LEADING "THE MISLEADING LADY" TO MATRIMONY

Sparkles From a Broadway Play in Which Jack Applies the Patagonian Method in His Courtship of Helen—Flaunting the Extreme Styles to Attract Men Underlying Theme

THE manner in which young women flaunt extreme and rather negligee styles to attract young men merely for the sake of playing and trifling with them is made the underlying theme of "The Misleading Lady." The two young authors, Charles Goddard and Paul Dickey, who, it will be remembered, were the authors of "The Ghost Breaker," do not refrain, however, from treating this theme in a very light, amusing and breezy manner. As a result this new play at the Fulton Theatre is a whimsical blending of farce, melodrama, satire and pure comedy.

The play opens at a week end party in the attractive country home of John Cannell, on the upper Hudson. Helen Steele is seated in the darkened living room before the fireplace, when Jack Craigen, a tall, lithe, determined looking man in his early thirties, appears on the veranda with his hunting dog. He orders his dog back into his automobile, then enters through the French windows.

"Well," he observes cheerfully, "time's up; it's 10 o'clock."

Helen—Oh! you startled me.

Jack—Startled you? Didn't you expect me?

Helen—Well——

Jack—Do you love me or don't you?

Helen—Why, Jack, this is so——

Jack—Now don't tell me this is so sudden, because you've had thirty minutes to make up your mind, while I've been doing a Marathon around the garage watching the hands of the clock creep up to the hour.

Helen—Do you realize that I've known you only five days?

Jack—What of that?

Helen—That's a very short time.

Jack—Well, you have to make allowances for a fellow who hasn't seen anybody but Patagonian cannibals for four years.

Helen—What are they like, the cannibals?

Jack—Oh, pretty much like you and I were a few thousand years ago.

Helen—Do cannibals love?

Jack—Guess you'd think so if one of them loved you.

Helen—What would he do?

Jack—Well, he'd probably smooth the knobs from one side of his war club, and some dark night show his serious intentions by knocking you down and dragging you off by the hair of your head—he and his best man—and the honeymoon would continue just as long as your father kept up the chase.

Helen—And you call that love?

Jack—Well, I've seen it stand the test in Patagonia.

Helen—But such a love couldn't last.

Jack—Oh, yes it does. There are no divorces in Patagonia.

Helen—But where there's love there must be kindness.

Jack—Well, Mr. Cannibal is kind, even gentle in his own iron handed sort of way. But you keep switching me off the issue. Do you love me or don't you?

Helen—I'm afraid I wouldn't care for Patagonia.

Jack—I'm not asking you to care for Patagonia. I'm only asking you to care for me and you do care, don't you?

Helen—There you go again. Do you expect me to propose to you?

Jack—No.

Helen—Then why don't you propose to me?

Jack—Well, hell's fire, ain't I proposing?

Helen—More romance! Can't you even tell we you love me and ask me? (Rises) Oh, I can't do it?

Jack—Ask you what? Tell me, Helen—ask you what?

Helen—Ask me to be your wife.

Jack—Well, haven't I? Helen, I can't be romantic. At a time like this a fellow can't go searching into the archives of his vocabulary for a lot of pretty speeches. I just love you, that's all—you are the meaning of that strange longing that I have felt and wondered at ever since I came to know myself—why, without you the moon, the surf, the night sounds are all tinsel, crash and nonsense. You are the keystone of my universe and I—I love you, Helen, that's all—will you marry me?

During this proposal scene the others in the party creep up behind the rails of the staircase and listen. Stephen Weatherbee, a chunky little chap, breaks into Jack's speech by exclaiming, "By Jove, she's done it; she's won the wager. Turn up the lights." The lights are hurriedly turned on, displaying Jack somewhat bewildered before the laughing house party and Sidney Parker, a middle aged refined theatrical manager, comes up to Helen and says, "Helen, you win the wager. The part is yours. That is the best piece of acting I ever saw."

Amy Foster—Wasn't it thrilling? Grace Buchanan—Perfectly wonderful.

Jack—Acting—wager. What do they mean, Helen?

Stephen—It was just a put up job. You see, Miss Steele——

Jack—Wait a minute, please. What is this, Helen? What does it mean?

Parker—Why, it was just a little joke.

