

His Widow's Husband

BY JACINTO BENEVENTE

TRANSLATED BY JOHN GARRETT UNDERHILL.

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CHARACTERS

CAROLINA. EUDOSIA. PAQUITA. FLORENCIO. CASALONGA.
ZURITA. VALDIVIESO.

THE SCENE *is laid in a provincial capital.*

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HIS WIDOW'S HUSBAND

A COMEDY BY JACINTO BENEVENTE

[Carolina is seated as Zurita enters.]

ZURITA. My friend!

CAROLINA. My good Zurita, it is so thoughtful of you to come so promptly! I shall never be able to repay all your kindness.

ZURITA. I am always delighted to be of service to a friend.

CAROLINA. I asked them to look for you everywhere. Pardon the inconvenience, but the emergency was extreme. I am in a terrible position; all the tact in the world can never extricate me from one of those embarrassing predicaments--unless you assist me by your advice.

ZURITA. Count upon my advice; count upon me in anything. However, I cannot believe that you are really in an embarrassing predicament.

CAROLINA. But I am, my friend; and you are the only one who can advise me. You are a person of taste; your articles and society column are the standard of good form with us. Everybody accepts and respects your decisions.

ZURITA. Not invariably, I am sorry to say--especially now that I have taken up the suppression of the hips, which are fatal to the success of any *toilette*. Society was formerly very select in this city, but it is no longer the same, as you no doubt have occasion to know. Too many fortunes have been improvised, too many aristocratic families have descended in the scale. There has been a great change in society. The *parvenus* dominate--and money is so insolent! People who have it imagine that other things can be improvised--as education, for example, manners, good taste. Surely you must realize that such things cannot be improvised. Distinction is a hothouse plant. We grow too few gardenias nowadays--like you, my friend. On the other hand, we have an abundance of sow-thistles. Not that I am referring to the Nuñez family.... How do you suppose those ladies enliven their Wednesday evenings? With a gramophone, my friend, with a gramophone--just like any vulgar café; although I must confess that it is an improvement upon the days when the youngest sang, the middle one recited, and all played together. Nevertheless it is horrible. You can imagine my distress.

CAROLINA. You know, of course, that I never take part in their Wednesdays. I never call unless I am sure they are not at home.

ZURITA. But that is no longer a protection; they leave the gramophone. And the maid invites you to wait and entertain yourself

with the *Mochuelo*. What is a man to do? It is impossible to resent the records upon the maid. But we are wandering from the subject. You excite my curiosity.

CAROLINA. You know that to-morrow is the day of the unveiling of the statue of my husband, of my previous husband--

ZURITA. A fitting honor to the memory of that great, that illustrious man. This province owes him much, and so does all Spain. We who enjoyed the privilege of calling ourselves his friends, should be delighted to see justice done to his deserts at last, here where political jealousies and intrigues have always belittled the achievements of our eminent men. But Don Patricio Molinete could have no enemies. To-morrow will atone for much of the pettiness of the past.

CAROLINA. No doubt. I feel I ought to be proud and happy, although you understand the delicacy of my position. Now that I have married again, my name is not the same. Yet it is impossible to ignore the fact that once it was mine, especially as everybody knows that we were a model couple. I might perhaps have avoided the situation by leaving town for a few days on account of my health, but then that might have been misinterpreted. People might have thought that I was displeased, or that I declined to participate.

ZURITA. Assuredly. Although your name is no longer the same, owing to circumstances, the force of which we appreciate, that is no reason why you should be deprived of the honor of having borne it worthily at the time. Your present husband has no right to take offense.

CAROLINA. No, poor Florencio! In fact, he was the first to realize that I ought to take a leading part in the rejoicing. Poor Florencio was always poor Patricio's greatest admirer. Their political ideas were the same; they agreed in everything.

ZURITA. Apparently.

CAROLINA. As I have reason to know. Poor Patricio loved me dearly; perhaps that was what led poor Florencio to imagine that there

was something in me to justify the affection of that great-hearted and intellectual man. It was enough for me to know that Florencio was Patricio's most intimate friend in order to form my opinion of him. Of course, I recognize that Florencio's gifts will never enable him to shine so brilliantly, but that is not to say that he is wanting in ability. He lacks ambition, that is all. All his desires are satisfied at home with me, at his own fireside. And I am as well pleased to have it so. I am not ambitious myself. The seasons which I spent with my husband in Madrid were a source of great uneasiness to me. I passed the week during which he was Minister of Agriculture in one continual state of anxiety. Twice he nearly had a duel--over some political question. I did not know which way to turn. If he had ever become Prime Minister, as was actually predicted by a newspaper which he controlled, I should have been obliged to take to my bed for the week.

ZURITA. You are not like our senator's wife, Señora Espinosa, nor the wife of our present mayor. They will never rest, nor allow others to do so, until they see their husbands erected in marble.

CAROLINA. Do you think that either Espinosa or the mayor are of a caliber to deserve statues?

ZURITA. Not publicly, perhaps. In a private chapel, in the class of martyrs and husbands, it might not be inappropriate. But I am growing impatient.

CAROLINA. As you say, friend Zurita, it might seem marked for me to leave the city. Yet if I remain I must attend the unveiling of the monument to my poor Patricio; I must be present at the memorial exercises to-night in his honor; I must receive the delegations from Madrid and the other cities, as well as the committees from the rest of the province. But what attitude ought I to assume? If I seem too sad, nobody will believe that my feeling is sincere. On the other hand, it would not be proper to appear altogether reconciled. Then people would think that I had forgotten too quickly. In fact, they think so already.

ZURITA. Oh, no! You were very young when you became a widow. Life was just beginning for you.

CAROLINA. It is a delicate matter, however, to explain to my sisters-in-law. Tell me, what ought I to wear? Anything severe, an attempt at mourning, would be ridiculous, since I am going with my husband; on the other hand, I should not like to suggest a festive spirit. What do you think, friend Zurita? Give me your advice. What would you wear?

