

The Suffragette: A Farce

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Mr Asterisks — Home Secretary
James — His Valet
Miss Belloney — A Suffragette
A Policeman, played by B.
Duke of Portland, played by B.
Field-Marshal Lord Oven, played by J.
False Minister, played by B.
A Constable, played by J.
scene: The Home Secretary's Study

Enter Asterisks, ushered by James—Asterisks has a very large, red hooked nose and a drooping fair moustache

Asterisks: I shall be writing all the morning, James.

James: You're always right in everything, sir.

Asterisks: True, James. Bring up the Monster Petition from the Associated Bottle-Washers when it arrives, James.

James: Yes, Sir. *(Goes.)*

*Asterisks goes to cupboard and searches in it.
Miss Belloney climbs through window, unnoticed, and runs into the well of the table.*

Asterisks: Ah, well, a Secretary of State has a dog's life. *(A growl.)* Dear me, and there's the dog! *(Looks*

round.) Owch! it's bitten me. *(Jumps up, and hops about, holding his leg.)* It's under the table! *(Miss Belloney crawls out.)* What in the name of heaven do you want?

Miss Belloney displays placard.

Belloney: The Vote!

Asterisks: You've got it. I vote you a public nuisance. How did you get here?

Belloney: Up the spout.

Asterisks: Where your clothes came from. Well, I thought you were a dog; it seems you're a—Never mind, I'm going to see if you're a bird.

(Throws her out of the window. Rings.)

Enter James.

Asterisks: James, you will find the mangled remains of an elderly and hideous female on the lawn. Inter them decently.

James: Indecently; yes sir. *(Exit.)*

Asterisks: Now for my letters. *(Settles down.)*

Enter James.

James: The Monsters' Petition, sir.

Asterisks: Put it down!

James does so—it is an immense brown-paper parcel, tied with string.

Exit James.

Asterisks: There'll be a hot time in the old House to-night. Hum! hum!

(Bending to his work.)

The parcel rises, bursts, and clasps hands over his eyes.

Belloney: Guess who it is.

Asterisks: Oh, there's only one person it can be—you, my own darling.

Belloney *(mimicking)*: Oh, yes, it's me, my own darling. But who's "you, my own darling"?

Asterisks: Not my wife. Surely it isn't Flossie Slapdash!

Belloney: No, it isn't, you old sinner! Now, you've given it away a bit.

Asterisks: Gertie, by Jove! I wouldn't have had you guess—I mean, it isn't what you think it is.

Belloney: Nor am I what you think I am—oh, your Gerties and Flossies!

Asterisks: Who are you then?

Belloney: I'm Votes for Women! *(Releases him.)*

Asterisks: Oh, you— *(Rings.)*

Belloney: Hush! hush! What would Flossie think if she heard you?

Enter James.

Asterisks: James, this isn't the Monster Petition; it's the Monster itself. Remove it!

James: Yes, sir. This way, Monster! *(Pushes her out.)*

Asterisks: Dear, dear, these interruptions are very trying. To work, to work!

The door opens, James gives a series of little discreet coughs, then withdraws.

Enter a bearded spectacled gentleman.

Asterisks: Hullo, Druce, the top of the morning to you. *(Advances to door, and holds out his hand.)* Oh, my mistake. Portland, of course. How de do?

Belloney: How de druce?

Asterisks: What can I do for your Dru—grace?

Belloney: A trifle, a mere trifle.

Asterisks: We are quite alone—won't you take your beard off?

Belloney: I will. *(Does so, and is discovered. Astericks startled.)* All I want is Votes for Women.

Asterisks: I suppose *you* came through the Underground Passage! Good morning; just a word. I'm going to send for a constable, and if you come in here again—Hollow way—the other one.

Belloney: So that's what Highgate [I get]. *(Exit.)*

Asterisks: This sort of thing really does take one's mind off one's work.

(At telephone.) James, let a constable come up and guard the door, please. Now to my letters!

A knock at the door.

Asterisks: Come in!

Enter Constable.

