

THE RED VIAL

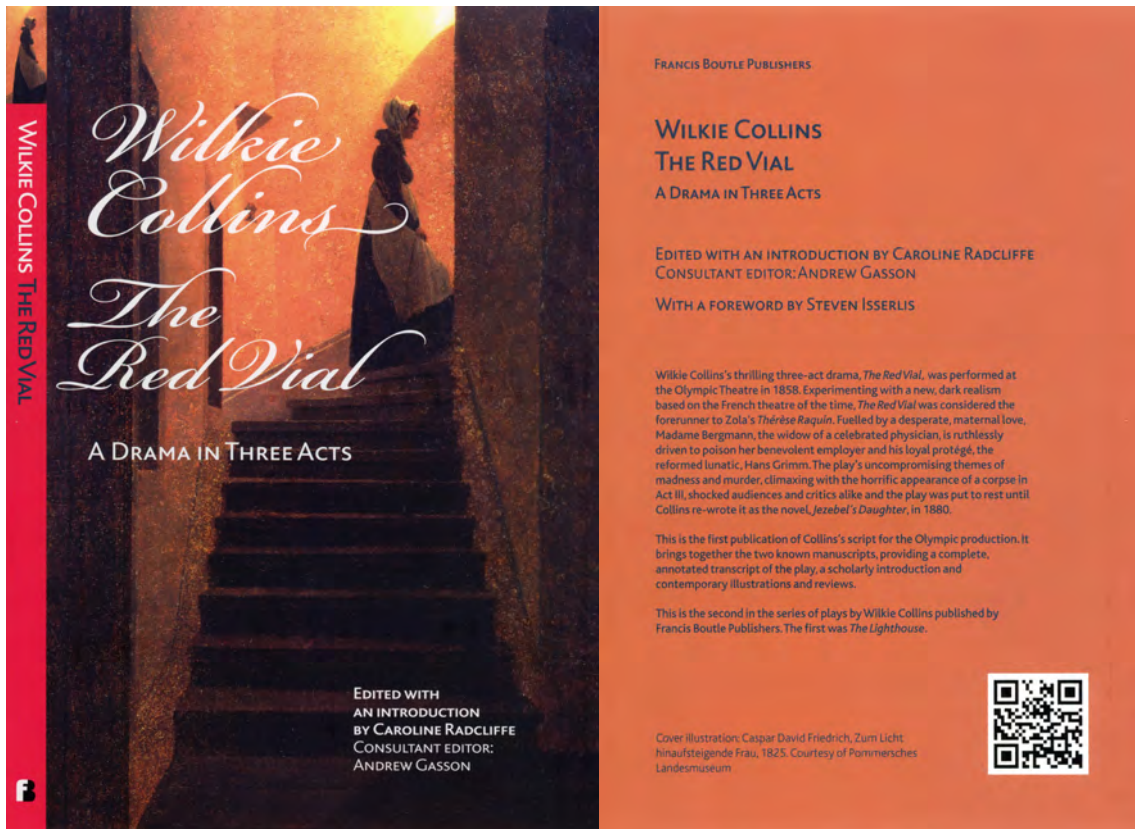
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WILKIE COLLINS THE RED VIAL

*Wilkie
Collins*
*The
Red Vial*

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

EDITED WITH
AN INTRODUCTION
BY CAROLINE RADCLIFFE
CONSULTANT EDITOR:
ANDREW GASSON

William Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) was a novelist, playwright, essayist and short story writer, the author of over thirty novels, including *The Woman in White*, *Armadale* and *The Moonstone*. He was a lifelong friend of Charles Dickens.

The Wilkie Collins Society was formed during 1980 to promote interest in the life and works of this important nineteenth century author. His books have attracted readers for more than a century and his unconventional lifestyle has intrigued the literary world for nearly as long. The Society has an international membership and further details can be found at www.wilkiecollinssociety.com



The Red Vial

ROYAL
OLYMPIC THEATRE
WYCH STREET, STRAND.

LESSEES AND MANAGERS, MESSRS.

F. ROBSON AND W. S. EMDEN

Kenington Park.

Tavistock Street, Bedford Square.

N.B.—The Doors will Open at Seven, and the Performances will commence at Half-past Seven. Half-price as near Nine o'Clock as is consistent with the Non-interruption of the Performance.

MONDAY, Oct. 25th, 1858. and During the Week

Will be performed the Comedietta of

**LADIES,
BEWARE!**

Colonel Vavasour.

Mr. G. COOKE

Sir Charles Vavasour.

Mr. GEORGE VINING

Matilda.

Miss WENDHAM

Lady Beauchamp.

Miss STEVENS

Grace Peabody.

Mrs. W. S. EMDEN

After which (13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th Times) an Entirely Original Drama, in Three Acts, entitled

**THE RED
VIAL**

Written for this Theatre by
WILKIE COLLINS.

The New Scenery by Mr. J. GRAY and Mr. GRAVEY. The Music arranged by Mr. BARNARD.
The Dresses and Appointments under the Direction of Mr. S. MAY and Mrs. CUL.

Isaac Rodenberg

(a Jewish Merchant of Frankfort)

Mr. ADDISON

Max Keller

(his Partner)

Mr. F. VINING

Karl

(Keller's Son)

Mr. WALTER GORDON

Playbill, *The Red Vial*

WILKIE COLLINS

The Red Dial

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

CAROLINE RADCLIFFE

CONSULTANT EDITOR: ANDREW GASSON



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Foreword

Wilkie Collins was a thoroughly un-Victorian Victorian – in almost every way. Romantically involved for many years with two women simultaneously, to neither of whom he was married (even though he had children with one of them), shockingly liberal in most of his views, a confirmed laudanum addict, a fan, even, of spicy, garlic-laden food – he was really a bit beyond the pale for respectable, moustache-twirling, corseted Victorian society. His novels too, replete with violence, sinister skulduggery, anti-religious satire and even – shudder – eroticism, shocked and appalled his contemporaries.

Maybe, though, that is too narrow a view of the Victorians. Among them were many, of course, who loved his works, his popularity for a time rivalling that of his friend, patron and collaborator Charles Dickens. And for today's readers, one major advantage of his outrageous modernism is that much of his writing requires considerably less 'period adjustment' than that of most of his contemporaries, even Dickens. Collins' scintillating wit, his powerful female characters (including one of the very first, if not THE first, female detectives in literature), his collage-like use of multiple narrators, reach across the centuries unblemished by time. At his greatest, I would venture to say, there is no more unputdownable author.

Both Collins and Dickens are remembered chiefly for their novels; but both were strongly drawn to the theatre also, sometimes joining forces as authors and actors in amateur productions. Dickens was, by all accounts, much the finer actor; but Collins had far more success as a dramatist. Several of his plays enjoyed extended runs on the stages of London and other cities. Some were adaptations of his own novel, but others, like *The Red Vial*, were original works (though, in an unusual role reversal, *The Red Vial* was later converted into a novel, *Jezebel's Daughter*). Perhaps one misses in his plays the humour and the multi-faceted presentation that are such attractive and consistently surprising features of the novels; but the vivid characterisations, the extreme contrasts between light and dark, the deep compassion of a play such as *The Red Vial*, are pure Wilkie.

The liberalism is there too: which other Victorian writer – apart from George Eliot – would have cast a Jew as the saintliest character (a more conventional playwright might well have portrayed the Widow Bergmann as a scheming Jewish mother, Rodenberg as a gentile, gentlemanly pillar of society!)? And we

are even encouraged to feel pity for the villainess, appalling though her actions are. For Collins, his characters were more than mere cyphers representing certain traits; they were three-dimensional living beings, with their own strengths and weaknesses. As he posited in his most famous novel, *The Moonstone*: ‘The best men are not consistent in good – why should the worst men be consistent in evil?’ Other Wilkie signatures are on show too – not least in the gothic noir of the closing act, reminiscent of the sinister sanatorium scene at the end of his own personal favourite (and mine, incidentally) among his novels, *Armada*.

Perhaps the dialogue seems stilted to modern ears, the characters exaggerated at times; but we have to imagine, as we read, a vividly presented stage, replete with both bright and gloomy colours, and the sort of acting that would have swept up Victorian audiences in a whirlwind of tension, indignation and empathy. Wilkie would not have allowed cheap caricature from his actors and actresses, however; they were there to represent human emotions, not to play pantomime villains or pallid saints. In an article for the magazine *Household Words*, he parodied the melodramatic style of acting that may have been the fashion in his time, but which he, ever the rebel, detested. This is his view of such an actor portraying rage: ‘The neck is stretched out, the head forward, often nodding, and shaken in a menacing manner against the object of the passion; the eyes alternately staring and rolling, the eyebrows drawn down over them, and the forehead wrinkled into clouds; the nostrils stretched wide, and every muscle strained... I ask any reasonable being,’ Wilkie continues with concern, ‘to reflect, first of all, on the exquisitely intricate, tender, and delicate construction of the nerves and muscles in the human face; and then to consider what must be the effect on those nerves and muscles, of the terrible epileptic contortions here insisted on, when habitually practised for hire, by men and women, night after night.’

Needless to say, the theatre has moved on immeasurably since *The Red Vial* was seen on the London stage; but that does not negate the qualities of Wilkie’s play. *The Red Vial* seems to me to be in a similar position to some music from the late 19th century. One can either stand aside from it and laugh with knowing superiority; or one can meet it on its own terms, and be moved. I, for one, would love to see *The Red Vial* performed with sincerity and verve on a modern stage; we could be assured, at least, of a memorable evening.

Steven Isserlis

Introduction

Wilkie Collins's play, *The Red Vial: a Drama in Three Acts*, was written and professionally staged at the Royal Olympic Theatre in 1858. It was never published.¹ The plot was later expanded and adapted by Collins as the basis for the novel, *Jezebel's Daughter* (1880).

The years 1855-1858 were intensively productive for Collins; alongside his prolific and increasingly popular literary output, he was working towards becoming a successful dramatist, writing three dramas in close succession, *The Lighthouse*, *The Frozen Deep* and the *Red Vial*.² Following the success of Collins's *The Lighthouse* for Charles Dickens's amateur theatricals in the summer of 1855, Dickens soon proposed a new drama based on the ill-fated 1845 Franklin expedition to discover the Northwest Passage. *The Frozen Deep* was written by Collins during 1856, although conceived, cast and revised by Dickens. The play was first performed at Tavistock House in January 1857. It was performed again at the Gallery of Illustration, Regent Street, in July, including a Royal Command performance on the 4 July. The play was then taken to the Manchester Free Trade Hall in August 1857 for the benefit of Douglas Jerrold's widow, substituting professional actors for the female members of the cast.³ Between the January and August performances of *The Frozen Deep*, Collins was simultaneously occupied with the professional staging of *The Lighthouse* at the Olympic Theatre. Heralding William S. Emden and actor, Frederick Robson's new management of the Olympic, they opened their inaugural season with *The Lighthouse*, running from 10 August to 17 October and meeting with great acclaim.

Inspired by the success of *The Lighthouse*, Collins was encouraged to submit another play to the Olympic – this time without the apparent involvement of Dickens who, since acting in *The Frozen Deep* with Ellen Ternan, had become passionately absorbed with her. The first indication that Collins was planning another drama came in a letter to his mother, Harriet Collins, on 5 October 1857:

Immense success of The Lighthouse. The other night the stalls were so full that the people had to be accommodated in the orchestra. Saturday last, I tried to get a private box for the Londons and found they were all taken. Robson goes into the country for three weeks this month – When he comes back the run of the play is to be resumed. I have engaged to do them another. ⁴

Act 1

The Red Vial

A Drama in Three Acts

By
Wilkie Collins.

(Represented, for the first time, at the Royal Olympic Theatre, October 11th 1858.)

<u>Persons of the Drama.</u>	<u>Acted By.</u>	Character
<u>Isaac Rodeberg</u> (A Jewish merchant of Frankfurt)	Mr. Addison.	
<u>Max Keller</u> (his partner)	Mr. F. King.	
<u>Karl</u> (Keller's son)	Mr. W. Gordon.	
<u>Hans Grimm</u> (Rodeberg's servant)	Mr. F. Robson.	
<u>Doctor Helzel</u> (A Physician)	Mr. White.	
<u>Joseph</u> (A servant)	Mr. Franks.	
<u>Schwartz</u> (First Watchman of the Dead-Street)	Mr. G. Cooke.	
<u>Duntzer</u> (Second Watchman)	Mr. H. Cooper.	
The Surgeon of the Dead-Street, and two Apprentices.		
<u>Widas Bergmann</u> (Rodeberg's housekeeper)	Miss Sterling.	
<u>Ulrika</u> (her daughter)	Miss Marston.	

The Scene is at Frankfurt on the Main.
The Period is the beginning of the present century.

[Note. The author of this Drama gives notice that he reserves to himself all rights of translation and of reproduction

Wilkie Collins The Red Vial Act I p. 1
(autographed manuscript in Collins's hand)
Courtesy of the Harry Ransom Centre, University of Austin, Texas

On Frederick Robson's return however, *The Lighthouse* was not resumed and Collins spent the next few months supporting Dickens, as close friend, traveling companion and collaborative writer, resulting in the publication of 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices' in October and November, 1857.⁵ On 13 April 1858, an overworked Collins wrote to James Lowe, the editor of *The Critic*, a weekly journal of literature and the arts, due to publish a brief literary biography in its issue of 5 June 1858:

There is nothing to add, except perhaps a word about works I have yet to bring out. I have a new three act drama at the Olympic Theatre which is to appear in the autumn, with Mr Robson in the principal character – an entirely new one, for him.⁶

The 'new, three act drama' – *The Red Vial* – opened at the Olympic Theatre on 11 October 1858. The evening's programme commenced with a revival of the one-act farce, *Ladies Beware*, followed by Collins's 'entirely original drama'.⁷ Frederick Robson as Hans Grimm and the renowned actress, Fanny Stirling, as Madame Bergmann, led the cast. Stirling was skilled at playing strong roles, both comic and tragic, gaining a reputation throughout the 1840s for her intelligent, psychologically truthful characterisations, realistic stage business and vocal nuance. One of the forerunners of a naturalistic acting technique, one commentator praised the 'exquisitely natural pathos of her acting' that established, 'a new style for future actresses to emulate'.⁸ Her most fêted tragic role was as the actress, *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, in which she displayed 'a whole history of internal emotion, without anything like violent ebullition'.⁹ Robson also excelled in realistic acting, mastering both the tragic and the grotesque. Actors, Marie and Squire Bancroft, describing Robson's intensity and 'presence', stated: 'the power of Robson on the stage was contagious like a fever, and, take him all in all, I think he was the most remarkable actor of those days, and perhaps one of the most remarkable of any days'.¹⁰ Robson could switch between tragedy and farce with convincing alacrity, qualities that equipped him for the quasi-schizophrenic, contradictory character of Hans Grimm:

No words of mine could do justice to my remembrance of this strange little genius, who is said to have resembled Edmund Kean in his bursts of passion, while in his comic moments he recalled memories of the greatest comedians of the past'.¹¹

The Olympic employed their skilled production team for *The Red Vial*, including the innovative scenic artist, Hawes Craven, who was key in introducing realistic scenery to the theatre; *The Standard* pronounced that: 'Every praise must be given to the scenery and dresses, over the combinations of which a painter's eye had evidently presided, the stage throughout presenting a picture



Fanny Stirling by Frederick Richard Window, albumen carte-de-visite, early 1860s © National Portrait Gallery, London.

perfect in grouping, colour and tone.¹²

Music for Collins's two earlier plays, *The Lighthouse* and *The Frozen Deep* had been composed by Francesco Berger, a popular composer and pianist and a member of Dickens's amateur theatrical company.¹³ Berger had hoped to provide the music for *The Red Vial* but Collins wrote to him on 10 August 1858:

I am much obliged to you for your kindly offering your assistance in reference to the musical part of my new play.

So far as I know at present, I have no choice in the matter, the arrangements for the play all resting with the managers of the Olympic, to whom I have assigned the dramatic copyright for a term of years. I believe the musical director of the theatre would, under these circumstances, officially undertake the musical arrangements of the play. However, I will ascertain from the manager exactly how the matter stands, and if it is not yet settled, I will place your kind offer before them, and will immediately let you know the result.¹⁴

Collins's best endeavours must have proved unsuccessful as the musical director for the Olympic Theatre, John Barnard, eventually arranged the music for the production. From his obituary, Barnard seemed admirably suited to *The Red Vial*:

His melodramatic music was frequently so spirited as to be of the greatest assistance to actors. He would "give them a chord" of such a kind as to curdle a sympathetic pit or gallery when a sensational incident was about to take place ... No musician ever lived who better understood the requirements of the stage ...¹⁵

All in all, the production of *The Red Vial* appears to have been impressively mounted with no costs spared – the Olympic's managers were clearly anticipating a successful run.

Cast List

Isaac Rodenberg (a Jewish Merchant of Frankfort)	Mr. Addison
Max Keller (his Partner)	Mr. Frederick Vining
Karl (Keller's Son)	Mr. Walter Gordon
Hans Grimm (Rodenberg's Servant)	Mr. Frederick Robson
Doctor Hetzel (a Physician)	Mr. White
Joseph (a Servant)	Mr. Franks
Schwartz (First Watchman of the Dead House)	Mr. G. Cooke
Duntzer (Second Watchman)	Mr. H. Cooper
The Surgeon of the Dead House	Mr. J. Howard
Assistant Watchmen	Messrs. James and Adams
Widow Bergmann (Rodenberg's Housekeeper)	Mrs. Fanny Stirling
Minna (Her Daughter)	Miss. Marston



(Thomas) Frederick Robson (né Brownbill) by (George) Herbert Watkins, albumen print, arched top, late 1850s © National Portrait Gallery, London.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

3 December

Set in the house of Isaac Rodenberg.

The Red Vial is set at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in Frankfurt. The play opens with Max Keller, a partner in the firm of Rodenberg & Keller discussing with Mrs Bergmann the arrangements for the marriage of his son, Karl, to Minna, the daughter of Mrs Bergmann.

Mrs Bergmann is the widowed housekeeper of Keller's partner, Isaac Rodenberg, and had been married to a physician eminent in the field of chemical science. Keller is intensely proud of his ancestral name and could not condone any debt or dishonour in Minna's family. Accepting Mrs Bergmann's assurances of probity, he agrees to the marriage taking place at the conclusion of Karl's studies five months later, on 3 June the following year.

Mrs Bergmann receives a letter refusing financial assistance from her wealthy relatives. It is delivered by Hans Grimm, a strange looking, harmless but simple-minded individual, whom Rodenberg, in an act of kindness, rescued from a lunatic asylum. He has given Hans the token responsibility of looking after the keys of the house. There is strong and mutual antipathy between Hans and Mrs Bergmann.

Rodenberg discovers that five thousand dollars have been stolen from his private 'Reserved Fund' account. The guilty Mrs Bergmann persuades Rodenberg that as Hans possesses the keys to the safe he must be responsible, despite his protestations of innocence. The truth is revealed shortly after and Mrs Bergmann confesses, pleading for the future happiness of her daughter. Rodenberg, in an act of generosity gives her until 4 June to return the money after which he will be obliged to inform his business partner, Mr Keller, ruining any possibility of Minna's marriage to Karl.

ACT II

3 June

Set in Rodenberg's bedroom and Mrs Bergmann's sitting room.

Rodenberg, nursed by Mrs Bergmann, has taken to his bed because of a mysterious illness during the previous two months. The wedding has been put off for three months, until 3 September, because of the death of Keller's wife. Repeated requests for money from her late husband's father have remained unanswered so that Mrs Bergmann is still unable to replace the stolen five thousand dollars. Rodenberg refuses her repeated entreaties to allow more time for Mina's sake because if Keller knows of her theft he will not permit the marriage to proceed.

Rodenberg's physician, Dr Hetzel, confirms to Mrs Bergmann his anxiety over the patient's future prognosis but is delighted to have met the widow of the late Dr Bergmann, an expert in deadly poisons. Hans, concealed in Mrs Bergmann's room, observes her dropping poison from a red vial into Rodenberg's drink, the same substance it is now revealed that accidentally poisoned Hans when he worked in Dr Bergmann's laboratory and affected his wits. Hans, without really knowing what he is doing, administers an antidote which he finds in Mrs Bergmann's chest of poisons. The antidote induces a state of suspended animation. Mrs Bergmann realises that she has been observed and gives Hans the red vial. She tells him it is a medicine, which will make him strong, hoping that he will poison himself.

ACT III

3 June, later that night

Set in the Frankfort Dead-House

The lifeless Rodenberg has been carried to the Dead-House. By law, all the bodies of the citizens of Frankfurt are laid out here with a bell rope attached to the right hand in case of a return to life and to avoid the possibility of premature burial. On duty at night is the second watchman, Duntzer, who explains the procedure to Keller and Mrs Bergmann. Hans has determined to sit up all night with Duntzer, certain that the antidote will work and Rodenberg will be saved.

Mrs Bergmann and Keller leave the waiting room while the first watchman, Schwartz, enters with Hans with whom he has been drinking. Hans, in a remorseful and partially inebriated state, is now convinced that he has poisoned Rodenberg and also discovers a recently delivered letter. Mrs Bergmann returns from visiting the duty surgeon. She is very thirsty and drinks a glass of wine into which Hans has innocently poured the contents of the red vial, still believing it to be for medicinal use.

Hans, Schwartz and Duntzer then perform a drunken *danse macabre* to the 'Mad Watchman's Song'. The end is interrupted by the ringing of the warning bell and Rodenberg appears, restored to life. When Hans sees that Mrs Bergmann is now feeling unwell he contemptuously returns the red vial and she realises that she has been stricken by her own poison. Rodenberg opens the letter which contains five thousand dollars sent by Mrs Bergmann's father-in-law. Mrs Bergmann expires, knowing that Minna's future is secure and happy.

Reception

Despite its strong cast and carefully staged production, *The Red Vial* was badly received by the Olympic's first night audience and was almost unanimously slated by the critics. This proved a blow to Collins's career as a dramatist from which he found it hard to recover. The drama was criticised for its unrelieved

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She ~~looked~~ ^{look!} the clock!

Hans. (Shuddering.) The cold of him creeps up my hands—and
 and up and up! It cools my heart; it cools my head.
 O the me! So the thought of my master arising back
 again?

Widow B. (Pointing to the ~~clock~~ ^{clock}.) Look!

Hans. Where?

Widow B. (Leaving the chair, and catching Hans by the arm.) Heed me!
 Heed me! He ~~is~~ ^{hand} moving!

Hans. Let me go! Master! Master! I hear you!