ZURITA. It is hard to say; the problem is difficult. Something rich and black, perhaps, relieved by a note of violet. The unveiling of a monument to perpetuate the memory of a great man is not an occasion for mourning. Your husband is partaking already of the joys of immortality, in which no doubt, he anticipates you.

CAROLINA. Thank you so much.

ZURITA. Do not thank me. You have done enough. You have been faithful to his memory. You have married again, but you have married a man who was your husband's most intimate friend. You have not acted like other widows of my acquaintance--Señora Benitez, for example. She has been living for two years with the deadliest enemy her husband had in the province, without any pretense at getting married--which in her case would have been preposterous.

CAROLINA. There is no comparison.

ZURITA. No, my friend; everybody sympathizes with your position, as they ought.

CAROLINA. The only ones who worry me are my sisters-in-law. They insist that my position is ridiculous, and that of my husband still more so. They do not see how we can have the effrontery to present ourselves before the statue.

ZURITA. Señora, I should not hesitate though it were that of the Commander. Your sisters-in-law exaggerate. Your present husband is the only one you have to consider.

CAROLINA. I have no misgivings upon that score. I know that both will appreciate that my feelings are sincere, one in this world, and the other from the next. As for the rest, the rest--

ZURITA. The rest are your friends and your second husband's friends, as we were of the first. We shall all take your part. The others you can afford to neglect.

CAROLINA. Thanks for those words of comfort. I knew that you were a good friend of ours, as you were also of his.

ZURITA. A friend to both, to all three; *si, señora*, to all three. But here is your husband.

[*Don Florencio enters.*]

ZURITA. Don Florencio! My friend!

FLORENCIO. My dear Zurita! I am delighted to see you! I wish to thank you for that charming article in memory of our never-to-be-forgotten friend. It was good of you, and I appreciate it. You have certainly proved yourself an excellent friend of his. Thanks, my dear Zurita, thanks! Carolina and I are both indebted to you for your charming article. It brought tears to our eyes. Am I right, Carolina?

CAROLINA. We were tremendously affected by it.

FLORENCIO. Friend Zurita, I am deeply gratified. For the first time in the history of the province, all parties have united to do honor to this region's most eminent son. But have you seen the monument? It is a work of art. The statue is a perfect likeness--it is the man, the man himself! The allegorical features are wonderfully artistic--Commerce, Industry, and Truth taken altogether in the nude. Nothing finer could be wished. You can imagine the trouble, however, we had with the nudes. The conservative element opposed the nudes, but the sculptor declined to proceed if the nudes were suppressed. In the end we won a decisive victory for Art.

CAROLINA. Do you know, I think it would have been just as well not to have had any nudes? What was the use of offending anybody? Several of our friends are going to remain away from the ceremonies upon that account.

FLORENCIO. How ridiculous! That only shows how far we are behind the times. You certainly have no feeling of that sort after having been the companion of that great, that liberal man. I remember the trip we took to Italy together--you surely recollect it, Carolina. I never saw a man so struck with admiration at those marvelous monuments of pagan and Renaissance art. Oh, what a man! What a wonderful man! He was an artist. Ah! Before I forget it, Carolina, Gutiérrez asked me for any pictures you have for the special edition of his paper, and I should like to have him publish the verses which he wrote you when you were first engaged. Did you ever see those verses? That man might have been a poet--he might have been anything else for that matter. Talk about letters! I wish you could see his letters. Carolina, let us see some of those letters he wrote you when you were engaged.

CAROLINA. Not now. That is hardly the time....

FLORENCIO. Naturally. In spite of the satisfaction which we feel, these are trying days for us. We are united by our memories. I fear I shall never be able to control myself at the unveiling of the statue.

CAROLINA. Florencio, for heaven's sake, you must! You must control yourself.

ZURITA. Yes, do control yourself. You must.

FLORENCIO. I am controlling myself.

ZURITA. If there is nothing further that I can do....

CAROLINA. No, thank you, Zurita. I am awfully obliged to you. Now that I know what I am to wear, the situation does not seem half so embarrassing.

ZURITA. I understand. A woman's position is never so embarrassing as when she is hesitating as to what to put on.

CAROLINA. Until to-morrow then?

ZURITA. Don Florencio!

FLORENCIO. Thank you again for your charming article. It was admirable! Admirable!

[*Zurita retires.*]

FLORENCIO. I see that you feel it deeply! you are touched. So am I. It is foolish to attempt to conceal it.

CAROLINA. I don't know how to express it, but--I am upset.

FLORENCIO. Don't forget the pictures, however, especially the one where the three of us were taken together on the second platform of the Eiffel tower. It was particularly good.

CAROLINA. Yes, something out of the ordinary. Don't you think, perhaps, that our private affairs, our family life.... How do we know whether at this time, in our situation....

FLORENCIO. What are you afraid of? That is the woman of it. How narrow-minded! You ought to be above such pettiness after having been the wife of such an intelligent man. Every detail of the private life of the great has its interest for history. Those of us who knew him, who in a certain sense were his colaborers--you will not accuse me of immodesty--his colaborers in the great work of his life, owe it to history to see that the truth be known.

CAROLINA. Nevertheless I hardly think I would print those letters--much less the verses. Do you remember what they said?

FLORENCIO. Of course, I remember:

"Like a moth on a pin I preserve all your kisses!..."

Everybody makes allowances for poetry. Nobody is going to take seriously what he reads in a poem. He married you anyway. Why should any one object?

CAROLINA. Stop, Florencio! What are you talking about? We are making ourselves ridiculous.

