

THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.

A Farce.

SCENE.—*A street at the west end of London. Enter SQUIRE HAMPER and his Lady, personages rather of the rustic order, recently come up from the family seat in Hampshire.*

Squire. WELL, Ma'am, I hope you 've had shopping enough.

Lady. Almost. Only one more—O! there it is, over the way.

Squire. What, the one yonder? Why, it 's all raven gray, picked out with black; and a hatchment over the door. What can you want at an undertaker's?

Lady. An undertaker's!—no such thing. Look at the goods in the window.

Squire. O, shawls and gowns! A foreign haberdasher's, I suppose, and that 's the French for it. Mason de Dool?

Lady. Hush! Don't expose your ignorance in the street; everybody knows French at the West End. It means the House of Mourning.

Squire. What, the one mentioned in the Bible?

Lady. No—no—dear me!—no. I tell you it 's a mourning establishment.

Squire. O, I understand. The master 's dead, and the shop 's put into black for him. The last new-fangled mode, I suppose, instead of the old-fashioned one of putting up the shutters.

Lady. Nonsense! It 's a shop to buy black things at.

Squire. Humph! And pray, Ma'am, what do *you* want with black things? There 's nobody dead belonging to us, as I know of, nor like to be.

Lady. Well; and what then? Is there any harm in just looking at their things—for I'm not going to buy. What did we come up to town for?

Squire. Why, for a bit of a holiday, and to see the sights, to be sure.

Lady. Well, and that black shop is one of them, at least for a female. It 's quite a new thing, they say, just come over from Paris; and I want to go in and pretend to cheapen something, just out of curiosity.

Squire. Yes, and pay for peeping. For in course you must buy after tumbling over their whole stock.

Lady. By no means—or only some trifle—a penn'orth of black pins—or the like. If I did purchase a black gown, it is always useful to have by one.

Squire. Yes—or a widow's cap. Perhaps, Ma'am, you 're in hopes?

Lady. La, Jacob, don't be foolish! Many ladies wear black for economy, as well as for relations. But I only want to inspect—for they do say, what with foreign tastiness, and our own modern refinements, there 's great improvements in mourning.

Squire. Humph—and I suppose a new-fashioned way of crying.

Lady. New fiddlesticks! It's very well known the Parisians always did out-do us in dress; and in course go into black more elegantly than we do.

Squire. No doubt, Ma'am—and fret in a vastly superior manner.

Lady. No, no. I don't say that. Grief's grief all the world over. But as regards costume, the French certainly do have a style that entitles them to set the fashion to us in such matters.

Squire. Can't say. I'm no judge.

Lady. In course not. They're women's matters, and should be left to our sex.

Squire. Well, well, come along, then! But stop. Ask your pardon, Sir, (*to a passenger*), would you oblige me with the English of that Greek or Latin, yonder, under the hatchment?

Stranger. O, certainly—"Mors Janua Vitæ"—let me see—it means, Jane, between life and death.

Squire. Thankee, Sir, thankee. I'll do as much for you when you come into our parts. Poor Jane! So it may come, mayhap, to be a real house of mourning after all!

The Squire and his lady cross over the road and enter the shop, where ebony chairs are placed for them by a person in a full suit of sables, very like Hamlet, minus the cloak and the hat and feathers. A young man, also in black, speaks across the counter with the solemn air and tone of a clergyman at a funeral.

May I have the melancholy pleasure of serving you, Madam?

Lady. I wish, Sir, to look at some mourning.

Shopm. Certainly, by all means. A relict, I presume?

Lady. Yes; a widow, Sir. A poor friend of mine, who has lost her husband.

Shopm. Exactly so—for a deceased partner. How deep would you choose to go, ma'am? Do you wish to be very poignant?

Lady. Why, I suppose crape and bombazine, unless they're gone out of fashion. But you had better show me some different sorts.

Shopm. Certainly, by all means. We have a very extensive assortment, whether for family, Court, or complimentary mourning, including the last novelties from the Continent.