Widow B. (Caspurately restoring him.) He! He! He! He! He! He!
 (The ~~hand~~ ^{hand} moves again to the top of the dial, and strikes the clock bell ^{on the} ~~in the~~ ^{moment}.)

Schwartz starts from his sleep, and looks up in terror
 Hans tries vainly to break from Widow Bergmann.

A pause. The door opens a few inches—then bangs to again
 with a dull sound. A second pause. The door opens
 a few inches again. A bare hand and arm steal out
 over its black surface, and slowly moves it back.
 As it opens wide, Joseph Madensky appears on the
 threshold. He is draped in a robe of black velvet, which
 covers him, except his right hand, and arm, from the
 wrist to the feet. His head is bare; his face deadly
 pale. He stands looking straight before him,
 without moving.

Madame
F. tries
vainly to
wake
him,
the bell
rings—
the arm
appears.

Wilkie Collins's *The Red Vial* Act III p. 15 (manuscript in the hand of an amanuensis/copyist)

Courtesy of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Austin, Texas

seriousness, its questionable morality and its shocking, 'revolting' Dead-House scene. Henry Morley, for instance, was unforgiving of its lack of comic sub-plot:¹⁶

... The fatal defect in *The Red Vial* is that it makes no allowance for the good or bad habit that an English audience has of looking out for something upon which to feed its appetite for the absurd. The orthodox writer of melodramas

satisfies that hunger with a comic underplot, and by so doing saves his terrors whole. But Mr. Wilkie Collins has experimented in a drama without one break in the chain of crime and terror, and the audience therefore makes breaks for itself at very inconvenient places. That a play so contrived should contain frequent solemn references to a doctor's shop, blue, green, and red bottles, drops and tablespoonfuls, small matter as that may be, is in the presence of a laughter-loving public very perilous. It needs the highest and the truest exaltation of the language of the drama to keep an audience in an English playhouse in a state of unbroken solemnity for two hours at a stretch. (16 October, 1858).¹⁷

Critics agreed that Fanny Stirling was at her tragic best in her interpretation of Madame Bergmann, which she was said to have acted with the intensity and ruthlessness of any Lady Macbeth,¹⁸ 'especially distinguishing herself by a most marvellous rendering of the various phases in the character of Widow Bergmann – the maternal love, the relentless pursuit of her object, the final remorse were all fully developed'.¹⁹ More unfavourably, however, her performance was remembered as 'the most brilliant failure of its day'.²⁰ Collins's creation of the female poisoner and the lunatic, Hans Grimm, were criticised as distasteful and one-dimensional in their characterisation. Opinions were divided on Robson's performance; *The Morning Chronicle* stated that 'Mr. Robson, as Hans Grimm, acted as he alone could act, and presented to his hearers a wonderful impersonation, which, though thoroughly Robsonian, was also thoroughly effective',²¹ whilst *Plays and Players* wrote: 'Robson did what could be done for the idiot; but it is a sheer waste of Robson's powers to put him to such a part'.²² While the rest of the cast were praised for their exceptional acting, Robson came under criticism, accused by some of being unable to manage the complex character of Grimm.

It was the Dead-House setting in Act III, however, that caused by far the most controversy. With critics objecting to the horribly realistic depiction of Rodenberg's reanimated corpse, wrapped in a funeral robe, slowly emerging from the Dead-House cell, one reviewer advised: 'If this scene be modified, and if the two last acts be condensed into one, the play will prove a great success. If not, not'.²³ Criticism ranged from shocked indignation ('revolting and improbable in the extreme'²⁴), to satirical disbelief:

Something of rare occurrence has just taken place at the Olympic. The public has been found sufficiently strong to dictate to author and manager, and the consequence is an amended version of *The Red Vial*. The alterations appear to be at the very last only.

It will be remembered by the happy audience of the first night, who for this season will be lions indeed, that Rodenburg (*sic*) comes from his room, apparently as a consequence of ringing his own bell, in a style combining all the unpleasant attributes of Lazarus with the dignity of an old Roman gentleman. He shuffles off, but returns in a couple of minutes, looking elegant enough, certainly; but, from his astonishing rapidity, suggesting that his

views as to the necessity of soap and water, razor and toothbrush, have undergone total change during his sojourn in the intermediate world.²⁵

The theatrical effect of the blue stage lights coupled²⁶ with the slowly increasing ‘Corsican–brothers music’²⁷ served to further enhance the horror.

Collins was immediately forced to make extensive cuts in response to the overwhelming objections.²⁸ From a selection of reviews it appears that Collins modified the final scene ‘by doing away with the appearance of the revived corpse and bringing the curtain down at the point when the dial moves and the bell strikes, at which moment *Madame Bergmann* expires, leaving *Hans* in an attitude of triumph and joy.’²⁹ Another account testified to the scene being ‘cut to bits’ with the play concluding with the ringing of the bell, and the death of Widow Bergmann, poisoned by Hans.³⁰

The cuts only partially satisfied the critics but the drama continued its run for a month. The review from *The Illustrated News*, for example, gave a sense of the ambiguity of the production’s reception:

OLYMPIC: Some judicious alterations have been made in Mr Wilkie Collins’s melodrama of “The Red Vial”, which now meets with no opposition. Mrs Stirling’s admirable acting alone should ensure an extended run to this startling production.³¹

The cuts reduced the length of the last act considerably, and the management, perhaps seeing an opportunity to lighten up the evening’s entertainment, added a further comedietta, *To Oblige Benson*, by Tom Taylor, to the programme.³² The programme was also strategically altered by placing *The Red Vial* first in the programme, followed by the lighter elements – *Ladies Beware!* ending with *To Oblige Benson* in which Robson also took the lead role.

Collins believed that the negative reception of *The Red Vial* was due to the failure of a British theatre audience and theatre critics to accept a new, serious style of drama; the actors – familiar with realism and welcoming a new style of writing that challenged audience and critics’ expectations – appreciated its strengths. Dramatist and critic, E. L. Blanchard also recognised its individuality, describing it as ‘extraordinary’ and Clement Scott, a highly regarded theatre critic, remembered it as ‘a very strong melodrama’.³³

Superficially, *The Red Vial* might be read as purely sensational, but it substantially breaks with melodramatic convention. Collins’s dramatic intentions can be better understood by aligning them with the acting style for which they were envisaged. Both Collins and Dickens attempted to create a dramatic style that united melodrama with dramatic realism. Although still working within a theatrical framework in the melodramatic tradition, both sought to bring a new, realistic and emotionally truthful style to their productions, influenced by the acting style they had witnessed in France. Equally, they attempted to profes-

sionalise both the writing and the production processes and tried to establish the, as yet undefined, role of author/director for themselves. Both insisted on selecting a suitable cast for their productions and on personally supervising rehearsals. For these reasons, Collins was attracted by the working methods of the Olympic Theatre, which had been recently established by the actor-manager, Alfred Wigan, prior to the period of management by Emden and Robson.³⁴ Wigan, reflecting the French acting style, was considered as one of the chief forerunners of a new school of acting in Britain. He gathered together a company of actors at the Olympic, all of them already renowned for their convincingly realistic acting technique. These included Fanny Stirling, Frederick Robson, Frederick Vining and Mr Addison,³⁵ all of whom appeared in *The Red Vial*. Wigan also extended the rehearsal process and created artistic but convincingly realistic sets and costumes. Collins conceived *The Red Vial* with the Olympic's company specifically in mind, shaping the characters of Grimm and Bergmann to Robson and Stirling's particular acting strengths. Stirling's grandson, Percy Allen, in his biography of Stirling, stated that "little by little, at last, from the Wigans, through the Bancrofts, our drama began again to be truthful, natural, and free."³⁶

In a letter to W. S. Emden, joint manager with Robson of the Olympic, on 24 February 1859, a somewhat aggrieved Collins (perhaps having learnt from his experience with *The Red Vial* that the public wanted comedy over sensational realism) proposed a farce based on his short story, *The Twin Sisters*:

Will you and Mr Robson look to the little piece, in one Act, left with this letter? It is – though I can hardly believe it myself! – actually the product of my pen.

I have had better ideas for better and more elaborate dramatic work – but they would run, in spite of me, into that vein of strong and serious interests which it would be, for the present at least, mere rashness and folly to attempt opening again. A piece to keep the audience roaring with laughter all through, was the piece I determined to write this time – and such as it is, you now have it.³⁷

Collins suggested Robson for the principle role and Mrs Stirling as the sisters, leaving the rest of the cast to the management's decision, but, as Collins anticipated, it was unlikely the management would risk another of his dramas so soon and *The Twin Sisters* was left unstaged.³⁸

In March 1862 while helping the French critic, Alfred-Auguste Ernouf, prepare a biographical memoir, Collins reflected on his disappointment with the English theatre in contrast to that of the French:

"The Red Vial" was performed at The Olympic Theatre. It was not successful with the public, though greatly liked by the actors. I have written no other Drama since, and my literary success has been entirely won as a novelist. If I had been a Frenchman – with such a public to write for, such rewards

to win, and such actors to interpret me, as the French Stage presents – all the stories I have written from “Antonina” to “The Woman in White” would have been told in the dramatic form. Whether their success as plays would have been equal to their success as novels, it is not for me to decide; But if I know anything of my own faculty, it is a dramatic one.³⁹

Percy Allen, Stirling’s grandson, had recognised Collins’s intentions, stating that:

“The Red Vial” is perhaps a forerunner of the French naturalistic play. Zola, one of the founders of French naturalism, was to write his first successful book, *Therese Raquin*, in 1867. *L’Assommoir*, which made his fortune, appeared in 1878.⁴⁰

Collins re-emphasised his use of dramatic realism in a further letter to Ernouf, 7 May 1862:

“The Frozen Deep” and “The Red Vial” are written in the same general plan as The Lighthouse. In all three dramas my intention was to invent a story containing a strong human interest – to work the story out by means of characters as little theatrical and as true to everyday nature as I could make them – , lastly, to surround events and persons thus produced with the most picturesque and striking external circumstances which the resources of the stage could realise.

Thus, the story of The Lighthouse, passes in the Eddystone Lighthouse, and is illustrated by all the little picturesque circumstances of lighthouse-life. The story of The Frozen Deep (a love story) is so constructed as to connect the interest of it with the Arctic Discoveries of England – and the main collision between two of the male characters occurs in a hut of Lost Explorers in the regions of eternal frost, with all the circumstances of danger in that situation interwoven with the circumstances of the plot.

The Red Vial traces the slow degrees by which circumstances distort the love of a mother for her child into the commission of a crime by the mother for the child’s sake. And here the climax of the Drama is worked out in the famous “Dead-House” of Franckfort – where all bodies are laid out before burial with a bell-pull attached to their hands, so that no supposed dead person may be buried alive by mistake. Here again, all the terrible and picturesque surroundings of the Dead House are associated with the story of the drama – just as the Lighthouse and the Arctic hut are associated with the other two stories. None of these three dramas have been printed. In the present degraded state of the drama in England – degraded, I mean, in the literary sense – I have refused all proposals to publish them, or to allow them to be acted after the period of their first stage appearance. I mean to keep them till better times come – and if no better times come, I will turn them into Novels.⁴¹

Collins determined to keep the play off the dramatic register in order to block further performances. In a letter dated 6 May 1859 to J. Sterling Coyne (playwright and Secretary of the Dramatic Authors' Society from 1856), he stated:

Considering the reception which this play met with in London, under all the advantages of being interpreted by an admirable company, under the immediate supervision of the author, I must honestly confess that I am unwilling to trust it to the chances of provincial representation by a company of whom I have no knowledge and over whose rehearsals I can exercise no control. On this ground, therefore – though I feel sincerely indebted to you for offering me the opportunity of producing again the play on the stage – I must beg you to excuse me ...⁴²

But in 1860 he discovered, “through an application from the manager of the Norwich Theatre” that *The Red Vial* had been placed on the list of The Dramatic Authors' Society. Writing again to Sterling Coyne, he pressed again for its removal:

After the reception accorded the play in London, I have no desire to give that acutely-critical portion of the British public which frequents Theatres any second opportunity of taking their dose of dramatic medicine out of “The Red Vial”.⁴³

Collins still remembered the *The Red Vial*'s poor reception three years after the event, referring to it as his ‘unlucky play’. In a letter to Charles Reade he wrote:

Give my kindest regards to Robson, and my best wishes for his speedy recovery. I have not seen him (to speak of) since the time of my unlucky play at The Olympic – but I have, and always shall have, the pleasantest recollections of his kindness and sympathy.⁴⁴

In 1862, reiterating his proviso that *The Red Vial* should not be performed again without his close direction he turned down a request by the actor-manager Charles A. Calvert to stage a production, presumably at the Theatre Royal, Manchester which Calvert was managing at the time:

I have reasons for not wishing The Red Vial to be again performed in public – except under circumstances which would enable me personally to superintend rehearsals.⁴⁵

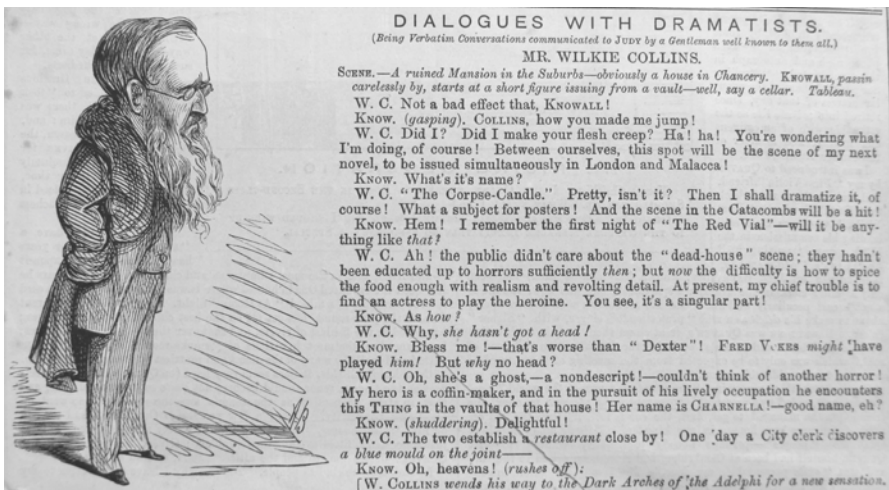
Collins did not then allow any of his dramas onstage until December 1867 when *No Thoroughfare* was staged at the Adelphi.



Front cover of Frederick Smallfield, “Supping on Horrors”, *Passages from Modern English Poets Illustrated by the Junior Etching Club*, Day & Son, London, 1861 (Andrew gasson Collection).

Despite the early disappearance of *The Red Vial* from the London stage, the play remained in people’s minds. It fast became an object of satire, an easy target for the many critics of sensation literature and drama. The watercolour artist, Frederick Smallfield (1829-1915), on the fringe of Collins’s Pre-Raphaelite friends, had painted *The Ghost Story*, depicting a young man with a look of horror seated at a dinner table reading a ghost story from a book. Beneath the book is a theatre playbill advertising Matthew Lewis’s *The Castle Spectre* (1797) – considered to be the first gothic drama. In 1859, shortly after *The Red Vial* had ended, *The Ghost Story* was soon reproduced in order to satirise Collins’s drama and retitled, ‘Preparing for a nightmare’. The playbill of *The Castle Spectre* was replaced with a playbill of *Ladies Beware* and *The Red Vial*, the implication clearly being that Collins was the dramatic successor to Lewis’s gothic horrors. In 1861, it was further reproduced as a black and white etching entitled, *Supping on Horrors*, to illustrate an anonymous poem with the same title in *Passages from Modern English Poets* published the following year.⁴⁶ The final stanza of the poem makes direct reference to *The Red Vial*:

The watch has ceased to tick! The waning light
Leaps up, flares round, sinks down, and all is night!
A breath! A crash! Oh! for the coming day!



“Dialogues with Dramatists’, Mr. Wilkie Collins.’, *Judy; or the London Serio-Comic Journal*, 1 December, 1875, p.61.

Courtesy of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Austin, Texas

He feels no fear! He simply “faints away”.
Would you, too, “Sup on Horrors?” Make a trial
Of stout, pork-pasties, and “The Blood Red Vial.”

Even as late as 1875, *The Red Vial* was still being mocked for its sensational use of horror. The satirical periodical, *Judy; or the London Serio-Comic Journal*, in its feature ‘Dialogues with Dramatists, once again recalled the drama’s disastrous first night.⁴⁷

Sources

Although the literary theme of premature burial was not new, Act III of *The Red Vial* shocked its audiences. Emphasising the play’s German Romantic, gothic setting, Collins set the action at ‘the beginning of the nineteenth century’,⁴⁸ in the Dead-House of Frankfurt, basing it on the German practice of laying out newly dead corpses for three whole days to ensure that there was no possibility of life or reanimation. In *A Life of Wilkie Collins*, Nuel Pharr Davis suggests that Dickens’s son Charley’s experiences in Germany in 1853 were a possible inspiration for *The Red Vial*. In all probability, the younger Dickens had come across the tradition of the German Dead-House and recounted it to Collins and Dickens.⁴⁹ At least one of the many English publications describing the practice of tying a bell to the finger of a corpse was known to Collins; he makes direct reference to an unidentified volume in his dedication to Alberto Caccia⁵⁰ in *Jezebel’s Daughter*:⁵¹

The events in which these two personages play their parts have been combined with all possible care, and have been derived, to the best of my ability, from natural and simple causes. In view of the distrust which certain readers feel, when a novelist builds his fiction on a foundation of fact, it may not be amiss to mention (before I close these lines), that the accessories of the scenes in the *Deadhouse of Frankfort* have been studied on the spot.

The published rules and ground-plans of that curious mortuary establishment have also been laid on my desk, as aids to memory while I was writing the closing passages ...⁵²

As with the historical, fact-based research carried out for *The Lighthouse*, Collins was keen to prove the realism of the scene – even of a scene that was intended for sensational dramatic effect.

Collins based the character of Widow Bergmann on Lady Gordon Duff's account of the real-life poisoner, Anna Maria Zwanziger, providing a footnote reference to her 'terrible career' in *Jezebel's Daughter*.⁵³ It was Zwanziger's position as a housekeeper who succeeded in repeatedly poisoning her wealthy employers within the home and yet managed to remain undetected that provided the model for Bergmann. Unlike her uneducated historical counterpart, in *The Red Vial*, Bergmann uses her advanced knowledge of chemical science to try to achieve her goal. Collins must also have been influenced by the recently notorious case of the young and beautiful Madeleine Smith, who was accused of poisoning her lover with arsenic and stood trial in July 1857; he was later to refer back to the case when it came to writing *The Law and the Lady* in 1875.

In her biography of Collins, Catherine Peters traces a possible inspiration for the character of Hans Grimm to a piece by Wills and Dickens on 'Idiots' in *Household Words* 4 June 1853, in which the humane treatment of the insane is considered.⁵⁴ Collins and Dickens's description of a lunatic in Chapter IV of *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* is far more likely to have presented the prototype for Hans Grimm. Rodenberg's adoption of Hans Grimm was certainly based on William Tuke's Quaker reforms for a humane care system for the insane. Rodenberg saves Grimm from the cruelties of Bedlam, offering him instead a position of trust in his home, enabling Grimm to become the loyal 'keeper of the keys'. Collins provides a footnote reference in *Jezebel's Daughter* to Tuke's institution, again evidencing further elements of the real within his dramas.⁵⁵

Another, more oblique and certainly surprising source for the characters of the young lovers, Minna and Karl, appears to have been influenced by a key event in Collins's personal life at the time of writing. Sometime between February and September 1858, Collins started to live with the young widow, Caroline Graves, with whom he was having a close relationship. In the British Library manuscript of *The Red Vial*, Collins has deleted the names of three of the characters, replacing them with the names of Widow Bergmann, Minna and Karl. The original, deleted names for Minna and Karl are almost certainly

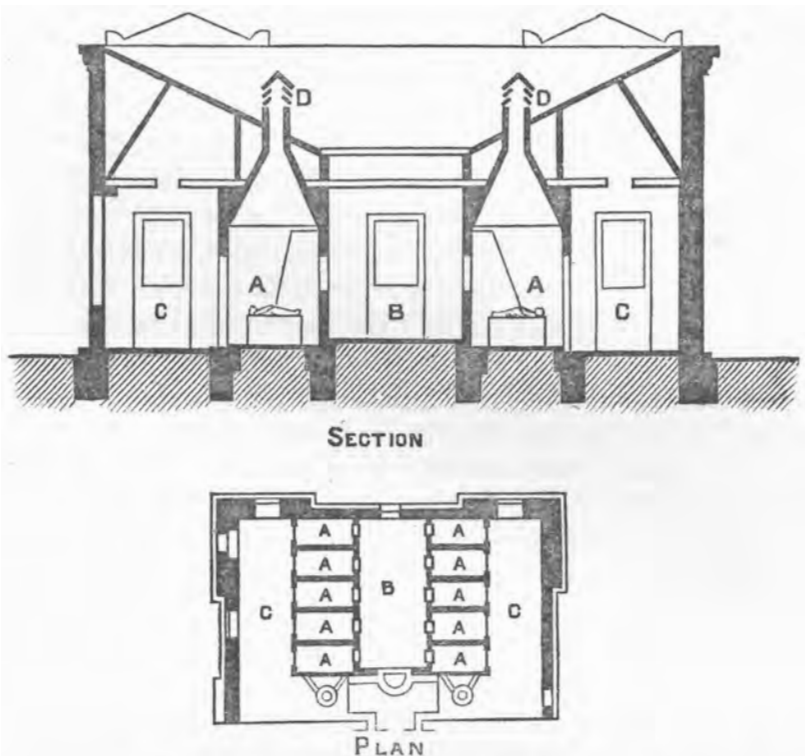


FIG. 2. —Deadhouse, Frankfort Cemetery.

