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*Author:* Bell, Florence Eveleen Eleanore Olliffe, Lady,  
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# A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

Drawn from:

## FOUR SHORT PLAYS

BY

LADY BELL

LONDON  
ARTHUR L. HUMPHREYS  
187 PICCADILLY, W.  
1922



A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

The plot of this piece was suggested to the writer by the late Charles Brookfield. Under the title of *An Underground Journey*, it was successfully produced at a benefit matinée at the Comedy Theatre in February, 1893, with the following cast:

It has now been re-written and brought up to date.

F. B.

1922.



## A SECOND-CLASS DUKE.

*Characters.*

THE DUKE OF PECKHAM RYE.

TOM (*his friend*).

MRS JENNINGS.

A TICKET COLLECTOR.

A RAILWAY GUARD.

SCENE: *A second-class railway carriage on the S.E. Railway.*

*At Victoria Station, S.E. Line. A railway carriage seen  
endways; a passenger (TOM) in it reading a paper.*

GUARD [*opening door*]. Here you are, sir; this train for Penge.

[DUKE *jumps into carriage breathless*; GUARD *whistles, train*

*goes off. Tom in corner of carriage, reading paper, looks up].*

TOM [*before seeing who it is*]. Ran it fine that time! [*Sees DUKE*] Hallo, it's you, Pecky!

DUKE. You, Tom! What an age since we've met.

TOM. Yes, it's a long time since the old Oxford days.

DUKE. Do you live in London?

TOM. Well—I live in Brixton.

DUKE. Brixton, do you?

TOM. Yes, we call it London.

DUKE. Oh, do you? It's quite a nice name for it.

TOM. Yes, it sounds well. And which of your palaces are you living in at this moment?

DUKE. Only in Grosvenor Square. I'm going to sell Castle Peckham.

TOM. Are you?

DUKE. Of course.

TOM. What a pity.

DUKE. That's not the worst misfortune—I haven't a cook.

TOM. Has anybody?

DUKE. Very few, I believe—what *I* call a cook.

TOM. Are you flying from London, then?

DUKE. I'm going to look for one.

TOM. Well done! At Brixton?

DUKE. No, further away—she's at Penge.

TOM. Funny place to look for a cook.

DUKE. Why?

TOM. You'll know when you get there.

DUKE. The person I'm really looking for is her employer. She has a little country retreat outside Penge, made of five workmen's cottages knocked into one.

TOM [*disapprovingly*]. Five!

DUKE. Yes, I suppose there were no more to be had.

TOM. Very probable. Who is the employer?

DUKE. The Princess Blakowska.

TOM. A Princess! That promises well for the cook.

DUKE. Yes, I've been up to London, to try to find her in

Berkeley Square. She was out. Now I'm going to see if she's at Penge. We've exchanged letters already—we've had a wonderful correspondence, even though it began on what is generally considered an unromantic subject. She came across my life at a time when it was overshadowed by misfortune; my French chef had just left me to go to America.

TOM. To be sure—he would.

DUKE. But she brought light into the gloom. I took up the *Times* one morning in despair.

TOM. Yes, lots of people feel that way when they take up the *Times*.

DUKE. But that day I found comfort in it. I scanned the advertisements; then I read, "A Russian Princess strongly recommends her admirable cook." Imagine! I wrote to the Princess in words of burning anxiety. She answered. I wrote again. She replied by a letter breathing sympathy and comprehension in every line. Listen. [*He draws out letter and reads it*]. "The Princess Blakowska presents her compliments to the Duke of Peckham Rye. She deeply sympathises with the unfortunate predicament in which he finds himself, and will indeed be glad to hear that he has secured the services of an artist like Susan Jennings." What feeling! What tenderness! How she understands! Don't you see her? Can you not evoke her?

TOM. Well, I never had your imagination, you know, Pecky, especially as regards the ladies.

[*Train stops. Voice outside: Brixton!*]

Good-bye, old boy; good luck to you.

[*Gets out, shuts door after him and remains a moment leaning on it.*]

DUKE. Do you like living here?

TOM. Very much. I have a wife and three children—and a cook!

DUKE. Wonderful family life!

TOM. Well, you buck up and get a family life, too. You are beginning at the right end, by the cook. Good-bye. Why do you travel second-class?

DUKE. Is it second? I meant to come third, like everyone else. I didn't know there were still seconds on this line.

[*Whistle sounds*].

TOM. Well, I'll leave you to your second-class solitude, unmolested by the millionaire or the pauper. [*Goes off*]. Ta, ta.