FLORENCIO. Why should we make ourselves ridiculous? Although I shall certainly stand by you, whatever you decide, if for no other reason than that I am your husband, his widow's husband. Otherwise people might think that I wanted you to forget, that I was jealous of his memory; and you know that is not the case. You know how I admired him, how I loved him--just as he did me. Nobody could get along with him as well as I could; he was not easy to get along with, I do not need to tell you that. He had his peculiarities--they were the peculiarities of a great man--but they were great peculiarities. Like all great men, he had an exaggerated opinion of himself. He was horribly stubborn, like all strong characters. Whenever he got on one of his hobbies no power on earth could pry him off of it. It is only out of respect that I do not say he was pig-headed. I was the only one who had the tact and the patience to do anything with him; you know that well enough. How often you said to me: "Oh, Florencio! I can't stand it any longer!" And then I would reason with you and talk to him, and every time that you had a quarrel I was the one who consoled you afterward.

CAROLINA. Florencio, you are perfectly disgusting! You have no right to talk like this.

FLORENCIO. Very well then, my dear. I understand how you feel. This is a time when everybody is dwelling on his virtues, his good qualities, but I want you to remember that that great man had also his faults.

CAROLINA. You don't know what you are talking about.

FLORENCIO. Compare me with him--

CAROLINA. Florencio? You know that in my mind there has never been any comparison. Comparisons are odious.

FLORENCIO. Not necessarily. But of course you have not! You have never regretted giving up his distinguished name, have you, Carolina, for this humble one of mine? Only I want you to understand that if I had desired to shine, if I had been ambitious.... I have talent myself. Now admit it!

CAROLINA. Of course I do, my dear, of course! But what is the use of talking nonsense?

FLORENCIO. What is the matter with you, anyway? You are nervous to-day. It is impossible to conduct a sensible conversation.--Hello! Your sisters-in-law! I am not at home.

CAROLINA. Don't excite yourself. They never ask for you.

FLORENCIO. I am delighted!... Well, I wish you a short session and escape.

CAROLINA. I am in a fine humor for this sort of thing myself.

[Florencio goes out. Eudisia and Paquita enter.]

EUDOSIA. I trust that we do not intrude?

CAROLINA. How can you ask? Come right in.

EUDOSIA. It seems we find you at home for once.

CAROLINA. So it seems.

PAQUITA. Strange to say, whenever we call you always appear to be out.

CAROLINA. A coincidence.

EUDOSIA. The coincidence is to find you at home. [*A pause.*] We passed your husband on the street.

CAROLINA. Are you sure that you would recognize him?

PAQUITA. Oh! he was not alone.

CAROLINA. Is that so?

EUDOSIA. Paquita saw him with Somolino's wife, at Sanchez the confectioner's.

CAROLINA. Very possibly.

PAQUITA. I should not make light of it, if I were you. You know what Somolino's wife is, to say nothing of Sanchez the confectioner.

CAROLINA. I didn't know about the confectioner.

EUDOSIA. No respectable woman, no woman who even pretends to be respectable, would set foot in his shop since he married that French girl.

CAROLINA. I didn't know about the French girl.

EUDOSIA. Yes, he married her--I say married her to avoid using another term. He married her in Bayonne--if you call such a thing marriage--civilly, which is the way French people marry. It is a land of perdition.

CAROLINA. I am very sorry to hear it because I am awfully fond of sweetmeats. I adore *bonbons* and *marrons glacés*, and nobody here has as good ones as Sanchez, nor anywhere else for that matter.

PAQUITA. In that case you had as well deny yourself, unless you are prepared to invite criticism. Somolino's wife is the only woman who enters the shop and faces the French girl, who gave her a receipt for dyeing her hair on the spot. You must have noticed how she is doing it now.

CAROLINA. I hadn't noticed.

EUDOSIA. It is not jet-black any more; it is baby-pink--so she is having the Frenchwoman manicure her nails twice a week. Have you noticed the condition of her nails? They are the talk of the town.

[*A pause.*]

PAQUITA. Well, I trust he is satisfied.

CAROLINA. Who is he?

PAQUITA. I do not call him your husband. Oh, our poor, dear brother!

CAROLINA. I have not the slightest idea what you are talking about.

EUDOSIA. So he has had his way at last and desecrated the statue of our poor brother with the figures of those naked women?

PAQUITA. As large as life.

CAROLINA. But Florencio is not responsible. It was the sculptor and the committee. I cannot see anything objectionable in them myself. There are such figures on all monuments. They are allegorical.

EUDOSIA. I could understand, perhaps, why the statue of Truth should be unclothed. Something of the sort was always expected of Truth. But I must say that Commerce and Industry might have had a tunic at least. Commerce, in my opinion, is particularly indecent.

PAQUITA. We have declined the seats which were reserved for us. They were directly in front and you could see everything.

EUDOSIA. I suppose you still intend to be present? What a pity that there is nobody to give you proper advice!

CAROLINA. As I have been invited, I judge that I shall be welcome as I am.

PAQUITA. Possibly--if it were good form for you to appear at all. But when you exhibit yourself with that man--who was his best friend--after only three short years!

CAROLINA. Three long years.

EUDOSIA. No doubt they seemed long to you. Three years, did I say? They were like days to us who still keep his memory green!

PAQUITA. Who still bear his name, because no other name sounds so noble in our ears.

EUDOSIA. Rather than change it, we have declined very flattering proposals.

CAROLINA. I am afraid that you have made a mistake. You remember that your brother was very anxious to see you married.

PAQUITA. He imagined that all men were like him, and deserved wives like us, our poor, dear brother! Who would ever have dreamed he could have been forgotten so soon? Fancy his emotions as he looks down on you from the skies.

CAROLINA. I do not believe for one moment that he has any regrets. If he had, then what would be the use of being in paradise? Don't you worry about me. The best thing that a young widow can do is marry at once. I was a very young widow.

EUDOSIA. You were twenty-nine.

CAROLINA. Twenty-six.

EUDOSIA. We concede you twenty-six. At all events, you were not a child--not to speak of the fact that no widow can be said to be a child.