‘Plan of the Deadhouse, Franfort Cemetery’, from Thomas Spencer Baynes, *The Encyclopædia Britannica, A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and General Literature*, Ninth Edition, Popular-Reprint, (New York: Henry G. Allen and Co. 1888), p. 331

Caroline and George, the name of Caroline Graves’s former husband. Caroline is considered to be the inspiration for *The Woman in White* (1860) – it is interesting to see that Collins initially referred to her two years earlier in his first draft of *The Red Vial*. Retaining the secrecy of their relationship, Collins must have reconsidered, renaming the characters with less traceable, German names.⁵⁶

Jezebel’s Daughter

By 1867 Collins was keen to make his novels available as cheap, popular fiction and started to consider recycling the plot of *The Red Vial*. He wrote to his mother on 8 January 1867:

I have a splendid idea for boiling down the Lighthouse, The Frozen Deep and the Red Vial into One Novel. If the penny journal takes to the Woman in

White, the penny journal shall have the new Novel. It will be just the thing for them.⁵⁷

Nothing, in fact, came of this idea but by 1878 the plot had begun to evolve into the sensation novel, *Jezebel's Daughter*. Ironically, this followed the advice of the damning review in *The Daily Telegraph* which suggested that the play would have been better written 'as a series of Chapters.'⁵⁸

Jezebel's Daughter was first syndicated in *The Bolton Weekly Journal* and several other provincial newspapers owned by William Tillotson. On 11 July 1878 Collins signed a contract for the novel which appeared from 13 September 1879 to 31 January 1880.⁵⁹ He received £500 for the serialisation which was paid in three instalments.⁶⁰

From 1875, Collins's publishers for book editions were Chatto & Windus. He needed to write *Jezebel's Daughter* fairly rapidly to maintain the demanding schedule required by Tillotson's newspapers. On 8 January 1880 he wrote to Andrew Chattto:

I don't know whether "I am getting along too fast for you" – but I report myself to you, in the first place, as having a new story almost ready for book publication. It has only appeared periodically in a dozen subscribing country newspapers – and it is not a sequel to "The Fallen Leaves."⁶¹

Jezebel's Daughter was subsequently published in book form in three volumes in March 1880.⁶² It ran to approximately 100,000 words for which Collins received payment in three instalments of £200.⁶³ In the USA the novel was also published in 1880 in the *Seaside Library*.⁶⁴

The novel is notable for the way it handles the issues of insanity and female emancipation. Through *Jezebel's Daughter*, Collins further explored the humane treatment of the mentally ill, and through the transformation of his sympathetically portrayed Jewish merchant (Rodenberg) into a female character (Mrs Wagner), who is effective both in business and as a philanthropist, he propounded views on equality, womens' employment and social responsibility. The plot also revolves around the use of poisons and includes forensic details applicable to detective fiction.⁶⁵

Plot Summary of *Jezebel's Daughter*

In 1828, the German firm of Wagner, Keller and Engelman has offices in London and Frankfort. After the death of her husband, the progressive Mrs Wagner becomes senior partner, running the London office where she plans to employ women clerks. To prove that the mentally ill can be cured by kindness, she removes Jack Straw, incarcerated in Bedlam, and takes him into her household.

In Frankfort, Fritz Keller, son of one of the other partners, has fallen in love

with Minna Fontaine, daughter of a sinister widow whose husband made a life-time study of poisons. Keller's father disapproves of Mrs Fontaine, who is constantly in debt, and refuses to allow Fritz and Minna to marry. Fritz is sent to London and a young Englishman, David Glenney, who narrates the story, goes to Frankfort in his place. Here he meets Minna and her mother and innocently introduces them to the third partner, Engelman. Mrs Fontaine, determined to further her daughter's marriage, uses Engelman, who falls in love with her, to trick her way into Keller's house.

Mrs Fontaine possesses a chest of poisons and their antidotes, which her late husband intended to be destroyed on his death. She doses Keller with a slow-acting poison and to win his goodwill revives him with the antidote. She becomes his nurse and then his housekeeper, having assured him, falsely, that she is no longer in debt. Keller withdraws his objections to the marriage of Fritz and Minna.

Mrs Wagner comes to Frankfort on business accompanied by Jack Straw, who is much improved by her kindness and devoted to her. He is immediately recognised by Mrs Fontaine as 'Hans Grimm', mentally damaged by being accidentally poisoned in her husband's laboratory years before.

Fritz returns to marry Minna. Mrs Fontaine has a debt to pay which falls due the day after the wedding, but when the ceremony has to be postponed she steals the key to Mrs Wagner's desk from Jack Straw and embezzles the money she needs from the firm's funds. Mrs Wagner discovers the theft and, unable to pay back the money, Mrs Fontaine poisons her with a fast-acting, undetectable poison. Jack Straw, apparently without success, tries to revive his benefactress with the same antidote that had saved Keller but her body is taken to the Deadhouse, where the devoted Jack refuses to leave her. In a lurid scene, Mrs Fontaine, who has secretly followed them, is accidentally poisoned by her own mixtures while Mrs Wagner recovers from a deathlike coma, ringing an alarm bell which alerts the watchman.

Mrs Fontaine dies, leaving a self-incriminating diary. Fritz and Minna marry, while Jack remains in the care of Mrs Wagner.

Comparison of the chief characters of *The Red Vial* and *Jezebel's Daughter*

The Red Vial

Isaac Rodenberg. A Jewish merchant
 Max Keller. His partner
 Karl. Keller's Son.
 Hans Grimm. Rodenberg's Servant.
 Doctor Hetzel. A Physician.
 Joseph. A Servant.
 Schwartz. First Watchman of the Dead-House.

Jezebel's Daughter

David Glenney. Narrator
 Mrs Wagner
 Max Keller
 Fritz Keller
 Jack Straw
 Doctor Dormann
 Joseph
 Schwartz

Duntzer. Second Watchman.

Widow Bergmann. Rodenberg's Housekeeper.

Minna. Daughter.

Duntzer

Madame Fontaine

Minna

Manuscript versions of *The Red Vial*

There are two known, extant manuscripts of *The Red Vial*, one in the British Library, London (BL) and one in the Harry Ransom Center, University of Austin, Texas (Texas). The earliest manuscript of *The Red Vial* is the version contained in the Lord Chamberlain's Plays (LCP) Collection at the British Library, a holograph written and signed in Wilkie Collins's hand. All theatres presenting new scripts were required to send copies of their plays to the Lord Chamberlain's office for licensing in advance of the play's opening. The manuscript for *The Red Vial* was received by the Lord Chamberlain on the 30 September with the license returned on 2 October. These dates are significant in tracing the drama's production history and the chronology of the manuscripts. Most plays contained in the LCP collection were sent for licensing at the last minute, once the script had been rehearsed and finalised – usually about a week before the play's opening; *The Red Vial* was sent to the licenser almost two weeks in advance of its opening, indicating that the Olympic Theatre was preparing further in advance for the production, perhaps providing scripts to actors earlier and perhaps allowing more rehearsal time for Collins's drama than was usual. The Texas manuscript shows extensive alterations to Act III. It can be ascertained from these changes that the Texas manuscript was made *after* the BL manuscript for two reasons. Collins's description of the simple bell mechanism attached to Rodenberg's corpse in the Dead-House, is, in the Texas manuscript, substituted for a large clockface, attached to a bell, with visibly moving hands that rotate before sounding the alarm. There is no indication in the text as to why this change was made but reviews for the opening night indicate that the change was already in place when the drama opened at the Olympic. It is probable that during the rehearsal period it was decided that the simple mechanism with its rope attached to a bell might not be adequately seen by the audience in the gloomy lighting conditions of the Dead-House scene and that a far more visible mechanism replaced it to ensure that the audience could see the all-important indication that the corpse was moving behind the cell door. Rather than just the bell beginning to move, as indicated by Collins's initial stage directions in the BL manuscript, the audience is given prior warning by seeing the dial moving on the clockface *before* the bell is sounded. This change must have contributed to an even greater build-up of suspense in the scene. The second point that dates the Texas manuscript as the later one, is that Collins has marked up substantial cuts on the manuscript. These cuts clearly respond to the many reviews that called for the Dead-House scene to be moderated and to suggestions that the play was too long. The cuts were added *after* the opening night and were certainly in place a week later,

when a second round of reviews was published, noting that the play had been improved through ‘judicious’ cuts. Thus, the BL copy is clearly a copy of the initial, finished draft and the Texas copy the revision, used at the Olympic, both before and after the cuts were made by Collins. The editors have been unable to trace a source or any musical score for ‘The Mad Watchman’s Song’ in Act III, so it can be assumed that the words were written by Collins and set to music by John Barnard, the Olympic’s composer. There is no surviving score or parts for any of the other accompanying music to *The Red Vial*.

After Collins’s death a great number of his manuscripts were auctioned in 1891. A cutting from the auction catalogue accompanies the Texas manuscript, stating that it is partly in the hand of an amanuensis (clearly identifiable in parts of the manuscript). There is also a note attached to the manuscript in Collins’s hand: ‘M.S. copy of “The Red Vial” (on which was afterwards founded my novel, “Jezebel’s Daughter”. ‘The Red Vial’ was first represented at the Olympic Theatre London 11th October 1858 – (and damned! Mrs Stirling and Addison both admirable. Poor little Robson did his best – “the rest is silence”’. Collins ironically applies Hamlet’s final words to Robson, implying that *he* had ‘died’ – i.e. flopped or failed – in *The Red Vial*.

As far as is known, there has been no published version of the text of *The Red Vial* and, since the performances at the Olympic in 1858, there has been no production of the play until a recent revival by the Department of Drama and Theatre Arts, University of Birmingham. This ran from 10-12 February 2011 and was directed by Caroline Radcliffe. Unlike other modern adaptations of Collins’s works, the production returned to Collins’s original dramatic script.

Editorial practice

The editors’ primary aim is to present an accurate and easily readable acting copy of the Texas manuscript. Having established that the Texas version of *The Red Vial* was the one acted at the Olympic, it has been decided to publish its text in its entirety rather than the earlier, BL version. The Texas manuscript is written partly in Collins’s hand and partly in another hand, to which Collins has added corrections, annotations and deletions. The manuscript demonstrates and attests to the various changes that the production went through. Major differences in the two manuscripts occur only in the third act with smaller differences occurring elsewhere. To enable the reader to compare the original BL version with the later, Texas version, the editors have noted all significant variants as endnotes. Any intentional deletions by Collins have been retained unless they represent a significant change to the meaning of the text; in both manuscripts, all deletions are heavily crossed out in Collins’s pen so that words and phrases are intentionally rendered illegible. Collins’s initial cuts, undoubtedly implemented in rehearsal, are indicated by bold, square brackets []. Later cuts, in response to the play’s reception, are indicated in the Texas manuscript by pencil brackets or ‘squiggly’ lines running down the side of the page, alongside the text;

the editors have indicated these either with square brackets within the text or in the endnotes. It should be stated, however, that cuts in a play script can rarely be regarded as definitive or indicative of the final, performed version, which may well have continued to change throughout its run.

In both manuscripts, Collins consistently misplaces the apostrophe in all short form contractions (e.g. is'nt); these have been standardised throughout. Inconsistencies with upper and lower case letters and spellings frequently appear in the manuscript and have all been retained except in the uses of 'Sir' and 'sir', which have been emended to the lower case, 'sir'. Collins uses upper and lower case, hyphenated and non-hyphenated forms of 'Dead-House' or 'Dead House'; these have been standardised to his most frequently used form, 'Dead-House'.

All underlinings in the manuscript have been italicised with no distinction made between single or double underlinings with characters and stage directions italicised in accordance with Collins's own, privately printed editions of some his other plays.

There are unidentified pencil annotations on some of the manuscript pages that appear to be names or perhaps instructions for stagehands; they are unclear and inconsistent and are therefore omitted.

Notes

- 1 There is an online edition of the British Library manuscript, *The Red Vial* (BLRedVial), ed. Richard Pearson, www.wilkiecollinsplays.net (date accessed: 22.07.16)
- 2 See *The Lighthouse*, Wilkie Collins, eds. Andrew Gasson and Caroline Radcliffe, Francis Boutle, 2013, for the first printed edition and introduction to the play.
- 3 Performed at Tavistock House 6, 8, 12 and 14 January; Gallery of Illustration 4, 11, 18, 25 July; Manchester Free Trade Hall, 21, 22, 24 August. Ellen Ternan (later to become Dickens's mistress), her sister, Maria and mother Frances were the professional actresses appointed for the Manchester production.
- 4 *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins, Collected Letters, 1831-1864*, eds. William Baker, Andrew Gasson, Graham Law, Paul Lewis, Pickering and Chatto, London, 2005, 5 October 1857, vol. 1, p.151.
- 5 Published in *Household Words*, 3-31 October, and *Harper's Weekly*, 31 October-28 November 1857. Collected in book form in 1890.
- 6 *The Public Face*, 13 April 1858, vol. 1, p.158.
- 7 *Ladies Beware! Or, Our Ultimatum*, was first performed at the Princess's Theatre, Oxford Street, 15 January, 1847, no author given.
- 8 *The Players: The Abstract and Brief Chronicles of The Times*, No. 1, February 25, 1860, p. 65; cited in David Rinear, "'To Submit and Patiently to Wait": The Career of Mrs. Stirling', *Theatre Survey*, Volume 35, Issue 2, November 1994, pp. 57-75, p. 69.
- 9 *The Times*, 10 October, 1849, p. 3, review for *The Reigning Favourite*, by John Oxenford at The New Strand Theatre (opened October 9, 1849), an adaptation of Scribe and Legouvé's *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, (opened Théâtre-Français, April 14, 1849).
- 10 *The Bancrofts, Recollections of Sixty Years*, Marie Bancroft and Squire Bancroft, John Murray, London, 1909, p. 30.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 12 *The Standard*, October 13, 1858, p.4, Issue no. 10659.
- 13 See Francesco Berger *Reminiscences, Impressions, & Anecdotes*, Sampson Low & Co., London, 1913.
- 14 *The Public Face*, 10 August 1858, vol. 1, p.166.
- 15 'Death of Mr. John Barnard', *The Era*, 23 March 1895, p. 8.
- 16 For a selection of reviews see pp.....
- 17 Henry Morley, *The Journal of a London Playgoer, from 1851-1866*, Routledge, London, 1866, p. 223.
- 18 'The play, such as it is, is the vehicle of some magnificent acting on the part of Mrs. Stirling. She makes quite a Lady Macbeth character of the physician's widow ...', *Illustrated London News*, October 16, 1858, issue no.

- 941, p. 356.
- 19 *The Morning Chronicle*, October 12, 1858, p. 4.
 - 20 *The Stage Life of Mrs Stirling, with some sketches of the nineteenth century theatre*, Percy Allen, E.P. Dutton, New York, 1922, p.165.
 - 21 *The Morning Chronicle*, *ibid*.
 - 22 *Plays and Players: the new quarterly review and digest of current literature, British, American, French, and German*, November 1858, vol. 7, no. 28, p. 311.
 - 23 *The Morning Post*, October 12, 1858, Issue 26463, p.4.
 - 24 *Plays and Players*, *ibid*.
 - 25 *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 24 October, 1858, p.8
 - 26 *Plays and Players*, *ibid*.
 - 27 *The Critic*, 16 October, 1858, p. 693.
 - 28 See Caroline Radcliffe, "Behind Closed Doors: The Theatrical Uncanny and the Panoptical Viewer in the Dramas of Wilkie Collins", *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 2015, 42: pp. 80-98, May 2015; 42 (1) for a detailed analysis of the negative reception of Act III of *The Red Vial*.
 - 29 *New Literary Gazette*, 16 October, 1858, p. 508.
 - 30 *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, *ibid*.
 - 31 *Illustrated London News*, 23 October, 1858, p. 380.
 - 32 Tom Taylor, *To Oblige Benson, comedietta in one act*, first performed Olympic Theatre, 6 March, 1854, adapted from *Un Service à Blanchard* by Eugene Moreau and Henry Delacour, *To Oblige Benson and Ladies Beware* were already in the Olympic's repertoire and could therefore be added at the last minute.
 - 33 *The Life and Reminiscences of E. L. Blanchard* edited by Clement Scott and Cecil Howard, Hutchinson, London 1891, Vol 1, p.205: '[1858] Oct. 13th. At night to Olympic; to see Wilkie Collins's extraordinary drama of *Red Vial*: acting of Mrs. Stirling wonderfully fine.' Scott and Howard added the footnote: 'This was a very strong melodrama. In it Mrs. Stirling played the part of the Widow Bergmann; Miss Marston, Minna; Walter Gordon, Karl; and Robson was great as a half-witted fellow, Hans Grimm'.
 - 34 Wigan managed the Olympic from 1853-1857. For an overview of Wigan's career see David Rinear, "Alfred Wigan: Victorian Realist", *Theatre Survey*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1972, pp. 44-59.
 - 35 First name unknown. Possibly Edward Phillips Addison, often referred to as 'Old Addison'.
 - 36 Percy Allen, *The Stage Life of Mrs Stirling with some sketches of the nineteenth-century theatre*, E. P. Dutton, (n.d.1922?), p. 12.
 - 37 Letter to W.S. Emden, *The Public Face*, 24 February 1859, vol. 1, p.174.
 - 38 The letter suggests that Collins had written a draft of the drama but the manuscript remains lost.
 - 39 Letter to Unknown Recipient (actually Ernouf), *The Letters of Wilkie Collins*, eds. William Baker and William M. Clarke, Macmillan, 1999, volume 1:1838-1865, 21 March, 1862, p. 208.
 - 40 *The Stage Life of Mrs Stirling*, p.165.
 - 41 *The Collected Letters of Wilkie Collins: Addenda & Corrigenda* (3), Baker, W., Gasson, A., Law, G., & Lewis, P, 2007, Wilkie Collins Society, pp. 38-39.
 - 42 Letter to J. Sterling Coyne, *The Public Face*, 6 May 1859, vol. 1, p.177.
 - 43 Letter to J. Sterling Coyne, *The Public Face*, 18 February 1860, vol. 1, p.190.
 - 44 Letter to Charles Reade, *The Public Face*, 4 June 1861, vol. 1, p. 235-6.
 - 45 Letter to Charles A. Calvert, *The Public Face*, 17 December 1862, vol. 1, p. 284.
 - 46 *Passages from Modern English Poets Illustrated by the Junior Etching Club*, Day & Son, London, 1861, p.41. A further reproduction was included in the Christmas number of *The Graphic*, 1878, p. 14.
 - 47 'Dialogues with Dramatists', Mr. Wilkie Collins., *Judy; or the London Serio-Comic Journal*, 1 December, 1875, p.61.
 - 48 *Jezebel's Daughter* is set in 1828.
 - 49 *The Life of Wilkie Collins*, Nuel Pharr Davis, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1956, pp. 149-150.
 - 50 Alberto Caccia was Collins's Italian translator and agent. The Dedication to Caccia occurs in all of the English editions from the first 1880 three volume edition, through to the cheap editions.
 - 51 Reflecting a contemporary interest in the German Romantic tradition, books such as *The Rural and Domestic Life of Germany*, William Howlitt, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, London, 1842, p. 348, or the journal, *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction*, eds. Reuben Percy, John Timbs, John Limbird, London, 1836, Vol. XXVII, p. 348, give accounts of the rope and bell system employed in the German deathhouses. For a recent, detailed account of the practice see Jan Bondeson, *Buried Alive*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York and London, 2001; Bondeson includes *Jezebel's Daughter* in a discussion of earlier and later literature on the themes of premature burial and reanimation.
 - 52 Wilkie Collins, *Jezebel's Daughter*, ed. Jason David Hall, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, p. 4.
 - 53 'The terrible career of Anna Maria Zwanziger, sentenced to death at Bamberg in the year 1811, will be found related in Lady Gordon Duff's translation of Feuerbach's "Criminal Trials."' *Jezebel's Daughter*, p. 77; the publication referred to is: Lady Duff Gordon, *Narratives of Remarkable Criminal Trials, translated from the*

- German of Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach*, John Murray, London, 1846, pp. 142-179.
- 54 *Household Words*, 4 June 1853, pp. 313-317 cited in *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins*, Catherine Peters, Secker & Warburg, London, 1991, p.127.
- 55 'In the first place she had discovered, while arranging her late husband's library, a book which had evidently suggested ideas of reformation in the treatment of the insane...' *Jezebel's Daughter*, p. 84; Collins footnote reads: '(1) Tuke's Description of the Retreat near York is reviewed by Sydney Smith in a number of the "Edinburgh Review," for 1814.' The publication referred to is: Samuel Tuke, *Description of The Retreat, an Institution near York, for insane persons of the Society of Friends, containing an account of its origin and progress, the modes of treatment, and a statement of cases*, London, 1813.
- 56 Pearson draws attention to the name changes in his online edition of the BL manuscript but does not connect them to the Graves. The deleted name for 'Widow B' appears to be 'Widow F' as in Fontaine in *Jezebel's Daughter*; the full name, Fontaine, certainly appears on the Texas manuscript but it is impossible to detect whether this was added at a later date by Collins whilst he was adapting the play into the novel. Collins had perhaps initially intended to name the character Madame Fontaine but changed it to the German name, Bergmann.
- 57 Letter to Harriet Collins, 8 January 1867, *The Public Face*, Vol. II, p. 60.
- 58 *Wilkie Collins: A Life of Sensation*, Andrew Lycett, Hutchinson, London, 2013, p. 181.
- 59 *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press*, Graham Law, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2000, p. 78.
- 60 *Serializing Fiction*, Law, p. 238.
- 61 Letter to Andrew Chatto, 8 January 1880, *The Public Face*, Vol. III, p. 265.
- 62 *Excursions in Victorian Bibliography*, Michael Sadleir, Chaundy & Cox, London 1922, p. 147.
- 63 Letter to Chatto & Windus, 20 February 1880, *The Public Face*, Vol. III, p. 269.
- 64 *The Seaside Library*, Vol. 34, no. 696.
- 65 See David Jason Hall's introduction to *Jezebel's Daughter* (2015) for a more complete analysis.

The Red Vial

ENTERED AT STATIONERS HALL.

ROYAL

Olympic Theatre

WYCH STREET,



STRAND.

LESSEES AND MANAGERS,

MR. F. ROBSON and MR. W. S. EMDEN.
Kennington Park. Tavistock Street, Bedford Square.

Monday, Nov. 8th, & during the Week,

Will be performed (25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, and 30th Times), an Entirely Original
Drama, in Three Acts, entitled

THE RED VIAL

WRITTEN FOR THIS THEATRE BY

WILKIE COLLINS.

THE NEW SCENERY BY MR. J. GRAY and MR. CRAVEN,
THE MUSIC ARRANGED BY MR. BARNARD.

THE DRESSES AND APPOINTMENTS UNDER THE DIRECTION OF
MR. S. MAY AND MRS. CURL.

Isaac Rodenberg, { (a Jewish Merchant of } Mr. ADDISON
Frankfort)

Max Keller, (his Partner) Mr. F. VINING

Karl, (Keller's Son) Mr. W. GORDON

Hans Grimm, (Rodenberg's Servant) Mr. F. ROBSON

Joseph, (a Servant) Mr. FRANKS

Schwartz, (First Watchman of the Dead House) Mr. G. COOKE

Duntzer, (Second Watchman) Mr. H. COOPER

The Surgeon of the Dead House, — Mr. J. HOWARD

Assistant Watchman, Messrs. JAMES & ADAMS

Widow Bergmann, (Rodenberg's Housekeeper) Mrs. STIRLING

Ninna, (her Daughter) Miss MARSTON

Act 1st.—THE FOURTH OF JUNE!

