you are.

JULIA: Trixie. But you know you mustn't see me unless Mrs. Blenkinsop knows.

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TRIXIE: She knows.

JULIA: What?

TRIXIE: And my uncle knows, too.

JULIA: The Bishop knows you have come to see me. (joyously) My dear Trixie. (kissing her) How did you manage it?

TRIXIE: Well, I was determined to see you. You know you can generally get what you want, if only you go on my plan.

JULIA: What is your plan?

TRIXIE: My old nurse said to me, "My cherub." she used to call me her cherub, "My cherub," she said, "if you want your way in this world you must let folks see that you mean to scratch first, scratch hardest, and scratch longest. And then folks generally won't scratch you at all." (triumphantly showing her nails and blowing on them) Nobody ever scratches me.

JULIA: But you didn't scratch.

TRIXIE: Oh, I had a row with Auntie.

JULIA: My dear Trixie, you can't go through life having famous rows with everybody.

TRIXIE: Why not? I always win. Actually, I love it. Auntie had hysterics and then, when Uncle came in, I had hysterics.

JULIA: Well ?

TRIXIE: Poor Uncle lifted up his hands to heaven. And so, you see, here I am.

JULIA: (gravely) I'm very sorry and very angry with you. (Trixie comes up winningly) No, Trixie, you know how much I love you, but I can never see or speak to you again.

TRIXIE: (trying to embrace her) Oh, Julia.

JULIA: What will your aunt think of me? What will the dear Bishop think of me? They will think I encourage you to come here.

TRIXIE: Who cares?

JULIA: Trixie!

TRIXIE: Oh forgive me.

JULIA: You must go back at once and tell your aunt I was very angry with you for coming to me against her wish, and that I sent you to beg her pardon.

TRIXIE: Beg her pardon! Not on your life!

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JULIA: Then our friendship is at an end.

TRIXIE: Well, that's what they want anyway.

(EXIT Trixie in a fury. Samways enters.)

SAMWAYS: Well? What did I tell you?

JULIA: But have you explained it to them?

SAMWAYS: No. Up to the present I have carefully avoided explanations, but tonight I am to dine with Lady Pinkney.

JULIA: That will give you a splendid opportunity, won't it?

SAMWAYS: To do what?

JULIA: To prove to them how unfortunate I've been.

SAMWAYS: Yes, yes. (gazing over his spectacles at her) But, how do we get over the puff-box?

JULIA: The puff-box?

SAMWAYS: And the other things?

JULIA: You can't expect me to remember all the details!

SAMWAYS: But the question is this: Do we own up to the puff-box or do we deny the very existence of the puff-box?

JULIA: Well? What do you think?

SAMWAYS: What do I think?

JULIA: You're the lawyer. You surely don't expect me to teach you your business.

SAMWAYS: My dear Julia, do let me explain to you once and for all the nature of evidence.

JULIA: No, no. I hate technicalities.

SAMWAYS: But if I'm to help you, I must know what line to take. Give me the exact particulars.

JULIA: I have given you the exact particulars.

SAMWAYS: Yes, but the exact particulars have never been quite the same. Let us make up our mind, once and for all, what the exact particulars are.

JULIA: What ought I to do?

SAMWAYS: Dish it up as well as you can. But tell her the complete story. Or at least a complete story.

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JULIA: Suppose

SAMWAYS: Yes?

JULIA: Suppose I had a perfect answer to all these insinuations but, for urgent reasons, my lips were closed. What would you advise me to do?

SAMWAYS: I should advise you to open them.

JULIA: I see you don't believe in me.

SAMWAYS: Now, now. What is the nature of this evidence you cannot reveal?

JULIA: (mysteriously) Do you know anything about morganatic marriages?

SAMWAYS: A little. Same as any other. It's binding. But the Duke was already married. Give it up, my dear Julia! You'll get into it very deep if you don't.

JULIA: But I'm in very deep water, clearly. Suppose there had been, I won't say a regular morganatic marriage, but something equivalent to a morganatic marriage. (Samways stares at her) It's hard when your own relations don't believe in you! (starts to cry)

SAMWAYS: Julia, don't cry.

JULIA: I've got to put in an appearance at the raffle! My lips are sealed.

(EXIT Julia trying to compose herself.)

SAMWAYS: But Julia! (helplessly) Why is it women can never understand the nature of evidence?

(Bevis enters furtively.)

SAMWAYS: (looking at him) Anything the matter?

BEVIS: No. Er, Samways

SAMWAYS: Yes.

BEVIS: If I wished to consult you

SAMWAYS: Certainly.

BEVIS: It doesn't concern myself.

SAMWAYS: Never does.

BEVIS: A dear old friend.

SAMWAYS: Always.

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BEVIS: This friend was betrayed into a friendship with a very desirable undesirable young woman. And in his desperation, he came to me.

