



FOUR
NEW PLAYS
FOR WOMEN
AND GIRLS

BY HAROLD BRIGHOUSE,
PHILIP JOHNSON,
MARGARET MACNAMARA,
AND MARY PAKINGTON.

NELSON PLAYBOOKS NO. 206

The Nelson Playbooks

Edited by JOHN HAMPDEN, M.A.

FOUR NEW PLAYS FOR
WOMEN AND GIRLS

No. 206

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FOUR NEW PLAYS
FOR
WOMEN AND GIRLS

SELECTED BY
JOHN HAMPDEN

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LONDON AND EDINBURGH

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OTHER PLAYS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

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See pages 103 and 104.
Little Glass Houses. PHILIP JOHNSON and HOWARD AGG.
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Unnatural Scene. KATHLEEN A. DAVEY.
(7 f. Modern Dress.)
See page 103.

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APRIL SHOWER

A FURTHER INCIDENT IN THE LIVES OF
THE SPINSTERS OF LUSHE

By PHILIP JOHNSON

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MISS CHARLOTTE BRIGHTE.

MISS LÆTITIA THURLOW.

MISS ALICIA PRAMLEY.

MISS ROSIE PRAMLEY.

MISS LUCY PEMBERTON.

PHEBE.

SCENE.—Miss Charlotte's drawing-room.

N.B.—All stage directions are given from the point of view of the audience.

To those who have no previous acquaintance with the Spinsters of Lushe, the author begs to present—

Miss Charlotte Brighte : a very charming lady. A connection of the Brightes of Brighte Hall.

Phœbe, her maid.

Miss Lætitia Thurlow : of diminutive build. Her eyes are very bright, and her movements quick and bird-like, and emphasized by the tinkling of the many beads, trinkets, and ornaments she wears.

The Misses Pramley : Miss Alicia, the elder, is tall and of a commanding appearance. The more uncouth of the male residents of Lushe have been heard to refer to her as "The Dragoon." Nevertheless, they are always very respectful to her should she have occasion to address them. She is definitely bound to spinsterhood. Miss Rosie, the younger of the two, still hopes.

Miss Lucy Pemberton : about the same age as Miss Rosie, and very, very pretty. She, too, still hopes.

For permission to perform this play application must be made to the author's agent, A. W. Thomson, 160 Muirhead Avenue, West Derby, Liverpool, England. No performance may take place unless written permission has been obtained in advance, and fee paid.

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APRIL SHOWER

It is upon a certain spring morning, in the year 1812, that the following incident occurs in the lives of the spinsters of Lushe. 1812! At mention of that date a grim chord steals across the symphony of European history, sounds, echoes, then dies away in a roll of distant drums . . .

Not that there is anything of grimness to be discerned within the four pastel-hued walls that encompass the drawing-room of Miss Charlotte Brighte. Indeed no! "An extremely elegant room," as those few who have been permitted to enter it would hasten to assure you; a room worthy of sheltering the taste, the susceptibilities, the genteel refinement of one who is a connection—distant, perhaps, but still a connection—of the Brightes of Brighte Hall. For such Miss Charlotte undoubtedly is, and as such we acknowledge in her the arbiter of social life in this our village of Lushe.

Let us forget, then, that the year is 1812, and only remember it is spring. That should not be so very difficult, for there, upon the ledge of the large diamond-paned window in the centre of the rear wall, is a bowl of primroses, to remind us. Through those same diamond panes, too, still further to aid us, we see that the houses

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on the other side of the street are bathed in sunshine of such a pale, shy radiance as is only to be observed when the year is still young. . . . As we stand thus, facing the window, the door through which we came into the room is on our R. On our L. is the fireplace, and in front of it a couch, so placed that whomsoever be seated upon it is almost facing us.

There is some one seated upon it now. Miss Charlotte Brighte herself, engaged with the latest book from the library. . . . For some moments there is silence, broken only by a tiny rustle as she turns a page. Then a low, discreet tap upon the door. Hearing it, Miss Charlotte raises her eyes, closes the book and places it beside her on the couch, then speaks :

Miss Charlotte. Please to come in. (*Phæbe enters.*)
Well, Phæbe, what is it ?

Phæbe. If you please, ma'am, I thought I'd make so bold as to look in and see if you was all right.

Miss Charlotte. Thank you, Phæbe, I find myself neither better nor worse.

Phæbe (shaking her head). Ah. . . . If there be anything you should fancy, ma'am, I'm sure I'll do my best. Arrowroot, I've heard tell, is vastly comforting. I made my poor mother a dish of it scarce an hour before she breathed her last.

Miss Charlotte (somewhat hastily). We would be wiser, I think, to wait until Mr. Lupin has had an opportunity of prescribing. . . . It was two o'clock he said he would call, was it not ?