Act 2nd.—THE PHYSICIAN'S SECRETS !!

ACT 3RD.—THE ALARM CLOCK !!!

Programme, *The Red Vial*. Courtesy of the New York Public Library

The Red Vial

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS.

BY

WILKIE COLLINS.

=

(REPRESENTED, FOR THE FIRST TIME, AT THE ROYAL
OLYMPIC THEATRE, OCTOBER 11 1858.)

Persons of the Drama. Acted By.1

ISAAC RODENBERG (A Jewish merchant of Frankfort Mr Addison.

MAX KELLER (His Partner.) Mr F. Vining.

KARL (Keller's Son). Mr W. Gordon.

HANS GRIMM (Rodenberg's servant). Mr F. Robson.

DOCTOR HETZEL (A Physician). Mr White.

JOSEPH (A Servant). Mr Franks.

SCHWARTZ (First Watchman of the Dead-House Mr G. Cooke.

DUNTZER (Second Watchman) Mr H. Cooper.

The Surgeon of the Dead-House, And Two Assistants.

WIDOW BERGMANN (Rodenberg's Housekeeper) Mrs Stirling.

MINNA (Her Daughter). Miss Marston.

The Scene is at Frankfort-on-the-Main.

The Period is the beginning of the present Century.

=

[**Note.** The Author of this Drama gives notice that he reserves to himself all rights of translation and of reproduction]

ACT I²

THE FOURTH OF JUNE.

SCENE. An apartment in the house of Isaac Rodenberg. A door in the Flat. A side door on the actor's right. Widow Bergmann and Max Keller discovered seated.

KELLER. Excuse me, Mrs Bergmann, if I bring the conversation back to the point from which it started. The object of our present interview is to discuss the question of the marriage of my son and your daughter. I have already reminded you that I am the travelling partner in the house of Rodenberg and Keller; that I am perpetually absent, in consequence, from my home in Frankfort; and that –

WIDOW B. And that you, therefore, know but little of my daughter and myself. So far, we are quite agreed, Mr. Keller.

KELLER. I leave for Vienna tomorrow, and, if our children are to be married, we must decide the question for them today. You have spoken of your daughter in terms of admiration which I am sure are deserved. Permit me now to say a word for my son. Karl has good conduct and good character to recommend him; and he will inherit the whole of my fortune. If I looked at his attachment from a worldly point of view, I might say that he has shown no great ambition in making his choice of a wife.

WIDOW B.³ Misfortune has obliged me, sir, to accept the situation of Mr. Rodenberg's housekeeper; but I am the widow of a physician. Although my husband died young and died poor, his discoveries in chemical science have conferred an honorable celebrity on the name I bear.

KELLER. I merely spoke, madam, of the view I *might* take of my son's attachment.⁴ In my opinion, rank is not essential to happiness. Riches my own son has got already. Let him marry for the best of all reasons – for love. Let his wife be a virtuous girl, born of honest parents – and I, his father, ask no more.

WIDOW B. Ah, Mr. Keller! if other parents were as free as you are from all taint of pride –

KELLER. Stay, Mrs. Bergmann: I have my pride. For two centuries past, my family has lived in this city of Frankfort, and no breath of dishonour has tainted our pure reputation in all that time. We have been rich, and have never turned our wealth to a base purpose. We have been poor, and have resisted the temptation to borrow, even when the hands of our dearest friends offered the loan. My ancestors were once among the humblest people in the city; but their bitterest enemies could never point at any one of them as a debtor. It was their opinion – as it is mine – that a man who incurs a debt contracts an engagement of honour. If he breaks it, no matter on what pretence, he dis-

graces himself. Those were the old-fashioned principles of traders in the bygone time;⁵ and I have done my best to make them my son's principles after me. If I come here now, to consent to Karl's marriage, it is because I have enquired in Frankfort, and have found that the reputation of his intended wife's family is unblemished. I ask no more, after that. In our commercial phrase, I offer you my hand on the bargain. (*Rises*)

WIDOW B. (*Rising and taking his hand*) You have done me justice, sir. In my own name and my daughter's, I thank you. (*Aside, after dropping Keller's hand*). Well over! Well over!

KELLER. We must mark this third day of December with a special line in the Calendar, Mrs. Bergmann. The great anxiety of our lives is now set at rest.

WIDOW B. One small anxiety still remains, sir. Shall we set that at rest also?

KELLER. Certainly. To what do you refer?

WIDOW B. To the day on which the marriage is to take place. You are going to leave us so soon, that I may not have another opportunity of hearing what your wishes are on that point.

KELLER. If my wishes followed my son's, I am afraid they would hardly give the young lady time to order her wedding-dress! I am no friend to long engagements; but I think I must make the period of Karl's courtship long enough to enable him to complete his studies at the University.

WIDOW B. And how long a period might that be?

KELLER. Rather more than five months. After that, my son and I are at your disposal and your daughter's.

WIDOW B. Then suppose we settle this weighty question at once. Shall we say this day six months – in other words, the third of June?

KELLER. With all my heart. And now that our negotiation is completed, I must ask leave to return to business of a less interesting nature.⁶ No! not a step nearer the door. No ceremony – we are almost relations now – no ceremony, I beg and pray.

(Exit, by the door in Flat.)

WIDOW B. Unfortunate people who can't pay their debts disgrace themselves, do they,⁷ Mr. Keller? What do *you* know of the struggles and temptations of poverty!

(Enter Minna, peeping through the door on the Right. She wears a walking cloak over her dress, and carries a garden hat in her hand.)

MINNA. Mama! Is he gone?

WIDOW B. (*Sadly*) Kiss me, my angel. Your happiness is secured; your life is provided for.

(*Enter Karl, peeping through the door in Flat.*)

KARL. Mrs. Bergmann! Is it all over!

WIDOW B. What in the world brings you here?

KARL. My father has gone straight to the counting-house. I was afraid to ask him, before clerks and strangers, the all-important question that I have come to ask *you*.

WIDOW B. And suppose I decline to reply, without first obtaining your father's leave?

KARL. (*Kissing Minna's hand.*)⁸ Then I shall look in Minna's face, and see the answer there!

MINNA. Oh, the vanity of men! He really believes that I cannot look happy now, except when I am thinking of *him*. (*To her mother.*) You look pale and harassed, dear. You have looked so for some time past.

WIDOW B. I have been anxious about you, Minna. But that is all over now. (*Puts her arm round Minna's waist.*)⁹ Are you jealous of me, Mr. Karl? You little think what a hard trial it is to give up my treasure, my own sweet darling, even to *you*!

MINNA. Remember, Mama, that we are not to part when I marry.

KARL. And remember that man never loved woman as I love *her*.

WIDOW B. Love her? Oh, what a difference between your love and mine! Have *you* given her little faltering feet their first lesson in treading the earth? Have *you* knelt by her pillow, night after night, to feast your eyes on her lovely sleeping face? Have *you* taught her lips to form their first words and to give their first kiss? Have *you* sat by her sick-bed, and felt the mortal agony of wrestling for her with *Death*. Have *you* watched the long brightening of her beauty from its dawning point, and the tender growth of her mind from its first impressions of the world about her? *Your* love? Oh, friend, friend! there is but one earthly love that is tainted by no thought of self¹⁰ – the love I give to this child – the love your own mother gives to *you*!

MINNA. I know it – we both know it. Don't let us have tears in our eyes on this happy day. Put on your bonnet and cloak, and come out into the garden. The fine, frosty air will do you so much good.

KARL. Yes, pray come out. A little brisk exercise, with my arm to lean on –

WIDOW B. No, my dears;¹¹ not now. I am expecting a letter by the post – a letter which I am anxious to receive. (*Sits herself*¹² *with her back to the door in Flat.*

Karl and Minna talk aside.) Ten days since I wrote to them, and no answer yet! Oh me, no answer yet!

*(Enter Hans Grimm, with a letter in his hand. He is dressed in grey, and has a bunch of keys hanging round his waist. His complexion is of a dull, yellowish white; his hair is long and grey; his expression stolidly vacant. He advances stealthily to the back of Widow Bergmann's chair.)*¹³

HANS. *(Holding out the letter.)* For you.

WIDOW B. *(Starting, and snatching the letter from him.)*¹⁴ You hideous, crazy wretch! have I not told you over and over again to keep your ghastly face out of my room? Who sent you here with this letter?

HANS. My master.¹⁵

WIDOW B. *(Turning her back on him.)* Shall I read it here? No! better be alone, in case it agitates me. *(Rises.)* I am going to my own room, Minna. Don't wait for me, love, if you wish to walk in the garden.

(Exit by the side door.)

KARL. *(Pointing to Hans.)* Minna, can you make this mysterious little mortal speak? Is he always in that dead-alive condition?

MINNA. Always, except when you talk to him of his master, Mr. Rodenberg; and then he wakes into life and intelligence in an instant. The poor creature's hair was turned prematurely grey, and his reason was a little shaken, some years since, by a dreadful accident. He is quite harmless, and wonderfully careful in performing the small round of duties intrusted to him in this house.

KARL. But who is he?

MINNA. Suppose you ask him yourself? – Hans!

(Hans comes forward.)

KARL. *(Laughing.)* Who are you, Hans?

HANS. I don't know.

KARL. But you must have had a father and mother?

HANS. Not that I know of.

KARL. Where were you born?

HANS. In the gutter.

KARL. Where were you brought up?

HANS. In the madhouse.

MINNA. Who took you out of the madhouse, Hans?

HANS. (*Suddenly brightening up.*) My master!¹⁶ (*To Karl.*) Where do you think he found me? In a stone cell, with a chain to my leg and a litter of straw to lie on. Look at my hands. How do you think I used to keep them from tearing my own flesh, when I was mad? I plaited my straw – all day long I plaited my straw.¹⁷ Oh, how the biting cold eat into me all the winter day! how the frightful darkness wrapped itself around me all the winter night! Do you know, sir, what is the greatest blessing in the world? Daylight! – daylight!! – daylight!!

MINNA. (*To Karl.*) You see he can talk fast enough, now.¹⁸ (*To Hans.*) I have been telling this gentleman how Mr. Rodenberg's charitable heart took him one day to the public madhouse, to see what he could do for the poor people who were shut up there. That was the first time you and your master met, was it not?

HANS. I woke up and saw the heavenly morning light streaming through my open door, and my master¹⁹ standing watching me in the midst of it. "Is this the man?" he said to the doctor behind him. And the doctor answered, "That is the man – treacherous and cunning." My master smiled and came close to me, and took from my side a little child's hat – the last thing that I had plaited out of my straw. "You made this?" he said. His was the first voice that had ever spoken kindly to me in all my life: my poor head burnt, and I put up my cold hands to cool it. "I'll find you some better way of cooling it than that," he said, and patted my shoulder gently, and went back to the Doctor with my little hat held tenderly in his hand. (*Drying his eyes hurriedly.*)²⁰ I never cry now – I'm so happy. But I burst out crying, then. Why do you both look at me in that way? (*Sobbing and stamping his foot.*)²¹ I'm not crying! I tell you, I never cry now!

MINNA. (*To Karl.*) Humour him. (*To Hans.*) No, no – no crying now!²²

HANS. (*Changing to a tone of triumph.*)²³ Would you believe that I can remember every little word my master said, every little thing my master did, on the day when I first saw him? I can! He held out my hat before the doctor. "Look," he said, "there is not a false turn anywhere in all this intricate plaiting. That poor creature is sane enough to fix his attention to this subtle work. Do you give him up as incurable, when he can do that?" – See how I can remember! not a word wrong, and more to come directly. – The condition of this place is a disgrace to humanity," says my master. "If these poor wretches are to be cured at all, they are to be cured by kindness." (*Changing to a tone of contempt.*) The doctor said something – I don't remember what. I have a fine memory of my own, but I'm not going to trouble it to remember what the doctor said. (*Snapping his fingers.*) Ha! ha! the Doctor! Laugh at the doctor, miss – a poor half-witted creature – and short, too – not above six inches

taller than me!

MINNA. Oh, Hans, what an absurd doctor!²⁴

HANS. (*Seriously.*) Hush! I've not done with what my master said yet. "Proofs", that was his next word – "you want proofs, before you try the experiment of kindness against the experiment of chains? I will give you those proofs., you have told me this man has not a relation or a friend in the world to lay claim to him. He has a friend – I lay claim to him." (*To Karl.*), I know what you would have done, in my place, when you heard that! You would have jumped to your feet, and screamed till the place rang again! I fastened both my hands on my chain, and set my teeth together, and kept quiet. My master comes to me again. "I have been asking questions about you, my poor fellow," he says.²⁵ "Is it true that you have been all your life an outcast?" I held on by the chain, and said, Yes. "Is it true that you were once employed by a chemist of this town, to sweep out the shop and put up the shutters?" I held on by the chain, and said, Yes. "Is it true that you once put some powder on your tongue, to taste it, when your master was out of the way?" I took a double turn of the chain, and said, Yes. "Is it true that the powder was poison, and that the doctors dragged you out of the jaws of *Death*, with your hair turned grey, and all your colour gone, and your poor wits a little crazed?" I took a treble turn of the chain, and said, Yes. "Drop that chain," he whispered gently, "and take hold of my hand instead." (*To Karl.*) Would you have dropped the chain, and been as quiet as a lamb the moment he touched you? I was. Would you have gone home with him afterwards, through all the noise and daylight of the town, and never once burst out raving with the glory of it? Would you have mastered reading and mastered writing, and waited teachably in this house till the blessed time came when he could first put trust in you? Look here! (*Snatches the keys from his girdle.*)²⁶ – I've been Keeper of the Keys for two years, and have never once mislaid them. Aha, young gentleman, you would hardly have thought that!

KARL. A great trust, Hans, the Keeper of the Keys – a great trust in your master's house!

MINNA. (*To Karl.*) You have no idea how fond he is of his master.

HANS. Fond of him! Don't you know what he said to me on the first day when I came here? I tried to fall on my knees at his feet, and he stopped me. "Friend," he said, "lift up your heart and stand equal with me. The debt of kindness is the one debt in this world which the poorest man alive may be rich enough in gratitude to repay." Fond of him! only fond of him, after such words as those! Other servants obey their masters like servants: I obey mine like one of his own limbs. – Hush! I can't say another word – I must go directly – my master wants me at this very moment.

KARL. I did not hear him call.

HANS. He *will* call.

MINNA. How can you possibly know that?

HANS. How do my master's hands know when he wants them to move? how do my master's feet know when he wants them to walk? (*Karl smiles.*) Ah! he laughs – the gentleman laughs! Will you listen, sir? If my master doesn't call me in less than a minute, *you* laugh at *me*. If he does, *I* laugh at *you*. Hush! – (*A pause. Rodenberg's voice is heard outside, calling "Hans!" Hans chuckles slyly at Karl, and shakes the keys.*) Ha! ha! ha! The keeper of the keys is not quite so crazy as he looks!

(*Exit, by the door in Flat.*)

KARL. The Keeper of the Keys is the hardest riddle to guess that ever I met with.

MINNA. (*Putting on her hat.*) Surely not! Touch the poor creature's heart, and you clear his head – awaken his gratitude, and you rouse his intelligence along with it. There is the clue to the riddle in three words. (*Taking Karl's arm.*) One turn in the garden, and then back again here to persuade my mother to join us.

(*Exeunt by the door in Flat.*)

(*Enter Widow Bergmann, by the side door, with a letter open in her hand.*)

WIDOW B. Refused! Refused, in the plainest, the coldest, the most pitiless terms! And these are the rich relations to whose mercy my husband left me on his death-bed! – Where am I to turn for help? Who am I to write to next?

(*Enter Rodenberg, hurriedly, by the door in Flat. He holds two books clasped to his bosom. His face and manner express violent agitation.*)

RODEN. Mrs. Bergmann!

WIDOW B. Good heavens, Mr. Rodenberg! what has happened?

RODEN. The worst of scandals, the vilest of treacheries. There are thieves in my house. I have been robbed!

WIDOW B. Robbed!

RODEN. (*Opening the books, on the table.*) Look here! judge for yourself. You see this book – the Cash Ledger. Look at that page, headed with the words, "Reserved Fund". You know what that means?

WIDOW B. I am afraid, sir, I am too ignorant of business –

RODEN. I'll explain it to you. "Reserved Fund" means the surplus money belonging to me and my partner, which is set aside to meet any unexpected calls on us. One of those calls came this morning. Without it, I might have discovered nothing for months to come. – Nearer! nearer! look here at the

entry for the last six months – notice the figures – Fifteen thousand dollars. (*Widow Bergmann trembles.*) Don't tremble – don't be nervous!

WIDOW B. How can I help it, sir, when I see you so violently agitated?

RODEN. (*Pointing to the book.*) Cash Ledger – *Reserved Fund* – Fifteen thousand dollars. Bear that in mind, and now look at this other book. This is my private account-book. (*Widow Bergmann starts back.*) – I tell you again, don't be nervous! – my private account-book that closes with a lock – my private account-book,²⁷ which I secretly keep as a check on the ledger. Here is the duplicate entry to correspond with the Cash book: “*Reserved Fund, Twenty thousand dollars.*” A difference of five thousand dollars between the two books!

WIDOW B. Are you sure there has been no mistake, sir!

RODEN. Absolutely sure. The entry in my account-book and the entry in the Cash-Ledger were both made, six months since, by the same hand, at the same time. The money has never been wanted before today. It has been kept locked up in an iron safe built into the wall. The key is always in my pocket. I have just come from the safe – the lock has not been tampered with. I have just reckoned up the money – it is *Fifteen* thousand dollars. Right by the ledger – wrong, five thousand dollars, by my account-book.

WIDOW B. Is the account-book always to be depended on, sir?

RODEN. Always. But there is another proof of the robbery besides that. Look back again at the Cash Ledger; look closely at the figures – 15,000. The paper under the three noughts is dull and rough, as it is on the rest of the page. The paper under the²⁸ two first figures – *Fifteen* – has a slight shine on it. The entry has been altered from twenty to fifteen; altered to correspond with the sum left in the safe after the robbery. But for my account-book, that lie in the ledger would have passed itself off on me as the truth.

WIDOW B. Do you suspect anybody, sir?

RODEN. Who can I suspect? All my clerks have served me faithfully for years.²⁹

WIDOW B. Who keeps the keys of the room where the safe is?

RODEN. (*Aside.*) Merciful Heaven! I never thought of that!

WIDOW B. Who keeps the keys of the room where the safe is?

RODEN. (*Sadly and unwillingly.*) Hans Grimm.

WIDOW B. Who wakes you in the morning? Who assists you in your room the last thing at night?

RODEN. (*In the same tone.*) Hans Grimm.

WIDOW B. (*Taking a chair.*) It is not my business,³⁰ Mr. Rodenberg, to point out

the plain conclusion to which my questions and your answers lead.

RODEN. (*Rousing himself.*) I can draw the conclusion for myself; and I will show you that I can act upon it. (*Aside.*) Oh, Hans, Hans, I would give twice five thousand dollars not to trace this robbery to you! (*To Widow Bergmann.*) I will tell him, in your presence, what suspicions fall upon him: you shall be witness of my impartiality. Hans! Hans!

(*Enter Hans Grimm.*)

Hans Grimm, I have been robbed, and suspicion falls on you!

HANS. On me! (*Looks about him in bewilderment.*) He suspects me! My master, who delivered me from my chains and my straw, believes that I have robbed him! (*A pause.*) Stop! stop! my head's dull. It's a joke. Why don't I laugh at it? – He doesn't laugh at it. Is he waiting for me. Oh, master, I can't laugh! There's something crying at my heart – I can't laugh! (*Looks earnestly at Rodenberg.*)³¹ Who accuses me? Not you? (*Affectionately.*) Oh, no, not you! (*Eyes Widow Bergmann attentively.*)³² Ha! you!!

WIDOW B. (*In terror.*) Help! help!³³

RODEN. No fear – I can control him. (*Points away to a distant part of the room.*) Hans! (*Hans draws back in the direction indicated, and crouches down against the wall.*)

(*Enter Joseph*)

RODEN. (*To Joseph.*) Now you are here, stay and keep near that man. I want you to take charge of him.

HANS. (*Starting up.*) Take charge of me! Am I back in my cell, and is this one of the dreams I used to have there? (*Shuddering.*)³⁴ The old creeping comes over me: the crawling cold is busy again with the roots of my hair. (*Loudly.*) I'm innocent! don't drive me mad again by saying I'm guilty! For shame! For shame!! for shame!!! (*Suddenly checking himself.*) Oh, hush! hush! I used to scream like that in the madhouse!

RODEN. Poor wretch! poor wretch!

WIDOW B. For Heaven's sake, sir, don't question him! Send him away immediately.

HANS. (*Overhearing her, and catching at Joseph's arm.*) Hold me, Joseph! The devil that tortured me in my straw has got here at last, and found me out. Mark that woman – mark her serpent's eyes – listen to her serpent's tongue. Hold me, Joseph, or I shall fly at her like a cat! (*Opening and shutting his fingers in the air.*) Look at my ten claws! Look how they long to be inches deep in her throat!

WIDOW B. Why do you keep him here, sir? The wretch horrifies me.³⁵

RODEN. He shall go: it is useless to prolong this. (*To Joseph.*) Take him into the next room, and wait there till I come to you.

HANS. (*Melting into tears.*) Yes! take me away. Do as he tells you, Joseph. Don't lose the best master that ever lived, as I have lost him. – Give me one last merciful look, sir, to take away with me! (*To Joseph.*) Does he turn aside his head? I can't see. Oh, man, man, do you know how the heart-ache scalds when it gets into the eyes? – Will Joseph help you now, sir, when you go to bed and when you get up, instead of me? May I tell him what to do? – No answer! not a word of farewell! Look into your own kind heart, master, and ask it if I have been ungrateful – ask it if poor crazy Hans is vile enough to rob you! – Give me your hand, Joseph: I'm a poor forlorn wretch, as helpless as any child – give me your hand, friend, and lead me away.

(*Joseph leads him out.*)

RODEN. (*Sinking back into a chair.*) Oh, Hans, Hans, my heart is heavy for you!

WIDOW B. (*Hurrying to him.*) You are ill. you are faint, sir! (*Rodenberg lays his hand on her arm to support himself.*) Let me loosen your cravat; let me get you something from my room. (*Rodenberg still mechanically holds her arm.*)

(*Enter Minna, in her walking dress.*)

MINNA. Mama, you *must* come out, you *must* enjoy the fresh, bracing air. What is the matter?

WIDOW B. Mr. Rodenberg is ill; run to my room, and bring the bottle of salts from my dressing-case.