SAMWAYS: Well?

BEVIS: I promised to help him.

SAMWAYS: How?

BEVIS: To ah pay the girl's her mother. I arranged things and got them away to Australia.

SAMWAYS: What then?

BEVIS: I think I've just seen the mother. It would be a terrible blow to my wi to my friend, if these women were to turn up again.

SAMWAYS: (delicately) Was there any result of this friendship?

BEVIS: (puzzled, then understanding) Result? No.

SAMWAYS: Then what's disturbing you?

BEVIS: Nothing.

SAMWAYS: Have they your friend's letters?

BEVIS: Not so stupid. No, not a scrap.

SAMWAYS: Did he make her any promises before witnesses?

BEVIS: I believe she doesn't even know his real name. He was most careful.

SAMWAYS: Then, he's got nothing to fear, so far as I can see.

BEVIS: A most unpleasant business. Yet it has been of some benefit to me. Taught me to be very strict in all such matters.

SAMWAYS: Naturally. Where did you see the woman?

BEVIS: Good Heavens!

SAMWAYS: What is it?

BEVIS: My Uncle.

SAMWAYS: Bill. How are you? Welcome back!

(ENTER William Stillingfleet.)

STILLINGFLEET: Ah, my dear Samways, how are you?

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SAMWAYS: First rate.

STILLINGFLEET: Bevis, my boy, how are you?

BEVIS: Quite well, Thanks.

STILLINGFLEET: And brother Teddy?

BEVIS: Teddy is as usual. My brother and I have nothing in common.

STILLINGFLEET: Let me see, you were married a few months ago; my congratulations! You must present me.

BEVIS: Of course. Perhaps I may as well prepare you.

STILLINGFLEET: No bad news, I hope?

BEVIS: No, but everything was very lax in the old Bishop's time. My father-in-law, the present Bishop, and my mother-in-law, Mrs. Blenkinsop have inaugurated a totally new regime.

STILLINGFLEET: Ah! Not lax, eh?

BEVIS: No, on the contrary. I needn't say we're delighted to see you.

STILLINGFLEET: Thank you.

BEVIS: You're going to stay some months with us?

STILLINGFLEET: Well, yes. If the new regime is not too bracing.

BEVIS: Of course, I don't wish to remind you of certain incidents that occurred during your former visits.

STILLINGFLEET: Well then, don't remind me.

BEVIS: Incidents I'm sure we all wish to see buried.

STILLINGFLEET: I'm sure we do. Nobody more than myself. We'll bury them straight off, shall we? In fact, we'll cremate them.

(SAMWAYS at the counter with drink, chuckling.)

BEVIS: In all seriousness, Uncle, in all sincerity, in all friendliness, I hope you'll allow me to give you a word of advice.

STILLINGFLEET: Certainly.

BEVIS: You may think me presumptuous.

STILLINGFLEET: No! I'm sure, from the line you're taking, you're actuated by a genuine desire for my welfare, aren't you? Come now! Confess it!

BEVIS: I am indeed.

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STILLINGFLEET: I was sure of it. Now go on!

BEVIS: If I may give you a caution which you must allow is justified by certain incidents in your former visits.

STILLINGFLEET: My dear boy, we cremated them some minutes ago.

BEVIS: So far as possible.

STILLINGFLEET: My dear Bevis, when you cremate a thing, cremate it and have done with it. Don't go raking amongst the dead ashes.

BEVIS: In any case, we shall expect you to adopt the somewhat altered standard that now prevails in Shanctonbury.

STILLINGFLEET: I will! I will! Nobody is more anxious to improve other people's morals than I am.

BEVIS: I see you haven't changed, Uncle. I'm afraid you won't find your present visit a very congenial one.

(EXIT Bevis.)

STILLINGFLEET: We shall see. (to Samways) That clammy young prig hasn't altered in the least. Just like his father. How has the other one turned out?

SAMWAYS: Teddy? We've had a terrible time with Teddy.

STILLINGFLEET: You mean the opera singer?

SAMWAYS: Yes. Teddy would insist on marrying the girl. We had the Devil's own job to part them. At last Lord Pinkney dragged Teddy off to Australia, and I squared the girl with five thousand pounds.

STILLINGFLEET: Teddy's back again, isn't he?

SAMWAYS: Yes, poor Teddy! I like him! There's no vice in Teddy. He's only a damned silly sentimental idiot.

(ENTER Teddy.)

TEDDY: I heard that Samways. You were talking about me.

SAMWAYS: No I er

TEDDY: Oh yes, you were. I recognized the description.

SAMWAYS: I'm er, very sorry.

TEDDY: (patting Samways) Don't fret, Samways, it's true. I am a damned silly sentimental idiot. (As Teddy turns to Stillingfleet, Samways beats a hasty, embarrassed retreat) Ah, Uncle Bill how goes it?