CAROLINA. No more than a single woman can be said to be old. However, I fail to see that there would be any impropriety in my being present at the unveiling of the statue.

EUDOSIA. Do you realize that the premature death of your husband will be the subject of all the speakers? They will dwell on the bereavement which we have suffered through the loss of such an eminent man. How do you propose to take it? When people see you standing there, complacent and satisfied, alongside of that man, do you suppose they will ever believe that you are not reconciled?

PAQUITA. What will your husband do while they are extolling the genius of our brother, and he knows that he never had any?

CAROLINA. That was not your brother's opinion. He thought very highly of Florencio.

EUDOSIA. Very highly. Our poor, dear brother! Among his other abilities he certainly had an extraordinary aptitude for allowing himself to be deceived.

CAROLINA. That assumption is offensive to me; it is unfair to all of us.

EUDOSIA. I hope you brought it with you, Paquita?

PAQUITA. Yes; here it is.

[*Taking out a book.*]

EUDOSIA. Just look through this book if you have a moment. It arrived to-day from Madrid and is on sale at Valdivieso's. Just glance through it.

CAROLINA. What is the book? [*Reading the title upon the cover.*]
"Don Patricio Molinete, the Man and His Work. A Biography. Together with His Correspondence and an Estimate of His Life."
Why, thanks--

PAQUITA. No, do not thank us. Read, read what our poor brother has written to the author of this book, who was one of his intimate friends.

CAROLINA. Recaredo Casalonga. Ah! I remember--a rascal we were obliged to turn out of the house. Do you mean to say that scamp Casalonga has any letters? Merely to hear the name makes me nervous.

EUDOSIA. But go on! Page two hundred and fourteen. Is that the page, Paquita?

PAQUITA. It begins on page two hundred and fourteen, but before it amounts to anything turn the page.

CAROLINA. Quick, quick! Let me see. What does he say? What are these letters? What is this? He says that I.... But there is not a word of truth in it. My husband could never have written this.

EUDOSIA. But there it is in cold type. You don't suppose they would dare to print--

CAROLINA. But this is outrageous; this book is a libel. It invades the private life--the most private part of it! It must be stopped.

EUDOSIA. It cannot be stopped. You will soon see whether or not it can be stopped.

PAQUITA. Probably the edition is exhausted by this time.

CAROLINA. Is that so? We shall see! We shall see!--Florencio! Florencio! Come quickly! Florencio!

EUDOSIA. Perhaps he has not yet returned.

PAQUITA. He seemed to be enjoying himself.

CAROLINA. Nonsense! He was never out of the house. You are two old busybodies!

EUDOSIA. Carolina! You said that without thinking.

PAQUITA. I cannot believe my ears. Did you say busybody.

CAROLINA. That is exactly what I said. Now leave me alone. I can't stand it. It is all your fault. You are insupportable!

EUDOSIA and PAQUITA. Carolina!

CAROLINA. Florencio! Florencio!

[*Florencio enters.*]

FLORENCIO. What is it, my dear? What is the matter? Ah! You? I am delighted....

EUDOSIA. Yes, we! And we are leaving this house, where we have been insulted--forever!

PAQUITA. Where we have been called busybodies!

EUDOSIA. Where we have been told that we were insupportable!

PAQUITA. And when people say such things you can imagine what they think!

FLORENCIO. But Eudisia, Paquita.... I do not understand. As far as I am concerned....

EUDOSIA. The person who is now your wife will make her explanations to you.

PAQUITA. I never expected to be driven out of our brother's house like this!

EUDOSIA. Our poor, dear brother!

FLORENCIO. But, Carolina--

CAROLINA. Let them go! Let them go! They are impossible.

PAQUITA. Did you hear that, Eudisia? We are impossible!

EUDOSIA. I heard it, Paquita. There is nothing left for us to hear in this house.

CAROLINA. Yes there is! You are as impossible as all old maids.

EUDOSIA. There was something for us to hear after all! Come, Paquita.

PAQUITA. Come, Eudisia.

[They go out.]

FLORENCIO. What is this trouble between you and your sisters-in-law?

CAROLINA. There isn't any trouble. We were arguing, that was all. There is nothing those women like so much as gossip, or making themselves disagreeable in any way they can. Do you remember Casalonga?

FLORENCIO. Recaredo Casalonga? I should say I did remember him! That man was a character, and strange to say, a profound philosopher with it all. He was quite a humorist.

CAROLINA. Yes, he was. Well, this philosopher, this humorist, has conceived the terribly humorous idea of publishing this book.

FLORENCIO. Let me see. "Don Patricio Molinete, the Man and His Work. A Biography. Together with His Correspondence and an Estimate of His Life." A capital idea! They were great friends, you know, although I don't suppose that there can be anything particular in this book. What could Casalonga tell us anyway?

CAROLINA. Us? Nothing. But go on, go on.

FLORENCIO. You don't say! Letters of Patricio's. Addressed to whom?

CAROLINA. To the author of the book, so it seems. Personal letters, they are confidential. Go on, go on.

FLORENCIO. "Dear Friend: Life is sad. Perhaps you ask the cause of my disillusionment. How is it that I have lost my faith in the future, in the future of our unfortunate land?" I remember that time. He was already ill. This letter was written after he had liver complaint and took a dark view of everything. Ah! What a pity that great men should be subject to such infirmities! Think of the intellect being made the slave of the liver! We are but dust. "The future of this unfortunate land...."

CAROLINA. No, that doesn't amount to anything. Lower down, lower down. Go on.

FLORENCIO. "Life is sad!"

CAROLINA. Are you beginning all over again?

FLORENCIO. No, he repeats himself. What is this? "I never loved but once in my life; I never loved but one woman--my wife." He means you.

CAROLINA. Yes. Go on, go on.