(*Minna hurries out by the door on the Right, and reappears immediately with a small bottle in her hand.*)

MINNA. Try this, sir – pray try this.

(*Rodenberg takes the bottle, removes the stopper, smells at it, and suddenly starts in his chair.*)

RODEN. What's this?

WIDOW B. Has she made a mistake? (*To Minna.*) Have you brought the wrong bottle? (*Tries to take the bottle from Rodenberg; he prevents her.*)

MINNA. Perhaps I have, Mama. I was in such a hurry, I never stopped to look. (*Turns to go back to the room.*)

RODEN. (*Stopping her.*) No, no, no need to go back. (*Looks intently at the bottle.*) Return to the garden, my dear: I wish to be alone with your mother for a little while. (*Minna goes out.*) There is a label on this bottle, madam – a label containing directions. I will read them to you.

WIDOW B. (*Aside.*) The wrong bottle! The wrong bottle!

RODEN. (*Reading.*) "Pass the composition three times over the writing to be removed, then dry up the moisture with blotting paper. The ink-marks will disappear, and the paper will show nothing but a slight shine on the surface." There (*pointing to the table.*) is my ledger, with that slight shine on one of its pages! I ask no questions, I hold no further communication with *you*. The money that has been stolen is my partner's as well as mine. Let Mr. Keller discover the guilty hands that have taken it. (*Going.*)

WIDOW B. Stop, sir! (*Falls on her knees.*) I confess everything: those guilty hands are mine! In the name of pity, in the name of justice, hear me – for my daughter's sake hear me – my daughter whose life and happiness are at your mercy!

RODEN. (*Starting.*) At my mercy!

WIDOW B. Listen! Listen! *I* took the key of the safe from your pocket, when you lay ill and helpless some months since. *I* took the key of the room from your faithful servant's pillow while he was asleep. – Yonder, in the garden, happy and loving and beautiful – yonder is the innocent cause of the crime that I have committed!

RODEN. Your daughter!

WIDOW B. (*Starting up.*) My daughter, for whom I would die a thousand deaths! My daughter, for whom I would commit a thousand crimes! My daughter, who is blood of my blood, and soul of my soul! Do you think I would have wronged you for my own advantage? Oh, I am wicked, but not so vile as that! It is for *her* that I have sinned. The happiness of her whole life was within my reach, if I stood on your money-bags to grasp at it. The strength of my wickedness and the strength of my love helped me together – and I stood on them!

RODEN. Miserable woman!

WIDOW B. No! not miserable. Guilty, disgraced, ruined; but not miserable while my eyes can question Minna's face, and see a smile on it for answer! Bear with me for a moment yet, and I will tell you all. When I first entered your service, you asked me if my poverty had led me into debt – I named a sum – and your generosity paid it.

RODEN. I understand. You deceived me then as you have deceived me now.

WIDOW B. I might have asked too much, even of *your* charity, if I had confessed the truth. I knew the wages your bounty gave, would pay the debts I had kept secret, if Time was allowed me. Time was promised, faithfully, solemnly promised. Four months since, when you lay ill, the wretches who had me in their power threatened me with a prison unless their demands were paid at two days' notice. When that threat came, you were powerless to help me.

When that threat came, my child's face lay hid on my bosom, and my child's voice was whispering to my heart the confession of her first love. You know the object of that love; you know the future husband of her choice; you know what Mr Keller would have said if Minna's mother had been dragged to prison. Pause, pause in Heaven's name, before you ruin my child for my fault! I ask you to give me time to restore the money, and I implore you to be mercifully silent until the atonement is made. I have written twice to my husband's father to help me. This very day I have received an answer – a cold, cruel answer. But I will write again – I will even confess the shameful truth, if nothing else will plead for me. (*Rodenberg turns away.*) You turn away! Go out into the garden; look at my Minna; see her the happiest creature that walks the earth, with the golden future of her married life just opening before her – see that; and then say the word to Mr Keller which blasts all that happiness and darkens all that future, if you can!

RODEN. If I can! You have forfeited all claim on my mercy; but your daughter, your unfortunate daughter –

WIDOW B. Bless you for your kind looks, your kind tones, when you speak of Minna!

RODEN. Your daughter's position touches me to the heart. I cannot condemn her – I cannot condemn any innocent creature to wretchedness, at the fair beginning of life. My conscience – yes! the Jew has a conscience – my conscience upbraids me for lending myself to a deception –

WIDOW B. You consent to save us!

RODEN. I consent to save your daughter, on one condition, which you must fulfil. Restore the money you have stolen by the Fourth of June next.

WIDOW B. The Fourth of June?

RODEN. On the evening of that day, the accounts of our house of business are balanced, and the profits are divided between my partner and myself. On that day, unless the money is restored, if I remain silent I defraud Mr Keller of the half of five thousand dollars. Make your atonement, therefore, by the Fourth of June, and your secret is safe. We are now at the Third of December. You have six months and one day before you.

WIDOW B. In Minna's name – I dare not say in my own – in *her* name, let me try to thank you. (*Attempts to kiss his hand.*)

RODEN. (*Withdrawing it.*) No! I keep my hand for the faithful servant whom I have wronged. (*Takes the ledger and account-book from the table, and walks to the door. Then stops and turns round.*) Remember! the Fourth of June.

(*Exit.*)

WIDOW B. This day six months for the marriage – Mr Keller has agreed to that.

Six months from the third of December brings us to the *Third* of June. Saved by a day! saved by a day!

The End of Act I

Act II³⁶

The Physician's Secrets

SCENE. The stage represents two rooms of unequal size, divided by a wooden partition.³⁷ The larger of the rooms is on the actor's left. It contains an old-fashioned bed, with drawn curtains,³⁸ placed with the head towards the left. On the right, in the same room, a large open window in the Flat. The sky seen through it indicates the time of sunset, and darkens gradually through the Act. On the left side of the same room, a door, and, lower down, an easy chair with a table near it. On the table, bottles of medicine, a table spoon, a jug of lemonade, and an empty tumbler.

At that end of the partition between the rooms which is nearest to the audience, a door of communication.

The smaller room, on the Right of the Stage, is furnished as a sitting-room. The door of entrance is in the Flat. On the right hand side of this room, low down towards the front of the stage, stands a German stove of white porcelain. Its shape is square; its height six or seven feet. In one side of it, more than half way up, there is a small recess, used for warming plates &c. &c. Just below this recess is placed a chair; and, on the flat top of the stove, there stands a box filled with earth, with a large shrub growing in it. On the left side of the room, against the partition, a chiffonier with cupboards that lock, and with books ranged on the upper shelf. On the right, just beyond the stove, a small table with glasses and a decanter of wine placed upon it.

At the rising of the curtain, Hans Grimm is discovered in the bedroom, dozing in the easy chair. The bed is occupied by Isaac Rodenberg. The door in the partition is closed. In the sitting-room, Widow Bergmann is discovered standing at the table, looking into a plain deal box of the size of a small medicine chest.³⁹ During the Second and Third Acts, Widow Bergmann, Minna, Max Keller, and Karl are all dressed in mourning.⁴⁰

RODENBERG. (*Calling faintly from the bed.*) Hans! Hans!⁴¹

HANS. (*Rousing himself.*) Master!

RODEN. I'm parched with thirst – more lemonade.

(Hans takes a glass of lemonade to the bed, and draws aside the curtains. As he pours out the lemonade, he strikes the jug against the glass. Hearing the sound in the next room, Widow Bergmann hastily closes the box, locks it up in the chiffonier cupboard, and then stops, listening, at the door in the partition.)

WIDOW B. Is he awake?

HANS. (*Returning to the table with the empty glass.*) I left the curtains open at the foot of the bed; all the air from the window gets to him and still the thirsty sickness worries him for drink!

RODEN. Is the night coming on?

HANS. (*Going back to the bed.*) Night? Oh, no! It is only sunset now.

RODEN. What day of the month?

HANS. I heard the clerk down stairs say it was the third of June.

(Widow Bergmann softly opens the door in the partition, and stands behind it listening.)

RODEN. The third of June. The doctor must make me stronger by tomorrow. I must have all my faculties about me on the Fourth of June. Where is Mr Keller?

HANS. Writing letters – letters by dozens, letters by scores! – down in the office.

RODEN. Are all my poor pensioners remembered and looked after, as they used to be when I was well?

HANS. All, master. Every day they crowd by hundreds before the house to know how you are.

RODEN. Do I look very ill? Tell me the truth.

HANS. Don't ask me, master!

RODEN. Is my memory going? I sometimes fear it is.

HANS. Don't fear anything of the sort. How can your memory be going, when it is as good or better than mine?

RODEN. Is it? Let me try what it is worth; let me see what I can remember – Have I been two months ill? Is that right?

HANS. Yes, master. Two long, warm, sunshiny months.

RODEN. And you have watched me, my faithful friend, all that time?

HANS. Except when Mrs Bergmann thrusts herself in. I hate Mrs Bergmann!

RODEN. And the doctor who first attended me has been dismissed? And a new doctor has been sent for from Darmstadt? What is his name? When did he come? Hans, my memory is going! I have forgotten when the new doctor came.

Hans. Not you! you remember – I know you remember. Why, he only came yesterday!

RODEN. And his name?

HANS. His name? I said your memory was as good as mine, master; and here is the proof of it – I have forgotten his name, too! Doctor? – doctor? –

WIDOW B. (*Showing herself.*) Doctor Hetzel.

HANS. (*Aside.*) What does *she* want here? I hate her! – Say you hate her too, master; and send her away.

RODEN. No, no – no quarrelling, no hard words – I can't bear them. Go into the garden – I have had no flowers in my room, today – go, Hans, and gather me some before the sun sets.

HANS. With all my heart, master – the sweetest and the prettiest I can find! (*Goes to the door on the left, stops, and looks back at Widow Bergmann.*) If I had the making of the laws, I would hang a woman for being a housekeeper!
(*Exit.*)

WIDOW B. I accidentally overheard some of your talk with Hans, sir. You have already tested your recollection of recent circumstances. Is your memory as good for more remote events? Do you remember a misfortune that happened six weeks ago?

RODEN. The wife of my dear friend and partner, Max Keller, died six weeks ago.

WIDOW B. Do you know the effect which that lady's death has had on the marriage of my daughter?

RODEN. The marriage has been put off.

WIDOW B. For three months. Minna was to have been married to day. This affliction delays her union with Karl until the Third of September. Six months since, you told me that the preservation of my guilty secret depended on my restoring the stolen money by the Fourth of June. I have appealed, as I said I would, to my husband's father, in Vienna, to help me. On the day, when Mrs. Keller died I wrote to him a full confession of my crimes; the letter remained unanswered. I wrote a second and a third time; and still no reply. The five thousand dollars are *not* replaced, Mr Rodenberg; the condition has *not been* fulfilled; and tomorrow is the Fourth of June. Tomorrow, unless you relent, Mr Keller's son and my daughter will be parted, never, on this side of eternity, to meet again!

RODEN. Do you count my influence with my partner as nothing? Do you forget my compassion for your unhappy child? The first words I speak to Mr Keller tomorrow, when the truth has been told, will be words that plead your daughter's cause.

WIDOW B. Do you talk in the same breath, sir, of exposing me to Mr Keller as a thief, and of asking him afterward to accept Minna as a daughter-in-law? Plainly – for my agony of mind leaves me no power of choosing my expressions – plainly and finally tell me – do you still hold to your resolution, or do you offer me the mercy of a reprieve?

RODEN. Mrs. Bergmann, for aught I know to the contrary, I may not rise from this bed again. If I conceal the truth tomorrow, when the time has come for

telling it, I am passively guilty of a lie. The day of repentance for that lie may never dawn in this world for *me*. Stand back from my bed! I will die as I have lived, faithful to the interests of my partner, and faithful to the cause of truth.

WIDOW B. Reflect, sir! I implore you reflect! All I ask is time to travel to Vienna, and to appeal personally to my husband's father. I entreat you to grant me this last chance, for my daughter's sake! Don't say you have decided against me yet! No! no! no! I will not believe that you have decided yet!

RODEN. You have heard my answer.⁴² I will die as I have lived!

(Enter Hans with a nosegay, showing in Doctor Hetzel. Widow Bergmann walks away from them to the table in front.)

HANS. The prettiest flowers in the garden, master; and this great doctor from Darmstadt come to cure you.

(Doctor Hetzel seats himself by the bedside. Hans strews some flowers over the coverlid of the bed.)

WIDOW B. He will die as he has lived? I can tell the doctor a secret – he will die soon! *(Pauses absorbed in thought. Hans leaves the bed, advances along the side of the partition, and, opening the door of communication, peeps into the sitting room. Widow Bergmann continues.)* And yet, he was my father's friend; he has been generous towards *me*; he has spoken tenderly of Minna – shall I give him one other chance? *(Looks towards the bed, sees Hans, and steals on him unperceived.)* How dare you look into my room! *(Seizes his arm.)*

HANS. Let go! Your cold hand chills me through my sleeve; the touch of your fingers is like the touch of death!

WIDOW B. Listen to me, Ideot! If you peep through that door, if you set foot in that room again, you will repent it to the last day of your life!

DOCTOR H. *(Speaking from the bedside.)* May I beg you to come here for a moment, Madam?

WIDOW B. Remember! *(Joins Doctor Hetzel)*

HANS. You threaten me, do you? You fancy you can frighten a grown man like me, because my wits are a little crazed? There isn't another servant in the house she dare talk to in that way! – What does she do, all alone in that room? I'll slip in, in spite of her, and see for myself! It's getting dark – I'll catch her there alone – I'll steal on her in the dusk – I'll frighten her out of her wits! – Oho! Hans! make her scream, my lad – make her scream! – *(Chuckles to himself; rubs his hands joyfully, and steals off, by the door on the left.)*

DOCTOR. *(To Rodenberg.)* Try to sleep a little, sir – let me hear, when I come back that you have had an hour's comfortable rest. *(Draws the curtains; then*

advances to the front of the stage with Widow Bergmann.)

WIDOW B. Will you favour me, Doctor Hetzel, with a moment's⁴³ private conversation in my own room?

DOCTOR H. Certainly, Madam.

(Widow B. leads the way into the sitting room, and closes the door of communication.)

WIDOW B. Is Mr. Rodenberg in any danger, sir?

DOCTOR H. If he was a younger man, I should answer, no. But, at his age, the results of a long illness are always doubtful.

WIDOW B. Tell me the worst plainly, sir. Would you be surprised if he were to die?

DOCTOR H. I give the answer most unwillingly – but, as you seem to insist on it – No, I should not be surprised. At the same time –

WIDOW B. Yes?

DOCTOR H. I have hopes of saving him; for he has the remains of an excellent constitution to help me. Much depends on the way in which he is nursed.

WIDOW B. I may say for myself, sir, that I ought to know how a good doctor may be helped by a good nurse. My late husband, Doctor Bergmann, was a member of your profession.

DOCTOR H. Doctor Bergmann! I am proud to become acquainted with the widow of so eminent a man. His extraordinary researches in chemistry have made him deservedly famous in his profession. It is still a favourite tradition in our medical school, that Doctor Bergmann discovered the composition of the deadliest poisons of antiquity – the poisons of the Roman Emperors, and the poisons of the Roman Popes.

WIDOW B. Some of his investigations might have led him that way, sir. But I need hardly tell you that the secrets of his laboratory were sealed secrets to me. Shall we see you again, to-night?

DOCTOR H. I will not fail to return. In the meantime, I am rejoiced to know that I leave our patient in such excellent hands.

(Exit, by the door in Flat. The sky outside the window of the bedroom begins to get dark.)

WIDOW B. Safe! Safe, so far! *(Pours out a glass of wine and drinks it eagerly.)* Down! down! All remembrance of past kindness – all fear of future detection, down! down! *(A knock at the door in Flat.)* Who's that? Come in! *(Enter Minna and Karl. Widow Bergmann continues, aside)*⁴⁴ She comes in time. The sight of her was all I wanted to nerve me!

MINNA. Do we disturb you, Mama?

KARL. We only came to ask how Mr Rodenberg is, this evening?

WIDOW B. Ill, my dears – too ill, I am afraid, to see you. Wait, however, while I ask him the question. (*Lights two candles, the stage now beginning to get dark. Leaves one candle in the sitting room, and takes the other with her into the bedroom, leaving the partition door ajar, after she has entered the room.*)⁴⁵ I am astonished at my own weakness! Twice, this pitiless old man has refused me; and yet, something urges me, in spite of myself, to try him for the third time! (*Goes to the bed, and parts the curtains.*) Minna and Karl have come to ask after you, sir; would you like to see them?

RODEN. After what has passed between us, Mrs. Bergmann, seeing them would needlessly distress me.

MINNA. (*Putting her arm round Karl's neck.*) Oh, Karl, don't look so sorrowful! Try to think, dear, that your poor mother is happy in Heaven!

WIDOW B. (*Still parting the bed curtains.*) Listen to them, sir, if you will not see them. The first chance words my daughter speaks, may be the words best fitted to plead her mother's cause!

MINNA. (*Continuing.*) When we are married, love, I will try to be something more to you even than your wife!

WIDOW B. Gentle words, sir, gently spoken; and yet how clearly they find their way to your bedside!

MINNA. I will try, dear, to supply the place in your heart that your lost mother filled. Since her death, our love is a sacred thing; and I may speak of it as I should never have spoken, if this affliction had not happened. (*Kisses his forehead.*) I may kiss you, Karl, as your mother used to kiss you! –

KARL. My own Minna! It is something to live for still, if I live to be worthy of you!

WIDOW B. (*To Rodenberg.*) You hear? Can you speak the fatal truth tomorrow, and ruin that future without a pang?

RODEN. I *must* speak the fatal truth.

WIDOW B. (*Turning from him.*) Die, then! (*Drops the bed curtain.*) It is useless to wait, Minna. Mr Rodenberg is not well enough to see either of you.

KARL. Good night, Mrs Bergmann.

MINNA. Good night, Mama.

(*Exeunt.*)

WIDOW B. Good night. (*Closes the partition door, and looks round the bedroom.*)

Hans is out of the way – the time has come – the chance is mine! (*Takes up the jug of lemonade, pauses, and looks back suspiciously at the bed.*)⁴⁶

(*The door of the sitting-room opens softly, and Hans steals in on tiptoe.*)

HANS. Miss Minna and Master Karl are gone – nobody here – I’ve got the forbidden room all to myself. Now, Mrs Bergmann, we’ll see which of us two can frighten the other! I can answer for myself, as long as she does’nt pounce upon me with those dead-cold hands of hers. (*Looks about him.*) Where shall I hide?

WIDOW B. (*Looking back at the Table.*) He sees nothing – he suspects nothing. Let me make sure of his drink, to begin with, and then – (*Pauses to consider.*)

HANS. (*Observing the stove, and the shrub placed on it.*) I know – up there! It’s summer time, and the top of the stove is just the place for me. Ho! ho! ho! this is one of my clever days. It’s months, sometimes, before a sharp thought like this gets into my head. Now then, chair! *I’m* light enough – I shan’t hurt you! (*Mounts from the chair to the recess in the stove, and from that to the top.*)

WIDOW B. (*Pouring the lemonade into the tumbler.*) He will take nothing unless Hans gives it to him. A difficulty – a serious difficulty there!

HANS. (*Crouching on the top of the stove, behind the shrub.*) It’s lucky I’m so little! A big man would be put to it for room up here. It’s beginning to get dark, already. How she’ll scream when she takes me for a ghost!

WIDOW B. He will take nothing – except from Hans! Well! let Hans give it to him. I see the way. – Stop! (*Feeling in her pocket.*) My husband’s list of the Poisons – the Poisons that are remembered as a tradition by Doctor Hetzel’s students; that are present as a reality in the next room! Did I leave the list in the medicine chest, or did I take it out? (*Produces a small manuscript book, opens, and reads it to herself*): – “In case of my death, I desire that the contents of my deal medicine-chest may be destroyed. They would do dreadful mischief in careless or wicked hands. – Francis Bergmann.” – (*Closes the book, and takes up the glass of lemonade.*) Courage! Courage! (*Passes into the sitting-room, and closes the partition-door.*⁴⁷ *Places the lemonade and the book on the table, takes the deal medicine chest from the cupboard, and places that also on the table.*)

(*Hans raises himself gently, and watches her from the top of the stove.*)

WIDOW B. (*Opening first the chest, and then the mss book.*) The speediest death is the safest – my time is short!

(*Hans expresses by his gestures that he is trying in vain to overhear her.*)

WIDOW B. Let me see the List: “Blue Vial” – (*Takes this and the other bottles that are mentioned, out of the chest, as she names them from the list.*). What does the book say of the Blue Vial? (*Reads.*) “Fatal in twelve hours”. Too long! too

long! – “Yellow Vial” – “Fatal in two days.” Worse! worse! – “Green Vial” – “Fatal in four hours.” Shall it be that? One more before I decide. “Red Vial” – “Fatal in a quarter of an hour.” Less time for me to betray myself; less time for *him* to suffer in! (*Looking again at the book.*) “Dose, seven drops in any liquid.” Stay! *His* experiments were on animals – *my* experiment is on a man. I’ll give *ten*!

HANS. (*Whispering to himself.*) I can’t hear her.

WIDOW B. (*Dropping the poison into the lemonade.*) One, two, three, four – Hush! – five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten! (*Puts the vial back in the chest, and the book in her pocket. Then takes up the lemonade.*) Death! – death that is great enough to fill the wide world; and yet small enough to be hid in this circling of glass! (*Takes the lemonade into the bedroom.*)

HANS. Shall I venture down? I can’t! I daren’t!

WIDOW B. (*Placing the lemonade on the table.*) When the master next calls for drink, the servant will take the glass that lies ready to his hand.

HANS. I know the glass! There’s a flaw half way down in it. Hide it where she may, I shall know it again.