VOICE [*outside*]. Stop, stop! [*Enter MRS JENNINGS hurriedly*].

GUARD. Stop! We can't stop. Come along, ma'am, or you'll be left behind. [*Opens door*].

MRS JENNINGS [*on platform looking at carriage*]. Is it empty?



GUARD [*impatiently*]. This end's empty.

MRS JENNINGS [*looking in*]. But the other isn't. There's a man. Some careless woman's forgotten her husband in the carriage.

GUARD. Are you going to get in, ma'am? If you're not, the platform's empty. You can have that to yourself if you like.

[MRS JENNINGS *gets in unwillingly: Guard bangs door, whistles, train goes*].

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, what a dust! [*sneezes violently*].

DUKE [*waking with a start*]. Oh! I beg your pardon!

MRS JENNINGS [*leaning back and panting in her corner*]. What for?

DUKE. For—for—seeing you so suddenly.

MRS JENNINGS. Well, I could hardly come in gradually, could I?

DUKE. No, madam, no—certainly not.

[MRS JENNINGS *pants*].

DUKE [*sympathetically*]. You seem a little out of breath!

MRS JENNINGS [*sharply*]. Yes, I'm quite out of it for the moment. I hope to have another supply in shortly, if you would only let me be quiet.

DUKE. Certainly, certainly, madam. In fact I shall not be sorry

to gasp a little more myself, too.

[*They both lean back*].

MRS JENNINGS [*after a pause, fanning herself*]. And the fellow putting me into a second-class carriage, too. I knew what would happen if I came second-class.

DUKE [*sympathetically*]. That you would pant?

MRS JENNINGS. Pant! No! I mean that in a second-class it's impossible to keep one's self *to* one's self as one would wish.

DUKE. Oh! You find it easier to be exclusive going third?

MRS JENNINGS. Third! I wasn't going third; I was going first, but I arrived in such a hurry, that I got into the carriage without stopping to look.

DUKE. That is exactly what happened to me, except that I meant to go third.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh! What! Am I travelling alone with a third-class passenger!

DUKE. You need not be alarmed, madam, I am the most harmless of men.

MRS JENNINGS. I will say you don't look much to be afraid of.

DUKE [*mortified*]. Oh, indeed! Thank you—thank you.

[*Leans back with his eyes shut*].

MRS JENNINGS [*aside, looking at him*]. He does look an inoffensive creature certainly.

DUKE [*opening his eyes, turning his collar up*]. There is a great draught in this carriage, don't you think so?

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, it's rather like a breezy common.

DUKE. I think the wind is coming in at that side.

MRS JENNINGS. I have no doubt whatever about it. I can tell by my hat. [*Pulling her hat straight*].

DUKE. Suppose you were to sit in this corner opposite me? I think you would feel it less.

MRS JENNINGS. Thank you. Perhaps I should. [*Moves over*].

[DUKE *goes to other end and shuts window*].

MRS JENNINGS [*aside—looking at him*]. Friendly little man—a commercial traveller, of course. [*Aloud*]. Do you travel?

DUKE. Invariably, when I'm in the train.

MRS JENNINGS. Ah, but I mean in ribbons and laces and that sort of thing.

DUKE [*surprised*]. No, madam; I generally travel in tweed unless I am in London, when I wear a black coat, and generally

a black face and hands as well, especially in the train.

MRS JENNINGS. It is true that the smuts are very disagreeable. I really have a hard struggle sometimes to be fit to be seen.  
[*Looking complacently at her clothes*].

DUKE. I must congratulate you, madam, on your success in the struggle.

MRS JENNINGS. In my position it is so very essential that I should be well dressed.

DUKE [*amused*]. In your position?

MRS JENNINGS [*firmly*]. Yes, in my position. Now I'm not going to tell you what it is, so you needn't think it.

DUKE. My dear madam, I never dreamt of being so indiscreet. I only meant that it is evident that you must shine in society.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, I shine all right, no doubt about that.

DUKE [*gallantly*]. I can well imagine it. Have you been out much in London this season?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, I've hardly had a moment to myself the whole of the summer.

DUKE. Indeed! Dinners, balls, parties, I suppose, every night?

MRS JENNINGS. Every night, yes!

DUKE. And which do you consider the most tiring form of entertainment?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, dinners, certainly—especially those very long ones.

DUKE. Ah, I see that like the rest of your sex, you don't seem to care much about the noble art of dining.

MRS JENNINGS. I assure you, you are very much mistaken. I flatter myself that if anyone in Europe understands that art, I do.

DUKE. Oh, then, how much we have in common!

