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[] and * have been used to indicate that a spelling or word is doubtful or illegible.

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Staton, James Taylor (1816-1875)

***The Wife Hunters* (1867)**

Scene: A Parlor in Hollyhock's house with table, chairs, &c. (Enter Mr. Hollyhock, with a Newspaper in his hand).

Hollyhock. Another of those advertising scoundrels, I see, has an application this morning in the paper for a young lady to open a correspondence with him, with a view to matrimony. (*Looks at paper*). He describes himself as 25 years of age, dark complexioned, of middle stature, and of prepossessing appearance! Upon my word, if Benjamin Hollyhock, when he was 25 years of age, and his hair was raven black, has placed himself upon a pedestal, and described his appearance as prepossessing, he would have been dubbed a proud, conceited coxcomb. But when I was young, we could

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get wives without advertising for them. Nay, I verily believe that I could have had a dozen, if the law of the land had not denied to our sex the luxury of a plurality of spouses. Luxury, did I say? Perhaps I'm wrong there, for it is open to serious doubt whether a couple or more of wives would not be found practically to be more of a plague than a blessing. Some persons I know conceive themselves to be most grievously hampered and tormented with one, and those who obtain wives by means of advertisements deserve to be tormented, for though most of them pretend to be very modest and disinterested, as this Romeo does here--(*pointing to advertisement*)--and to have resorted to advertising on account of a want of time to devote to the searching out a wife in the natural way, they are designing knaves every one of them, and are in reality more anxious about money than female society.

Terence (*outside*). This, I presume, is the mansion of Benjamin Hollyhock, Esquire, member of the--of the--Twiterville Floral and Agricultural Society, Chairman of the Gentlemen of the Board of Guardians for the Trotterville Union, Churchwarden, late Overseer, and dispenser of gratuitous advice and botanical medicine to the deserving poor (*Enters*).

Hollyhock. Who are you, sir, that enters my house in such a rude and abrupt manner? You seem to know not only my name, but a portion of my history. Who are you, sir?

Terence. Fair, sir, an' I'm sometimes puzzled to give meeself a correct description of meeself. But my name sir, is Terence O'Sullivan, an' I'm extramely sorry that I cannot, with that regard for truth which becomes a rale Christial jintleman, add "Esquire".

Hollyhock. Well, Mister Terence O'Sullivan, as you've entered my house unbidden, and rather unceremoniously, will you oblige me by volunteering a statement as to the nature of your business?

Terence. Shure, sir, an' I'll do that same; but as we may have to converse together for a short time, for my business is peculiar--d'ye mind that?

Hollyhock. Go on, sir.

Terence. I'm coming to the first point, sir. My business, as I was remarking, is peculiar--delicately peculiar. Fair, sir, I may add, it is interestingly peculiar.

Hollyhock. Don't add anything, sir, but proceed, and be brief, for I have not much time to spare. I have an appointment at eleven.

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Terence. At eleven, and now, I suppose, it is about ten. Unfortunately, sir, the only watch I ever had I lent to a male relative, under rather peculiar circumstances.

Hollyhock. Confound your peculiarities, sir. What is your business with me?

Terence. Don't get into a passion, sir. The Chairman of a Board of Guardians should never lose his temper. That's my sentiment, sir, an' if you'll examine it well--

Terence. I'll explain sir, if ye'll only have a little patience. As I was remarking, sir, as my business is peculiar---delicately peculiar, and requires the calmest of consideration and the absence of all hurry, I submit to your judgment, as an agreeable preliminary, whether it would not be as well if we were both seated.

Hollyhock. Well, i don't object to any person who comes here on business taking a seat, especially if that business involves consultation and deliberation; but, personally, I prefer standing at present.

Terence. Ye're a very kind jintleman, sir, and I'll not distress yez with such an exhibition of freedom as the taking of a seat, whilst you stand; and further let me say, that my modesty prevents me from suggesting to you the debt of gratitude ye would place me under by asking e to take a glass of wine. No, we'll say nothing about the wine, although, bedad, I dare be sworn ye've got some prime in the bin--some of the rale sparkling, heart-cheering, knock-me-down stuff. But bad luck to the spalpeen, say I, that would give precedence to wine when whishky was to be had. Did yez ever taste a drop of the rale ould Irish malt whishky--that which had never been contaminated wid the guager's stick?