FLORENCIO. "I never trusted but one friend, my friend Florencio." He means me.

CAROLINA. Yes, yes; he means you. But go on, go on.

FLORENCIO. I wonder what he can be driving at. Ah! What does he say? That you, that I....

CAROLINA. Go on, go on.

FLORENCIO. "This woman and this man, the two greatest, the two pure, the two unselfish passions of my life, in whom my very being was consumed--how can I bring myself to confess it? I hardly dare admit it to myself! They are in love--they love each other madly--in secret--perhaps without even suspecting themselves."

CAROLINA. What do you think of that?

FLORENCIO. Suspecting themselves.... "They are struggling to overcome their guilty passion, but how long will they continue to struggle? Yet I am sorry for them both. What ought I to do? I cannot sleep."

CAROLINA. What do you say?

FLORENCIO. Impossible! He never wrote such letters. Besides, if he did, they ought never to have been published.

CAROLINA. But true or false, they have been published, and here they are. Ah! But this is nothing! You ought to see what he says farther on. He goes on communicating his observations, and there are some, to be perfectly frank, which nobody could have made but himself.

FLORENCIO. You don't mean to tell me that you think these letters are genuine?

CAROLINA. They might be for all we know. He gives dates and details.

FLORENCIO. And all the time we thought he suspected nothing!

CAROLINA. You do jump so at conclusions, Florencio. How could he suspect? You know how careful we were about everything, no matter what happened, so as not to hurt his feelings.

FLORENCIO. This only goes to show all the good that it did us.

CAROLINA. He could only suspect--that it was the truth; that we were loving in silence.

FLORENCIO. Then perhaps you can explain to me what was the use of all this silence? Don't you see that what he has done now is to go and blurt the whole thing out to this rascal Casalonga?--an unscrupulous knave whose only interest in the matter is to turn these confidences to his own advantage! It is useless to attempt to defend it. Such foolishness was unpardonable. I should never have believed it of my friend. If he had any doubts about me--about us--why didn't he say so? Then we could have been more careful, and have done something to ease his mind. But this notion of running and telling the first person who happens along.... What a position does it leave me in? In what light do we appear at this time? Now, when everybody is paying respect to his memory, and I have put myself to all this trouble in order to raise money for this monument--what are people going to think when they read these things?

CAROLINA. I always said that we would have trouble with that monument.

FLORENCIO. How shall I have the face to present myself to-morrow before the monument?

CAROLINA. My sisters-in-law were right. We are going to be conspicuous.

FLORENCIO. Ah! But this must be stopped. I shall run at once to the offices of the papers, to the judicial authorities, to the governor, to all the booksellers. As for this Casalonga--Ah! I will settle with him! Either he will retract and confess that these letters are forgeries from beginning to end, or I will kill him! I will fight with him in earnest!

CAROLINA. Florencio! Don't forget yourself! You are going too far. You don't mean a duel? To expose your life?

FLORENCIO. Don't you see that it is impossible to submit to such an indignity? Where is this thing going to stop? Is nobody's private life to

be secure? And this goes deeper than the private life--it impugns the sanctity of our intentions.

CAROLINA. No, Florencio!

FLORENCIO. Let me go!

CAROLINA. Florencio! Anything but a duel! No, no!

FLORENCIO. Ah! Either he will retract and withdraw the edition of this libel or, should he refuse....

CAROLINA. Zurita!

FLORENCIO. My friend.... You are just in time!

[*Zurita enters.*]

ZURITA. Don Florencio.... Carolina.... Don't say a word! I know how you feel.

FLORENCIO. Did you see it? Did you hear it? Is this a civilized country in which we live?

CAROLINA. But surely he has not heard it already?

ZURITA. Yes, at the Club. Some one had the book; they were passing it around....

FLORENCIO. At the Club?

ZURITA. Don't be alarmed. Everybody thinks it is blackmail--a case of *chantage*. Don Patricio could never have written such letters.

FLORENCIO. Ah! So they think that?

ZURITA. Even if he had, they deal with private matters, which ought never to have been made public.

FLORENCIO. Exactly my idea--with private matters; they are confidential.

ZURITA. I lost no time, as you may be sure, of hurrying to Valdivieso's shop, where the books are on sale. I found him amazed; he was entirely innocent. He bought the copies supposing that the subject was of timely importance; that it was of a serious nature. He hurried at once to withdraw the copies from the window, and ran in search of the author.

FLORENCIO. Of the author? Is the author in town?

ZURITA. Yes, he came with the books; he arrived with them this morning.

FLORENCIO. Ah! So this scamp Casalonga is here, is he? Tell me where I can find him!

ZURITA. At the Hotel de Europa.

CAROLINA. Florencio! Don't you go! Hold him back! He means to challenge him.

ZURITA. Never! It is not worth the trouble. Besides, you ought to hold yourself above such things. Your wife is above them.

FLORENCIO. But what will people say, friend Zurita? What will people say?

ZURITA. Everybody thinks it is a huge joke.

FLORENCIO. A joke? Then our position is ridiculous.

ZURITA. I did not say that. What I do say....

FLORENCIO. No, no, friend Zurita; you are a man of honor, you know that it is necessary for me to kill this man.

CAROLINA. But suppose he is the one who kills you? No, Florencio, not a duel! What is the use of the courts?

FLORENCIO. No, I prefer to fight. My dear Zurita, run in search of another friend and stop at the Hotel de Europa as my representatives. Seek out this man, exact reparation upon the spot--a reparation which shall be resounding, complete. Either he declares over his own signature that those letters are impudent forgeries or, should he refuse....

CAROLINA. Florencio!

FLORENCIO. Stop at nothing! Do not haggle over terms. Let it be pistols with real bullets, as we pace forward each to each!

ZURITA. But, Don Florencio!

CAROLINA. Don't go, I beg of you! Don't leave the house!

FLORENCIO. You are my friend--go at once!