Lady. Yes, I should like to see *them*.

Shopm. Certainly. Here is one, ma'am, just imported—a Widow's Silk—*watered*, as you perceive, to match the sentiment. It is called the "Inconsolable;" and is very much in vogue in Paris for matrimonial bereavements.

Squire. Looks rather flimsy, though. Not likely to last long—eh, Sir?

Shopm. A little slight, Sir—rather a delicate texture. But mourning ought not to last for ever, Sir.

Squire. No, it seldom does; especially the violent sorts.

Lady. La! Jacob, do hold your tongue; what do you know about fashionable affliction? But never mind him, Sir; it's only his way.

Shopm. Certainly—by all means. As to mourning, ma'am, there has been a great deal, a very great deal indeed, this season, and several new

fabrics have been introduced, to meet the demand for fashionable tribulation.

Lady. And all in the French style?

Shopm. Certainly—of course, ma'am. They excel in the *funèbre*. Here, for instance, is an article for the deeply afflicted. A black crape, expressly adapted to the profound style of mourning,—makes up very sombre, and interesting.

Lady. I dare say it does, sir.

Shopm. Would you allow me, ma'am, to cut off a dress?

Squire. You had better cut *me* off first.

Shopm. Certainly, sir—by all means. Or, if you would prefer a velvet—ma'am—

Lady. Is it proper, sir, to mourn in velvet?

Shopm. O quite!—certainly. Just coming in. Now, here is a very rich one—real Genoa—and a splendid black. We call it the Luxury of Woe.

Lady. Very expensive, of course?

Shopm. Only eighteen shillings a yard, and a superb quality; in short, fit for the handsomest style of domestic calamity.

Squire. Whereby, I suppose, sorrow gets more superfine as it goes upwards in life?

Shopm. Certainly—yes, sir—by all means—at least, a finer texture. The mourning of poor people is very coarse—very—quite different from that of persons of quality. Canvas to crape, sir?

Lady. To be sure it is! And as to the change of dress, sir, I suppose you have a great variety of half-mourning?

Shopm. O, infinite,—the largest stock in town! Full, and half, and quarter, and half-quarter mourning, shaded off, if I may say so, like an India-ink drawing, from a grief *prononcé* to the slightest *nuance* of regret.

Lady. Then, sir, please to let me see some Half Mourning.

Shopm. Certainly. But the Gentleman opposite superintends the Intermediate Sorrow Department.

Squire. What the young fellow yonder in pepper-and-salt?

Shopm. Yes, Sir; in the suit of gray. (*Calls across.*) Mr. Dawe, show the Neutral Tints!

[*The Squire and his Lady cross the shop and take seats vis-à-vis; Mr. Dawe, who affects the pensive rather than the solemn,*

Shop. You wish to inspect some Half Mourning, Madam?

Lady. Yes—the newest patterns.

Shopm. Precisely—in the second stage of distress. As such, Ma'am, allow me to recommend this satin—intended for grief when it has subsided,—alleviated you see, Ma'am, from a dead black to a dull lead colour!

Squire. As a black horse alleviates into a gray one, after he's clipped!

Shopm. Exactly so, sir. A Parisian novelty, Ma'am. It's called "Settled Grief," and is very much worn by ladies of a certain age, who do not intend to embrace Hymen a second time.

Squire. Old women, mayhap, about seventy.

Shop. Exactly so, Sir,—or thereabouts. Not but what some ladies,

Ma'am, set in for sorrow much earlier;—indeed, in the prime of life : and for such cases, it's very durable wear.

Lady. Yes ; it feels very stout.

Shopm. But perhaps, Madam, that is too *lugubre*. Now here is another—not exactly black, but shot with a warmish tint, to suit a woe moderated by time. We have sold several pieces of it. That little *nuance de rose* in it—the French call it, a Gleam of Comfort—is very attractive.

Squire. No doubt ; and would be still more taking, if so be it was violet colour at once, like the mourning of the Chinese.