Hollyhock. Sir, if you are only here to talk of wine and whisky, I must beg of you to leave the house, and bid you a good morning.

Terence. Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, I'm not here to talk of wine or whishky, or any other popular eye water; I'm here, sir, on more important business; business, sir, that is peculiar---delicately peculiar.

Hollyhock. Cofound your peculiar business! State it, sir, or leave the house.

Terence. Now, Master Hollyhock, don't get into such a towering passion; don't lose your temper; ye'll be shure to want it again next board day. I've an uncle that belonged to one of these boards, and it was a maxim wid him to keep all the temper he'd got for its meetings.

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Hollyhock. Now, will you explain your business?

Terence. Certainly, sir, and that without further circumlocution; for I see ye're not in the humor for a friendly chat on miscellaneous subjects. Ye've had a great variety of things for breakfast, I * [persave], and now yez wants a change. (*Hollyhock manifests impatience*). Be nisy, sir, be nisy; do, that's a dear ould darlin.

Hollyhock (*Looking at his watch*). I give you two minutes, sir. If within that time you don't proceed straightforwardly to state the nature of your business, I shall leave the room, and order you to be put out.

Terence. Bedad, but that would be unjintlemanly. But, shure sir, I'll not put yez to so much trouble. I'll tell yez my errand at once, premising simply that it is peculiar--interestingly peculiar--delicately peculiar. It relates to your fair daughter, sir.

Hollyhock. My daughter!

Terence. Your daughter--your fair daughter--the very centre from which radiates the beauty that imparts the light of loveliness to the faymale darlins of Twitterville.

Hollyhock. Now, don't be speaking of her beauty, you only waste time, for I am not to be overcome with blarney.

Terence. Faix, sir, but that assurance gives me comfort; it says to me, Terence, ye've a sensible man to dale wid, and not a waik, superficial crayter, liable to be whisk'd about by every wind that blows.

Hollyhock. Well, never mind that; what about my daughter?

Terence. I've been told, sir, that she's still in a state of single blessedness--a solitary flower blooming in silence beside the parent stem.

Hollyhock. Well, and if she is in a state of single blessedness, what's that to you, eh?

Terence. Och, its just everything, sir; for I'm in a state of single--no, not blessedness, sir, for ever since I caught a glimpse of your charming rosebud, I have been as miserable as Pat Fagan's cow when it came to a knowledge of the melancholy fact that a butcher had been inquiring after its health and physical condition.

Hollyhock. Oh, I perceive now what you are after. You are here to declare your passion for my daughter are you?

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Terence. And to supplicate for the loan of her delicate hand and heart. An 'och, sure, if ye'll lend them to me for life, I'll pledge my honor to do all that I can to make her conveniently comfortable and happy.

Hollyhock. This is really a surprise, sir.

Terence. Bedad, no, don't say that; don't say that its surprising that a man should be after making love to such a beautiful, bewitching daughter of Venus as your little rosebud. Yez ought to be surprised that ye've not had her taken off yer hands long ago.

Hollyhock. Taken off my hands! What do you mean?

Terence. Oh, the manin's as plain as the hole in Mike McMurrough's nankeens. I mane to say that its wonderful so lovely a craytur should have been allowed to remain out of the fetters of Cupid till the present time. Man alive! I could die for so beautiful a darlin.

Hollyhock. Well, die; for it strikes me that you'll never obtain either my daughter's hand or heart.

Terence. Fathers are bad judges; but I suppose that's not news.

Hollyhock. No; but if you'll tell me the grounds on which your supposition rests that you are an eligible match for Miss Rose Hollyhock, that may be news.

Terence. Oh, I'll do that same. In the first place, sir, she's lively,--she's bewitching; in the second place, if I'm not gulled by a spalpeen at the hotel, she's got a respectable fortune; in the third place, her wish is to meet wid an illegant young man to transform into a husband; in the fourth place, I'm informed that her father is anxious to get her off his hands, bekase he objects to having two females in the house at once, an' prefers the society of another wife to that of a daughter; and, in the fifth place, bekase Terence O'Sullivan could do very well wid a wife an' a fortune.