Phæbe. Very sorry he were to keep you waiting so long, but he'd a powerful lot of calls to make this forenoon, as he declared. It must be uncommon gratifying for our new physician to be welcomed to the village by such a grand lot of sickness, ma'am.

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Miss Charlotte. I was not aware of any epidemic.

Phæbe. Oh, but indeed there is, ma'am. Why, as I put my foot in at his door, Miss Withers's Martha was coming out, she having called to bespeak a visit from him for her mistress.

Miss Charlotte. Miss Withers? But she was in excellent health yesterday.

Phæbe. Taken sudden, I expect, ma'am. . . . And as I was leaving, there was Miss Teasdale's Patty on the doorstep.

Miss Charlotte. Miss Teasdale at least I know to be well. 'Twas but last night we met over the card-table at Miss Carroway's.

Phæbe. She finds herself but poorly this morning, it would seem. And as for Miss Carroway——

Miss Charlotte. What?

Phæbe. They're hoping it mayn't be a quinsy, ma'am; but all she can do is to whisper, "Is the physician come yet? Is the physician come yet?"

Miss Charlotte. But this is indeed most unaccountable.

Phæbe. Yes, ma'am; though vastly pleasing for the new physician, and him such a fine figure of a gentleman, and with as straight a pair of legs as ever I see.

Miss Charlotte. Phæbe!

Phæbe. Pray pardon, ma'am.

Miss Charlotte. Such indelicacy! You horrify me!

Phæbe. I'm truly sorry, ma'am, but——

Miss Charlotte (*silencing her with a gesture*). That will do, if you please. . . . We shall, I trust, judge of our new physician by his skill, and not by his appearance. That is of no consequence whatever.

Phæbe. No, ma'am. Though I did hear tell of a young lady who lay sick for months, being tended

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by a handsome apothecary, but was up and about the day after they called in one with a wart on his nose.

Miss Charlotte (very aloof). I will trouble you, Phœbe, not to repeat such stories to me. There is a coarseness about them of which I cannot approve.

Phœbe. Yes, ma'am. But——

Miss Charlotte. Go now and attend to your duties, if you please.

Phœbe. Yes, ma'am. . . . And I'm sure I hope you'll soon be recovered, ma'am. If you ask me, 'tis no more than a trifling affliction of the stomach, and so Mr. Lupin will tell you.

Miss Charlotte (who has started in horror). Stom—! I trust, Phœbe, that our new physician will be too much of a gentleman ever to have heard of that odious word. (*A distant knock is heard.*) The front door!

(*Phœbe hurries out. The moment she is out of the room, Miss Charlotte rises, tiptoes hastily across to the door and stands, her ear pressed against it, listening. After no more than a few seconds, satisfied as to the identity of the caller, she speeds back to the couch and re-seats herself in an attitude of the utmost composure.*)

Phœbe (re-entering). If you please, ma'am, Miss Thurlow to see you.

(*Miss Thurlow enters, and Phœbe goes off, closing the door behind her.*)

Miss Charlotte (with an admirably simulated air of surprise). Why, Lætitia, this is indeed an unlooked-for happiness!

Miss Lætitia. Dear Miss Charlotte—so very early—please to forgive.

Miss Charlotte. Can it ever be too early for friends to meet? Pray sit down, do.

APRIL SHOWER

Miss Lætitia (sitting). I have heard it remarked that those who are joined in marriage do not always find the morning hours the most conducive to agreeable conversation.

Miss Charlotte. Marriage? I said friends. . . . Why, I do declare, Lætitia, you're wearing a new bonnet!

Miss Lætitia (holding her head at an angle, the better to display the bonnet). You like it?

Miss Charlotte (admiringly). Indeed, and I think it vastly becoming. Those feathers——

Miss Lætitia. My milliner informs me that the queen herself has been observed to be partial to feathers of late. . . . My only fear is lest here in Lushe the style be thought a trifle too advanced.

Miss Charlotte (protesting). No, no! I consider it our duty to accept such of the dictates of fashion as accord with true gentility. I like the bonnet very well.

Miss Lætitia. You reassure me. . . . 'Twas the sweetness of the morning that tempted me to wear it. Spring is everywhere to-day, everywhere.

Miss Charlotte. Indeed, yes.

Miss Lætitia. The trees in the Rectory garden are already unfolding their leaves. The first in the village, I believe.

Miss Charlotte. The dear Rector! . . . The gilly-flowers are blooming earlier in my own garden than in any one else's, I notice.

Miss Lætitia (not to be outdone). My own crocus flowers are truly a carpet of purple and gold.