Asterisks: Just stand at the door, please, officer, and if any aged and decrepit female of gigantic size and murderous disposition—

Constable: I understand, sir. *(Draws his truncheon, and whacks at an imaginary Suffragette. Asterisks buries himself in his letters. The constable whistles "God Save the King." Asterisks looks up as he stolidly goes through the tune. Constable sings.)* "Confound their politics! Frustrate their knavish tricks!"

(Seeing Asterisks listening.) That's the women, sir?

Asterisks: Yes it is, I'm sorry to say, constable. But I am very busy this morning, and I must really ask you—

Constable: Begging your pardon, sir, there's only one way to do it— *(Sings.)*

"On thee our hopes we fix"—
and that is to give them Votes. *(Throws off helmet and tunic, and is disclosed. She thwacks the Minister with truncheon, still humming.)*

"And make them fall."

*Knocks down Asterisks, and runs out.
Asterisks slowly rises.*

Asterisks: God save us all!

Enter James hastily.

James: Oh, sir, such an awful riot in the square. There's a lady with a shotgun and two loaders, and she's bagged a hundred and thirty-three and a half braces of specials before lunch, and, well, sir, the millingtery was to fire on her, sir—but they couldn't bear to look at her, sir!

Asterisks: Peace, James; be a man!

James: I'm sure I'd be a woman if I could, sir. O the awful—

Asterisks: Peace, James. We are not without resource. You may go now, and—be very careful not to enter the room again. But you may allow anyone else—**anyone** else, James—male or female—

James: What about herumfrodites, sir?

Asterisks: *Anyone* else, James, is to be allowed to pass unchallenged.

James: Very good, sir. *(Exit.)*

Asterisks goes to cupboard, takes out a drawer and a very large stone bottle of ink. He pours this into the drawer, and poises it deftly on the door, which he leaves ajar. Executes a dance round the room, rubbing his hands, nearly knocks the door and drawer over himself; returns to desk.

Asterisks: Now, we await the assault. For *(declaims)*
"In the hands of men supremely great
The Ink is mightier than the sword."

Bends to his work.

James *(off)*: Walk straight in, my lord, I pray you.

The door opens, and the drawer falls. A mass of ink, partially concealing a Field-Marshal in full uniform (played by James) rushes into the room.

Asterisks *(squaring up)*: Now, Votes for Women!
Come on!

Field-Marshal: My dear Asterisks, a joke's a joke, I dare say, but I must say that when I call on official business upon one of His Most Gracious Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State, it is highly unbecoming and indeed indecorous, partaking, almost, I might almost say, of the nature of aw—*(Very pompous, to contrast with his absurd appearance. Asterisks, who has been shrieking with laughter, recognises that this is the real man, is struck with the most dreadful apprehension—collects his wits—)*

Asterisks: My *dear* Lord Oven, this is a most dreadful business. That you should suspect *me* of playing you such a schoolboy trick! We are both victims of these terrible women, I fear. That trap was meant for me, I make no doubt. Come along, I must give you a bath and a change of clothes. See! I'm a good deal splashed myself!

Field-Marshal: Well, I suppose—

Asterisks: No supposing; come along. *(Exeunt.)*

Belloney disguised as the Minister re-enters almost immediately, and starts busily writing letters, humming cheerfully in a shrill falsetto.

After him—Enter a real Constable (played by James) and salutes.

Minister: Constable, I expect to be attacked by a most desperate female woman. Destroy her instantly when I give the signal!

The Policeman exhibits a brace of revolvers and three toy cannon, which he trains on doors and window.

James: Ready, sir, ready!

Enter, wildly, a man in a bath-towel, with his hair full of soap (played by Asterisks); starts at seeing the presentation of himself in the chair.

Asterisks: By heaven, I'm going mad! Constable (*grasping his arm*), you're solid anyhow! Tell me, before I rave—is there anybody sitting in that chair, or is there not?

James: Ho, yus, La Milo. That's Mr. Hasterisks, the 'Ome Sekertury.

Asterisks: It's the devil! It's the woman! And she's got my clothes!

Belloney (*rising with dignity*): Constable, arrest that woman!

A struggle. They go out. Belloney gives a short dance of triumph, comes forward and bows, removing the false nose and moustache.