Hollyhock. Oh, indeed!

Terence. Yes, sir, an' he may as well confess that he would consider it as raily inconvenient to have one without the other.

Hollyhock. Well, you are very candid anyhow.

Terence. Candid, sir; what's that? Oh, I see; yez manes that I've got the candied tongue; that I'm the master of sweet words an' honied phrases. But yer wrong; I'm a poor hand at flattery, sir. It's been my ill luck never to have had the opportunity of licking the blarney stone.

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Hollyhock. No, your modesty won't allow you to confess the fact, that's it.

Terence. Bedad, an' yez may be right; I have often been charged wid the possession of a superabundance of modesty.

Hollyhock. I could like to see the jury that would bring in a verdict of guilty upon such a charge; but I suppose you have other possessions besides modesty!

Terence. I have a warm, true heart, sir.

Hollyhock. Have you no estates?

Terence. Well, sir, I believe that if I had my rights, I should possess considerable property in the county of Kerry; but I left my native country for special reasons before I could make good my title.

Hollyhock. What are your means of living?

Terence. Fair, sir, but that's a puzzler, for my manes are various, an' changeable as various. I have taken to many occupations, sir, but none of them seemes to agree wid me, the last more especially.

Hollyhock. What was that?

Terence. I was a commercial traveller, sir, last. I travelled the country as the representative of a timber merchant. I did the principal retail trade for a manufacturer of matches.

Hollyhock. Oh, well, Mr. O'Sullivan, I may as well relieve you of all further trouble and anxiety, by informing you that Miss Rose Hollyhock can never become more closely connected with you than she is at present. The door is open, sir.

Terence. I see it is, sir, an' to show you that you are the last man in the world I would like to offend, I'll take your hint an' my departure. But I shall call again, sir, when ye've had time to think over my proposal.

Hollyhock. You may save yourself the trouble, sir.

Terence. Oh, bedad, but faint heart never did fair lady win, an' the want of perseverance has led to many unnecessary failure. So yez may rely upon my calling again. In the meantime, give my compliments to Miss Hollyhock, an' say that I shall do myself the honor, at some future an' no distant day, to seek a personal interview, when she may judge for herself of the personal merits and attractions of Terence O' Sullivan. For the present, good-bye.

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Hollyhock. Good-bye, sir. (*Exit Terence*).

Hollyhock. Well, this is really a strange adventure. Whatever can have made this fellow presume that my daughter is in want of a husband, and that I was desirous of getting her off my hands, as though she were so much lumber or dead stock? And what a cargo of solemn impudence the fellow has, to be sure.

(*A loud knock at the door*). Who have we here now? (*Another knock, louder, that before*). Come in, sir; come in, and don't destroy the door.

Enter Giles Grumphin, hat in hand, holding on to his forelock, and looking a little frightened.

Hollyhock. Well, sir, what is your business here? It must, I think, be of great importance, judging by the force of your hammering at the door.

Giles. If awve made too mitch din, aw beg yoa pardon; but my mam said hoo'd bin tow'd by Doctor Littlepip's mon ut yoa wur a bit deof; un so aw mut knock wi my clug very herd.

Hollyhock. Oh, I'm much obliged to Doctor Littlepip's man: give him my compliments when you see him, and say that if he thinks really that I am deaf, he would confer a favor by suggesting to the doctor, his master, the propriety of paying me a professional visit, with a view to effect a removal of the affliction.

Giles. If aw con think uv aw ut yoa said, sur, aw will tell, him, but awve not a good yed for carryin a greight jorum o words, espeshully when some on um's unkuth.

Hollyhock. Well, now what brings you here?

Giles. Wot brings me heere?

Hollyhock. Yes, what brings you here?

Giles. Waw, nuthin browt me; aw coom on my own legs.

Hollyhock. Umph! Well, what is the nature and purport of your business?

Giles. The naturunpurfurt o my bizness, sur? Aw dunnot know wot a naturunpurfurt is?