STILLINGFLEET: How are you, Teddy?

TEDDY: A bit slack at present. I come to you, because being a bit of a black sheep yourself, eh?

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STILLINGFLEET: Well, off–white, brown.

TEDDY: We black sheep ought to stick together. You don't know how the old lady rags me. And Bevis! He's a Holy horror, Bevis. Well, I got back from Australia three months ago.

STILLINGFLEET: What happened then?

TEDDY: The old lady didn't kill the fatted calf for me, I assure you!

STILLINGFLEET: No?

TEDDY: Instead of trotting out the fatted calf she trots out Miss Trixie Blenkinsop, the Bishop's niece. And Teddy is expected to worship the little beast and marry her.

STILLINGFLEET: What does Teddy say to that?

TEDDY: No, thank you. Bevis has married a Blenkinsop. One Bevis and one Blenkinsop are enough in any family. Besides, coming back on the boat from Australia, there was such a handsome girl.

STILLINGFLEET: What?

TEDDY: She appeals to me. She appeals to me.

STILLINGFLEET: You're not thinking of it?

TEDDY: No, no. It's this hole of a place and that Blenkinsop gang. A gruesome state of affairs. Have you ever been in love, Uncle Bill?

STILLINGFLEET: Scores of times.

TEDDY: (disgusted) I asked for a little sympathy. (going off) Hush! The old lady! You won't tell her?

STILLINGFLEET: No, Teddy, but

TEDDY: Honor! Hush!

(ENTER Lady Pinkney.)

LADY PINKNEY: Ah, my dear Bill, I'm delighted. Don't go, Teddy!

STILLINGFLEET: Ah, Madge, my darling. (kissing her) I'm very glad to see you.

LADY PINKNEY: Teddy, where have you been all afternoon?

TEDDY: I've been ruminating.

LADY PINKNEY: But, you were told off to help Blenkinsop at their stall.

TEDDY: With Trixie Blenkinsop? Thank you. I told my self off to scuttle.

LADY PINKNEY: They're all waiting for you to help with the raffle.

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TEDDY: Let them wait. I've had just about enough of this Blenkinsop bevy. "Oh, for a lodge in some vast wilderness!"

(EXIT Teddy sulking.)

LADY PINKNEY: That wretched boy! What shall I do with him? If only Bevis had been the elder!

STILLINGFLEET: I am rather glad he's not.

LADY PINKNEY: Really Bill! You're incorrigible. But I am glad to see you. You're earlier than we expected.

STILLINGFLEET: I took the express. Well, Madge, you're looking wonderfully young and charming.

LADY PINKNEY: It must be my troubles and worries that preserve me. I hope you haven't come to add to them.

STILLINGFLEET: Only with a view of making you still younger and more charming.

LADY PINKNEY: No, Bill, I don't want any compliments. You're well over forty. Surely, you're not going to have any more escapades. I've trouble enough with the boys.

STILLINGFLEET: Surely not Bevis?

LADY PINKNEY: Oh, he's terribly strict. Anyway, however fond I am of you, and however much you may stand in need of my watchfulness, I've no time to look after you and keep you out of mischief.

STILLINGFLEET: My dear Madge, as you say, I'm over forty and I really believe I am now arriving at an age when I shall soon be able to care for myself and keep myself out of mischief.

LADY PINKNEY: I hope so. That reminds me. We're likely to have something of a scandal in Shanctonbury.

STILLINGFLEET: (enchanted) Indeed.

LADY PINKNEY: Mrs. Wren has come back.

STILLINGFLEET: Julia?

LADY PINKNEY: You weren't in Shanctonbury at the time.

STILLINGFLEET: Ah, yes. I remember. The Grand Duke. The puff-box.

LADY PINKNEY: Yes. Now, Bill, promise me you won't meet her.

STILLINGFLEET: Now that was a most promising affair. Cat of a woman, the Duchess. I hear she worried the poor Duke into his grave.

LADY PINKNEY: No. He died of German measles.

STILLINGFLEET: I should like to know the real history of that puff-box.

LADY PINKNEY: Samways is dining with us tonight, and I intend to know everything. I've asked Mrs. Fewing.

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STILLINGFLEET: Poor Georgina! Do you remember, I proposed to Georgina four years ago. Lucky escape. I mean for her.

LADY PINKNEY: I don't think so. Georgina has seven thousand pounds a year. Now Bill, think what a comfort it would be to us, if you would

STILLINGFLEET: Marry Georgina Fewing.

LADY PINKNEY: Well, I don't wish to be premature. Still, consider the opportunity.

STILLINGFLEET: To do what?