MRS JENNINGS [*scornfully*]. You and me?

DUKE. Yes, don't you feel it yourself?

MRS JENNINGS. No, I can't say that I do. I don't like having much in common with people I meet in the train.

DUKE. Why not?

MRS JENNINGS. One never knows who they are.

DUKE. That is the beauty of it. I think that going about unknown is rather enjoyable.

MRS JENNINGS. It's a cheap enjoyment at any rate. [*Whistle heard*]. Oh, there's a horrid tunnel. Now we shall be smothered.

[*The stage becomes dark*].

DUKE [*loud*]. What a horrid noise!

MRS JENNINGS. What!

DUKE. What a horrid noise!

MRS JENNINGS. I can't hear.

DUKE. What?

MRS JENNINGS. I can't hear.

DUKE. I don't know what you say!

MRS JENNINGS. Hold your tongue—do!

DUKE [*shouting*]. What!

*[She makes him violent signs. The stage grows light again].*

MRS JENNINGS. What do you chatter for?

DUKE. Chatter, my dear madam? I thought you made a remark which I didn't quite catch.

MRS JENNINGS. You needn't have run after it in the tunnel.

DUKE. I really must apologise—it was my natural anxiety not to lose what you said.

MRS JENNINGS. Come, come, my good man, none of your cheap compliments. I'd keep those for third-class passengers if I were you.

DUKE [*dignified*]. Cheap, madam?

[*Voice outside*: Herne Hill!].

TICKET COLLECTOR [*opens door*]. Tickets, please.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, I'm in the wrong class!

TICKET COLLECTOR. You must pay the difference, please, m'm.

MRS JENNINGS. Why?

TICKET COLLECTOR. Because it's the Company's rules. Come, be quick, please, m'm. A third-class passenger has no business in a second-class carriage.

MRS JENNINGS [*indignantly*]. Third-class! Now do I look like a third-class passenger?

TICKET COLLECTOR. Dear me, yes! Thirds is often smarter than firsts nowadays.

MRS JENNINGS. Well, I've got a first-class ticket. Now, perhaps you will tell me what the difference is and pay me.

TICKET COLLECTOR. No, I'm not going to pay you anything, m'm. It's no look-out of the Company's if parties choose to worsen themselves; but if you've got a first-class ticket, m'm, you may stay where you are, free of charge.

MRS JENNINGS [*sarcastically*]. Very kind, I'm sure.

DUKE. There'll be something to pay on my ticket. I think mine is a third-class.

TICKET COLLECTOR. Something to pay? I should rather think there is. Why can't you gents and ladies sort yourselves properly before you start, instead of mixing the Company's accounts in this way? It's sixteen and two-thirds per cent. since just before the Bank Holiday, added to 50 per cent. in January, 1918. [*Does a rapid sum*]. That comes to 4½d. from Victoria to Penge.

[DUKE *is also busy with a pencil and paper*].

DUKE. I can't check these figures in such a hurry. How is it worked?

TICKET COLLECTOR. By your paying me 4½d., now, if you please. The train's late as it is.

DUKE. The railway company must make a good deal of money in these days, I should think.

TICKET COLLECTOR [*pocketing money*]. Well, sir, if time is money as people say, the Company must have lost a good deal of it at this station, through you keeping me here talking. Why, all the windows of the train is black with heads sticking out of them to know what we're waiting here for.

[*Waves flag, whistles and disappears*].

MRS JENNINGS. If I had thought of it, I might have got into a first-class at Herne Hill, and have avoided all this bother.



DUKE. That would have been cruel of you.

MRS JENNINGS. Cruel? Why?

DUKE. Because you would have left me alone.

MRS JENNINGS. Now look here, my good friend, just stick to your travelling and don't make any more pretty speeches to me; that's the worst of third-class people, you never know what they will say next.

DUKE. But my dear madam, I trust I have not said anything very startling—as yet.

MRS JENNINGS. No, not as yet, but I daresay you will in a minute.

DUKE. Well—I might be able to think of something—

MRS JENNINGS. Now, you take care what you're about. I know what travellers are.

DUKE. I should have thought that travelling made people pleasanter.

MRS JENNINGS. Ah! I see you don't understand—Never mind, I might have expected it, for you don't look very bright. I wonder where I put my newspaper. Oh, there it is.

DUKE [*handing it to her*]. Allow me.

MRS JENNINGS [*opens it out; reads*]. Thank you.

DUKE. Do you consider the *Ladies' Pictorial* an agreeable paper?