CAROLINA. No, he will never go!

ZURITA. But, Don Florencio! Consider.... The situation is serious.

FLORENCIO. When a man is made ridiculous the situation ceases to be serious! How shall I have the face to show myself before the monument! I--his most intimate friend! She, my wife, his widow! And everybody thinking all the while of those letters, imagining that I, that she.... No, no! Run! Bring me that retraction at once.

ZURITA. Not so fast! I hear the voice of Valdivieso.

FLORENCIO. Eh? And Casalonga's! Has that man the audacity to present himself in my house?

ZURITA. Be calm! Since he is here, perhaps he comes to explain. Let me see--

[*He goes out.*]

CAROLINA. Florencio! Don't you receive him! Don't you have anything to do with that man!

FLORENCIO. I am in my own house. Never fear! I shall not forget to conduct myself as a gentleman. Now we shall see how he explains the matter; we shall see. But you had better retire first. Questions of honor are not for women.

CAROLINA. You know best; only I think I might remain within earshot. I am nervous. My dear!--Where are your arms?

FLORENCIO. What do I need of arms?

CAROLINA. Be careful just the same. Keep cool! Think of me.

FLORENCIO. I am in my own house. Have no fear.

CAROLINA. It upsets me dreadfully to see you in such a state.

FLORENCIO. What are you doing now?

CAROLINA. Removing these vases in case you should throw things. I should hate awfully to lose them; they were a present.

FLORENCIO. Hurry, dear!

CAROLINA. I am horribly nervous. Keep cool, for heavens' sake! Control yourself.

[*Carolina goes out. Zurita reënters.*]

ZURITA. Are you calmer now?

FLORENCIO. Absolutely. Is that man here?

ZURITA. Yes, Valdivieso brought him. He desires to explain.

FLORENCIO. Who? Valdivieso? Naturally. But that other fellow, that Casalonga--what does he want?

ZURITA. To have a few words with you; to offer a thousand explanations.

FLORENCIO. No more than one explanation is possible.

ZURITA. Consider a moment. In my opinion it will be wiser to receive him. He appears to be innocent.

FLORENCIO. Of the first instincts of a gentleman.

ZURITA. Exactly. I did not venture to put it so plainly. He attaches no importance to the affair whatever.

FLORENCIO. Of course not! It is nothing to him.

ZURITA. Nothing. However, you will find him disposed to go to any length--retract, make a denial, withdraw the book from circulation. You had best have a few words with him. But first promise to control yourself. Shall I ask them to come in?

FLORENCIO. Yes ... yes! Ask them to come in.

ZURITA. Poor Valdivieso is awfully put out. He always had such a high opinion of you. You are one of the two or three persons in this town who buy books. It would be a tremendous relief to him if you would only tell him that you knew he was incapable....

FLORENCIO. Thoroughly! Poor Valdivieso! Ask him to come in; ask them both to come in.

[Zurita retires and returns presently with Valdivieso and Casalonga.]

VALDIVIESO. Señor Don Florencio! I hardly know what to say. I am sure that you will not question my good faith in the matter. I had no idea ... in fact, I never suspected....

FLORENCIO. I always knew you were innocent! but this person....

CASALONGA. Come, come now! Don't blame it on me. How the devil was I to know that you were here--and married to his widow! Sport for the gods!

FLORENCIO. Do you hear what he says?

ZURITA. I told you that he appeared to be innocent.

FLORENCIO. And I told you that he was devoid of the first instincts of a gentleman; although I failed to realize to what an extent. Sir--

CASALONGA. Don't be absurd! Stop making faces at me.

FLORENCIO. In the first place, I don't recall that we were ever so intimate.

CASALONGA. Of course we were! Of course! Anyhow, what difference does it make? We were together for a whole season; we were inseparable. Hard times those for us both! But what did we care? When one of us was out of money, all he had to do was to ask the other, and be satisfied.

FLORENCIO. Yes; I seem to recall that the other was always I.

CASALONGA. Ha, ha, ha! That might be. Stranger things have happened. But you are not angry with me, are you? The thing is not worth all this fuss.

FLORENCIO. Do you hear what he says?

VALDIVIESO. You may be sure that if I had had the slightest idea.... I bought the books so as to take advantage of the timeliness of the monument. If I had ever suspected....

CASALONGA. Identically my position--to take advantage of the monument. Life is hard. While the conservatives are in power, I am reduced to extremities. I am at my wit's end to earn an honest penny.

FLORENCIO. I admire your colossal impudence. What are you going to do with a man like this?

ZURITA. Exactly the question that occurred to me. What are you going to do?

CASALONGA. For a time I was reduced to writing plays--like everybody else--although mine were better. That was the reason they did not succeed. Then I married my last landlady; I was obliged to settle with her somehow. A little difference arose between us, so we agreed to separate amicably after smashing all the furniture. However, that will be of no interest to you.

FLORENCIO. No, no, it is of no interest to me.

CASALONGA. A novel, my boy! A veritable work of romance! I wandered all over the country explaining views for the cinematograph. You know what a gift I have for talk? Wherever I appeared the picture houses were crowded--even to the exits. Then my voice gave out. I was obliged to find some other outlet for my activities. I thought of my friends. You know what friends are; as soon as a man needs them he hasn't any friends. Which way was I to turn? I happened to hear that you were unveiling a monument to the memory of friend Patricio. Poor Patricio! That man was a friend! He could always be relied upon. It occurred to me that I might write out a few pages of reminiscences--preferably something personal--and publish any letters of his which I had chanced to preserve.

FLORENCIO. What luck!

CASALONGA. Pshaw! Bread and butter--bread and butter, man! A mere pittance. It occurred to me that they would sell better here than anywhere else--this is where he lived. So I came this morning third class--think of that, third class!--and hurried at once to this fellow's shop. I placed two thousand copies with him, which he took from me at a horrible discount. You know what these booksellers are....