LADY PINKNEY: To reform yourself, generally. Guiding my boys

STILLINGFLEET: Certainly. Don't mind doing any amount of general reformation. Why, only five minutes ago, I was giving the very best advice to Teddy.

LADY PINKNEY: What about?

STILLINGFLEET: His love affairs. Just a word: keep a very sharp watch on Teddy.

LADY PINKNEY: Bill! Surely, he hasn't taken up with another one?

STILLINGFLEET: Can't say. But keep a very sharp look out on Teddy.

LADY PINKNEY: (aghast) There's another one. I feel sure there is. (Church bell rings in the distance) The bell for the Bishop's sermon. Will you come?

STILLINGFLEET: I don't feel particularly in need of spiritual refreshment. But bodily! I haven't had any lunch.

LADY PINKNEY: You'll find something here. I must go. Dinner at eight. (turning back, very imperatively) Bill, remember! You are not to know this Mrs. Wren.

STILLINGFLEET: Of course not. Of course not!

(ENTER Trixie, excitedly, not seeing Lady Pinkney.)

TRIXIE: Mrs. Wren, Mrs. Wren! I haven't gone yet.

LADY PINKNEY: Miss Blenkinsop! I cannot believe my eyes.

TRIXIE: Aunt and uncle know that I'm here.

LADY PINKNEY: Trixie! How can you tell me such a dreadful story?

TRIXIE: Oh, Mrs. Pinkney, I'm capable of anything. No one knows how abandoned and depraved I can be. But, bad as I am, I don't lie! And I allow no one to question my word.

LADY PINKNEY: (seizing her hand) Come with me at once. I must see the Bishop and Mrs. Blenkinsop about this.

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TRIXIE: (pulling her hand loose) No! After what has just passed I cannot be seen in public with you.

(EXIT Trixie.)

STILLINGFLEET: That's the young lady you intend for Teddy?

LADY PINKNEY: Yes.

STILLINGFLEET: Won't she be rather a handful for him?

LADY PINKNEY: My dear Bill, we must make haste and marry Teddy to somebody.

STILLINGFLEET: Before he marries himself to a nobody.

LADY PINKNEY: He simply has no sense of what is due to our position. I must run over to the bishop's and find out what is the meaning of her being with Mrs. Wren.

(EXIT Lady Pinkney.)

(ENTER Julia.)

JULIA: I thought I heard somebody shrieking.

STILLINGFLEET: We had a little scene with Miss Blenkinsop.

JULIA: Trixie? Where is she?

STILLINGFLEET: My sister has followed her to the Bishop's palace. Perhaps it will be better not to announce our engagement to my sister just for the time, eh?

JULIA: I leave it all to you. Do it just when you think the right moment has come.

STILLINGFLEET: It won't be today. Don't you think it would be better for us to ah, satisfy the good people of Shanctonbury?

JULIA: I wonder what would satisfy the good people of Shanctonbury. What would satisfy you?

STILLINGFLEET: Have I ever seemed curious?

JULIA: No. Then you are quite satisfied.

STILLINGFLEET: Quite. Quite.

JULIA: Well?

STILLINGFLEET: Well?

JULIA: What ought I to do?

STILLINGFLEET: I think you ought to say.

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JULIA: Say what?

STILLINGFLEET: Well, just enough to make people's minds easy about you.

JULIA: Suppose that were difficult?

STILLINGFLEET: Difficult?

JULIA: Suppose, I only say, suppose Suppose it were impossible?

STILLINGFLEET: Then I would leave the matter entirely in your hands.

JULIA: You would be satisfied to do that? For now and always?

STILLINGFLEET: So far as my own happiness is concerned; I suspect nothing; I regret nothing! I guess nothing. I don't even want to know if there is anything to know.

JULIA: You have the most complete confidence in me. I love being trusted.

STILLINGFLEET: Cremation is best with dead loves. We will let the good people of Shanctonbury say and think what they please. We will say nothing. We understand each other. (they kiss)

(ENTER Teddy.)

TEDDY: Hello again, Uncle Bill, Mrs. Wren. I saw the old lady going down the road.

STILLINGFLEET: Yes, she's gone.

TEDDY: I hope I have one true friend in Shanctonbury.

JULIA: You have indeed.

TEDDY: I should like to consult Mrs. Wren, privately if

STILLINGFLEET: You cannot do better. Trust her thoroughly, my boy.

JULIA: Mr. Stillingfleet, you won't go very far In case we need your advice.

(EXIT Stillingfleet.)

TEDDY: You know I'm in a situation that peculiarly demands the exercise of a little feminine tact and sympathy. There's nothing picks a man up like feminine sympathy. Especially when he's in the midst of events that may shape themselves into a kind of social revolution.

JULIA: (alarmed) Social revolution! You're not going to head a social revolution?

TEDDY: Yes, in a minor kind of way. With your aid and sympathy.