Shopm. Yes, Sir. I believe that is the fashionable colour at Pekin. Now here, Ma'am, is a sweet pretty article, quite new. A morning dress for the Funereal Promenade. The French ladies go in them to Père la Chaise.

Squire. What's that—a chaise and pair ?

Shopm. Excuse me ; no, sir. By your leave it's a scene of rural interment, near Paris. A black cypress sprig, you see, Ma'am, on a stone-colour ground, harmonises beautifully with the monuments and epitaphs. We sold two this very morning—one to Norwood, and one to Kensal Green. We consider it the happiest pattern of the season

Squire. Yes ; some people are very happy in it, no doubt.

Shopm. No doubt, sir. There's a charm in melancholy, sir. I'm fond of the pensive myself. But possibly, Madam, you would prefer something still more in the transition state, as we call it, from grave to gay. In that case, I would recommend this lavender Ducape, with only just a *souvenir* of sorrow in it—the slightest tinge of mourning, to distinguish it from the garb of pleasure. Permit me to put aside a dress for you.

Lady. Why, no—not at present. I am not going into mourning myself ; but a friend, who has just been left with a large family——.

Shopm. Oh, I understand ;—and you desire to see an appropriate style of costume for the juvenile branches, when sorrow their young days has shaded. Of course, a milder degree of mourning than for adults. Black would be precocious. This, Ma'am, for instance—a dark pattern on gray ; an interesting dress, Ma'am, for a little girl, just initiated in the vale of tears.

Squire. Poor thing !

Shop. Precisely so, sir,—only eighteen pence a yard ma'am—and warranted to wash.—Possibly you would require the whole piece ?

Lady. Why no—I must first consult the Mama. And that reminds me to look at some widow's caps.

Shop. Very good Ma'am. The Coiffure department is backwards—if you would have the goodness to step that way.—

The lady followed by the squire, walks into a room, at the back of the shop :—the walls are hung with black, and on each of the three sides is a looking glass, in a black frame, multiplying infinitely, the reflections of the widows' caps, displayed on stands on the central table. A show-woman in deep mourning is in attendance.

Show. Your melancholy pleasure, Ma'am ?

Lady. Widow's caps.

Squire. Humph!—that's plump any how!

Show. This is the newest style, Ma'am—

Lady. Bless me! for a widow!—Isn't it rather,—you know, rather a little,—

Squire. Rather frisky in its frilligigs!

Show. Not for the mode, Ma'am. Affliction is very much modernised, and admits more *goût* than formerly. Some ladies indeed for their morning grief wear rather a plainer cap,—but for evening sorrow, this is not at all too *ornée*. French taste has introduced very considerable alleviations—for example, the *sympathiser*—

Squire. Where is he?

Show. This muslin *ruche*, Ma'am, instead of the plain band.

Lady. Yes; a very great improvement, certainly.

Show. Would you like to try it, Ma'am?

Lady. No, not at present. I am only inquiring for a friend—Pray what are those?

Show. Worked handkerchiefs, Ma'am. Here is a lovely pattern—all done by hand,—an exquisite piece of work—

Squire. Better than a noisy one!

Show. Here is another, Ma'am,—the last novelty. The *Larmoyante*—with a fringe of artificial tears, you perceive, in mock pearl. A sweet pretty idea, Ma'am.

Squire. But rather scrubby, I should think, for the eyes.

Show. O dear, no, sir!—if you mean wiping. The wet style of grief is quite gone out—quite!

Squire. O! and a dry cry is the genteel thing. But, come, Ma'am, come, or we shall be too late for the other Exhibitions.

The Squire and his Lady leave the shop: on getting into the street, he turns round, and takes a long last look at the premises.

Squire. Humph! And so that's a Mason de Dool! Well, if it's all the same to you, Ma'am, I'd rather die in the country, and be universally lamented, after the old fashion—for, as to London, what with the new French modes of mourning, and the "Try Warren" style of blacking the premises, it do seem to me that, before long, all sorrow will be sham Abram, and the House of Mourning a regular Farce!