WIDOW B. Now to find Hans! – No! better lock my own room first for safety’s sake. (*Goes back to the sitting room, and turns the key in the partition door.*) So far safe! Now for the door that leads to the staircase! (*Exit by the door in Flat, locking it after her on the outside.*)

HANS. Gone! (*Descends from the stove, and comes down hurriedly to the front of the stage.*) What has she done? What has she dropped into my master’s drink? My forehead’s all damp – my eyes are dim – my hands are icy cold. (*Passes his handkerchief over his forehead.*) – What am I doing? Thinking of myself when my master may be in danger? (*Throws the handkerchief passionately on the ground, pounces on the medicine chest, and draws out the Red Vial.*) Here it is! – No writing on it – nothing to tell me what it is, – Red? What do I remember of Red? (*Puts the Vial back – a pause.*) Poison!!! The stuff that poisoned *me*, when I was in the doctor’s shop, was kept in a red bottle. Stop! stop! stop! Nothing quenches my master’s thirst. When I was poisoned, nothing quenched mine. – Oh, my head! my head! the thoughts are crowding into it faster than it can bear! (*Falls on his knees, and beats both his hands desperately on his head.*) More sense! More sense!! More sense! Oh, *Father of Mercies*, five minutes’ sense to save my master; and the madhouse afterwards for the rest of my life! (*Starting to his feet.*) Hark! She’s coming back – the murderess who has laid him on that sick bed – the murderess who has poisoned him slowly day by day! Are my hands big enough to squeeze the life out of her at her throat? No, no, no! if she has poisoned him already, killing *her* won’t save *him*. – Oh, I’m too crazy to be believed, or I would tell Mr Keller! – The other

bottles! I saw her take out more bottles! (*Goes to the chest, takes out several bottles together; then looks in.*) What's this hid away in the bottom of the chest? (*Takes out a little parcel wrapped up in paper; tears off the paper, and discloses a plain glass bottle with a little colourless liquid in it.*) More poison? (*Looks at the paper.*) Writing! Oh happy, happy day when I learnt to read! (*Reading.*) "Antidote." What's that? Curse on their hard words that a poor man can't understand! Here's more under it. "Good Against Poison." Ah! I understand that. – "Good Against Poison." Is it sent from Heaven to help me? I tried to pray just now – I cried from my heart for sense enough to save my master. Is this the answer? – How shall I know? (*A pause.*) Shall I drop the bottle on the floor, and let that decide? If the mercy of Heaven guided my hand to it, the mercy of Heaven can keep it whole. How high shall I hold it? As high as my heart? If it breaks it's a sign not to use it. If it keeps whole, it's the answer to my prayer; it's health, safety, life to my master! – (*Drops the bottle.*) – I hardly dare look at it! – (*Kneels down, and takes it up.*) Whole!!! Oh, thank God! thank God! thank God! (*Rushes to the partition-door with the bottle and paper in his hand; unlocks the door; and bangs it to after him, when he gets into the bedroom.*)⁴⁸

RODEN. Hans? Is that you?

HANS. Yes, master. (*Goes to the table, and examines the glass on it.*) Here it is! here's the flaw half-way down! Has he drank any of it? – Master, have you been thirsty? have you wanted your drink, since I have been away?

RODEN. No – but I want some now.

HANS. In a minute!⁴⁹(*Pauses*) Has she poisoned him before this? Oh she has! She has! Or why should he be so ill? Why should that thirsty sickness worry him for Drink? I'll empty the tumbler at once; I won't give myself time to doubt. (*Empties the glass out of the window; then comes back and examines the written paper again.*) – "Good Against Poison."

HANS. More hard words, after "Good Against Poison." What's this, lower down? "Dose" – that's what I want! – "Dose, one table-spoonful in any liquid." (*Measures the Antidote into the tumbler; fills up with lemonade; then looks again at the bottle.*) Empty! The last dose left. This is the mercy of Heaven – I can't doubt it now! (*Hides away the bottle and paper in his bosom.*)

(*Enter Widow Bergmann, by the sitting-room door.*)

WIDOW B. No Hans in the house; no Hans in the garden – what does it mean? Can he have got back into the bedroom, by the other staircase? (*Turns the key of the partition-door.*) How did this door come unlocked? (*Enters the bedroom. Hans starts.*) So! You are here, after all? What's the matter?

HANS. (*Taking up the glass of lemonade.*) You startled me.

WIDOW B. What are you going to do with that glass? Has your master called for drink?

RODEN. Hans! Didn't you hear me? I'm thirsty again.

WIDOW B. Take it to him!

HANS. (*Aside; moving away slowly.*) If it should do him harm, after all!

WIDOW B. Take it!

HANS. No escape! (*Goes to the bed, with the glass of lemonade.*)

WIDOW B. (*After following Hans, and seeing him give the lemonade to Rodenberg.*) Drained! Drained to the dregs! When my child wakes me tomorrow, will she see what I have done for her in my guilty face? (*Returns to the sitting-room.*)

HANS. (*Dropping the bed curtain.*) Saved! If there is mercy above us, saved by me! Oh! have his own good words come true at last? Has my poor gratitude given back all that his rich charity bestowed on me? – Your hand, master, dear, before you go to sleep again!

(*Rodenberg puts his hand out between the curtains. Hans falls on his knees and kisses it. The hand pats him on the head gently before it is withdrawn.*)

WIDOW B. (*Observing Hans's handkerchief on the floor of the sitting-room.*) What's this? (*Looks at the mark.*) "Hans Grimm". He has been in this room! – (*Calling.*) Hans! – (*Hans enters the sitting-room.*) Shut the door. (*He obeys. She suddenly shows him the handkerchief.*) Yours! I found it on the floor – you have been in this room!

HANS. (*Drawing back from her.*) I must own the truth or she'll be too clever for me.⁵⁰

WIDOW B. You have been in this room.

HANS. I can't deny it. I have.

WIDOW B. What for?

HANS. For no reason that I know of.

WIDOW B. Where were you? (*Hans points to the top of the stove.*) When? While I was here?

HANS. Yes.

WIDOW B. Wretch! Did you see – ?⁵¹

HANS. (*Aside.*) What can I say?

WIDOW B. The truth! I insist on the truth! What did you see?⁵²

HANS. I saw you take a pretty Red Vial from a deal box.

WIDOW B. (*aside.*) My blood curdles! My heart stands still!

HANS. (*Hesitating*) – I – I saw you drop something out of the Red Vial into my master's lemonade.

WIDOW B. You saw that! – (*Pressing her hand on her heart.*) Quiet! quiet! – What did you think when you saw that?

HANS. (*Drawing back again.*) I daren't tell her! (*Turns away, and affects to be looking at the books on the chiffonier.*)

WIDOW B. (*Aside.*) Lost, if he lives! How to silence him for ever? – (*To Hans, speaking gently.*) Come here, Hans, and answer my question. What did you think when you saw me drop something into your master's drink?

HANS. (*Remaining near the chiffonier.*) I thought –

WIDOW B. Yes?

HANS. I thought – (*Aside.*) What am I to say to her? (*To Widow B.*) I thought I should like to have that pretty red vial.

WIDOW B. You shall have it! (*Aside.*) I thank the crazy wretch for those words! (*To Hans, kindly.*) Come here – don't be afraid.

HANS. (*Advancing a step.*) Afraid?⁵³

WIDOW B. Nearer, Hans: we are not quite such good friends as we ought to be; I was very unjust and unfair to you, some time ago, when your master lost a few dollars, and thought they were stolen. You shall have the red vial, Hans, as a proof that I am sincere in wishing to be better friends with you. (*Takes the bottle from the chest.*) And I will tell you what is inside it, because that is only fair. You know that this is a medicine-chest, of course?

HANS. (*Aside.*) I never thought of that!

WIDOW B. Yes, yes – you know my husband was a doctor, and you were once in a doctor's shop yourself. – Come and look at it. You need not be afraid – you won't be poisoned, this time – there are no *powders* here.

HANS. (*Eagerly advancing again, close to Widow Bergmann.*) Are all poisons in powder?

WIDOW B. To be sure! Was it not a powder that poisoned you?

HANS. It was! (*Aside.*) How came I to forget that?

WIDOW B. And see, not one of these vials has got a powder in it.

HANS. What has the red vial got in it?

WIDOW B. Medicine.

HANS. Medicine?

WIDOW B. Yes, medicine that will cure your master – medicine that will do *you* good, when you are taken ill.⁵⁴ You have sat up, in that sick-room, many, many nights together, Hans; and I think I have heard you complain sometimes of feeling weak in your body, and gloomy in your mind?

HANS. Yes!

WIDOW B. Well, when you next want strength, and want spirits, take ten drops out of this Red Vial, and you will be restored to yourself again. (*Gives the vial to Hans – then locks up the chest and puts it away in the cupboard. Hans remains alone at the front of the stage.*)

HANS. Have I done wrong? The poison that nearly killed me, *was* powder – her husband *was* a doctor – that box *is* a medicine chest. Have I harmed my master, when I meant to save him? – Stop! you came in here, and poured out this physic in secret. Why?

WIDOW B. Because the new doctor would be angry if he knew that I was interfering with him. If my husband had been alive, he would have cured your master before this – I am sure of that, and therefore, I privately give Mr. Rodenberg my husband's medicine.

HANS. (*Vacantly.*) Yes, yes. (*Goes towards the partition door – then suddenly stops.*) Wait! I've got another question to ask you. Did your husband ever make poisons?

WIDOW B. *He!* he had a horror of them. He was much more likely to make antidotes to poisons.

HANS. (*Opening the door.*) Antidote! That's the hard word on the paper!

WIDOW B. Don't forget – ten drops from the Red Vial, in any drink you like, whenever you want strength and spirits. Go in, now, and see how your master is. (*Hans enters the bedroom, repeating to himself Widow Bergmann's directions relating to the Red Vial – closes the door after him – and goes slowly to the bed.*) Sink sun – pass night – come morning! Oh, my child! tomorrow I can look freely at last to your wedding-day!

HANS. (*Returning from the bed.*) Asleep. Surely it's a good sign when he's asleep? (*Takes the written paper from his bosom again.*) Does it say anything here about sleep? – What's this? More writing on the other side! (*Reads.*) "Memorandum. I have tried giving this antidote, as a simple drug, in cases where no poison⁵⁵ had been taken beforehand. Results very strange and startling, being nothing less than –" More words that I can't understand! Oh, these gentlemen, these gentlemen! plain language is not fine enough for them to write in! – (*Crumpling the paper up in his bosom.*) I won't look at it any more! it only frightens me. How can I have done him harm, when I would die to do him good? (*The view of the sky from the window entirely fades out.*)

Night come already! Oh, I wish it was morning instead! – My hands tremble;
my mind is black with doubts and fears. Red Vial! I shall want you tonight!⁵⁶

WIDOW B. (*Opening the door a few inches.*) Hans! How is your master?

HANS. Asleep, I think!

WIDOW B. (*Closing the door again.*) Asleep, forever!

*End of Act 2*⁵⁷

Act III⁵⁸

The Alarm Clock⁵⁹

SCENE. The Dead-House at Frankfort. The scene in Flat represents the wall of a long corridor, the ends of which are supposed to terminate, on the right and the left, out of sight of the audience. Towards the left extremity of the wall, a black door which opens inwards. Above the door and set parallel with it,⁶⁰ a circular white clock dial, from ten inches to a foot in diameter. The dial bears no figures, and has one hand only, with a little hammer at the end of it. The hand, at the rising of the curtain, points straight downwards at the lowest part of the dial (the part which is occupied in ordinary clocks by the figure, VI.) At the upper part of the dial (where the figure XII is placed in other clocks,) a small projection, separating the metal drum against which the hand is suffered to strike. Hanging down from the unseen space between the back of the clock and the wall, in a long loop over the door, a cord, the loose end of which is passed through a hole in the wall, close to the left-hand side of the clock-dial. A little lower, on the left of the door, and level with the top of it, a bracket fixed against the wall with a burning lamp on it.⁶¹ Other doors and clocks, painted, along the Flat towards the right; and, on the extreme right, this inscription: Watchman's Room. Lower down, on the right, a small round table and two chairs all covered with coarse black stuff. A lamp burns on the table. The light on the stage is dim. The entrances and exits are right and left, on either side of the stage.

Enter, from the right, Widow Bergmann and Max Keller, preceded by Duntzer.

WIDOW B. Is this the place?

KELLER. This is the Dead-House of Frankfort.

WIDOW B. (*To Duntzer.*) And you?

DUNTZER. I am the second watchman of the Dead-House.

KELLER. Is Schwartz still the first watchman?

DUNTZER. Yes, sir. He has the duty by day, and I have the duty by night.

WIDOW B. Are you two alone in this dreadful place?

DUNTZER. No, madam. Below stairs there are two more men. One is a clerk who registers the names of the dead as they are brought in. The other is a servant who assists my comrade and myself in the duties of the house.

KELLER. The surgeon's apartments are above-stairs, I think?

DUNTZER. Yes, sir. The surgeon asked me at what hour Mr Rodenberg died. Was I right in answering, at half past eight, tonight?

KELLER. Half past eight was the time. It is now getting on towards eleven. The bearers who will bring to this place all that is mortal of my dear lost friend,

will soon leave the house where he died. I have come here before them to see that his last resting-place on the way to the grave is worthy to receive the remains of the best and truest man that ever lived. And this lady, who loved and honoured him, has come with me to share the pious duty. Where will he be laid?

DUNTZER. (*Pointing to the clock-door.*) In that room. The other rooms are tenanted by the dead already.⁶²

WIDOW B. (*To Keller.*) Have no exceptions ever been made? Are the great and the wealthy who have died in Frankfort, always brought here?⁶³

KELLER. Always. This place was founded when the dread of being buried alive was strong in men's minds. It is the law that the bodies of all citizens of Frankfort shall be laid out here, each in a separate room; and that a cord which communicates with an alarm-clock shall be passed round the hand of the dead. Thus, if, in any case, the trance of a few hours has been mistaken for the terrible reality of death, the first movement of the reviving body betrays itself by the motion of that hand on the dial. (*pointing to it.*) The hand strikes a clock-bell – the watchmen are within hearing – the surgeon is within call – and the faint struggle of returning life is certain to be aided at the instant when it begins.⁶⁴

WIDOW B. (*To Duntzer.*) Have you ever heard the stroke of the clock?⁶⁵

DUNTZER. I have been in this place for twelve years; and *I* have never heard it.

WIDOW B. (*To Keller.*) You are a native of Frankfort. Have you ever been told that the clock struck?⁶⁶

KELLER. Never!

WIDOW B. (*To Duntzer.*) Will the procession of the bearers pass through this corridor?

DUNTZER. No: it will enter the room by a second door.⁶⁷ (*To Keller.*) Would you like to assure yourself now, sir, that all things are fitly prepared?

(*Keller makes a sign in the affirmative. Duntzer pushes open the door.*⁶⁸ *The room is dark. Keller takes the lamp from the table, and looks in, without entering the room.*)

WIDOW B. (*Alone, in front of the stage.*)⁶⁹ Hans! – when will Hans be here? Twice this evening, I have seen the Red Vial at his lips; and twice the chance of the moment has removed it from them again. While he lives, my secret is in danger! While he lives, he may tell others what he saw in my room, as he told *me*! I have watched him till the doctor left the house – I must watch him again when he gets here among strangers – I must make sure of him when he comes to this place! (*Duntzer lets the door of the room fall to again,*⁷⁰ *and*

returns with Keller to the front.) Mr Keller, do you think it right to indulge Hans Grimm in his mad resolution to sit up tonight with the Watchman of the Dead-House?

KELLER. Why should we thwart the poor creature? He finds comfort in his own hopeless persuasion that his master is not dead yet. His delusion is harmless. Why should we hesitate to trust him here?

DUNTZER. He is here, now, sir. (*Keller goes up to the table, and sits down by it.*)

WIDOW B. Here now! Where is he? Who has he spoken to?

DUNTZER. He is in the *Watchman's Room* with Schwartz. (*Points off, right.*) The poor crazy creature brought with him a bundle of his master's clothes, insisting that Mr Rodenberg would be sure to want them before the morning. Schwartz, who is surly and silent with all the rest of the world, has taken a strange fancy to him; and the two have been sitting together for some time past.

WIDOW B. (*Aside.*) Fool, fool, to let him out of my sight for an instant! (*To Duntzer*)⁷¹ In that room, did you say? – Stay! has he seen anyone else, besides Schwartz?

DUNTZER. The house-surgeon spoke to him, when he first came in.

WIDOW B. (*Aside.*) Worse and worse! He may have already aroused the surgeon's suspicions. I must see the surgeon directly.

DUNTZER. What did you say, madam?

WIDOW B. I asked if I could see the surgeon.

DUNTZER. Certainly. He is upstairs at this moment.

KELLER. (*Rising.*) Why should you want to see the surgeon?

WIDOW B. I feel an absorbing interest in the past history of this place. The surgeon is sure to know more of it than anyone else. I want to ask him if that clock (*pointing to it*) has ever yet struck within the memory of man. I want to know if there could be any case in our own time, when one of the clock-bells might be likely to ring – to ring at the hush of night – to ring in the dead silence of this fearful place!⁷²

KELLER. Has Hans infected you with his delusion? Your nerves are shaken by the calamity that has befallen us. Past anxiety and present grief are weighing too heavily on your mind. Go home, Mrs Bergmann, and try to get some rest.

WIDOW B. I can't rest. My mind and body are alike over-fatigued. Humour me in my caprice, sir, as you are willing to humour Hans. – Where is the surgeon? How shall I find his room?

DUNTZER. I will show you his room. (*To Keller.*) Do you remain here, sir?

KELLER. No. I will return to the door, and watch for the procession of the Bearers, as it enters the street. (*Exit. Right.*)

DUNTZER. This way, madam. (*Exit, with Widow Bergmann, Left.*)

(*Enter Schwartz, from the Watchman's Room,*⁷³ *with a bottle and two glasses.*)

SCHWARTZ. Hans! Come out into the passage, Hans. It's a fine cool air for drinking in, here. (*Sets the bottle and glasses on the table. Hans enters, slowly and dejectedly from the Watchman's Room*) Aha! There you are! Now, what do you say to a drop of the third bottle?⁷⁴

HANS. (*Fiercely.*) Curse the wine! (*Flings himself down sullenly by the chair on the right.*)

SCHWARTZ. Why, you Scarecrow, hasn't *the* wine made a man of you? Didn't you come here whimpering? And what dried your eyes? – My wine! What made you surer than ever you were before that your master isn't dead yet? My wine! What put colour into your yellow face, and light into your fishy eyes, and brains into your empty head? Ha! ha! ha! my wine – my wine!⁷⁵

HANS. (*Starting up.*)⁷⁶ I hate your wine! Your wine's a betrayer – your wine's a liar – your wine promises and doesn't perform! I want to forget who I am, and where I am, and everything that's happened; and the wine helps me for half an hour, and then leaves me worse than I was before. I don't want to think – I don't want to feel – I don't want to live till my master's kind voice speaks to me once more. Kill me till my master comes to life again! Will your wine do that? Away with your bottles, and drown me in a barrelful, if it will!

SCHWARTZ. Ha! ha! ha! Little man,⁷⁷ you do me good! Come and be watchman here, and shake my leathery sides for me all day long. I know what you want: I'll drown your troubles for you in better liquor than wine. Son Hans, you have a vile knack of getting drunk on a sudden and getting sober on a sudden. Correct that! When our mad watchman here was alive, he was just like you. Look up at the bracket where the lamp is. My fellow-servant hung himself to that, just twelve years ago. And why did he hang himself? Shocking! shocking! *He* got drunk on a sudden, and sober on a sudden. Correct that, Hans, correct that!

HANS. (*Speaking to himself.*) Oh, master, master, I did it for the best!

SCHWARTZ. That's not the song! Have you forgot it already? Didn't I tell you that my fellow-servant who hung himself up there, made poetry when the fit was on him? Didn't I teach you the *Mad Watchman's Song*? And didn't you croak it out along with me, when my wine made a man of you? Shocking! Shocking! to see a fellow-creature forget himself like that! Stop where you

are: I'll get something to pick you up again – I'll set you chattering and screeching like a poll-parrot on a hot perch!⁷⁸ Stop where you are, Son Hans, till Father Schwartz comes back and picks you up again.

(Exit into the Watchman's Room.)

HANS. *(Rising.)* Dead? No! not if all the doctors in Germany said it. Is there any kind soul in the wide world who would not accuse me of poisoning him, if I told the truth? They would put me in prison, master, if I told the truth – they would keep me away from you when you wake up and want me again! Dead? The paper that was round the bottle says nothing about death! *(Taking it from his bosom and reading.)* “I have tried giving this Antidote as a simple drug⁷⁹ in cases where no poison had been taken beforehand. Results very strange and startling, being nothing less than – suspension of the functions of life.” Life! that one word is plain enough. But “suspension” – “functions” – what do they mean? Happy, happy people, who have their heads full of learning! It ends with “life” – that's all the comfort I have. The last word of the writing is “life”! *(Puts the paper back.)* What's this? *(Feeling in his breast.)* The Red Vial! *(Produces it.)* Why did I drink that man's wine, when I had this to help my sinking spirits and to quiet my trembling hands? My memory used to be such a good one; and now I'm losing it! How many drops did she say – how many drops?

*(Enter Schwartz, with another bottle.)*⁸⁰

SCHWARTZ. What! on your legs again, Crazybrains? *(Sees the Red Vial.)* What's that?

HANS. *(Not attending.)* Ten drops – she said ten drops.

SCHWARTZ. Physic?

HANS. Yes.

SCHWARTZ. How dare you physic yourself when you have got me for a doctor? Son Hans, I'm ashamed of you. Put it away!

HANS. She said it would do me good.

SCHWARTZ. *She!* – Little man, a word of advice – never listen to what a woman tells you. Let her take her physic herself. It may do for *her*. I've got the physic that will do for *you*. Look! *(Holds up the bottle.)*

HANS. How it shines! Is it gold? *(Puts back the Red Vial.)*

SCHWARTZ. Yes, drinkable gold. Brandy! *(Seats himself by the table and pours out the brandy.)* Here! Pull up that other chair, and try this!

HANS. Drinkable gold! *(Goes to fetch the chair, then pauses suddenly.)* No! I can't stop now. I haven't time.

SCHWARTZ. What do you mean?

HANS. Let me think. I've brought my master's clothes here, nicely folded and nicely brushed. Stop! stop! I've brought something else with them. (*Feels in his coat pocket.*) His letter!

SCHWARTZ. Whose letter?

HANS. My master's. A letter that came for him tonight, when he was asleep. I took care of it, while the rest were all crying round his bed; and I've brought it here to wait for him along with his clothes (*Takes out the letter.*) Oh, it's all crumpled! He'll think I'm untidy. How can I smooth it out again?

SCHWARTZ. (*Taking the letter from him.*) Smack it down flat with your hand, and put the lamp on it. (*Places the letter under the lamp.*)⁸¹

HANS. Yes, yes! the lamp is heavy; the lamp will smooth it out.⁸² Can I leave it there? No! I must take it back home with me. If they *will* bring my master to this place, I must go at once and help them.

SCHWARTZ. *You* help them! They won't let you. They'll leave you in the crowd, and, when you get here again, you'll find the door locked. Stop along with me, and leave the letter where it is. Your master is on his way here, already. They'll take him up the other stairs, and put him into that room. You'll know as soon as he's in there.