JULIA: Oh, but I've no sympathy with social revolutions.

TEDDY: Even one for your benefit?

WHITEWASHING JULIA

JULIA: My benefit? I'm sure no one ever benefits from a social revolution.

TEDDY: You might.

JULIA: I don't understand.

TEDDY: With my help. And the help of some friends I am about to introduce into the neighborhood.

JULIA: (doubtful) You're going to introduce some friends of yours?

TEDDY: Yes. And I thought we might get up a nice little coterie of social outsiders and snap our fingers at the Bishop and the Blenkinsops.

JULIA: But social outsiders don't form nice little coteries, do they? I'm sure they don't.

TEDDY: You see I'm going to get married.

JULIA: What? And Lady Pinkney doesn't know?

TEDDY: No.

JULIA: You must tell Lady Pinkney at once.

TEDDY: No. I brought the girl here on purpose to introduce her to you.

JULIA: Well of course, I should be delighted if Mr. Stillingfleet were present.

TEDDY: I don't trust Uncle Bill. Oh oh! Mother's coming. I'll clear out for a while.

(EXIT Teddy furtively. Enter Lady Pinkney.)

JULIA: Dear Lady Pinkney. I was beginning to think my Shanctonbury friends had forgotten me.

LADY PINKNEY: Oh no, dear. In fact we've been thinking and talking a great deal about you.

JULIA: Then I'm sure you've been thinking and saying all the kind things you possibly could.

LADY PINKNEY: Now my dear Mrs. Wren, I'm going to have a little quiet, friendly talk on a subject of vital importance to you.

JULIA: Yes. We women understand each other so much better than men understand us, don't we? For genuine sympathy, woman must always go to woman.

LADY PINKNEY: Now, to return to our conversation. You are surprised old friends haven't called on you?

JULIA: I did think it a little unkind. I must tell you I'm not responsible for Teddy's visits to me.

LADY PINKNEY: (upset) My son Edward has been calling on you?

JULIA: Yes. You didn't know?

WHITEWASHING JULIA

LADY PINKNEY: (very upset) Not a word. I think it most inconsiderate of him.

JULIA: I told him so. And I asked him as a favor to me not to call again unless you knew.

LADY PINKNEY: Thank you. Edward is a great trial to me.

JULIA: He has a very sweet nature.

LADY PINKNEY: Yes, yes. (hurriedly) May I ask how Edwin became acquainted with you?

JULIA: Oh, but your brother presented him to me in London.

LADY PINKNEY: (after choking) My dear Mrs. Wren. Now do let me warn you. In the strictest confidence, my brother is a most charming man, and I'm personally fond of him

JULIA: And he simply adores you.

LADY PINKNEY: Yes, yes, But for your own sake let me beg you not to encourage his visits.

JULIA: (enjoying herself) You think Mr. Stillingfleet is not quite a nice acquaintance for me?

LADY PINKNEY: Well, I won't say that. But he is the most erratic, impossible creature where women are concerned. I'm speaking solely in your interest, solely for your good.

JULIA: I'm sure you are.

LADY PINKNEY: Now please, let my brother plainly understand that he will not be welcome in the future.

JULIA: Certainly, if you wish it. But I've so few friends

LADY PINKNEY: I was certainly not aware, either, that Miss Blenkinsop had been visiting you. (Julia says nothing) It was quite against my wish.

JULIA: Yes. So she said.

(ENTER Bevis and Samways.)

BEVIS: This is an extraordinary story about my brother.

SAMWAYS: Yes, curious, isn't it?

BEVIS: Mother! Teddy is going to marry another one of them. He's just told us.

LADY PINKNEY: What? What is to be done? What would Pinkney say?

JULIA: Dear Lady Pinkney. Will you think me intrusive if I make a suggestion?

LADY PINKNEY: No, no. When did you first know of this?

JULIA: Only a moment before you came. Let me help you out of this difficulty.

WHITEWASHING JULIA

LADY PINKNEY: How?

JULIA: If I were you I should not oppose this marriage.

LADY PINKNEY: Not oppose it?!!

JULIA: Not for the moment. You must gain time. Tell them that the marriage cannot take place until Lord Pinkney returns from Australia. That will take six months.

LADY PINKNEY: My dear Mrs. Wren.

JULIA: I will suggest they take a trip to the continent. I'll send Meade with them. A great deal may happen in six months.

LADY PINKNEY: It's a great scheme. I congratulate you.

JULIA: Shall I suggest it to them?

LADY PINKNEY: Well, there could be no harm.

JULIA: Well, leave it to me; I'll try to get them to accept it.

LADY PINKNEY: Thank you very much. Dear Mrs. Wren, I'll leave the matter in your hands.

JULIA: (going) I'll be right back.

LADY PINKNEY: Your nearest way will be through the conservatory.

