

**AN AUTOGRAPH  
LETTER: A COMEDY  
IN THREE ACTS**

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An Autograph Letter: A Comedy in Three Acts by Esther B. Tiffany

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**ESTHER B. TIFFANY**

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# AUTOGRAPH LETTER

*A Comedy in Three Acts*

BY  
ESTHER B. TIFFANY,

AUTHOR OF "ANITA'S TRIAL," "A RICE PUDDING," "THE WAY  
TO HIS POCKET," "YOUNG MR. PRITCHARD,"  
"THAT PATRICK," ETC.

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BOSTON

*Walter H. Baker & Co.*

## CHARACTERS.

JOHN MASTERS.

HAL MASTERS, *nephew to John Masters.*

PHILIP STAUNTON.

DR. PROCTER.

SHERIFF.

PRISCILLA MAY.

HELEN STAUNTON, *daughter to Staunton.*

LIBBY MASTERS, *sister to John Masters.*

MRS. GRIGGS.

MAID.



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# AN AUTOGRAPH LETTER.

## ACT I.

SCENE.—STAUNTON'S room in a lodging-house, meagrely furnished. Door, L., in flat; door, R.; window, R., in flat; table, R.; easy-chair, L.; secretary, to lock, at back. HELEN and DR. PROCTER discovered.

DR. PROCTER (c., pompously). As I before elucidated to you, my dear young lady, skilled competence and proficiency—in other words, a trained nurse.

HELEN (down R. at table). But I love nursing.

DR. PROCT. You are—permit the personality—excessively youthful, absolutely inexperienced.

HEL. Why, I'm almost eighteen.

DR. PROCT. And your father's condition necessitates unceasing supervision. These—er—drops at intervals of—um—half an hour.

HEL. Yes, sir.

DR. PROCT. And two-thirds of a wine-glass of old port every two hours.

HEL. Yes, sir.

DR. PROCT. Exercise great discretion concerning the port. 'Gross & Paige keep the only port in the city in the least suitable for a refined and delicate palate. Then, any trifle that might tempt the capricious appetite of a convalescent. Er—um—Hamburg grapes—er—peaches—the breast of a partridge—er—er—dairy cream—in short, any little trifle of that character.

HEL. Yes, sir. (Aside.) And only ten dollars in the house!

DR. PROCT. Following which treatment, a trip to the South as soon as locomotion appears desirable. Above all,

Prof. Warren Sombard

no undue excitement. In other words, no cerebral perturbation. You—eh—comprehend? I make myself—eh—lucid?

HEL. Yes, sir. I think I understand. (*Aside.*) Though, where the money is to come from I do not understand.

DR. PROCT. You may expect me in the morning. Er—good-day—Miss—er—er—Staunton.

HEL. Good-morning, Dr. Procter. (*Exit DR. PROCTER D. L. in F.*) Wine! Hamburg grapes! A journey to the South! Poor father! And our purse growing lighter every hour. How much have I? (*Counts her money.*) Ten dollars and forty cents—and after that is gone! Ten dollars all that is left from the sale of that valuable autograph letter of Washington's! It brought us one hundred dollars, but how quickly one hundred dollars go! Could I borrow from Hal? (*Goes L.*) No, no; from him least of all. He must not even suspect our strait. He sees me well dressed—he does not fancy that these are the last of all my pretty clothes. Father always would give me such lovely things, even when he couldn't afford it. (*A knock at D. in F.*) Come in.

(*Enter MRS. GRIGGS, D. in F.*)

MRS. G. (*at door*). The young feller that's keepin' company with you 's ringin' at the front-door bell.

HEL. Mrs. Griggs, if you please, there is no young man keeping company with me.

MRS. G. Oh, they ain't! Well, then, if they ain't—if he ain't—and he's quite easy in his pocket, I should say—I'll just trouble you for that rent; that's all.

HEL. Mrs. Griggs, I must ask you to wait a little longer.

MRS. G. Wait? And haven't I been waitin', patient as a lamb, bein' convinced that young feller meant business, and would hand over so'thin' handsome soon as you was engaged?

HEL. Mrs. Griggs, if ever— (*HAL appears at D. in F.*)

HAL. Good-morning, Miss Helen. Oh, Mrs. Griggs, good-morning.

HEL. Good-morning, Mr. Masters.

MRS. G. We was just talkin' about you.

HAL. That's what made my ear burn so.

HEL. Come in, Mr. Masters. (*Goes up.*)

MRS. G. I'd like to have a few words with you in private, Mr. Masters, when you're through here.

HAL. Oh, certainly, Mrs. Griggs.



HEL. (*drawing him in and shutting the door on MRS. G.*)  
Promise me you won't let her speak to you.

HAL. I can't say I'm very anxious for an interview, but why —

HEL. Because I — well, because —

HAL. That's quite sufficient reason. I'll avoid Mrs. Griggs. I'll sneak out and in the back way. I'll — but I beg your pardon, how's your father? (*Comes down to C.*)

HEL. About the same. (*Down to R.*)

HAL. In bed still?

HEL. No, up and around, but feverish and restless. Something seems preying on his mind. He wakes and calls out at night in such an agonized way —

HAL. Can I see him?

HEL. No, he's asleep now.

HAL. Isn't there anything I can do? What has Old Port ordered for him?

HEL. Old Port?