Miss Charlotte. A carpet! Mine, I declare, are more like a sea! Yes, quite a sea of colour. You must look at them before you go, Lætitia.

Miss Lætitia (determined that nothing shall induce

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her to). Thank you . . . if I have time. (*A short pause.*) Myself, I must confess to a partiality for the flowers of summer. The rose, Miss Charlotte! How I do love the rose!

Miss Charlotte. Ah, yes. The queen of flowers, I always say.

Miss Lætitia. Others have said it too, I fancy.

Miss Charlotte. The marigold!

Miss Lætitia. And the lupin! Let us not forget the sweet lupin.

Miss Charlotte (dreamily). So tall. . . . Such long, straight legs.

Miss Lætitia. Legs? La, Miss Charlotte!

Miss Charlotte (recovering herself—hastily). Stems, Lætitia, stems, of course.

Miss Lætitia. Of course. . . . And speaking of that excellent flower reminds me of my purpose in being abroad so early. . . . Our new physician's name is Lupin, too, Miss Charlotte.

Miss Charlotte (very casually, smoothing the folds of her gown). Is it? Ah, yes, now that you mention it, I do believe it is.

Miss Lætitia (lingering over the name). Mr. William Lupin. (*Draping her shawl.*) I am on my way just now to pay a call upon him.

Miss Charlotte (betrayed into an exclamation). You—you are about to visit Mr. Lupin?

Miss Lætitia (quite placidly, adjusting the angle of her bonnet). Why, yes, Miss Charlotte. (*Then looking at her, somewhat simperingly.*) You find nothing of impropriety, I trust, in a respectable female visiting her physician?

Miss Charlotte. But—but you are not ill?

Miss Lætitia. Oh, but indeed I am. I am very ill, I assure you. Oh yes. H'm!

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Miss Charlotte. I do not recollect having heard you complain.

Miss Lætitia. 'Tis not my nature to do so. Nevertheless, I am ill. (*Shakes her head and sighs heavily.*) My spirits——

Miss Charlotte. Spirits? What ails them, pray?

Miss Lætitia (*more sighing and head-shaking*). Low, Miss Charlotte, so very low.

Miss Charlotte (*somewhat coldly*). Indeed. I had not observed it.

Miss Lætitia. I flatter myself I am not one of those who must ever be making a moan about their afflictions. Far from it. I prefer to place myself in the hands of some worthy medical gentleman who will prescribe for me. (*Rising.*) And indeed I must delay no longer, but make my way towards his door.

Miss Charlotte (*not rising*). You will not find Mr. Lupin at home, Lætitia.

Miss Lætitia. Not at home? But——

Miss Charlotte. Our new physician finds his services in considerable request to-day, and will doubtless have left upon his calls.

Miss Lætitia (*dashed*). Oh . . . I had not thought of that. . . . (*Then recovering her spirits—brightly.*) Then I must leave a message entreating him to call at my house. Yes, on second thoughts, I do believe that to be the better plan. . . . If he will be so obliging as to call at two o'clock it would suit me very well. Yes, yes.

(*She moves towards the door.*)

Miss Charlotte (*hastily*). You need not expect him at that hour, Lætitia. He—he will be occupied elsewhere.

Miss Lætitia (*pausing with her hand on the door-*

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handle). You appear very conversant with Mr. Lupin's movements, Miss Charlotte. . . . Perhaps at half-past two, then, I may be permitted to—

Miss Charlotte (interrupting her). Not a moment before three, if you please. My own symptoms will take at least an hour to describe, I know they will.

Miss Lætitia (staring at her). Your symptoms?

Miss Charlotte. That was what I said.

Miss Lætitia. But I had not heard—

Miss Charlotte. Like yourself, Lætitia, I make no moan. The fact remains that I find myself far from well. Very far. . . . Indeed, I may say that my own symptoms are such as to make a mere lowness of the spirits quite trivial by comparison.

Miss Lætitia (moving across to her). Trivial, Miss Charlotte! I do protest! I—

Miss Charlotte. Pooh! A glass of sherry wine in the mornings is all you require, and so I'll be bound he will tell you. (*As Miss Lætitia opens her mouth to speak.*) In fact, unless I am much mistaken, our new physician will be mightily put out at finding his valuable time wasted over such a flimsy trifle—and he such a busy man.

Miss Lætitia (shrilly). Flimsy trifle! You would regret those words to your dying day if to-morrow I were discovered floating among the reeds—as has happened before now to those whose spirits were low.

Miss Charlotte. Nonsense!

(*This is too much. From no one—no, not even from a connection of the Brightes of Brighte Hall—will Miss Lætitia accept such a flouting of the rules of friendship and social intercourse. With every bracelet and chain a-tinkle, every feather a-tremble,*