JULIA: Oh, I know quite well. You forget I used to be a frequent visitor here.

(EXIT Julia.)

(Lady Pinkney sinks exhausted into a chair. Stillingfleet enters after a moment.)

LADY PINKNEY: Ah, Bill. Mrs. Wren is being very helpful about Teddy.

STILLINGFLEET: Is she?

LADY PINKNEY: I must make her a very handsome acknowledgement. And then it would be a great relief to everybody if she would leave Shanctonbury, eh ? **STILLINGFLEET:** I don't think so, After all this help she's been, I should have thought you would wish her to stay near you. **LADY PINKNEY:** Personally, I should be delighted. But it's useless for her to think of living in Shanctonbury unless she clears up the puff-box. Meantime, what acknowledgement do you think **STILLINGFLEET:** It's difficult to say. **LADY PINKNEY:** We certainly owe her a large debt of gratitude. **STILLINGFLEET:** A present would be a very grave mistake. **LADY PINKNEY:** Why? **STILLINGFLEET:** It would look as if you thought her services could be bought and paid for. **LADY PINKNEY:** Well, what! **STILLINGFLEET:** It's a dilemma, but I think I can help you out of it.

LADY PINKNEY: How? **STILLINGFLEET:** I don't think you know how attached you are to Mrs. Wren. As for myself

LADY PINKNEY: Bill!

WHITEWASHING JULIA

STILLINGFLEET: In fact, I've been thinking over the good advice you've been giving me for years past about settling down.

LADY PINKNEY: Bill!

STILLINGFLEET: That's the best of me. I do take good advice. Not all the time perhaps. Good advice shouldn't be taken recklessly, should it? No. It seems to roll off me like water off a duck, but all the while Madge, it's making a deep impression on me. Or rather, in me. I'm taking it internally. That dear good sister of mine. She's right after all. Now, where can I find a woman

LADY PINKNEY: (much alarmed) Bill!

STILLINGFLEET: A woman of refinement.

LADY PINKNEY: Bill, you're not going to marry Mrs. Wren!

STILLINGFLEET: You see, you recognized her description in a moment! Now congratulate me.

LADY PINKNEY: Bill, this is too bad of you! If you marry Mrs. Wren it will make Shanctonbury quite impossible for me!

(Bill looks undisturbed by this prospect; some might think quite enchanted with the idea.)

(ENTER Julia.)

JULIA: Trixie and Edward just raced off to the Bishop's palace on the best of terms with each other. I'm sure I can easily lead them into a real attachment. (looking at Lady Pinkney) Is anything the matter?

LADY PINKNEY: No. My brother has just told me.

STILLINGFLEET: She's naturally a little surprised to hear of our engagement. Such a dear sympathetic creature. (Lady Pinkney is gasping, ready to burst) Oh, don't deny it, my dear)

LADY PINKNEY: (after composing herself bravely, frigidly) May I ask how this has come about?

STILLINGFLEET: Oh, we met in London and studied Botany together.

LADY PINKNEY: Botany? You have been studying Botany? (under her breath) Anatomy, more likely!

STILLINGFLEET: Er, yes. A few rudiments. Do you know, Madge, I actually didn't know the names of our commonest wildflowers. Bugloss, Bladder Campion, Sticklewort. Sticklewort or Stipplewort? Still don't. It's disgraceful for a man to arrive at my age and not know the names of the simplest wildflowers.

LADY PINKNEY: Stipplewort! Sticklewort! You'll drive me mad with your, your An Botany! (she rushes out) **JULIA:** I'm afraid we've made her angry. **STILLINGFLEET:** Madge will get over it. She's really not a prude. **JULIA:** No? **STILLINGFLEET:** Not in the least, by nature, that is. She actually has a skeleton or two in her closet. **JULIA:** Lady Pinkney? Not possible. **STILLINGFLEET:** Something like a family crypt if it were ever to be dug up. **JULIA:** (laughing) You mustn't say things like that. **STILLINGFLEET:** She was bidding fair to outstrip her older brother, and would have too, by Jove, if she hadn't fallen in love with Pinkney, and immolated herself on the altar of respectability. **JULIA:** You are making things up. **STILLINGFLEET:** Word of a gentleman. I could tell you some things **JULIA:** You mustn't tell me your sister's secrets. **STILLINGFLEET:**

WHITEWASHING JULIA

Somehow, I feel I really must. For instance, in Venice there was the famous gondola incident. **JULIA:** Hush! (Stillingfleet is warming up to relate the story with great relish when Bevis enters looking very serious.) **BEVIS:** (to Julia) Will you allow me a few moments with my uncle? **JULIA:** Certainly. (to Stillingfleet) Whatever happens, don't let me bring discord into your family. **STILLINGFLEET:** Oh, you shan't. (to Bevis after Julia leaves) Now, my boy –

BEVIS: I cannot say that I am surprised, remembering certain incidents in your former career.