Hollyhock. You're a natural I can hear, so I must speak plain. What do you want? Do you understand that?

Giles. Yoi, aw undercumstonds that. Un, if yoa'll promise me ut yoa'll not get into a panshun, aw'll tell yoa wot aw wants.

Hollyhock. Oh, I won't get into a panshun, as you call it, depend upon it.

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Giles. Well, then, I's cum'd to see if yoa'll let me cooart yoar dowter?

Hollyhock (*starting and looking astonished*). Court my daughter!

Giles. Yeez, sur.

Hollyhock. Why, who the deuce persuaded you to come and put such a question as that to me?

Giles. Aw didno need mitch persuadin, sur, for aw seed hur gooing to church last Sunday, un aw went aw quite serious; for aw never clapt een on sitch a beauty.

Hollyhock (*laughing*). Love struck, eh?

Giles. Yeez.

Hollyhock. And so you have mustered courage sufficient to come and pop the question?

Giles. Yeez.

Hollyhock. Have you done this entirely at the prompting of your own heart?

Giles. The wot, sur?

Hollyhock. The prompting of your own heart.

Giles. I doesn't know wot the prompting uv a hert is?

Hollyhock. Well, innocent, have you come here of your own accord, without any asking you to do so?

Giles. Well, not disactly. For yoa seen, as soon as aw geet whoam, un haws'd t' eit my dinner, aw couldno get on; my appetoite wur missin; un every meawthful ut aw tried to swallow wanted loike to stop i' my swallow poipe. My mother could see uz aw wur eawt o gear, for there wur dumplins to dinner---a berm un to stert wi, un a blagberry un t' finisht wi.

Hollyhock. You are fond of dumplings, then, are you?

Giles. Eh, yeez, aw am so. Aw welly lives on um.

Hollyhock. I should recommend you, then to take a quantity cold, as a kind of medicine. I have heard it said that, taken cold, dumpling is a rare antidote to excessive love; it may cure you of your affection for my daughter, and end in the restoration of your appetite; which, I feel persuaded, would be to you, a great blessing.

Giles. Yeez, sur.

Hollyhock. And, by the bye, now I remember, we have some cold pudding at present in the house, stuffed with raspberry jam.

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Giles. Eh, is that so? Dun yoa, for sure, have cowl puddin i' this house?

Hollyhock. Why is it a thing to be wondered at? Have you never any cold pudding at your house?

Giles. Bless yoa, now; its no choance o getting cowl at eawr house; we awlus eits it whole its hot.

Hollyhock (*laughing*). Oh, I see. (*Aside*). I'll have a little sport with this bumpkin. (*To Giles*). Well, now, sir, about my daughter; you were saying something about your mother. Has she had anything to do with your coming here?

Giles. Yeez, a little bit. For when shoo seed at aw couldn't eit my dumplings i' my usual way, shoo says, Giles wot ails the lad, makes thee shamrock so oer thy dumpies? Hoo awlus caw um dumpies hoo does. Well, mam, aw says aw do feel eawt o sorts; aw never had th' same mack uv a feelin before; its loike a sort uv an aw-over-me puckerashun, un my hert espeshully feels as if it wur gooin to be ith dumps.

Hollyhock. Clear symptoms of love.

Giles. Indeed, sur; un is Simpson's love a very strung sort?

Hollyhock (*laughing*). Oh, very strong. But go on with your story.

Giles. Yeez, sur. As I wur sayin, when my mam had sperred me, loike, I said to hur, Mam, awve not felt gradely, sin aw seed Squire Hollyhock's dowter cummin fro th' church. Eh, sez I, shoo did look pratty. Th' seet uv hur set my hert o flutterin till it wriggled one oth studs eawt o my shurt front. Indeed! cries shoo. Yeez, cries I. Then, says shoo, teawrt i' love.

Hollyhock. She's a clever woman, I hear, is your mother.