VALDIVIESO. I call you to witness--what was customary under the circumstances. He was selling for cash.

CASALONGA. Am I the man to deny it? You can divide mankind into two classes--knaves and fools.

VALDIVIESO. Listen to this--

CASALONGA. You are not one of the fools.

VALDIVIESO. I protest! How am I to profit by the transaction? Do you suppose that I shall sell a single copy of this libel now that I know that it is offensive to my particular, my excellent friend, Don Florencio, and to his respected wife?

FLORENCIO. Thanks, friend Valdivieso, thanks for that.

VALDIVIESO. I shall burn the edition, although you can imagine what that will cost.

FLORENCIO. The loss will be mine. It will be at my expense.

CASALONGA. What did I tell you? Florencio will pay. What are you complaining about?--If I were in your place, though, I'd be hanged if I would give the man one penny.

VALDIVIESO. What? When you have collected spot cash?

CASALONGA. You don't call that collecting? Not at that discount. The paper was worth more.

FLORENCIO. The impudence of the thing was worth more than the paper.

CASALONGA. Ha, ha, ha! Really, I cannot find it in my heart to be angry with you. You are too clever! But what was I to do? I had to find some outlet for my activities. Are you going to kill me?

FLORENCIO. I have made my arrangements. Do you suppose that I will submit meekly to such an indignity? If you refuse to fight, I will hale you before the courts.

CASALONGA. Drop that tragic tone. A duel? Between us? Over what? Because the wife of a friend--who at the same time happens to be your wife--has been intimate with you? Suppose it had been with some one else!

FLORENCIO. The supposition is improper.

CASALONGA. You are the first man I ever heard of who was offended because it was said that he had been intimate with his wife. The thing is preposterous. How are we ever going to fight over it?

ZURITA. I can see his point of view.

FLORENCIO. Patricio could never have written those letters, much less to you.

CASALONGA. Talk as much as you like, the letters are genuine. Although it may have been foolish of Patricio to have written them--that is a debatable question. I published them so as to enliven the book. A little harmless suggestion--people look for it; it adds spice. Aside from that, what motive could I have had for dragging you into it?

FLORENCIO. I admire your frankness at least.

ZURITA. What do you propose to do with this man?

FLORENCIO. What do you propose?

CASALONGA. You know I was always fond of you. You are a man of ability.

FLORENCIO. Thanks.

CASALONGA. You have more ability than Patricio had. He was a worthy soul, no doubt, but between us, who were in the secret, an utter blockhead.

FLORENCIO. Hardly that.

CASALONGA. I need not tell you what reputations amount to in this country. If he had had your brains, your transcendent ability....

FLORENCIO. How can I stop this man from talking?

CASALONGA. You have always been too modest in my opinion; you have remained in the background in order to give him a chance to shine, to attract attention. Everybody knows that his best speeches were written by you.

FLORENCE. You have no right to betray my confidence.

CASALONGA. Yes, gentlemen, it is only just that you should know. The real brains belonged to this man, he is the one who should have had the statue. As a friend he is wonderful, unique!

FLORENCIO. How am I going to fight with this man?

CASALONGA. I will give out a statement at once--for public consumption--declaring that the letters are forgeries--or whatever you think best; as it appeals to you. Fix it up for yourself. It is of no consequence anyhow. I am above this sort of thing. I should be sorry, however, to see this fellow receive more than his due, which is two *reals* a copy, or what he paid me.

VALDIVIESO. I cannot permit you to meddle in my affairs. You are a rogue and a cheat.

CASALONGA. A rogue and a cheat? In that case you are the one I will fight with. You are no friend of mine. You are an exploiter of other men's brains.

VALDIVIESO. You are willing to fight with me, are you--a respectable man, the father of a family? After swindling me out of my money!

CASALONGA. Swindling? That is no language to use in this house.

VALDIVIESO. I use it where I like.

FLORENCIO. Gentlemen, gentlemen! This is my house, this is the house of my wife!

ZURITA. Valdivieso!

CASALONGA [*to Florencio*]. I choose you for my second. And you too, my friend--what is your name?

VALDIVIESO. But will you listen to him? Do you suppose that I will fight with this rascal, with the first knave who happens along? I, the father of a family?

CASALONGA. I cannot accept your explanation. My friends will confer with yours and apprise us as to the details. Have everything ready for this afternoon.

VALDIVIESO. Do you stand here and sanction this nonsense? You cannot believe one word that he says. No doubt it would be convenient for you to retire and use me as a Turk's head to receive all the blows, when you are the one who ought to fight!

FLORENCIO. Friend Valdivieso, I cannot permit reflections upon my conduct from you. After all, you need not have purchased the book, which you did for money, knowing that it was improper, since it contained matter which was offensive to me.

VALDIVIESO. Are you speaking in earnest?

FLORENCIO. I was never more in earnest in my life.

CASALONGA. Yes, sir, and it is high time for us all to realize that it is in earnest. It was all your fault. Nobody buys without spending the wares. It was your business to have pointed out to me the indiscretion I was about to commit. [*To Florencio.*] I am perfectly willing to withdraw if you wish to fight him, to yield my place as the aggrieved party to you. I should be delighted to act as one of your seconds, with our good friend here--what is your name?

ZURITA. Zurita.

CASALONGA. My good friend Zurita.

VALDIVIESO. Am I losing my mind? This is a trap which you have set for me, a despicable trap!

FLORENCIO. Friend Valdivieso, I cannot tolerate these reflections. I am incapable of setting a trap.

ZURITA. Ah! And so am I! When you entered this house you were familiar with its reputation.

CASALONGA. You have forgotten with whom you are speaking.

VALDIVIESO. Nonsense! This is too much. I wash my hands of the whole business. Is this the spirit in which my advances are received? What I will do now is sell the book--and if I can't sell it, I will give it away! Everybody can read it then--and they can talk as much as they want to. This is the end! I am through.