HANS. How?

SCHWARTZ. Try a drop of my physic, first, and I'll tell you. (*Hans drinks.*) What's that like?

HANS. Fire! Fire in my heart; fire in my head! – How shall I know when my master is in that room? Tell me, or I'll tear it out of you!

SCHWARTZ. Ha! ha! ha! Crazybrains is getting like himself again. Here! I'll show you. (*Takes Hans across the stage.*) Do you see that cord?⁸³

HANS. Yes!

SCHWARTZ. That's the cord that moves the hand on the dial, and makes the clock strike. It hangs down loose in a loop, don't it? you keep your eye on that loop. When you see it move, and run up tight to the hole in the wall, look into that room. There you'll find your master on the bed, with the end of the cord fastened round his fingers.⁸⁴ (*Returns to his seat, and holds up the bottle.*) Try a drop more.

HANS. Hush! don't speak; don't move! I'm watching the rope!

(*Enter Duntzer. Right.*)

DUNTZER. Schwartz, it's close on eleven o'clock. The procession of the *Bearers* can't be far off now. – Surely, you are not giving that mad creature brandy?

SCHWARTZ. Never you mind!

DUNTZER. Is he to stop here all night? You know the doors are locked at eleven o'clock. The lady must have gone already – She is not to be found in the surgeon's room. I shall lock up in ten minutes. What is to be done with that man?

SCHWARTZ. Leave him alone!

DUNTZER. (*Aside.*) Surly brute! Is he going to sleep in that chair all night?

(*Exit. Right.*)

HANS. (*Pointing to the rope.*) It moves! It moves!

SCHWARTZ. (*Sleepily.*) Aye, aye.

(*The loop of the cord⁸⁵ is slowly drawn up till it disappears through the hole in the wall. Hans points to it all the time.*)

[Hans. (*Hurrying to the door.*) Master! master! (*Stops suddenly.*) Oh! to think of him there, alone on his narrow bed – his kind eyes closed, his friendly voice hushed – his poor breath⁸⁶ smothered over with the black pall of death! I daren't go in; I daren't look at him! – (*Turns to the table.*) more drink. My heart's all cold again. (*Takes more brandy.*)]

(*Enter Widow Bergmann, Left.*)

WIDOW B. I have lost myself in this desert of passages. (*Sees Hans.*) Ah! you here. (*Aside.*) His eyes shine strangely. Has he drunk of the Red Vial? (*Points to Schwartz.*) Who is that?

HANS. I'll tell you! A witch who deals in drinkable gold! (*Drinks again.*)

WIDOW B. (*Crossing the stage.*) Is the poison speaking in those wild words? Safe, if it is. The surgeon's own lips have assured me that he suspects nothing. (*Turns and sees the clock over the door.*) The alarm-clock! I am back in the corridor.⁸⁷

[⁸⁸HANS. (*Approaching close to her.*) Hush! a secret. *He* is in there, and the end of the rope is fastened round his hand!

WIDOW B. (*Aside.*) How wild his eyes are! – Come away, Hans. Come away, home. Don't let us stop here.

HANS. Another secret! I mean to stop here all night.]

WIDOW B. (*Aside.*) Horrible! [⁸⁹I daren't leave him. – Where is the other watchman? Where is Mr. Keller?

HANS. Hark! – (*The church-clocks of Frankfort strike eleven. One begins, near at hand: two others chime in from a distance. Then a pause – and one clock strikes eleven by itself.*)⁹⁰ Hark! *His* clock. (*Points to the door.*) The chapel clock of the

hospital he founded. I call it, Silvertongue. Who contradicts me?

WIDOW B. Hush! hush! (*Aside.*)] My heart sinks – my knees tremble under me!
(*Goes to the chair on the right, and seats herself, with her face turned away from the door.*)

HANS. (*Following her.*) A third secret –! Turn your head the other way, and look at the hand on the dial. You'll see it move round. You'll hear the clock strike before long.⁹¹ (*Goes to the table.*)

(*A noise below, as of bolting and locking a heavy door.*)

[WIDOW B. What's that? (*calling to Schwartz.*) Watchman! Oh, Heavens can he sleep in such a place as this! Hans! Hans! What noise was that?

HANS. We are locked up! – Locked up for the night!

WIDOW B. Horrible! horrible! – Watchman, wake! – Where are the rest of them? Am I shut in here with a madman and a drunkard?

HANS. Ha! ha! ha! We are a fine company here. One mad, one drunk, one frightened – and the rest dead all down the passage!

WIDOW B. (*Sinking back in the chair, and hiding her face.*) Water! water! – I'm faint.

HANS. Water? There isn't a drop.⁹² Wine, if you like. –]⁹³ (*Aside, pouring out some wine.*) She shan't have drinkable gold; she shan't taste Father Schwartz's physic!!! Physic!!!⁹⁴– Oh, what a thought! (*Produces the Red Vial.*) Her own physic. He (indicating Schwartz) said let her take her own physic. She wants it badly enough now; and she shall have it. (*Drops the Poison into the wine.*) If it does her good, I'll mix the rest with the drinkable gold, and take it while Schwartz is asleep.

[WIDOW B. Water! water!

HANS. There is none. Here's wine.

WIDOW B. Anything to moisten my parched lips. (*Drinks the wine.*)]

HANS. She has drunk it now we shall see!

WIDOW B. You are quieter now, Hans. Come home! come home!

HANS. (*Pointing to the clock.*) When the clock strikes – not before.⁹⁵

[WIDOW B.⁹⁶ I shall die if I stay here. – Watchman! wake, wake, and let me out!
(*A ray of moonlight glimmers in at the end of the corridor and shines over the dial.*)

⁹⁷The clock! The clock! hide me! hide me – the hand is moving!

HANS. Ha! Look! The moon – the cold white moon that the mad watchman sings about. Father Schwartz! I'm a man again! I remember the mad watchman's song. Listen! listen!]

WIDOW B. Oh, stop him! stop him!

[HANS. Stop me? I'm up in the clouds – I'm racing on a whirlwind – I'll sing the stars down from Heaven to hear me! Schwartz! wake up! – wake up for the mad watchman's song!]

The moon was shining, cold and white,
In the Frankfort Dead-House, on New Year's night –

Poor me!

And I was the watchman left alone,
While the rest to dance and feast were gone.

I envied their lot, and cursed my own.

Poor me!

Backwards and forwards with hasty tread,
I walked on my watch by, the door's of the dead –

Poor me!

And I said, it's hard on this new year,
When I want to be dancing to leave me here –
Alone with death and cold and fear.

Poor me!

Any company's better than none, I said;
If I can't have the living, I'd like the dead –

Poor me!

Oh Lord forgive me! I said no more!
The corpse-bells rang at every door,
Black shadows crept across the floor.

Poor me!⁹⁸

The curtains opened – there stood a ghost⁹⁹
On every threshold, as white as frost

Poor me!

Each spectre said with a mocking grin,
We are the ghosts of the dead within,
Come dance with us the new year in.

Poor me!

Down, down upon me the spectres swept,
Like flames in the wind, they whirled and leapt –

Poor me!

You called us – they shrieked – and we gathered soon;
Dance with your guests by the New Year's moon!
I danced till I dropped in a deadly swoon.

Poor me!

And since that night, I've lost my wits,
And I shake with ceaseless ague fits –

Poor me!

For the ghosts they turned me cold as stone,
On that new year's night when the white-moon shone,
And I walked on my watch, all, all alone,

Poor me!

And, oh, when I lie in my coffin bed,
Heap thick the earth above my head –

Poor me!

Or I shall come back and dance once more,
With frantic feet on the Dead-House floor,
And a ghost for a partner at every door.

Poor me!

[HANS.¹⁰⁰ Ha! There he is – come back! There he rises, with the earth dripping from him, and the halter round his neck! – Dance! ghost, dance! I'm as mad as you are! – (*Breaks into a terrible*¹⁰¹ *dance, with the fancied ghost for a partner.*

Then stops suddenly, and points off, with both hands.) There he goes! – there, there, there, there! – Gone!】

WIDOW B. (*Looking steadfastly at the clock*¹⁰² *and shrinking back in horror*) The clock! the clock!¹⁰³

¹⁰⁴【HANS. (*Shuddering.*) The cold of him creeps up my hands – up and up and up! It cools my heart; it cools my head.】 I shall shudder.¹⁰⁵ Oh me! Is the thought of my master coming back again?¹⁰⁶

WIDOW B. (*Pointing to the clock.*¹⁰⁷) Look!

HANS. Where?

WIDOW B. (*Leaving the chair, and catching Hans by the arm.*) Hide me! hide me! The hand is moving! (*The hand of the dial travels halfway round the half circle of the dial – then stops for a moment. The crank of the bell moves.*)¹⁰⁸

HANS. Let me go! Master! Master! I hear you!

WIDOW B. (*Desperately holding him.*) The clock! bell! the clock! bell!¹⁰⁹ (*The hand moves again to the top of the dial, and strikes the clock-bell ringing on it one deep note.*¹¹⁰ *Schwartz starts from his sleep, and looks up in terror. Hans tries vainly to break from Widow Bergmann. A pause. The door opens a few inches – then bangs to again with a dull sound. A second pause. The door opens a few inches again. A bare hand and arm steal out over its black surface, and slowly move it back. As it opens wide, Isaac Rodenberg appears on the threshold. He is dressed in a robe of black velvet, which covers him, except his right hand, and arm, from the neck to the feet. His head is bare; his face deadly pale. He stands looking straight before him, without moving, or speaking; the light from the lamp on the bracket falling in one bright ray across his face. Widow Bergmann shrieks and drops to the ground at the sight of Rodenberg. Hans remains for a few moments struck with ecstasy; his arms outstretched lovingly towards his master – then rushes up to him and falls at his knees. Schwartz stands motionless close to the entrance, on the Right*¹¹¹ *After an instant of silence, a voice is heard, off, right, calling*¹¹² *“The bell! the bell!!!” Duntzer enters, and stops thunderstruck, by Schwartz’s side.*¹¹³)

DUNTZER. (*In a whisper.*) Alive!¹¹⁴ (*Exit with Schwartz, right.*)¹¹⁵

HANS. (*Clasping his master’s knees.*) Speak to me, Master. Say, “Hans” – oh, say, “Hans!”¹¹⁶

RODEN. (*Faintly.*)¹¹⁷ Where am I? What has happened? This dress –

HANS. Oh, don’t wear it another moment! (*Rises.*) Come in – come in, there. (*Pointing off, right.*) I can dress you, master, dear, in this dismal place, as I dress you at home. Lean on me – heavily, heavily.

*(Rodenberg advances a few steps across the stage, leaning on Hans's shoulder. The surgeon of the Dead-House enters to them from the right, and helps to support Rodenberg. They go out, Right)*¹¹⁸

[¹¹⁹WIDOW B. *(Reviving.)* No fear about your marriage, child. You shall be happy, Minna – your mother will take care of that. *(Rising feebly to her feet.)* A burning pain in my heart; my heart throbbing; something strange, I don't know what, in my head. *(Looks round.)* Ah! The frightful door, the frightful bell! Do the dead rise in judgement against the living? Did I see him there? This is the Dead-House – yonder are the passages where I lost myself in coming from the surgeon's room – I *did* see him standing there! – Death itself has turned against me! *(A pause.)* Where is he? Spirit or man, I must find him! Are my eyes dim? Or is the place growing dark? The lamp – the lamp will help me in these lonesome passages. *(Takes up the lamp.)* A letter? – I see a letter on the table! “Vienna”, on the post-mark! Addressed to me? No! “Isaac Rodenberg”; and, down here, at the side, – the name of my husband's father, Bergmann? It is Bergmann!¹²⁰]

(Enter Hans, Right)

HANS. The letter – my master's letter – what are *you* doing with it?

WIDOW B. Where is your master?

HANS. How faint her voice is! how pale she looks! *(Produces the Red Vial.)* Here! take it back. I won't have it. If it does you harm, how can it do *me* good?

¹²¹WIDOW B. Does *me* harm?

HANS. Yes: you drank it in the wine. *(Widow Bergmann sinks back in the chair with a cry of horror.)* What have I done wrong?¹²² I gave *you*, in your necessity, what you told me to take, in mine. Ten drops when you want health and spirits – those were your own words.

WIDOW B. Your master! As you value your happiness in this world and your salvation in the next, fetch your master!

HANS. Even her voice is changed! – You shall see my master. *(Exit Right.)*¹²³

WIDOW B. Death-struck by my own crime! Oh, my child, my child, the growing agony burns fainter! There is but one pang, now, – the pang of parting from *you*!

*(Enter Rodenberg, Right.)*¹²⁴

RODEN. You have asked for me, *and* I come. *(Aside, after looking at her intently.)* Is the face of Sin so like the face of Death!

WIDOW B. *(Giving him the letter.)* Open that.

RODEN. Wretched, wretched woman! Hans has told me all. Don't hope to

deceive *me* as you have deceived *him*.

WIDOW B. Open that letter – my time is short – Death is like you; he grants me no reprieve.

RODEN. What does she mean?

WIDOW B. Ask Hans what he did with the Red Vial.

RODEN. The Red Vial! – Stay! we are within reach of help!

WIDOW B. Open the letter. There is no help for *me*. The fumes of the Red Vial are mounting in waves to my head! (*Rodenberg opens the letter, and hurriedly runs his eye over it.*) Speak. While I have sense to hear you! Why does my husband's father write to you?

RODEN. He has faith in *my* honesty. After long hesitation, rather than have his name exposed in a Court of Justice, he sends the five thousand dollars.

WIDOW B. (*Rising, and clasping her hands in rapture.*) Happy at last! Oh, Minna, Minna, happy at last!

RODEN. Wait! Wait! I'll bring the surgeon. (*Exit, Right.*)

WIDOW B. (*Advancing, as the delirium of the poison seizes her, towards the door of Number 10*)¹²⁵ Where is Minna's room? The house seems strange to me – where is it? – Ha! *there* – there is the door, with the little white curtains hanging over it! – Hush! hush! I am going to Minna's room; I am going to tell her the good news. Don't stop me – I must tell Minna – hush! hush! hush! I must tell Minna! (*Stagger forward into the room. The door falls to after her. As she disappears, Rodenberg and the surgeon enter, right, followed by Hans.*)¹²⁶

RODEN. (*To the surgeon, pointing to Number 10*) In there! I saw the door close on her. – (*The surgeon enters the room.*) – Hans! Where is the Antidote? Where are the drops you mixed with my drink?¹²⁷

HANS. Gone! The last dose was the dose I gave you.

RODEN. The last! Oh, Hans! Hans! – Go in, and ask how she is.

(*Hans opens the door of Number 10.*¹²⁸ *The surgeon meets him on the threshold – raises his hand warningly, and whispers in Hans's ear. Then disappears and closes the door on him.*)

HANS. (*Starting, and looking round at Rodenberg.*) Is it my fault, Master?

RODEN. No, no; my faithful friend – not your fault. Is she worse?

HANS. Dead!¹²⁹

RODEN. Dead, at the moment when the lost money is restored! Dead, without a farewell word from the child for whom she has sinned! Dead by the hand of one victim, on the bed that she prepared for the other! (*A murmuring of voices*

and a distant sound of bells, heard without.)¹³⁰ What noise is that?

HANS. Hark! The news of you waking to life again has flown through the city!
The joy-bells, master, the joy-bells are ringing for your sake!¹³¹

RODEN. The joy-bells – while the bed in that room bears its burden of death,
after all! The joy-bells – while the poor motherless girl listens vainly at home
for the footstep that shall never return! – Oh, I may yet be worthy of the
mercy that saved me, if I live to dry *her* tears – if I live to guide her tenderly
towards the better future of her married life!¹³²

HANS. Are you pleased with me, master? My poor head is perplexed with many
doubts; my thoughts go back for refuge to the quiet past time; and all the
memory I have stops at those first words when you sheltered me in your
house, and forbade me to kneel and thank you: “Lift up your heart, friend,
and stand equal with me. The debt of kindness is the one debt in this world,
which the poorest man alive –

RODEN.– *Has* been rich enough in gratitude to repay!”¹³³

Notes

- 1 BL: actors' names not given.
- 2 Texas: pencil note added by Collins: Note to Printers – Follow all the parentheses and underlinings carefully: the only means of distinguishing between the stage directions and the Text being to print the stage directions and parentheses and in italics. WC
- 3 BL: sentence deleted and cut before Misfortune ...: (I must by you to remember, sir, that my position in the world was not always what it is now. Although) continues: Misfortune ...
- 4 BL: sentence cut after attachment: (if I were a wordly man. But I am not a wordly man.) continues: In my opinion ...
- 5 BL: sentence cut after bygone time: (– they are my principles still –) continues: and I have done ...
- 6 BL: sentence cut after nature: (By-the-bye, I am charged with my wife's apologies. You know the delicacy of her health, and will therefore excuse her for not having come here with me.) continues: – No! not a step ...'
- 7 BL: deleted: 'appear to be in debt are rascals and cheats, are they' and replaced by 'can't pay their debts disgrace themselves do they'.
- 8 BL: (*Going to Minna's side, and kissing her hand.*)
- 9 BL: (*Puts her arm round Minna's waist, and presses one of her daughter's hands to her bosom.*)
- 10 BL: sentence cut after self: (wearied by no act of sacrifice, wasted by no lapse of time –) Continues: the love I give...
- 11 BL: (*Composing herself.*) No, my dears ...
- 12 BL: (*Seats herself at the table with her back ...*)
- 13 BL: (*Enter Hans Grimm, with a letter in his hand. He is dressed in black, and has a bunch of keys hanging at his waist. His hair is long and grey; his complexion of a dull, yellowish white; his step quiet and stealthy; his expression stolidly vacant. He advances noiselessly to the back of Widow Bergmann's chair.*)
- 14 BL: (*Starting violently and snatching the letter from him.*)
- 15 BL: Master.
- 16 BL: sentence cut after My master! (The good angel who helps and blesses us all). Continues: – (*To Karl*) ...
- 17 BL: sentence cut after straw: (Mats and baskets and toys and hats, I made them all out of my straw.) Continues: Oh, how the biting ...
- 18 BL: sentence cut after fast enough now: (Shall I make him talk on?) Continues: (*To Hans*) ...
- 19 BL: deleted: 'the good angel' and replaced by 'my master'.
- 20 BL: (*Taking out his handkerchief, and drying his eyes.*)
- 21 BL: (*Crying, and stamping his foot passionately*)
- 22 BL: (*To Karl.*) Humour him. No, no, Hans – no crying now!
- 23 BL: (*To Karl, changing suddenly to looks and tones of triumph.*)
- 24 BL: (*Laughing*) Continues: Oh, Hans ...
- 25 BL: "I have been asking questions, my poor fellow, about you," he says.
- 26 BL: (*Snatches the keys from his girdle, and shakes them in the air.*)
- 27 BL: This is my private account-book
- 28 BL: those
- 29 BL: dialogue cut: WIDOW B. The temptation of a moment sometimes triumphs over the honesty of a life. RODEN. Not with my clerks – not with my honest, faithful clerks!
- 30 BL: It is not my place
- 31 BL: (*Looks earnestly at Rodenberg; then starts and changes.*)
- 32 BL: (*Advances till he stands in a line with Widow Bergmann's chair, and eyes her attentively.*)
- 33 BL: (*Striking a bell on the table.*) Help! Help!
- 34 BL: (*Shuddering violently.*)
- 35 BL: The wretch horrifies me!
- 36 Collins has inserted the following above Act II: **Act 2 The Red Vial** • A Drama in Three Acts by Wilkie Collins. • **Note** – for the foot of the page. The author of this Drama gives notice that he reserves to himself all rights of translation and of reproduction. BL: Collins has inserted a note next to the act heading: • **Note**: – • During the second and third acts Widow Bergmann, Minna, Max Keller, and Karl are all dressed in mourning.
- 37 Collins has utilised a 'two-compartmental' scene for Act II.
- 38 BL: (*placed parallel with the Flat, and having the head set towards the left.*)
- 39 BL: an ordinary medicine chest.
- 40 BL: this sentence is inserted as a note next to the act heading (see footnote 36).
- 41 BL: (*Calling faintly.*) Hans! – Hans!
- 42 BL: You have had my answer. ...
- 43 BL: minute's
- 44 BL: (*Enter Minna and Karl*)

- WIDOW B. (*Aside*)
- 45 BL: stage direction is simply: (*Opens the partition-door, and leaves it ajar after she has entered the bedroom.*)
- 46 Texas: Collins uses a dash to separate the stage directions for the sitting room and the stage directions for the bedroom within the two-compartment scene.
- 47 BL: omitted: and closes the partition door.
- 48 BL: after – I hardly dare look at it! – : (*Kneels down, and takes it up.*) Whole!!! (*Rushes to the partition door, with a scream of exultation, and with the paper in his hand; unlocks the door; and bangs it to after him, when he gets into the bedroom.*)
- 49 From this point BL varies from Texas ms. through to line starting:
 WIDOW B. (*After following Hans ...*)
 HANS. In a minute! – I'll empty it at once; I won't give myself time to doubt. (*Empties the glass out of the window; then comes back and examines the written paper again.*) – "Good Against Poison."
 (*Enter Widow Bergmann, by the sitting-room door.*)
 WIDOW B. No Hans in the house; no Hans in the garden – what does it mean?
 HANS. More hard words, after "Good Against Poison." What's this, lower down? "Dose" – that's what I want! – "Dose, one table-spoonful in any liquid." (*Measures the Antidote into the tumbler; fills up with lemonade; looks again at the bottle.*) Empty! The last dose left. This is the mercy of Heaven; I can't doubt it now! (*Hides away the bottle and paper in his bosom.*)
 WIDOW B. Can he have got back into the bedroom, by the other staircase? (*Tries the key of the partition door.*) How did this door come unlocked? (*Enters the bedroom. Hans starts.*) So! You are here, after all? What's the matter?
 HANS. (*Taking up the glass.*) You startled me.
 WIDOW B. What are you going to do with that? Has your master called for drink?
 RODEN. Hans! Didn't you hear me? I'm thirsty again.
 WIDOW B. Take it!
 HANS. (*Aside; moving away slowly.*) If it should do him harm, after all! –
 WIDOW B. Take it!
 HANS. No escape! (*Goes to the bed.*)
- 50 BL: I must own something; or she'll be ...
- 51 BL varies from Texas ms. here:
 WIDOW B. Wretch! Did you see – ?
 HANS. I saw you take a pretty red vial from a deal box.
 WIDOW B. (*aside.*) My blood curdles! My heart stands still!
 HANS. (*Aside.*) I'll go near enough to the truth to try her (*To Widow B.*) I saw you drop something out of the red vial into my master's lemonade.
- 52 Texas: This line and Hans's line above are inserted by Collins.
- 53 BL: (*Advancing a step.*) You change about so, I don't know what to make of you.
- 54 BL: when you are ill.
- 55 BL: after "Memorandum.: I have tried giving this Antidote in cases where no poison ...
- 56 BL: Shall I want you tonight?
- 57 BL: The End of Act II
- 58 Collins has inserted the following above Act III: Act 3 The Red Vial• A Drama in Three Acts by Wilkie Collins. • **Note**– for the foot of the page. The author of this Drama gives notice that he reserves to himself all rights of translation and of reproduction.
- 59 The stage directions of Act III vary considerably between the two manuscript versions due to the Olympic's decision to add a more visible clock face to the bell pulley system in the Dead-House (see introduction p..).
 BL version of Act III:
 Act III
 The Bell
 (*Scene. The Dead-House at Frankfort. The stage represents part of a long corridor, the ends of which are supposed to terminate, on the right and the left, out of sight of the audience. The scene in the Flat presents a plain panelled wall. In the middle of the wall, a narrow black door, with the figure, 10, painted on it in large white characters. Above the door, and on the left hand side of it, a large bell, moved by a wooden crank. Attached to the crank, a rope; with the end passed through a hole in the wall. The rope is not drawn tight to the crank, but hangs down loosely below it in a loop. On the right of the door, a bracket fixed against the wall. The Flat scene is continued off the stage, to right and left, as far as the audience can see. At the left end of it, a black door, marked, 9, with a bell painted above it, to correspond with number 10. At the right end, a door marked, Watchman's Room. On the right side of the door of Number 10, a plain arm chair, placed against the wall. On the left side, a small round table, and a second arm chair. A lamp burns on the table. The light on the stage is dim.*
Enter, from the right, Widow Bergmann, and Max Keller, preceded by Duntzer.)
- 60 Texas: inserted: and set parallel with it