STILLINGFLEET: My dear Bevis, we cremated 'em.

BEVIS: I did not, as you term it, cremate them.

STILLINGFLEET: (sharply) Well, I did.

BEVIS: After those incidents I cannot say that any action of yours would cause me any great surprise or concern.

STILLINGFLEET: No? I thought you showed just a little too much concern.

BEVIS: On account of our family, yes. On account of my dear mother, and wife, yes. On account of the unpleasantness all around that must attend this most ill advised step, yes. But on your account, no.

STILLINGFLEET: Quite thrown me over, eh? Quite washed your hands of me?

BEVIS: I think you might, for once, drop your habit of turning everything into a jest. Surely, you must see this as a serious moment.

STILLINGFLEET: It is. And if you and your wife object to sit at the table with the lady who is to be my wife, I advise you to hurry across to the Bishop's palace and join their party.

BEVIS: I wasn't thinking of dinner.

STILLINGFLEET: Well, I was. Now, shall we let the matter rest?

BEVIS: I cannot allow the matter to rest. I have never felt so thoroughly upset in the whole course of my life.

STILLINGFLEET: Upset at what?

BEVIS: At the painful prospect of Mrs. Wren being introduced into our family. Now, my dear Uncle, I do beg you to realize what it is you are doing. It's not yet too late.

STILLINGFLEET: My dear Bevis, it's too late. Too late even for sermonizing about it.

BEVIS: But reflect? What will be the result of this undesirable alliance? What does my mother say? How am I to regard it? Do you intend to reside amongst us? You will find it impossible. What do you suppose, what do you suppose will be the effect in Shanctonbury?

STILLINGFLEET: I hope I shall never willingly shock or offend my neighbors. But I will allow neither you nor your mother nor anyone else to dictate to me whom I shall marry, or where I shall live when I have married.

BEVIS: (incensed) Very well! I don't know what mother's feelings or intentions may be, but speaking for myself and my wife's family, I must tell you frankly we shall not countenance this marriage; we shall not recognize you

WHITEWASHING JULIA

or your wife in any way. We shall let all our neighbors plainly see how we regard you, and if you continue to live in Shanctonbury

(ENTER Mrs. Benbow.)

MRS. BENBOW: I beg your pardon for intruding. Oh, Mr. Stillingfleet, how d'ye do?

STILLINGFLEET: Hello.

(Bevis tries to hide his face.)

MRS. BENBOW: I'm looking for Lady Pinkney. This is Lady Pinkney's son.

MRS. BENBOW: Teddy! Well, my business is with him as well. Oh, it's not Teddy.

BEVIS: What do you want with me? I've paid you, haven't I?

MRS. BENBOW: (surprised) Mr. Brown!

STILLINGFLEET: Brown!

BEVIS: I will have nothing to do with you. I ah (to Stillingfleet) She must be some impostor!

(ENTER Samways.)

SAMWAYS: Ah, Mrs. Benbow.

BEVIS: (grabbing Samways and whispering) One moment, Samways.

SAMWAYS: (after a hurried consultation) All right. Leave it to me. Come this way, Mrs. Benbow.

MRS. BENBOW: Of course. (to Bevis) Mr. Brown.

(EXIT Samways and Mrs. Benbow.)

STILLINGFLEET: Old acquaintances.

BEVIS: No, at least Perhaps you think this affair requires an explanation.

STILLINGFLEET: Not a bit, my dear lad. If you're in a mess, take my advice, don't explain to anybody how you got there, but quietly pick yourself up, wipe your boots and say no more about it. Now, can I lend you a helping hand?

BEVIS: In what way? I'm not in any mess.

STILLINGFLEET: Glad to hear it.

BEVIS: When my past actions are examined, I shall have nothing to be ashamed of.

STILLINGFLEET: I'm sure you won't. We shall learn a great deal that will redound to your credit.

WHITEWASHING JULIA

BEVIS: I don't say that

STILLINGFLEET: Ah, that's your modesty. You befriended that poor young lady and now stand here shaking with fright that your good charitable actions should become known, and blazed abroad in Shanctonbury. Isn't that right, eh! (Shaking Bevis good humoredly)

BEVIS: (ghastly with fright) Uncle I'll tell you everything.

STILLINGFLEET: My dear Bevis, I don't wish to know.

BEVIS: I'd better tell you in case any garbled account of it should become public. My only wish is to spare my dear mother and wife the pain of hearing anything that would destroy their ideal of me.

STILLINGFLEET: All for the sake of others.

BEVIS: I've tried to set a very high standard.

STILLINGFLEET: All for the sake of others.

BEVIS: That woman has no possible claim on me.

