

The “Just Right” Gentlemen
A Comedy of Manners
Excerpted Scenes 1 and 2

SCENE 1: "Coming Home"

(The stage is empty save for a table covered in paper noisemakers and party hats. Next to these, there is pizza, and a few bottles of wine and beer. From offstage there begins a chanting: "Hey-o, hee-o, can't beat Ancedoni-o! Hey-o—" All of a sudden the chanters, a group of army men, rush on. They partake in the party favors, grab the hats, and excitedly greet each other. They are all dressed in formal Victorian-style dress, complete with sashes and military accoutrement. They are all digging into the food and drink when there is a sudden interruption.)

SERGEANT SNIFFLE

Alright, it's time for a toast!

(The men all look up at Sergeant Sniffle, who is decked in a plethora of military medals and finery.)

SERGEANT SNIFFLE

To the end of three hard years fighting the good fight...to a victory (*sneeze*) well deserved...to wine and women...to Ancedonia!

ALL MEN

TO ANCEDONIA!

SERGEANT SNIFFLE

Now I'd better see you all partaking in the food and drink tonight...and the Ance-Madamoiselles!

ALL MEN

HOORAH!

(The men all now resume chatter. SIR PIPORS, standing to the right, receives admirers from his troop.)

SIR HENDERSON

It was a privilege to serve with you, my man.

SIR PIPORS

Thank you, Henderson.

ADMIRAL ADMIRABLE

If Sniffle is our North Star, you are our Biggest Dipper!

SIR PIPORS

Oh, Admiral Admirable, you don't know what that means to me.

SERGEANT SNIFFLE

And that leaves me, ha! *(Sneezes)*

SIR PIPORS

Oh, Sergeant Sniffle, I am not worthy of any praise from you. While I did my best to obey your orders, I am only a Corporal! You are the one worthy of such praise!

SERGEANT SNIFFLE

Oh, do not worry, my boy, this is the time to celebrate! You are a hero: the country will recognize you as such, and you will have no trouble enjoying the acclaim you deserve.

SIR PIPORS

I am assured by your words.

(PIPORS gives an awkward smile as SNIFFLE toasts their drinks together. PIPORS walks away and stands alone for a minute until RICKEN approaches him.)

SIR RICKEN

Pipors, my man! *(He hugs PIPORS)* What a delight it is to see you back from the edge!

SIR PIPORS

Same to you, Ricken! Wow, you are venerated indeed! *(He points to RICKEN's new medals on his uniform)*

SIR RICKEN

These? *(He shakes his head)* They're nothing more than ceremonial. You are the one who led us into battle and back!

SIR PIPORS

(He stares into the distance thoughtfully) Yes, those hippos weren't going to ride themselves!

SIR RICKEN

Oh, that only cements your privilege! Us assistant corporals only get dingoes!

SIR PIPORS

Ah, it's not the animal, but the man topping it that counts, right?

(The two chuckle, contemplate what he just said, then quickly move on.)

SIR RICKEN

Well, what are you to do now? Have you procured employment?

SIR PIPORS

Sniffle helped me out there. I have just been installed as Ancedonia's deputy Affluent Crime Preventer.

SIR RICKEN

Now, what is that position?

SIR PIPORS

It is one of deception. I at first appear to do the work of a socialite, ingratiating myself with Ancedonia's high and mighty. I might play their games of pool, court their women, drive their golf carts. Then, when I am alerted to a domestic residence that is considering evildoing, I am dispatched to their house, where they enjoy my company so thoroughly they forget any thought of committing crimes.

SIR RICKEN

I am envious, I admit! Will they take any other men with military experience?

SIR PIPORS

(Wanting to scare him off) Uh, yes, but you have to know their secret handshake.

SIR RICKEN

And what is that?

SIR PIPORS

I couldn't tell you myself. It is muscle memory, and that can only be triggered when they request it of me.

SIR RICKEN

Oh, you are very privileged then indeed.

(They are silent for a moment, then:)

SIR PIPORS

Ricken, may I tell you a secret?

SIR RICKEN

Yes, Corporal.

SIR PIPORS

Do you remember how I said I would never be pulled down to the dreary settlement of domestication by a lady?

SIR RICKEN

Yes, Pipors, you gallivant with all sorts of women!

SIR PIPORS

Yes, but I must tell you...I've switched on a power source in my heart that won't go away! I am truly in love and wish to marry!

SIR RICKEN

Oh, happy day, Pipors! Would I know the lucky lady?

SIR PIPORS

No, she is of such an exalted status that even I have only been permitted to see her a few times. She is a true force of nature.

SIR RICKEN

And what is the trouble, then?

SIR PIPORS

Oh, I suppose it is a familiar one—that my family will not approve.