MRS JENNINGS [*behind paper*]. Particularly agreeable—when I can enjoy it in peace. [*Holding up paper between them*].

DUKE [*half to himself*]. I, on the contrary, dread being left alone with my own thoughts! For I am haunted, possessed by one idea—the thought of that beautiful unknown—that lovely Russian I am seeking. [*Looking cautiously at his companion*]. Don't go on reading too long, madam; do talk to me again. Your fresh unconventionality takes me out of myself.

MRS JENNINGS [*moves her paper to one side, and looks angrily at him*]. My fresh what?

DUKE. Unconventionality.

MRS JENNINGS [*returning to her paper*]. I'll thank you not to use that language to me.

DUKE. I beg your pardon, I'm sure.

MRS JENNINGS. Granted. Now do be quiet and let me read my paper in peace.

DUKE [*with a sigh*]. Very well. [*He sits silent*].

[*MRS JENNINGS returns to paper and reads. Then she gives a shriek. DUKE, startled, looks up*].

DUKE. Dear lady, what is it?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, such a thing I've found in this paper.

DUKE. What is it? Has the Government gone out again?

MRS JENNINGS. Not it! Something much more important! Here's a recipe for tomatoes with cream, which I've been looking for all my life.

DUKE [*much excited*]. Tomatoes! Oh, how immensely interesting! I am passionately fond of tomatoes!

MRS JENNINGS. So am I!

DUKE. I've been longing to find a new way of cooking them.

MRS JENNINGS. So have I! And now I shall know it!

DUKE. So shall I!

MRS JENNINGS. Listen! "Cut off the tops, scoop out the seeds without breaking the outer skin—put them into a large stew pan —"

DUKE [*listening intently*]. The seeds?

MRS JENNINGS [*impatiently*]. No, no, man! The tomatoes! "Put them in a stew pan with a gill of oil"—that's the secret of frying, mind you. Oil, not butter! Frying oil, the very best oil!

DUKE. Oh, an intelligent woman!

MRS JENNINGS. "Chop up some button mushrooms, some parsley,

some endive, some celery, some olives, some oysters, some minced ham, and some fat bacon; fry all together for five minutes, add the yolks of two eggs and a tablespoonful of the thickest cream; fill some patties with the mixture, bake for ten minutes and serve. This makes a delicious dish." I'm sure it must be! A dish fit for a Duke!

DUKE. For a Duke—it must, indeed!

MRS JENNINGS. And to think I should have taken up the paper accidentally and come upon it all at once!

DUKE [*with feeling*]. Yes, indeed! It was a rare piece of good fortune. I am glad to see, madam, that you are interested in cookery.

MRS JENNINGS. I am, indeed! More than in anything else.

DUKE. Oh, how I admire you for it! Now that is my ideal of what a woman's interest in life should be. I love to picture her graceful feminine intelligence playing round such things as—as

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MRS JENNINGS. Tomatoes—

DUKE. Exactly. Tomatoes, or some other fragrant product of the soil. There is to me something repulsive in the idea of a woman's mind endeavouring to grapple with magisterial problems or political research. No! Let her rather spend hours of patient investigation amongst her saucepans, endeavouring to wring from them their secrets.

MRS JENNINGS. It doesn't take me as long as that, I can tell you, to find out if a saucepan is clean or dirty.

DUKE. I was thinking of the finer problems of the saucepan, the delicate combinations which reveal the true artist. Tell me, dear lady, do you ever go into your kitchen, and play the part of tutelary genius of your establishment?

MRS JENNINGS. Into my kitchen!!! I should think so! I'm hardly ever out of it.

DUKE. I was sure of it. I picture you flitting to and fro, presiding over the culinary labours of the day, surrounded by a bevy of deft and noiseless maidens—

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, as to that, the less we say about them, the better. Kitchen-maids are a set of careless, chattering hussies. They break the plates and burn the vegetables, and then they say their mothers are ill and they must go away.

DUKE [*puzzled*]. Oh! Are they such good daughters?

MRS JENNINGS [*contemptuously*]. Good fiddle-de-dees!

[*Voice outside: Dulwich!*]

MRS JENNINGS [*in excitement*]. Oh, look!

DUKE [*springing up and looking out*]. What is it?

MRS JENNINGS. Can't you see for yourself?

DUKE [*craning*]. I see nothing particular.

MRS JENNINGS. Nothing particular? [*Pointing*].

DUKE. Except the Crystal Palace. Is *that* what you mean?

MRS JENNINGS. Well, isn't that enough for you?

DUKE. Oh, quite enough, I assure you.

