

**FANNY AND THE SERVANT
PROBLEM: A
QUITE POSSIBLE
PLAY IN FOUR ACTS**

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Fanny and the Servant Problem: A Quite Possible Play in Four Acts by Jerome K. Jerome

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Four Acts

JEROME K. JEROME

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"FANNY AND THE SERVANT PROBLEM"

ACT I

SCENE.—*Bantock Hall, Rutlandshire. Her boudoir.*
A handsome, well-lighted apartment in the south-west wing of the castle, furniture and decorations of the Louis XIV period. A deep bay, lighted by three high windows facing the south-west, occupies the right of the stage. The door at back R. of fireplace leads to Lord Bantock's apartments. The door in L. wing leads through her ladyship's dressing-room into her ladyship's bedroom. A large Adams fireplace, in which a cheerful wood fire burns, occupies the back C. Over it is the full length portrait of Constance, first Lady Bantock, by Hoppner. The furniture is handsome but simple—French with the exception of a small upright piano. A large desk faces the three windows, a round table between it and the fireplace. A settee, backed by a screen, is L., at an angle to the fireplace. Comfortable chairs are in plenty. A profusion of early spring flowers decorates the room. Electric lighting is from sconces placed round the walls.

The TIME is sunset of an early spring day. A golden light fills the room.

(The rising of the curtain discovers the TWO MISS WETHERELLS—two sweet old-ladies who have grown so much alike it would be difficult for a stranger to tell the one from the other. The hair of both is white, they are dressed much alike, both in some soft lavender coloured material, mixed with soft lace. The French clock on the mantelpiece sounds in soft musical note six strokes.)

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ELDER (*hidden in the deep bay of the window*). Such a lovely sunset, dear.

(THE YOUNGER MISS WETHERELL, *her back towards the spectator, is arranging flowers on the round table R.C. She looks round, goes across to the window. Her sister comes back a little into the room. THE TWO OLD LADIES stand holding each other's hands, looking out.*)

YOUNGER. Beautiful!

(*A silence. The sun is streaming full into the room.*)

You—you don't think, dear, that this room—(*she looks round it*)—may possibly be a little too sunny to quite suit her?

ELDER (*not at first understanding*). How, dear, too sun— (*She looks and grasps the meaning.*) You mean—you think that perhaps she—does that sort of thing?

YOUNGER. Well, dear, one is always given to understand that they do—women—ladies of her—profession.

ELDER. It seems to me so wicked; painting God's work.

YOUNGER. We mustn't judge hardly, dear. Besides, dear, we don't know yet that she does.

ELDER. Perhaps she's young, and hasn't commenced it. I fancy it's only the older ones that do it.

YOUNGER. He didn't mention her age, I remember.

ELDER. No, dear, but I feel she's young.

YOUNGER. I do hope she is. We may be able to mould her.

ELDER. We must be very sympathetic. One can accomplish so much with sympathy.

YOUNGER. We must get to understand her. (*A sudden thought.*) Perhaps, dear, we may get to like her.

ELDER (*seems doubtful*). We might try, dear.

YOUNGER. For Vernon's sake. The poor boy seems so much in love with her. We must—

"The painted lady in
"Passing of the *Shelton* *Love Boat*"

(Enter BENNET L. C. *He is the ideal butler.*)

BENNET. Doctor Freemantle. I have shown him into the library.

YOUNGER. Thank you, Bennet. Will you please tell him that we shall be down in a few minutes. I must just finish these flowers. (*She returns to the table.*)

ELDER. Why not ask him to come up here. We could consult him—about the room. He always knows everything.

YOUNGER. A good idea. Please ask him, Bennet, if he would mind coming up to us here.

(BENNET, *who has been attending to the needs of the fire, turns to go.*)

Oh, Bennet!

(*He stops and turns.*)

You will remind Charles to put a footwarmer in the carriage!

BENNET. I will see to it myself.