Giles. Yeez, shoo's nowt else but clivver. The cureit uv the church say shoo be's the clivverest, sensiblest woman, un the best nuss ut lives insoide the parish. Shoo intended the cureit's woife when shoo wur in the straw, as folks caw it; un the cureit sed shoo desarved greight credit--thoose wur his very words--for th' way in which hoo'd made th' gruel un nourisht her payshunce, un he said, i' my yerrin, that if it hadn't bin for hur, his good lady, as he cawd hur, would never ha bin ogen restored to a state o confluessence; though wot he meont, yoa known, aw hadno the least noshun. Theese cureits un sitchloike are so [h]ee larnt, un use sitch big words sometoims to give eawt sitch very smaw ideos.

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Hollyhock. I understand. But, you were going to say how far I am indebted to your mother for the honor of this visit. She advised you to come here, I suppose, and pop the question?

Giles. Yeez, sur; yoa've gow[as]sed it to a shavin; un shoo said aw wur a very loikely lad; un that if aw could get yoar rosebud for a woife it would be a grand thing for booath on us, cause hood have plenty o brass?

Hollyhock. And the combination of beauty and brass gave a zest to your affections, I suppose?

Giles. A jest to my affecshuns, sur?

Hollyhock. Yes, a jest, if you like; for the affair will turn out a farce, I doubt.

Giles. It will, will it, sur? then may I have yoar dowter?

Hollyhock (*laughing*). Nay, that's more than you can reasonably call upon me to say at present. I must hear further, and then you must consult her personally.

Giles. Nay, sur aw'll not insult her personality. Shoo is so hondsone.

Hollyhock. Consult her, man, consult her.

Giles. Oh, aw see, aye.

Hollyhock. But before you are introduced to her, you must satisfy me that you are a person that would conform to my motions of what a son-in-law ought to be.

Giles. Yeez, sur.

Hollyhock. In the first place, how old are you?

Giles. Aw wur just noineteen last Poncake Tuesday. Awve yerd my uncle Isaac say that aw shouldn't ha bin born till Ash Wednesday, but aw wur determined t' be ith world i' time for that yer's poncakes.

Hollyhock (*laughing*). Nineteen, only? Why you're a strapper for a youth of that age.

Giles. Yeez, sur; that's wot th' whole village says; un Uncle Timothy swears if aw wur t' goo abroad, its wot the world at large would say.

Hollyhock. You've a trade I suppose; what is it?

Giles. Aw works ith fields. Awn once o former Blower's yed men. He gies me noine shillin a wick, un a deal o brokken meight.

Hollyhock. You're what they call an agricultural laborer, eh?

Giles. Praps, they does caw us chaps by that foine name; but aw dunnot know.

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Hollyhock. You're industrious, I suppose? You work hard?

Giles. Well, pratty middlin, loike. Blower taks care o that. He preiches to us sometoimes, un tells us wot a big sin it is to be idle; he tells us that the scripturs say that he that winnot work, neither mun he eit; un that its an order fro above that men should aw yern their brade by th' swat o their brows.

Hollyhock. And you believe that of course?

Giles. Well, aw dunnot know eggsactly; for yoa see there's a greight monny people abeawt heere ut dunno work at aw, un yet they eiten mooar than me. It seems to be th' rule loike that thoose ut are gentlemen un do nowt, live on th' richest un th' daintiest meight; un as for its beein ordert that they should yern their brade by th' swat o their brows, if it be so, why dunnot they swat? Blower, neaw, he never swats, un he doesno work hawve as herd as me, but he lives a foine [s]eet better.

Hollyhock. I'm glad to hear that you are so industrious; but never get disconnected. Blower is your master, you know, and he has enough to do watch every end.

Giles. Yeez, sur I dar say he has; Missis often says ut its mooar than he con do.

Hollyhock. And she is right, I'll be bound.

Giles. Yeez, sur, aw daw say hoo is, for awve yerd her say above a dozen toimes that if it hadn't bin for hur, he'd ha bin ith wearkheawse lung sin. But he's a rare mower, is Blower. Yoan seen him mow, aw dar say.

Hollyhock. Never in my life.

Giles. Then yoa never seed th' king o grass cutters. Eh, he is a mower! He awlus goes last; un he whisks away; un if thoose ut are ith front dunnot keep mowin, he never stops, but he whisks away, un he just cuts their legs off, un goos on, whiskin away ogen.