MRS JENNINGS. Of course it's the Crystal Palace; there it is, shining away like anything.

DUKE. Do you consider it beautiful?

MRS JENNINGS. Beautiful? Never thought about that, but it's a most wonderful place.

DUKE. Oh, yes. The concerts you mean, and the fireworks.

MRS JENNINGS. I don't hold much with concerts, or fireworks either. It's the restaurant I am thinking of—the most wonderful restaurant with a chef in it who's the best in Europe, they say.

DUKE. Ah, that is wonderful, indeed.

MRS JENNINGS. I believe you. They say the Crystal Palace will soon get up again in the world if he stays there.

*[She is looking out of the window all this time. Whistle outside. Train goes on. She continues to read her paper].*

MRS JENNINGS [*reading her paper*]. Ah, here is something in

your line—autumn fashions and materials.

DUKE. In my line?

MRS JENNINGS. Isn't that the line you take in your travelling?

DUKE [*gallantly*]. Sometimes, madam, when I am travelling my attention is forcibly called to these things—when I have such exquisite specimens of the art under my eyes.

MRS JENNINGS. There you are again with your pretty speeches—but I must say I think I do look rather nice to-day. I've a particular reason.

DUKE [*looking at her admiringly*]. It must be a very particular reason that would justify such a hat as that.

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, the hat I must admit is rather a triumph. You'd hardly believe that it's a last year's hat, would you?

DUKE. Last year's! Never!

MRS JENNINGS. It is though; it's a hat warmed up again, so to speak.

DUKE [*politely*]. But not hashed!

MRS JENNINGS. No, not hashed, I flatter myself. All my friends tell me it looks like a hat from Paris.

DUKE. So it does!

MRS JENNINGS. The fact is that last year, when I was in Paris, I saw one just like it and copied it.

DUKE. Ah, that explains everything. Do you know Paris well?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, yes. I've been a good deal in Paris. I studied there—[*catching herself up*]

DUKE. Studied! What?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, never you mind what; things a woman ought to know.

DUKE. I didn't know such things could be learnt in Paris.

MRS JENNINGS. Ah, that's because you're a John Bull, my good friend, and haven't seen enough of the world. You should try to get leave, and travel on the Continent for a month or so. It opens one's mind considerably.

DUKE. Have you been much abroad? Your mind seems to be particularly open.

MRS JENNINGS. Yes. I don't think there is much of the oyster about me.

DUKE. Where else have you been?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, pretty much all over—to Germany, to Italy, and to all sorts of foreign watering places.

DUKE [*starting*]. Foreign watering places? Have you ever met



any Russian Princesses?

MRS JENNINGS. Russian Princesses! I should think so, all over the place. They're as common as blackberries!

DUKE [*disconcerted*]. As common as blackberries!

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, dear, yes! Russian Princesses of all kinds, good, bad, and indifferent.

DUKE. I wonder to which of those kinds a Princess belongs that I am interested in?

MRS JENNINGS. What's her name?

DUKE. Princess Blakowska—

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, I know her quite well.

DUKE [*thrilled*]. You know her?

MRS JENNINGS. Intimately. [DUKE *is thrilled with excitement*]. I should call her one of the indifferent ones—indifferent to what people say about them, I mean.

DUKE. Princess Blakowska! But I imagine her to be a most delightful charming woman.

MRS JENNINGS. So she is, most beguiling—most fascinating, but, after all, that is not the way to prevent people talking about you. A good many people seem to talk about Princess Blakowska.

DUKE. Do they indeed? [*Saddened*].

MRS JENNINGS [*nodding her head*]. Lots.

DUKE. Oh, do tell me what sort of a woman she is.

MRS JENNINGS. Very good looking—

DUKE. I was sure of it—

MRS JENNINGS. Very elegant looking; she is about my height and figure. We can quite well wear each other's clothes. She's got rather a temper.

DUKE. A temper!

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, yes! And it's that—and other things that made it rather difficult—[*she checks herself*]. But in one respect she would be a woman after your own heart.

DUKE. I've no doubt she would!

MRS JENNINGS. She has a passion for cookery.

DUKE. I knew it!

MRS JENNINGS. She understands more about dining than any other woman I ever met.

DUKE. Oh, what a delightful friend to have!

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, she is! She has been a very good friend to me, I must say, until—until we parted company. But why are you

so interested in her? Do you know her?

DUKE. No, I don't know her exactly—but—from what I have heard and imagine of her, I should like to.

MRS JENNINGS. I daresay you would. Lots of people feel the same.

