

**THE CASE OF
REBELLIOUS SUSAN: A
COMEDY IN THREE ACTS**

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The Case of Rebellious Susan: A Comedy in Three Acts by Henry Arthur Jones

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HENRY ARTHUR JONES

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REBELLIOUS SUSAN: A
COMEDY IN THREE ACTS**

THE PLAYS OF
HENRY ARTHUR JONES

THE CASE OF
REBELLIOUS
SUSAN

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY
HENRY ARTHUR JONES

AUTHOR OF

"THE LIARS," "MICHAEL AND HIS LOST ANGEL," "THE TEMPTI
"THE CRUSADERS," "JUDAH," "THE CASE OF REBELLIOUS
SUSAN," "THE DANCING GIRL," "THE MIDDLEMAN,"
"THE ROGUE'S COMEDY," "THE TRIUMPH OF THE
PHILISTINES," "THE MASQUERADERS," "THE
MANGROVES OF JANE," "CARNAC SAHIE,"
"THE GOAL," "MRS. DAN'S DEFEACE,"
"THE LACKEY'S CARNIVAL," "THE
PRINCESS'S NOSE," ETC.

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TO MRS. GRUNDY.

DEAR AND HONOURED MADAM,

In dedicating this little comedy to you I have no other object in view than that of bribing and blinding your well-known susceptibilities, and of endeavouring to win over and conciliate that large body of English playgoers who take their opinions and morals ready-made from you, the august and austere effigy of our national taste and respectability.

The truth is, my dear lady, I am a little fearful that without some such shelter as your powerful protection, many excellent persons may be in doubt as to the exact moral which this comedy sets forth; or indeed may go further and doubt whether there is a moral in it at all; or, dreading and cruellest alternative, may actually proclaim that it is *immoral*. The mere possibility of this latter alternative is so painful to me, that I am obliged to recall a conversation which I recently overheard in a railway carriage.

"Ah, who wrote that play?" I heard one passenger inquire of another.

"That man Henry Arthur Jones," replied his neighbour.

"I hate that fellow," said the other. "He is always educating the people."

Now though I cannot honestly credit myself with any such unselfish motive in writing plays as my fellow-passenger ascribed to me, I could not help

feeling a glow of virtuous pride when I found that my natural ingrained tendencies were so salutary and so patriotic. And if I have in any way contributed to the State Education grant, or lowered the School Board rate in any parish, I hope I shall not be deprived of the merit that attaches to such public benefactions merely because they have been quite involuntary and unsuspected on my part.

Now, my dear Mrs. Grundy, I will not go so far as to say that I know with any degree of certainty what the moral of this comedy is. I will leave that for you and the public to discover. And I am very hopeful in this respect when I remember that one of our keenest and most analytical critics, in interpreting for us a recent masterpiece of the lobworm-symbolic school, declared that though he was very doubtful what the play did mean, yet he was quite sure that it meant a very great deal. And so, my dear ma'am, I will not pin myself down to any one, definite, precise, hard-and-fast, cut-and-dried moral in this comedy. Why should I? Why should I needlessly limit the possible scope of its beneficent operation, or curb my boundless desire that all sorts of unexpected collateral good may haphazardly visit those who witness its representation?

I know of no task wherein the generosity and the ingenuity of the critical playgoer may be more profitably employed than in finding a profound significance in passages where the author himself has never detected it; and in dragging to light profound moral truths from hiding-places where the author himself has never imagined them to be lurking. Therefore, my dear Mrs. Grundy, if you will be pleased to wink at any little outside indiscretion, and if the public will set its wits to work,

I have no doubt a very serviceable moral is to be extracted from this comedy.

Look at life itself, my dear lady. The moral of it is not very obvious at first sight, but there must be a tremendous moral hidden somewhere in it. Nay, there must be hundreds of morals in it, and I am not without a suspicion that in claiming only one moral for this comedy I have done myself a very grave injustice. For all I know it may be teeming with morals.

But perhaps you will say that my comedy is quite unlike life. I am aware that I have no warrant in the actual facts of the world around me for placing on the English stage an instance of English conjugal infidelity. There is, I believe, madam, a great deal of this kind of immorality in France, but I am sure you will rejoice to hear that a very careful and searching inquiry has not resulted in establishing any well-authenticated case in English life. And even had the inquiry revealed a quite opposite state of things, I know you will agree with me that it would be far better to make up our minds that the facts are wrong and stick to that, than to allow the possibility of anything hurtful to our continued self-esteem and self-righteousness. I am too sensible, madam, of the honour of belonging to the same nation as your own revered self to do anything to impair its holy self-esteem and worship of its own conviction that it is the most moral, most religious, most heaven-favoured nation under the sun.

Happily, as I say, there is not the slightest necessity for disturbing our cherished national belief that immorality is confined to the Continent, and especially to France. Let us, therefore, again thank Heaven that we are not as other nations are, and let

us avoid seeing or hearing anything that may disturb our belief in our own moral superiority.

So, my dear madam, I have frankly to own that I have not the slightest justification in fact for laying the scene of my comedy in England, and I am again justly open to the charge, so often made against me, of being quite false to life as my countrymen see it.

And now, my dear lady, having endeavoured to win your approbation by every means in my power, let me again say that all I am anxious for is that you should not too hastily condemn the piece because its morality is intrinsic and not extrinsic. For I do stoutly affirm, adorable arbitress of British morals, that there is a profound moral somewhere in this piece. Only, if I dare hint so much to you, dear lady, it is well at times not to be too ferociously moral. There is a time to be ferociously moral, and a time to refrain. The present, my dear Mrs. Grundy, is an eminently suitable time to refrain. Let us not be always worrying books and plays for their morals. Let us not worry even life itself for too plain, or too severe a moral. Let us look with a wise, sane, wide-open eye upon all these things; and if a moral rises naturally from them let us cheerfully accept it, however shocking it may be; if not, let us not distress ourselves.

If, my dear ma'am, you cannot see any moral in this little comedy, take it for granted there is one, and—go and see the play again. Go and see it, my dear Mrs. Grundy, until you do find a moral in it. And remember that it is not only trifles like this that are naturally repugnant to you. Remember how hateful to you are all the great eternal things in literature and art. So much so, that if our English Bible itself were to be now first presented to the

British public, you would certainly start a prosecution against it for its indecency and its frightful polygamistic tendencies.

Refrain, my dear lady! Refrain! Refrain! And if you must have a moral in my comedy, suppose it to be this—"That as women cannot retaliate openly, they may retaliate secretly—and *lie!*"

And a truly shocking moral it is, now we have got it. But oh, my dear Mrs. Grundy, Nature's morality is not your morality, or mine. Nature has ten thousand various morals, all of them as shocking as truth itself. The very least of them would fright our isle from its propriety if it were once guessed at.

Refrain, my dear madam! Refrain! And—excuse me—isn't that foot of yours rather too near that tender growing flower—I mean the English drama? And your foot is so heavy! Don't stamp out the little growing burst of life. Refrain, my dear lady! Refrain! Adieu!

Yours, with the deepest reverence for all
things worthy of reverence,
HENRY ARTHUR JONES.

P. S. My comedy isn't a comedy at all. It's a tragedy dressed up as a comedy.