Hollyhock. The deuce he does! How many pairs has he cut off?

Giles. Oh, not any yet; but he would do if they didn't keep movin.

Hollyhock. Astonishing! But now tell me of some of your own qualities. Are you blest with perseverance?

Giles. No, sur, aw never wur blest wi hur; aw bin blest wi Temperance un Prudence, un my mam; but never by Perseverance.

Hollyhock. Well, its something to have been blest with temperance and prudence.

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Giles. Yoi, but I couldno fancy oather on um; though mother said they wur boath ready to goo through th' world wi me.

Hollyhock. Why couldn't you fancy them?

Giles. Waw, because they wurno pratty; they wur nowt to yoar sweet little rosebud. Temperance had a very red yed; un Prudence wur pock-merkt, un had a wry meawth, un wur so terrible fat too. Mon, hoo lookt loike a looad a fleawr, wi a streng badly teed reawnd th' middle, even when hoo wur drest up.

Hollyhock. Oh, you're talking of two women, and not two virtues.

Giles. Yeez, sur, Temperance Dobbikin un Prudence Shawcross; un as yoa say aw dunnot think ut oather on um wur too vartuous. We noane on us are, awm towld.

Hollyhock. Well, you're are an original, I think.

Giles. Is that another foine name for a worker ith fields?

Hollyhock. No, it means that you are a genius. But, now, suppose you and my daughter were introduced to each other, and she took a fancy to you, would you know how to conduct your courtship in a style becoming her position.

Giles. Well, sur, I thinks I could manage to pleos hur, un to give hur every satisfacshun.

Hollyhock. You wouldn't cross her, I suppose?

Giles. Eh, now, not for th' world. Shoo should have aw hur own way.

Hollyhock. Did you ever pay your addresses before to a young lady?

Giles. No, sur; mother awlus said I wur too young un tender until I menshut yoar rosebud, un then shoo aw at wonst had hur een oppent, un shoo said that it wur gettin quite toime ut aw lookt eawt for a lasse to mak a woife on.

Hollyhock. Then, being inexperienced in love affairs, you think you've natural talent sufficient to enable you to pay your addresses in a befitting and satisfactory manner?

Giles. I durnt know, sir, abeawt havin my dresses made in a gradely fittin manner; but aw think if yoa seed me i' my Sunday clooas, yoad praise my taylior.

Hollyhock. You don't understand me, sir. Suppose you were for the first time speaking to my daughter, what would you say?

Giles. Oh, sur, mother has twot me a speech---a gradely noice un.

Hollyhock. Lets hear it, and then I'll tell you whether it is suitable. Suppose me to be the young lady.

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Giles. Well, aw'll try, but wrinkles un a gray yed are not fun on a yung lady.

Hollyhock. Well, but imagine me to be the young lady, for the sake of delivering the speech.

Giles. Aw underston yoa. Neaw then; let me see; heaw does it begin? Oh, aw have it. (*Throws himself into an attitude*). O thou mooast lovely uv beonuses, see before thee an adorin swine, one whose hert is full uv infecshun, un whose soul yammers after thy love, even as a goose yammers after stubble. When I fust say thy ebony yure, thy scawrulin een, thy jonquilin nose, thy chubby lips, un aliblastar neck, aw felt the flames uv Cupid burnin my innurds, un threatenin, unless slekt eawt by the hecter uv thy love, to consume my whole frame. Let me, then, yer fro thy spoutin lips the words, 'Giles, be moine', un my happiness is creatert for even un dever."

Hollyhock. Capital, sir, capital! Just go home and write that speech down on paper, or get Blower to do it and bring a copy to me. I'm sure it will please my pet, and save you the trouble of going down on your knees to her in the delivery.

Giles. O, thank yoa. Aw'll not be above an heawr away. Oh, thank yoa,. Oh, wot news for mother: awm shure hool be astonisht at my luck. (*Exit*).

Hollyhock. I must go now and see my pet, and let her know what's going on. We'll have some sport with his bumpkin, and learn him a useful lesson or two, before we part company. (*Exit*).