DUKE. To tell you the truth, I have been making an attempt to see her to-day, but without success. I went to her house in Berkeley Square, but now I am trying elsewhere.

MRS JENNINGS. But I thought you didn't know her.

DUKE [*embarrassed*]. No more I do, but we've been exchanging letters.

MRS JENNINGS. Exchanging letters?

DUKE [*with a face of rapture*]. Yes, yes; I've had two letters from her.

MRS JENNINGS [*looking at him with a sudden thought*]. I wonder if you are looking for something, too?

DUKE. Something?

MRS JENNINGS [*archly*]. Something connected with a situation—for someone....

DUKE. I am, indeed.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, I see; that explains everything.

DUKE [*puzzled*]. Explains everything?

MRS JENNINGS. Your interest in tomatoes....

[*Voice outside: Sydenham Hill! Train stops*].

MRS JENNINGS [*jumping up*]. Oh, look! look!

DUKE. What is it this time?

MRS JENNINGS [*pointing*]. Don't you see?

DUKE. I see the Crystal Palace again. Is it still that?

MRS JENNINGS. Of course. And here you get another view of it. You see that bulge in the roof?

DUKE. Oh, yes; you mean the dome—

MRS JENNINGS. Well, whatever it's called, there's where the restaurant is. Oh, it does shine, doesn't it? Oh, what a place, isn't it? I do love seeing it.

[*Loud whistle: train moves*].

There now we don't see it again till we get to Beckenham.

DUKE. What a pity! I get out at Penge.

MRS JENNINGS. Look here, my good friend, I'll give you a word of advice. It isn't my business, I daresay, but if I were you, I

don't think I'd try for the Princess Blakowska.

DUKE [*embarrassed*]. Try—for her?

MRS JENNINGS. I don't think it's a situation you'd like.

DUKE. A situation I should like!

MRS JENNINGS. At least, I know it's a situation other people haven't liked.

DUKE. Other people!

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, dear me, yes! She's always changing!

DUKE. Always changing!

MRS JENNINGS. Always. You know your own business best, of course, but there's a word to the wise for you, if you choose to take it. After all, these things are always a gamble, one never knows how they will turn out.

DUKE [*bewildered*]. A gamble?

MRS JENNINGS. I'm embarked on the same sort of adventure myself—I'm going for the Duke of Peckham Rye.

DUKE [*bounding from his seat*]. What, madam?

MRS JENNINGS. I daresay it won't be an altogether easy job. They say he's a queer customer sometimes.

DUKE. Queer customer!

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, very.

DUKE. I wonder what else they say about him!

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, they say he's rather a fogley, of course.

DUKE. A fogley!

MRS JENNINGS. And very fond of the ladies.

DUKE [*pleased*]. Oh, is he?

MRS JENNINGS. And that he can't be five minutes with one without making himself agreeable to her.

DUKE. Well, I don't call that a fault.

MRS JENNINGS. No, I daresay not, but I know nothing about that, of course, as my relations with him have been entirely on a business footing.

DUKE. Your relations with him?

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, we have been exchanging letters for the last week.

DUKE. Exchanging letters for the last week! [*With a sudden idea—aside*]. Ha! can it be that—no—it is not possible!

MRS JENNINGS. You'd never guess what subject he's been corresponding with me about—not quite the sort of thing you'd expect from a Duke.

DUKE [*aside*]. I really believe it is! [*Aloud*] Can it be the subject we were speaking about just now? Is it—

MRS JENNINGS. Cooking? Yes, it is! Now what do you think of that for the Duke of Peckham Rye?

DUKE. Madam, [*with emotion*] your words almost convince me that what I have been expecting is a certainty—yes, I have guessed your secret!

MRS JENNINGS [*amazed*]. My secret. [*With an idea*]. Oh, you have guessed that what you are trying for, I am very near to?

DUKE [*bewildered*]. What I am trying for?

MRS JENNINGS. Well, then, to speak plainly—Princess Blakowska.

DUKE [*excited*]. Ah! You admit how nearly the mention of that name has touched you.

MRS JENNINGS. What's the use of denying it?

DUKE. No good! It would be useless, for my heart tells me too surely that I am right.

MRS JENNINGS. Your heart! What's that got to do with it?

DUKE. From the moment you spoke, I was interested in you. It began to dawn on me who you were—you spoke of being abroad in foreign watering places—interested in cookery. A wild thought darted into my mind, but I hardly dared to hope.

[MRS JENNINGS *alarmed*]. Then you told me of your correspondence with the Duke, and my heart filled with delight.