FLORENCIO. Wait? What was that? I warn you not to sell so much as one copy?

ZURITA. I should be sorry if you did. Take care not to drag me into it.

CASALONGA. Nor me either.

VALDIVIESO. Enough! Do as you see fit--and I shall do the same. This is the end--the absolute end! It is the finish!

[*Rushes out.*]

FLORENCIO. Stop him!

CASALONGA. It won't be necessary. I shall go to the shop and take back the edition. Whatever you intended to pay him you can hand directly to me. I am your friend; besides I need the money. This man shall not get the best of me. Oh! By the way, what are you doing tonight? Have dinner with me. I shall expect you at the hotel. Don't forget! If you don't show up, I may drop in myself and have dinner with you.

FLORENCIO. No! What would my wife say? She has trouble enough.

CASALONGA. Nonsense! She knows me, and we should have a good laugh. Is she as charming, as good-looking, as striking as ever? I am keen for her. I don't need to ask whether she is happy. Poor Patricio was a character! What a sight he was! What a figure! And age doubled him for good measure. I'll look in on you later. It has been a rare pleasure this time. There are few friends like you. Come, shake hands! I am touched; you know how it is. See you later! If I don't come back, I have killed my man and am in jail for it. Tell your wife. If I can help out in any way.... Good-by, my friend--ah, yes! Zurita. I have a terrible head to-day. See you later!

[*Goes out.*]

FLORENCIO. Did you ever see anything equal of it? I never did, and I knew him of old. But he has made progress.

ZURITA. His assurance is fairly epic.

FLORENCIO. What are you going to do with a man who takes it like this? You cannot kill him in cold blood--

[*Carolina reënters.*]

FLORENCIO. Ah! Carolina! Were you listening? You heard everything.

CAROLINA. Yes, and in spite of it I think he is fascinating.

FLORENCIO. Since Carolina feels that way it simplifies the situation.

ZURITA. Why not? She heard the compliments. The man is irresistible.

FLORENCIO. Carolina, it comes simply to this: nobody attaches any importance to the matter. Only two or three copies have been sold.

CAROLINA. Yes, but one of them was to my sisters-in-law, which is the same as if they had sold forty thousand. They will tell everybody.

FLORENCIO. They were doing it anyhow; there is no further cause for worry.

CAROLINA. At all events, I shall not attend the unveiling to-morrow, and you ought not to go either.

FLORENCIO. But, wife!

ZURITA. Ah! The unveiling.... I had forgotten to mention it.

CAROLINA. To mention what?

ZURITA. It has been postponed.

FLORENCIO. How?

ZURITA. The committee became nervous at the last moment over the protests against the nudes. After seeing the photographs many ladies declined to participate. At last the sculptor was convinced, and he has consented to withdraw the statue of Truth altogether, and to put a tunic upon Industry, while Commerce is to have a bathing-suit.

CAROLINA. That will be splendid!

ZURITA. All this, however, will require several days, and by that time everything will have been forgotten.

[Casalonga reënters with the books. He is completely out of breath and drops them suddenly upon the floor, where they raise a tremendous cloud of dust.]

CAROLINA. Ay!

CASALONGA. I had you scared! At your service.... Here is the entire edition. I returned him his thousand pesetas--I declined to make it another penny. I told you that would be all that was necessary. I am a man of my word. Now it is up to you. No more could be asked! I am your friend and have said enough. I shall have to find some other outlet for my activities. That will be all for to-day.

FLORENCIO. I will give you two thousand pesetas. But beware of a second edition!

CASALONGA. Don't begin to worry so soon. With this money I shall have enough to be decent at least--at least for two months. You know me, señora. I am Florencio's most intimate friend, as I was Patricio's most intimate friend, which is to say one of the most intimate friends you ever had.

CAROLINA. Yes, I remember.

CASALONGA. But I have changed since that time.

FLORENCIO. Not a bit of it! He is just the same.

CASALONGA. Yes, the change is in you. You are the same, only you have improved. *[To Carolina.]* I am amazed at the opulence of your beauty, which a fortunate marriage has greatly enhanced. Have you any children?

CAROLINA. No....

CASALONGA. You are going to have some.

FLORENCIO. Flatterer!

CASALONGA. But I must leave before night: there is nothing for me to do here.

FLORENCIO. No, you have attended to everything. I shall send it after you to the hotel.

CASALONGA. Add a little while you are about it to cover expenses-- by way of a finishing touch.

FLORENCIO. Oh, very well!

CASALONGA. That will be all. Señora, if I can be of service.... My good Zurita! Friend Florencio! Before I die I hope to see you again.

FLORENCIO. Yes! Unless I die first.

CASALONGA. I know how you feel. You take the worst end for yourself.

FLORENCIO. Allow me that consolation.

CASALONGA. God be with you, my friend. Adios! Rest in peace. How different are our fates! Life to you is sweet. You have everything--love, riches, satisfaction. While I--I laugh through my tears!

[*Goes out.*]

CAROLINA. That cost you money.

FLORENCIO. What else did you expect? I gave up to avoid a scandal upon your account. I could see that you were nervous. I would have fought if I could have had my way; I would have carried matters to the last extreme. Zurita will tell you so.

CAROLINA. I always said that monument would cost us dear.

FLORENCIO. Obviously! Two thousand pesetas now, besides the twenty-five thousand which I subscribed for the monument, to say nothing of my uniform as Chief of Staff which I had ordered for the unveiling. Then there are the banquets to the delegates....

ZURITA. Glory is always more expensive than it is worth.

FLORENCIO. It is not safe to be famous even at second hand.

CAROLINA. But you are not sorry?

FLORENCIO. No, my Carolina, the glory of being your husband far outweighs in my eyes the disadvantages of being the husband of his widow.

[*Curtain.*]