SIR RICKEN

Why wouldn't she approve? If she is of high standing, why would—

SIR PIPORS

No, it's not—

OLD LADY

(From offstage) Oh, won't somebody help! Please help!

(Everyone becomes quiet as the OLD LADY slowly shuffles her way onstage with a cane.)

SIR RICKEN

(Rushing toward her) Good madam, what is the problem?

OLD LADY

My purse was stolen! A young man took it, and I saw you all here, and—

SERGEANT SNIFFLES

Oh, Lady, be assured that my men would never take from an innocent woman. We adhere to a strict moral code of conduct.

SIR RICKEN

Pipors! Do your duty!

SIR PIPORS

Huh?

SIR RICKEN

You are a crime fighter now, right? Use your skill to help her find it!

OLD LADY

Oh, would you? Please?

(PIPORS awkwardly looks between RICKEN, SNIFFLES, and OLD LADY).

SIR PIPORS

I...uh...what was in it?

OLD LADY

Well, there was about ten Ancedos. And a picture of my grandchildren!

SIR PIPORS

And that's it?

OLD LADY

Yes, but I—

SIR PIPORS

I apologize, Madam, my crime fighting only extends to the more affluent among us. You might know the Affluent Ancedonian Crime Prevention Committee?

(She stares back blankly. He replies earnestly:)

Why don't you consult the Dollar Deficit Deft Detectives?

OLD LADY

Oh...up yours!

(She smacks PIPORS and runs away. The other fellows witness this and immediately draw their broadswords, ready to chase.)

SERGEANT SNIFFLES

Easy, gentlemen! She is of no concern to us!

SIR HENDERSON

But sire, she—

SERGEANT SNIFFLES

No matter! Look at her clothes! What do I always say: "if there's no sash—"

ALL MEN

(in unison) "You can't be brash!"

SERGEANT SNIFFLES

Alright. Now disperse! And leave her to her womanly ways.

(The crowd again calms down, and the partygoers begin to leave.)

SERGEANT SNIFFLES

Now, Pipors, won't you stay? The Admirable household wants to host a few of our most venerated soldiers for a dessert party of the finest order!

SIR PIPORS

Oh, sir, I thank you, but I must get a great rest, as tomorrow I begin my first day on the job!

SERGEANT SNIFFLES

Ah, yes! Give the ACF my best wishes! (*Seeing PIPORS'S confused face*) the Affluence Crime Fighters!

SIR PIPORS

Oh, yes, I understand. Godspeed!

(PIPORS runs off the stage. We see ADMIRAL ADMIRABLE pull the OLD LADY's purse from under his shirt, and count the money.)

ADMIRAL ADMIRABLE

Enough for new ribbons...have mercy!

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2: "The Beautiful Lady"

(Open on an empty-set stage, except for a large, ornate golden gate at the back. It's early morning. SIR HENDERSON, still in his regalia, is eagerly pacing back and forth in front of it, occasionally shaking the gate and crying out "Lovely!" As this happens, SIR PIPORS is attracted by the noise and comes over to see what's going on.)

SIR PIPORS

My good Sir Henderson, what a stir you seem to be in.

SIR HENDERSON

You are right, my friend, my spirits are well agitated!

SIR PIPORS

What is the cause of this behavior?

SIR HENDERSON

Beyond that gate, Sir Pipors, lies my future! The beautiful one who is promised to me as a wife!

SIR PIPORS

Ah, happy day, Henderson, that you may be married at last! In our trooping days, like me, you always thought yourself too flighty to be worn down by a woman. But why does she not open the door and let you in?

SIR HENDERSON

She is...incapacitated. She unfortunately does not have those abilities that may permit her to open it.

SIR PIPORS

No servant, either? Who may assist her?

SIR HENDERSON

No, sir. She lives alone, and only comes to the gate when her whims take her. This is her newest residence: she has only lived here a month.

SIR PIPORS

Why, then, perhaps she is lost, and cannot find the gate.

SIR HENDERSON

Maybe...oh, LOVELY! LOVELY! I'M HERE! *(He shakes the gate again.)*

SIR PIPORS

Hush, now, sir, you mustn't disturb the town's waking up! I myself am on the way to work!

SIR HENDERSON

Oh, but you don't understand, Corporal, I must see her! I must give her the ring I plan to wed her with!

SIR PIPORS

...What is the fair maiden's name, Henderson?

SIR HENDERSON

Why, it is Barbara Headley! *(Beat.)* What is it? You seem trifled.

SIR PIPORS

Because it was three weeks ago that Lady Barbara promised herself to me!

SIR HENDERSON

It cannot be. You are surely mistaken.

SIR PIPORS

I am not! She smiled, tossed her hair at me in a womanly way, and insisted with her eyes that I was hers.

SIR HENDERSON

So you admit she did not say she loved you directly? You make assumptions, then.