YOUNGER (as BENNET goes out). Thank you, Bennet. (*To her sister.*) One's feet are always so cold after a railway journey.

ELDER. I've been told that, nowadays, they heat the carriages.

YOUNGER. Ah, it is an age of luxury! I wish I knew which were her favourite flowers. It is so nice to be greeted by one's favourite flowers.

ELDER. I feel so sure she loves lilies.

YOUNGER. And they are so appropriate to a bride.
So—

(Enter, announced by BENNET, DR. FREEMANTLE. *He is a dapper little man, clean shaven, with quick brisk ways.*)

DR. F. (*he shakes hands with the TWO OLD LADIES.*) Well, and how are we this afternoon? (*He feels the*

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pulse of the YOUNGER.) Steadier. Much steadier!
(*Of the ELDER.)* Nervous tension greatly relieved.

YOUNGER. She has been sleeping much better.

DR. F. (*he is standing between them. He pats the hand of the ELDER.)* Excellent! Excellent!

ELDER. She ate a good breakfast this morning.

DR. F. (*he pats the hand of the YOUNGER.)* Couldn't have a better sign. (*He smiles from one to the other.)* Brain disturbance, caused by futile opposition to the inevitable, evidently abating. One page Marcus Aurelius every morning before breakfast. "Adapt thyself," says Marcus Aurelius, "to the things with which thy lot has been cast. Whatever happens——"

YOUNGER. You see, doctor, it was all so sudden.

DR. F. The unexpected! It has a way of taking us by surprise—bowling us over—completely. Till we pull ourselves together. (*Make the best of what can't be helped like—like brave, sweet gentlewomen. He presses their hands.*)

(They are both wiping away a tear.)

When do you expect them?

ELDER. To-night, by the half-past eight train. We had a telegram this morning from Dover.

DR. F. Um! and this is to be her room? (*He takes it in.*) The noble and renowned Constance, friend and confidant of the elder Pitt, maker of history, first Lady Bantock—by Hoppner—always there to keep an eye on her, remind her of the family traditions. Brilliant idea, brilliant!

(They are smiling with pleasure.)

ELDER. And you don't think—it is what we wanted to ask you—that there is any fear of her finding it a little trying—the light. You see, this is an exceptionally sunny room.

YOUNGER. And these actresses—if all one hears is true——

(The dying sun is throwing his last beams across the room.)

DR. F. Which, thank God, it isn't. *(He seats himself in the large easy chair.)*

(The TWO LADIES sit side by side on the settee.)

I'll tell you just exactly what you've got to expect. A lady—a few years older than the boy himself—but still young. Exquisite figure; dressed—perhaps a trifle too regardless of expense. Hair—maybe just a shade too golden. All that can be altered. Features—piquant, with expressive eyes, the use of which she probably understands, and an almost permanent smile, displaying an admirably preserved and remarkably even set of teeth. But, above all, clever. That's our sheet anchor. The woman's clever. She will know how to adapt herself to her new position.

YOUNGER *(turning to her sister)*. Yes, she must be clever to have obtained the position that she has. *(To the DOCTOR.)* Vernon says that she was quite the chief attraction all this winter—in Paris.

ELDER. And the French public is so critical.

DR. F. *(drily)*. Um! I was thinking rather of her cleverness in "landing" poor Vernon. The lad's not a fool.

ELDER. We must do her justice. I think she was really in love with him.

DR. F. *(still more drily)*. Very possibly. Most café chantant singers, I take it, would be—with an English lord. *(He laughs, and settling himself more comfortably, takes in his hand a vase of flowers, is smelling them.)*

ELDER. You see, she didn't know he was a lord.

DR. F. *(sits up)*. Didn't know—?

YOUNGER. No. She married him, thinking him to be a plain Mr. Wetherell, an artist.

DR. F. *(he puts back the vase—pushes it from him)*. Where d'ye get all that from?