MRS JENNINGS [*alarmed, aside*]. The man is mad, I do believe!

DUKE. Now I know that you are she whom I have been seeking! Oh, what unlooked for happiness! You are the Princess Blakowska!

MRS JENNINGS. I, the Princess Blakowska!

DUKE. Yes, I have discovered your secret—don't try to conceal it any more.

MRS JENNINGS [*terrified, looks at him*]. Oh!

DUKE. You are, aren't you? Oh, say I am right!

MRS JENNINGS [*humouring—heartily*]. Of course, yes, of course! I am the Princess Blakowska.

DUKE. Oh, what unlooked for good fortune! That after thinking of you, dreaming of you, going across London to seek you in vain, Providence should bring us together!

MRS JENNINGS [*aside*]. This is horrible! He is quite out of his mind! Oh, what shall I do? Where is the cord of communication with the guard! Outside that window probably! [*Aloud*]. I feel a little faint—I should like to have some air. [*Goes to window*].

DUKE. Oh, pray let me!



MRS JENNINGS. No, thank you! I would rather do it myself!

[*Goes to window, DUKE standing too*].

DUKE. Do let me!

MRS JENNINGS. No, no, I tell you. [*Puts her hand out, gropes wildly about*]. Nothing! [*Tries to shut window*].

DUKE. Now, really, you must let me do that for you.

MRS JENNINGS [*returning quickly to her seat, aside*]. They're so fearfully strong at times!

DUKE [*struggling*]. This is certainly a stiff window.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, where can that cord be? [*Sees a printed notice—reads it*]. No, the story of a man who was fined forty shillings for travelling in the wrong class. I shall have to pay £2 for travelling with a madman!

DUKE. At last!

[*Comes back and sits beside MRS JENNINGS. She jumps into DUKE'S seat opposite*].

DUKE [*smiling tenderly*]. And now, dear Princess, that I know your name, will you not try and guess mine?

MRS JENNINGS [*aside*]. This is positively awful! It's like a fairy tale. He'll eat me if I don't guess right.

DUKE. Can't you guess?

MRS JENNINGS. Well, I'm not sure!

DUKE. It is a name which is not unknown.

MRS JENNINGS [*pretending to have an idea*]. I have it; you are a dethroned king!

DUKE [*disappointed*]. No—you are laughing at me—I am not a king.

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, well—you are a Duke, then!

DUKE. A Duke, yes!

MRS JENNINGS [*aside*]. Lucky shot!

DUKE. Is it possible you can still doubt who I am, after the letters we have exchanged? [MRS JENNINGS *bewildered*]. I am the Duke of Peckham Rye!

MRS JENNINGS [*humouring him*]. Oh, indeed, yes! The Duke of Peckham Rye! Very nice, indeed!

DUKE [*aside*]. How curiously she takes it! She doesn't seem a bit interested. [*Aloud*]. I hoped, madam, after what had passed between us, that you would, perhaps, not be sorry that we should meet.

MRS JENNINGS. Of course, yes—I am delighted to make your acquaintance.

DUKE. Shall I confess to you with what a subtle mysterious charm my fancy had already, and rightly, invested you? The very paper on which your letters were written, the perfume which clung to them was dear to me.

MRS JENNINGS [*trying to conceal her uneasiness*]. Oh, yes, indeed, yes! Most kind of you, I'm sure!

DUKE. I have them next my heart—see, here they are!

[*Brings out packet of letters, shows her the cover of one*].

MRS JENNINGS [*starts and shrieks*]. What—what do I see! Princess Blakowska's hand-writing!

DUKE. Your own writing—yes, of course.

MRS JENNINGS [*agitated*]. But tell me—tell me quickly—how did you get that letter?

DUKE [*surprised*]. In the simplest way in the world, since it was addressed to me—my name's on the envelope!

MRS JENNINGS [*gasping*]. What—the Duke of Peckham Rye! It is not possible that you are really! Oh!

DUKE [*alarmed*]. What can be the matter, my dear Princess?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, Princess! Was there ever such a situation as this? It is awful!

DUKE [*aside*]. Upon my word, I believe she is not quite right!

[MRS JENNINGS *suddenly bursts into fits of laughter*. DUKE *looks excessively alarmed*. MRS JENNINGS *hides her face in her hands, rocks backwards and forwards*].

DUKE [*looking at her terrified*]. That is the way a maniac laughs for nothing. I wonder if there is a cord. Perhaps, madam, you would like a little air? [*Goes to window, lets it down, and feels furtively about outside*]. [*Sadly*]. No, there is nothing.