HAL. I beg his pardon, Dr. Procter. Old Port is what we call him at the Medical School, because he cures everything, from a sprained finger to lockjaw, with a glass of old port. I'm sure, now, he's ordered your father some old port.

HEL. Yes, he has.

HAL. I thought so. Now, I've got in the cellar at home — that is, we've got — my Uncle John, you know; I say we because he goes shares with everything —

HEL. What a dear old gentleman your uncle must be.

HAL. Old gentleman! Why, Uncle John is barely forty, and hasn't a gray hair.

HEL. Except what you have caused him.

HAL. Oh, that kind doesn't count! But this old port of his — I'll bring you round a half a dozen bottles.

HEL. Oh, no.

HAL. Oh, yes. Good-by. I'll run round now. (*Goes up to door and comes back.*) Oh, by the way —

HEL. Yes.

HAL. There are some things we don't go shares in — Uncle John and I.

HEL. Debts?

HAL. Debts? No, bless him, if I had any, he'd insist on taking them all himself. No — secrets!

HEL. So he has a cellar full of secrets as well as of port?

HAL. Uncle John, secrets? What an idea! You ought to see him! He's a complete book-worm, except when he's off fishing and tramping; and then he's the jolliest, drollest—but secrets, the kind of secrets I mean—why, do you know, he can't endure women.

HEL. Why, I thought you said he was nice!

HAL. But, then, perhaps Aunt Libby—that's his only sister—has something to do with his opinion of women. (*Goes up to door and returns.*) You—you haven't asked me what my secret is.

HEL. It wouldn't be a secret if you told me, would it?

HAL. There's nothing cosier than a secret just for two; is there, now? (*Takes her hand.*)

HEL. It depends on the two. (*Draws away.*)

HAL. Yes, of course; and then, when one of the two is dependent on (*aside*) Uncle John, who holds the purse-strings. (*Aloud.*) But I must go. I'll be right back with the port. I'll bring it round in six trips, a bottle at a time. Good-by.

HEL. Good-by.

HAL. Good-by. (*Aside.*) I'll have to bottle myself up, or— (*Exit D. L. in F.*)

HEL. That dreadful Mrs. Griggs. (*Up c.*) If she should speak to him! (*Looking out of door.*) There she is now; he sees her—he's running. He pretends not to notice her. She's calling after him. He won't hear. There, he's out of sight. (*Down R.*)

(*Mrs. G. appears at door.*)

MRS. G. Rather hard of hearin', that young feller, ain't he?

HEL. Oh, Mrs. Griggs, I must just step out for a moment to the druggist. Father is asleep, but if he should wake and call, will you come in?

MRS. G. Yes, I'll be round. (*Exit.*)

HEL. (*looking in at chamber door, R.*) Yes, he's fast asleep still. I'll only be gone a moment. I would have asked Mr. Masters to get the medicine for me, but that nice old druggist is so kind, and calls me "my child," and gives me the drugs cheaper than to anybody else, and a few cents mean so much just now. Hark! (*Distant thunder.*) I must make haste before the storm is here. (*Exit D. in F.*)

STAUNTON (*calling from within*). Helen! Helen! It's here again. Priscilla, why will you torment me so! (*He*

*enters, R., half awake, supporting himself feebly on chairs and tables as he moves.*) Helen! Helen! Priscilla!

*(Enter PRISCILLA, D. in P.)*

PRIS. Who calls? What is it?

STAUNT. *(starting as he sees her)*. Priscilla!

PRIS. How do you know me by name?

STAUNT. *(trembling, R.)*. Priscilla!

PRIS. Why, is it, can it be, Philip Staunton? *(Down c.)*

STAUNT. *(gazing at her wildly)*. Why do you haunt me so, Priscilla? I cannot drop off to sleep but I dream of you. I wake, and you are by my pillow. Is it because you know I am dying that you dog my steps?

PRIS. *(aside)*. Ill—aged—wandering in mind! Can this be Philip Staunton? *(Aloud)*. Why, Philip, we have not met these twenty years, you and I.

STAUNT. Do you think to draw it out of me with those eyes of yours, Priscilla? Why will you not let me die in peace?

PRIS. *(soothingly)*. Sit down, Philip. Come, let me make you comfortable in this big chair. There. And where shall I find a pillow for your back? In the next room? *(Exit into bed-chamber, R.)*

STAUNT. *(going L.)*. Die in peace. If only she would let me die in peace! *(Sits L.)*

*(Enter PRIS. R.)*

PRIS. *(to L., arranging the pillow)*. There. And now let me fan you. Your head is hot. Feel how cool my hands are.

STAUNT. Is it really you, Priscilla?

PRIS. Really I. *(Sits near him.)*

STAUNT. *(coming to himself)*. I am afraid I was only half awake when I first came in. I had been dreaming. Do you ever dream, Priscilla?

PRIS. *(sighing)*. Yes, Philip.

STAUNT. They are ugly things, these dreams, and when you are ill and weak, Priscilla, how all the faces of those you have injured in your life rise up before you.

PRIS. I don't know, Philip. I never wilfully injured any living being; nor you either, I trust.

STAUNT. *(roused)*. Wilfully? Who said anything about wilfully? Of course no one injures a friend wilfully; it's because one is tempted; because one's blood is hot; because to own anything so sweet and bewildering as a young girl