- 61 Texas: inserted: *with a burning lamp on it.*
- 62 BL: The other rooms from One to Nine are tenanted ...
- 63 BL: Are the great and the wealthy who have died in Frankfort, always been brought here?
- 64 BL: KELLER. Always. This place was founded when the dread of being buried alive was strong in men's minds. It is the law that the bodies of all citizens of Frankfort shall be laid out here, each in a separate room; and that a rope which communicates with a bell shall be passed round the right hand of the dead. Thus, if, in any case, the trance of a few hours has been mistaken for the terrible reality of death, the first movement of the reviving body betrays itself by the sound of the bell – the watchmen are at hand – the surgeon is within call – and the faint struggle of returning life is certain to be aided at the instant when it begins.
- 65 BL: have you ever heard the sound of the bell?
- 66 BL: Have you ever been told that the bell rang?
- 67 BL: No: it will enter the room, Number Ten, by a second door.
- 68 BL: Duntzer pushes open the door of Number 10.
- 69 Stage direction omitted in BL.
- 70 BL: *Duntzer lets the door fall to again,*
- 71 BL: WIDOW B. (*Walking away right.*) Fool, fool, to let him out of my sight for an instant! Continues: In that room did you say? ...
- 72 BL: I have an interest – an absorbing, breathless interest – in the past history of this place. The surgeon is sure to know more of it than anyone else. I want to ask him if that bell – if any of the bells all down the corridor – have ever rung yet within the memory of man. I want to know if there could be any case, in our own time, when one of the bells might be likely to ring – to ring at the hush of night – to ring in the dead silence of this fearful place!
- 73 BL: *Watchman's Door*
- 74 BL: (*Approaching the table.*) HANS! Come out into the passage, HANS! It's a fine cool air for drinking in, here. Come out, and bring the lamp with you. (*Sets the bottle and glasses on the table.*) (*Enter HANS from the watchman's room, slowly and dejectedly, carrying a burning lamp. The stage brightens a little.*) SCHWARTZ. I'll put it up for you, Crazy brains. (*Places the lamp on the bracket. The light from it falls vividly across the door of number 10.*) There! – Now what do you say to a drop of the third bottle? (*Goes to the table.*)
- 75 BL: After empty head? : What made you forget all your troubles, and set you singing and dancing like the mad devil's brat that you are? Ha! ha! ha! my wine – my wine!
- 76 BL: (*Starting up passionately on his knees.*)
- 77 BL: Ha! ha! ha! Medicinal little man,
- 78 BL: I'll set you chattering and kicking your heels like a poll parrot on a hot perch...
- 79 BL: omitted: as a simple drug
- 80 BL: (*Enter Schwartz, with a second bottle.*)
- 81 BL: both stage directions omitted.
- 82 BL: Yes, yes! the lamp is heavy; the lamp will press it out smooth again. (*Puts the letter under the lamp.*)
- 83 BL: Ha! ha! ha! Crazybrains is getting like himself again. He'll be chanting the mad watchman's song again before long. Here! I'll show you. (*Takes HANS across the stage.*) Do you see that rope?
- 84 BL: That's the rope that pulls the bell. It hangs down loose in a loop, don't it? You keep your eye on the loop. When you see it move, and run up tight to the hole in the wall, look into that room. There you'll find your master on the bed, with the end of the rope in his hand.
- 85 Texas: deleted: bell
- 86 BL: heart
- 87 BL: (*Turns and sees the door in the middle.*) Number Ten! I am back in the corridor.
- 88 Texas: square brackets [] indicate Collins's initial cuts to the Olympic production in response to the reviews of the opening performances, marked in the manuscript by pencil lines, indicating the sections to be cut (see Introduction p. ...).
- 89 Texas: the section contained within the square brackets is indicated on the ms. by a pencil line, indicating a more extensive cut than initially made in the stage direction below (see previous endnote).
- 90 Texas: stage direction marked with a penciled box, indicating a cut.
- 91 BL: You'll see it move. You'll hear it ring before long. (*Goes to ...*)
- 92 BL: There is but a drop
- 93 Texas: the cuts here are unclear; it would appear that HANS's speech here is maintained.
- 94 Texas: Physic!!! inserted.
- 95 BL: HANS. (*Pointing to the bell.*) When the bell rings – not before.
- 96 BL ms. varies considerably from the Texas ms. from this point:
WIDOW B. • I shall die if I stay here. – Watchman! wake, wake, and let me out!
Note and HANS's dialogue on reverse of folio:
• A white ray of moonlight glimmers in at the end of the corridor. HANS sees it.
HANS. Ha! Look! The moon – the cold white moon that the mad watchman sings about. Father Schwartz! I'm

- a man again! I remember the mad watchman's song. Listen! listen!
Returns to main text but cuts indicated:
[SCHWARTZ. (*Chanting drowsily in his sleep*) "The moon was shining white and cold" –
HANS. (*Wildly*) Ha! The mad Watchmen's Song! Father Schwartz, I'm a man again – I'm bright, inside and out, with drinkable gold! I remember the song. Listen! Listen!]
WIDOW B. Oh, stop him! stop him!
- 97 Texas: the remainder of this line is inserted at bottom of page, replacing deleted text.
- 98 BL: Any company's better than none, I said;
If I can't have the living, I'd like the dead –
Poor me!
Before my lips could utter more,
The corpse-bells rang at every door,
And footsteps crept across the floor.
Poor me!
- 99 BL: The doors gaped wide there stood a ghost.
- 100 Texas: Hans indicated in pencil in the margin. A penciled cut is indicated for this section of Hans's dialogue.
- 101 BL: terrified
- 102 BL: bell
- 103 BL: The bell! the clock!
- 104 Texas: cut indicated in pencil.
- 105 Texas: I shall shudder inserted in pencil.
- 106 Texas: extra stage directions inserted in margin: Madame F. tries vainly to wake them. The bell rings – the arm appears.
- 107 BL: bell
- 108 BL: (*Leaving the chair, and catching Hans by the arm.*) Hide me! hide me! The bell is moving! The crank of the bell moves.
- 109 BL: Collins inserts clock! before bell! but does not delete bell! as in other instances: The clock! bell! the clock! bell! It is unclear what his intention is.
- 110 BL: The bell swings slowly to and fro – then rings one deep note.
- 111 BL: left
- 112 BL: left, shouting
- 113 BL: *Duntzer enters, and stops thunderstruck at the sight of Rodenberg, by Schwartz's side.*
- 114 BL: (*To Schwartz, in a whisper.*) Alive!
- 115 BL: This stage direction absent.
- 116 BL: The following dialogue cut: RODEN. (*Faintly.*) Hans!
DUNTZER. He is alive! (*Turning to go out.*) Help! A life saved in the Dead-House! – Help! Help! (*Exit, left. Schwartz follows.*)
- 117 BL: Stage direction absent.
- 118 BL: (*Rodenberg advances a few steps, leaning on Hans's shoulder. The surgeon of the Dead-House enters, Right, and helps to support Rodenberg. They go out Right.*) The following scene directions and dialogue cut (BL): *Enter, left, the surgeon of the Dead-House, followed by Schwartz, Duntzer, and two assistants. Duntzer hurries to Widow Bergmann, and raises her head. The Surgeon goes to Rodenberg, and helps him. One of the 'assistants takes the lamp from the bracket, and opens the door of the Watchman's Room. Hans, Rodenberg, and the Surgeon enter it.*)
DUNTZER. She is recovering. Help me to put her in the chair. (*Widow Bergman is placed in the chair on the right.*)
Leave her quiet, till the Surgeon sees her. (*A knocking heard below at the outer door.*) What's that? The window is open there. (*Points through the doorway of Number Ten.*) Ask who knocks.
(*Schwartz and the Assistant enter the room. Schwartz calls. "Who's there?" Keller's voice answers, "Max Keller."*)
DUNTZER. Mr Keller! He has missed the lady at her own house, and has come here to seek for her. (*Calling*) I will run down, Schwartz, and break the news to Mr Keller. (*Exit, Right.*)
- 119 Texas: Collins has written Part 3 and a pencil line in the margin next to this speech, possibly indicating that it is cut or amended.
- 120 BL: "Bergmann"? – It is "Bergmann"!
- 121 BL: WIDOW B. Does me harm?
- 122 BL: WIDOW B. (*Falls back in the chair.*)
HANS. What have I done wrong?
- 123 BL: (*Exit into the Watchman's Room.*)
- 124 BL: (*Enter Rodenberg from the Watchman's Room.*)
- 125 BL: (*Approaching the door of the middle room as the delirium of the poison registers.*) Where ...
- 126 BL: (*As she disappears Rodenberg and the Surgeon come out of the Watchman's room, followed by Hans.*)
- 127 BL: RODEN. (*To the Surgeon.*) In there! I saw the door close.
(*The Surgeon enters the room.*)

- RODEN. Hans! Where is the Antidote? Where are the drops you mixed with my drink?
- 128 BL: (*Hans opens the door of the middle room. The surgeon ...*)
- 129 BL: Dead. (*Walks aside a little.*)
- 130 BL: *A murmuring of voices heard, with bells, without.*) What noise ...
- 131 BL: Hans's speech cut here. Unclear. Cited by Pearson as: –Hark! The rapture of all the city has found a voice to welcome [you] master. The joy-bells, master, the joy-bells are ringing for your sake! news of your waking to life again has flown among them like wildfire. Hundreds are waiting with torches to lead you home. Hundreds more have rushed off to the Belfry Tower to set the joy-bells ringing. Replaced by note on opposite verso marked •: Hans. • Hark! The news of you waking to life again has flown through the city! The joy-bells, master, the joy-bells are ringing for your sake!
- 132 BL: Cut: (*The first peal of the bells is heard in the distance, Cheering voices mingle with it.*)
HANS. Hark! the joy of all the city has found a voice to welcome you!
RODEN. (*Beckoning Hans to his side.*) And the love of a faithful friend sweetens the pleasure of hearing it!
- 133 BL: (*The bells ring louder; the cheering increases: Rodenberg rests his arm on Hans's neck, and points to the way out. Keller appears at the door of the Watchman's Room, with Schwartz, Duntzer, and the Surgeon, waiting to join Rodenberg. The two Assistants are seen a little beyond them, standing with lamps, to light the way down the passage. The Curtain falls.*)
The End.

Selected reviews for The Red Vial

Illustrated London News, October 23, 1858, p. 380.

OLYMPIC: Some judicious alterations have been made in Mr Wilkie Collins's melodrama of "The Red Vial", which now meets with no opposition. Mrs Stirling's admirable acting alone should ensure an extended run to this startling production.

The Journal of a London Playgoer – From 1851 to 1866 by Henry Morley, London 1891, pp. 189-191, (originally published in 1866, this extract is taken from the 1891 edition).

October 16. – At the OLYMPIC we have had, during the week, the opening of Mr. Wilkie Collins's *Red Vial*. Intent upon the course, of his narrative, the author has in this instance forgotten that in a drama characters are not less essential than a plot. There is not a character in *The Red Vial*. One person is, indeed, benevolent; another rigid in the sense of probity; another, represented by Mrs. Stirling, weak in the same, and wicked; and another, represented by Mr. Robson, a maniac, with wits of dimensions varying according to the convenience of the story; but they are all shadows for a tale that should be read in ten minutes, not characters to be offered bodily to our senses, for a two hours' study. Still with the same exclusive care about the story, it happens also that the author of *The Red Vial* has taken no pains to secure pithiness of expression; there is no effort to say good things pointedly, and sometimes even a tendency to say commonplace things tediously, as if they were worth elaborating into speeches.

But the defect fatal to the success of this melodrama, probably, is something in itself apparently more trivial than any of these faults. The morality of the play is, indeed, to a certain extent, bad; we are asked for some sort of sympathy with mother's love that begets robbery and murder; but plays seldom are condemned for bad morality. Crowded houses at the Haymarket have this week taken harmless delight in *London Assurance*, of which the whole story shines only through a bright halo of swindling and lying; a play without the faintest recognition in it of such a principle as honour, except by a weak tag at the end about two gentlemen. That play succeeds because it has a fairly managed story, a pleasant variety of well-marked stage-characters, enough of sparkle in the dia-

logue, although it is by no means good, and an easy sense of the ridiculous everywhere paramount. Want of power in the writing does not much offend an audience that is otherwise contented. When will *Boots at the Swan* fail to attract playgoers to the Olympic, and to awaken peals of laughter there? Yet as a piece of writing it is utterly unreadable. The fatal defect in *The Red Vial* is that it makes no allowance for the good or bad habit that an English audience has of looking out for something upon which to feed its appetite for the absurd. The orthodox writer of melodramas satisfies that hunger with a comic underplot, and by so doing saves his terrors whole. But Mr. Wilkie Collins has experimented in a drama without one break in the chain of crime and terror, and the audience therefore makes breaks for itself at very inconvenient places. That a play so contrived should contain frequent solemn references to a doctor's shop, blue, green, and red bottles, drops and tablespoonfuls, small matter as that may be, is in the presence of a laughter-loving public very perilous. It needs the highest and the truest exaltation of the language of the drama to keep an audience in an English playhouse in a state of unbroken solemnity for two hours at a stretch. Mr. Robson and Mrs. Stirling raise the story to the utmost possible height by their acting; every help of effective scenery has been supplied on the most liberal scale. The piece is the work of a popular writer, admirably mounted, perfectly acted, with the favourite actor of the day labouring his utmost in what should have been a striking part. Nevertheless it was condemned, and condemned, as we believe, not for any serious demerit, but for a defect arising from misapprehension of the temper of an English audience. It is no new temper among us. Even Shakespeare felt that to King Lear the Fool was necessary. Such plays as *Jane Shore*, or Otway's *Orphan*, never had healthy life upon our stage; and as a nation we have for the style of the serious French drama an ingrained antipathy. There must be a deeper earnestness than plays can demand, in whatever serious thing Englishmen are to look at without exercise of that sense of the humorous which is part of their life; so natural a part that every man is in every grade of society regarded as a bore who wants it; and the very phrase with thousands even among our educated men for not finding a thing acceptable is "seeing no fun" in it.

The Musical World, 16 October 1858, vol. 36, p. 667.

Olympic – Idiocy, theft, murder, and the Morgue – such are the materials from which Mr Wilkie Collins – we beg pardon, Wilkie Collins – has wrought his new play, *The Red Vial*, and with which he has endeavoured to indicate a new mode of infusing vitality into the declining drama. To strive to produce something novel is very laudable in a writer of the present day; but, when deviating from the beaten path, care should be taken not to lose sight of it entirely. In his attempt to achieve something original, Mr. Wilkie Collins has, like vaulting ambition, lighted on the unnatural. In some respects *The Red Vial* betrays great ingenuity, and even indicates power, but the "horrors on horrors" which the

writer accumulates, he has not poetical force or elevation of sentiment to assuage or modify, and the facts are left to their own naked repulsiveness. Less finely acted, the drama would have been summarily dismissed from the stage on the first night of its performance. Mr. Robson acts the part of the idiot with astonishing energy and truthfulness; but in his acting less proximity to nature would be desirable, since the effect on the audience is not that which an author contemplates, nor an actor aims at – an immediate desire to get up and leave the theatre. We were never before so deeply impressed by Dr. Johnson’s observation, that “fatuity is not the proper prey of the satirist,” as after witnessing *The Red Vial* on Monday evening. It is to be lamented that the first entirely serious part written for Mr. Robson should not have been a success. Although Mr. Wilkie Collins’s new play must be pronounced a failure, he must not, therefore, be told to write no more. Let him eschew imitating the nude abominations of the modern French melodramatic school; nor seek German charnel houses for subjects to place in all their unsophisticated loathsomeness before his English audiences. He may then produce something worthy of himself, since his talent is undeniable.

16 October 1858 (unidentified newspaper review, Harvard Theatre Collection)
OLYMPIC – On Tuesday we witnessed the second representation of Mr. Wilkie Collins’s three-act original drama of the “Red Vial,” (the plot of which might suit a German “Newgate Calendar”) written expressly by him for this theatre; and while we bear testimony to the power, intense vigour, breadth of grasp, and striking situations which characterise and abound in the drama, the harrowing nature of the details, culminating to a climax of the utterly horrible in the last act, and thereby partaking of the nature of an anti-climax, compel us to join in the critical judgement already pronounced by numerous journals, viz.: – that it is one of the brilliant failures of the age, and that, while the author’s powers for story writing are of the most splendidly imaginative order, his gifts as a dramatist are marred by a fatal misconception of what is suited to the exigencies of the modern stage; not less so that he is utterly at variance with the tastes of his auditory, who cannot revel in the ghastly processes of poisoning or the mysteries of the Morgue; nor can they accept the appalling phases of madness on the stage in a mimetic form, when the awful visitation is spreading in our midst, and is becoming a reality far too frightful to be simulated by the most peculiarly gifted actor of his day. A mother who, out of the exaggeration of the maternal sentiment – the holiest human feeling known in human intercourse – who will go through any degrees of crime for love of her child – who, to secure her daughter’s happiness with the man of her choice, whereby she becomes in a manner alienated from that mother for ever – who will abstract a key, take moneys from a safe, obliterate an item in a ledger by means of a chemical agent, and not hesitate, finally, to stop short at poisoning – at murder! – is at once an object of our pity and of our abhorrence. But she may also interest us legitimately, since,

after all, it is the province of representative psychology to make the virtues and the vices meet, as it were, upon a neutral ground, the one taking tint and reflection from the other; and when to commend and when to condemn becomes conscientiously a difficult matter. But the initiative, taken step by step, the manipulation, and corpse born to the dead house, the dreadful movements of that ghostly index-hand, and the still more dreadful sound of the bell, showing that the supposed dead yet lives within its dismal but unseen cell, whose ghostly precincts are open before us, and all this, while the wretched woman is herself poisoned through *herself* as a final cause, retribution though it be – these become too revolting, too horrible, too much, at last, for the over-burthened senses to bear; and the collapse sustained, after having been wrought up to breathless pitch of agony, is the very best proof of failure, and that having sought after too much, the interest has vanished in a fit of needless and oppressive terror. That the piece was put upon the stage with accessories and scenic accompaniments which exhibited alike equal liberality and pictorial scale, it would be impossible to deny. That it was performed by one and all, from first to last, in a surpassing manner, we are almost happy to admit. Mrs. Stirling was simply unapproachable! Ristori was never more graceful, Rachel never more terrible, or Mrs. Charles Kean more tender, each in the superlative degree of these passions, than was this gifted actress in the many moods of passion that swept like a whirlwind and darkened like an eclipse upon her soul, in her impersonation of the miserable and unhappy widow – the fond, the self-abnegating mother. Her true vein is tragedy, with comedy, full of grace and finish, as its adjunct; once what we beheld, justifies us in saying, that if Mrs Stirling undertook the part of *Lady Macbeth*, she would fill up the colossal proportions of this magnificent creation, as it has rarely been filled up, since the days of Siddons or O’Neil. Her sob of sorrow was as mournful as November winds over the graves of those we love. Her cry of horror made the pulses standstill, and we never remember to have realised the Terrible in representations so vividly before. Mr Robson’s *Hans Grimm* was original, startling, and approached to the terrible also; but it is a fearful thing “to make fools o’ the other senses.” Mr. Addison was so admirable in his part, that he deserves ampler praise than we can now bestow. Mr. G. Cooke relieved the tedium of a hideous scene by his unctuousness; but though the audience applauded the acting, they could not admire the piece.

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FRANCIS BOUTLE PUBLISHERS

WILKIE COLLINS

THE RED VIAL

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY CAROLINE RADCLIFFE
CONSULTANT EDITOR: ANDREW GASSON

WITH A FOREWORD BY STEVEN ISSERLIS

Wilkie Collins's thrilling three-act drama, *The Red Vial*, was performed at the Olympic Theatre in 1858. Experimenting with a new, dark realism based on the French theatre of the time, *The Red Vial* was considered the forerunner to Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*. Fuelled by a desperate, maternal love, Madame Bergmann, the widow of a celebrated physician, is ruthlessly driven to poison her benevolent employer and his loyal protégé, the reformed lunatic, Hans Grimm. The play's uncompromising themes of madness and murder, climaxing with the horrific appearance of a corpse in Act III, shocked audiences and critics alike and the play was put to rest until Collins re-wrote it as the novel, *Jezebel's Daughter*, in 1880.

This is the first publication of Collins's script for the Olympic production. It brings together the two known manuscripts, providing a complete, annotated transcript of the play, a scholarly introduction and contemporary illustrations and reviews.

This is the second in the series of plays by Wilkie Collins published by Francis Boutle Publishers. The first was *The Lighthouse*.

Cover illustration: Caspar David Friedrich, *Zum Licht
hinaufsteigende Frau*, 1825. Courtesy of Pommersches
Landesmuseum