SIR PIPORS

No! That is not the truth! If you truly know Barbara, you know she is a woman of few words. That it is her actions, her good deeds, that make her who she is. If she had chosen you, you would understand.

SIR HENDERSON

Then why has she given me this?

(SIR HENDERSON reaches into his pocket and pulls out a gray metal oval locket. He opens the latch to reveal a beautiful lock of blonde hair, with a blue ribbon tied around it.)

SIR PIPORS

No! A lock of her hair!

(PIPORS pulls out of his pocket an identical locket and, as he opens it, reveals another lock of blond hair with blue ribbon.)

There I have you matched, Corporal!

SIR HENDERSON

No...she is mine! Yours is an old, expired promise. Mine is new and refined! By what law must she be consigned to you forever?

SIR PIPORS

The law of...she said so!

SIR HENDERSON

Shouldn't she be able to follow her heart? If you love her, would not your heart let her take the lead?

SIR PIPORS

(After giving it some thought) Let the fair Barbara decide. Let us plead our case to her and she will choose who she will take as a husband!

SIR HENDERSON

Very well then. LOVELY!

(The two men both shake the gate and cry out for her. It still will not open. They stop after only a minute of this, exhausted.)

(In between breaths) Love...ly...I need you...

SIR PIPORS

I...cannot...live without you...

SIR HENDERSON

Neither...can...I...

(The two men catch their breath and stand to face each other.)

SIR HENDERSON

Oh, I can be troubled no longer by this waiting! I cannot do this alone! She will be mine and mine only.

SIR PIPORS

Not if I have any say! Prepare to face the blade! *(He indicates and begins to unsheath his broadsword.)*

SIR HENDERSON

Oh no, Pipors, I gave up that life after my time on the field—I am a peaceful man! I do not carry such implements on my person.

SIR PIPORS

(Putting back his sword) Then prepare for a fight of the flesh!

(The men begin slapping and shoving each other. Their robes and sashes become ripped and undone during the fighting.)

SIR PIPORS

Give it up, Corporal!

SIR HENDERSON

You first, Corporal!

(Suddenly, the golden gates open on their own. There begins an audible but steady whirring from offstage. The men quickly stop fighting and look offstage.)

SIR HENDERSON

No! She cannot see us like this!

SIR PIPORS

It is too late! Barbara will judge us as she will!

(Enter BARBARA through the gates, who is really a Barbie hairstyling doll head on a Roomba. "She" moves between them, then stops. The men immediately throw themselves at her feet.)

SIR HENDERSON

Oh, most beautiful, most exalted Lady Headley! Have mercy on us!

SIR PIPORS

Yes! We only challenged each other for the gift of your love!

(BARBARA rotates to face SIR HENDERSON for a few seconds, then rotates to SIR PIPORS. She then faces forward, unmoving.)

SIR PIPORS

No! No! Look upon me! Look upon me with your adoration and grace!

SIR HENDERSON

You fool! Look at the way her hair tosses, she clearly chooses me!

SIR PIPORS

Lay her hair down! Let her choose!

(The two men grab out of their pockets and open the hair lockets, and set them down at their feet.)

It's now or never, my dearest!

(BARBARA goes to HENDERSON'S side and vacuums up the hair lock with a schlip! HENDERSON jumps for joy, while PIPORS wails in despair.)

SIR HENDERSON

Happy day! I am chosen, and we are to be together forever!

(What's this? Barbara now has an upset "stomach," and her whirring sound stops and starts.)

Darling wife? What is wrong?

(HENDERSON looks on in confusion until it hits him—he pats his coat pocket, and realizes that Barbara has eaten the ring he was to give her as well as the hair.)

She can't...she's on a no-metal diet for the wedding!

(HENDERSON leans down and rubs with his hand the back of the Roomba to sooth her, but this was the wrong move. Her pained noise suddenly increases, as she moves rapidly in a circle between the men. HENDERSON and PIPORS are

confused on what to do, and look to each other for help. Finally BARBARA powers down and stops in place.)

No!

(HENDERSON sobs, believing her lost. PIPORS, however, retrieves from his breast pocket a Roomba manual to try and diagnose the problem.)

SIR PIPORS

It's here, my friend...she just needs her dirt receptor replaced...that prolonged beeping was a symptom. Perhaps the house inside will have it.

(HENDERSON stops weeping and looks up.)

SIR HENDERSON

She...she just needs a replacement part?

SIR PIPORS

Yes! Do not weep, we must only help restore her to health!

SIR HENDERSON

How did you know?

SIR PIPORS

(Gesturing to the manual) Ah, you always should try to get to know the woman you love, right?

(The men look at each other a moment, then bolt past the open gate to try and find the part first. BARBARA's doll head tips over and falls onto PIPORS'S gifted lock of hair.)

END OF SCENE 2