MRS JENNINGS [*going into fresh fits of laughter*]. It's no use—I've already looked!

DUKE [*more and more mystified*]. You—have—already—looked?

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, I must laugh! I do beg your pardon, your Grace, but the whole thing is too extraordinarily absurd. You would never guess for whom I took you!

DUKE. For whom did you take me?

MRS JENNINGS. First for a commercial traveller—

DUKE. A commercial traveller!

MRS JENNINGS. And then—and then—oh, it is too dreadful!—for a cook!

DUKE. A cook! Me!

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, you, your Grace! Did you ever hear anything like it; but, after all, you took me for a Princess.

DUKE. But who are you, then? You told me you were the Princess Blakowska.

MRS JENNINGS. Yes, but I'm not—I told you that to humour you.

DUKE. Upon my word! To humour me?

MRS JENNINGS. Yes! Because I thought you were mad.

DUKE. And I thought *you* were mad. One of us is, certainly!

MRS JENNINGS. It isn't me!

DUKE. Then why were you laughing in that insane way?

MRS JENNINGS [*laughing again*]. I was laughing to think how surprised you would be if you knew who I was.

DUKE. And who are you then? [*Impatiently*].

MRS JENNINGS [*hesitating*]. Oh, your Grace! you will never forgive me!

DUKE. Well, what is it?

MRS JENNINGS. Look inside your letter again, your Grace, the one Princess Blakowska wrote to you.

DUKE. What is all this mystery about? [*Opens letter and reads*]. "She will be glad to hear that he has secured the services of an artist like Susan Jennings." Well?

MRS JENNINGS. Now, can't you guess who I am? I am not the

Princess Blakowska, your Grace, I am not, indeed; and yet—that letter concerns me.

DUKE [*gasping, looks at her transfixed*]. What! Is it possible that you are—

MRS JENNINGS. Susan Jennings! Yes! Oh, pray forgive me, it is not my fault that you thought I was the Princess.

DUKE. And you're the cook! [MRS JENNINGS *bows her head silently*]. What a precious fool I've been making of myself. But then why did you pretend you were somebody else? You said you were a first-class passenger.

MRS JENNINGS [*with dignity*]. Excuse me, your Grace! I didn't pretend. I had to come first because I'm on my way to call on your Grace. I'm still with the Princess at Penge till the end of the week. I went to your house at Grosvenor Gardens, and you were out, and now I am going back. I thought it was more suitable, everything considered, that I shouldn't run the risk of travelling with servants or people of inferior position.

DUKE. But my dear Princess—I mean, my dear madam—tut-tut—I mean, my good woman, what do you call yourself?

MRS JENNINGS. An artist.

DUKE. An artist! Yes, that was what the Princess said.

MRS JENNINGS. And, oh, your Grace, I *should* like to try those tomatoes for you.

DUKE. Those tomatoes! Well, Mrs Jennings, if you are sure you can be discreet and silent, and will reveal to no one what has passed between us to-day—

MRS JENNINGS. Oh, the grave is chatty, I do assure you, compared to me.

[*Voice outside: Penge! GUARD puts his head inside window unseen by them*].

DUKE. Very well, then, you may consider yourself engaged.

MRS JENNINGS [*enraptured*]. Engaged! Oh!!

GUARD [*loud*]. Penge! [DUKE and MRS JENNINGS *start and pick up papers, etc.*]. Well, this is a business-like betrothal as ever I see! [*Aloud*]. This is your station, sir. Better come out and have the rest of the ceremony on the platform.

DUKE [*getting out*]. Look here, my man—none of your insolence!

[DUKE *gets out loftily*].

MRS JENNINGS [*speaking to GUARD at window*]. You mustn't speak to him like that; he's the Duke of Peckham Rye.

GUARD. Ah, yes, likely! And you're a Member of Parliament, I suppose. *All right!*

[*He walks a little further away*].

DUKE [*coming to window—says hesitatingly*]. One thing I should like to ask, Mrs Jennings—I believe it is customary—why did you leave Princess Blakowska?

MRS JENNINGS [*sarcastically*]. Why? Well, of course, I left her—with her goings on!

DUKE [*startled*]. What!

[CURTAIN *comes down quickly as the* GUARD'S whistle is heard].

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#### TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

Occasional missing punctuation has been silently added. In one instance, "you" was substituted for "your" and vice versa, as required by the context. A missing final "s" was added on one occasion. No substantive changes were made.

[The end of *A Second-Class Duke* (from *Four Short Plays*) by Bell, Florence Eveleen Eleanore]