STILLINGFLEET: No?

BEVIS: Not morally.

STILLINGFLEET: No?

BEVIS: When I was at Oxford I was betrayed into a very undesirable friendship. Really betrayed into it.

STILLINGFLEET: I've had that happen so many times. I sympathize. Go on.

BEVIS: But I very soon conquered.

STILLINGFLEET: Brave boy!

BEVIS: I got them out of the country to Australia, by paying a considerable sum. That's really all. I cannot imagine why they are here. (pause) Uncle, you won't misunderstand me?

STILLINGFLEET: How?

BEVIS: At first sight I might appear a hypocrite.

STILLINGFLEET: Oh, not at all. Oh, no!

BEVIS: No, I'm really not.

STILLINGFLEET: Say no more. So far as I'm concerned it's past. But there's someone who is very dear to me

BEVIS: Mrs. Wren! I fear I have been very mistaken in my estimate of Mrs. Wren.

STILLINGFLEET: You will please let that be known.

WHITEWASHING JULIA

BEVIS: Oh, yes. To everybody.

STILLINGFLEET: Yes, do, do. You're good at explanations.

BEVIS: We shall receive her ourselves, and if she is received by us, I don't think you need have any doubt.

STILLINGFLEET: Then I'll leave all the explaining to you.

BEVIS: Yes, if Samways

(ENTER Samways.)

SAMWAYS: (rubbing his hands) That's settled. The lady leaves Shanctonbury tomorrow and we shall have no further trouble with her. (To Bevis) Your friend Mr. Brown need have no further anxiety.

BEVIS: Whew! Thank you so much.

SAMWAYS: The Teddy matter is settled, too. She can't very well pretend to innocence over the matter after having been involved with Mr. Bee Mr. Brown.

(ENTER Julia.)

BEVIS: (advancing cordially to her) My dear, dear Mrs. Wren. I very much regret there has been any misunderstanding between us and I hope we shall be good friends in the future. (offering his hand)

JULIA: (nonplussed) I shall be delighted but (looking at Stillingfleet for an explanation, he merely nods and winks) But (shaking Bevis's hand) Delighted.

(ENTER TRIxie followed by LADY PINKNEY.)

LADY PINKNEY: I wish never to have anything more to do with Trixie!

TRIXIE: There! What did I tell you?

JULIA: But Lady Pinkney, she is very sorry and has come to ask your forgiveness. Trixie.

TRIXIE: (in a quick, hard, perfunctory, impertinent tone) I beg your pardon.

JULIA: No, Trixie! Not in that tone.

TRIXIE: (a shade softer) I beg your pardon, Lady Pinkney.

(Lady Pinkney remains cold and severe.)

TRIXIE: (LOUD) I BEG YOUR PARDON, LADY PINKNEY!

JULIA: Trixie! Trixie!

TRIXIE: Well, what can I do? I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, There!

WHITEWASHING JULIA

JULIA: I'm sorry Lady Pinkney, it is I who have to beg your pardon for having brought this rude, naughty girl to you. Will you please forgive me. (sternly to Trixie) Trixie, you might have spared me this!

TRIXIE: (penitent) I'm very sorry, Lady Pinkney, I beg your pardon! I really mean it this time. Will you please forgive me?

LADY PINKNEY: I forgive you, Trixie.

BEVIS: How much better it is to be guided by the experience gained from our past follies.

STILLINGFLEET: How much better still, never to commit any folly at all. To be always wise and judicious like you, eh, Bevis?

BEVIS: I can't say I've never committed any folly or mistake.

STILLINGFLEET: Oh, I think you might.

BEVIS: But, I can honestly say that my past mistakes have really improved my character.

STILLINGFLEET: Ah, now there's the danger of a character like yours. You go on improving it until it becomes a standing menace to all your neighbors. For the sake of us poor sinners, don't improve it any further.

BEVIS: I wish you wouldn't jest about these things. (to his mother) Uncle William has explained everything to me most satisfactorily, and for my part, I shall dine with Mrs. Wren.

LADY PINKNEY: I don't understand.

BEVIS: You may be quite sure mother, that I have thoroughly satisfied myself.

LADY PINKNEY: But the puff-box.

BEVIS: I will not repeat scandal. Be satisfied that I am satisfied.

LADY PINKNEY: Bevis. (they confer apart)

JULIA: Do tell me! What did you tell him about me?

STILLINGFLEET: Nothing.

JULIA: Nothing?

LADY PINKNEY: (emerging from the conference with a cordial smile) Oh, if Bevis is satisfied, I am more than satisfied. Everything is explained.

STILLINGFLEET: Everything.

LADY PINKNEY: I always knew the puff-box was a pure myth. Yes, you acted very wisely, Julia, in saying nothing. I always said so.

CURTAIN