Jack—What was?

Helen—I wanted to play the Siren in Barrie's new play, which Mr. Parker is producing this season—and he said it wasn't in me—didn't you, Mr. Parker?

Parker—Well, yes, that's the way it started. You know Miss Steele wants to go on the stage.

Helen—Oh, please, Mr. Parker, explain to Mr. Craigen; don't you see how embarrassed we are?

Parker—Well, it's simple enough. Coming up on the train we were discussing the part of the Siren in the new play——

Helen—And I said just in fun I would really be a Siren and make somebody propose at this house party.

Parker—I told her you were the man—that the wager was on and the part of the Siren was hers if she captured you by Saturday night.

Enter John Cannell, the host, in motor cap and coat.

Cannell—Hello, everybody: I'm sorry, dear, we didn't intend to be so long, but we blew a tire.

Mrs. Cannell—John, is he with you?

Cannell—Who, Tracey? Yes, we came in his car.

Stephen—Good Lord, Tracey's here!

Grace—Now there's going to be trouble.

Stephen—Scandal. Tracey and Helen are engaged.

Cannell—Hello, what's this? Mother, what's somebody been doing?

Mrs. Cannell—Why, John, they——

Jack—Well, you see, Cannell, during your absence I have been supplying a little innocent diversion for the party, and I may say with pardonable pride not without some success.

Jack rushes down the room laughing. Tracey enters dressed in his motor clothes.

Tracey—Going, Mr. Craigen?

Jack—Yes, Mr. Tracey.

Tracey—You are in a hurry.

Jack—Quite so, Mr. Tracey.

Tracey—It's funny you're leaving just as I arrive.

Jack—Funny?

Tracey—Yes, damned funny!

Jack—Then why don't you laugh?

Tracey—Look here, Craigen, I don't like your behavior toward Miss Steele.

Jack—No more do I.

Tracey—I think you have taken advantage of my absence.

Jack—I never heard of you before tonight.

Tracey—I don't believe you are as innocent in this matter as you pretend.

Jack—It is of no consequence what you think or what you believe and I suggest before you say anything further that you find out what you are talking about.

Tracey—They tell me you are a dangerous man, is that so?

Jack—You needn't be afraid unless you give yourself reason to be.

Jack exits. Shortly Helen steals into the room, goes to the outer door and calls, "Mr. Craigen!" Jack, who has been starting his motor, enters.

Jack—Did somebody call me? I beg your pardon—Mr. Barrie's Siren.

Helen—Please don't call me that again—I'm not a Siren.

Jack—Is this really Miss Steele? Charmed, I'm sure.

Helen—Please, please, don't—can't you appreciate how I feel?

Jack—Do you feel?

Helen—Jack, I've come down here to apologize as humbly as a woman can for what I've done.

Jack—You'd better go right back to bed.

Helen—Then you won't forgive me?

Jack—Sure, I forgive you.

Helen—But I know you don't from the way you say it. I want to know what you are thinking.

Jack—You, will cringe behind your sex and cry "brute" and "coward," and—No, you had better go back to bed.

Helen—I played the game; I can listen to the consequences.

Jack—You can—sit down. No, not there—over there. Helen, you played the game wrong—stupidly, blindly, like all women to-day.

Helen—How?

Jack—Because you offer only one bait to us men. Of all the cards you hold you know how to play just one. It is an ace—it takes one trick—the first—and then you lose all the others.

Helen—And what is that one card?

Jack—Your sex. Man tunnels the mountains, spans the plains that you may travel in luxury; he feeds you, clothes you and shelters you and works body and brain to exhaustion that you may have always new comforts and luxuries.

Helen—Doesn't he share them?

Jack—Yes, but he supplies them, he lays them all at your feet and in return what do you offer? Your sex.

Helen—It was enough in your case.

Jack—Quite true. You won your first trick. We can't take the credit of that away from you. But you can never win another from me. You know it isn't pleasant to be made a fool of. You hurt me deeply, because when I told you that I loved you I meant it, every word. But I'm afraid you will always remain exactly what you are, a pretty woman, a waster, a consumer of human energy who will contribute in return—nothing! You'll win your measure of success as all women win their little triumphs of to-day—by sex appeal.

Helen—That's not true.

Jack—It is true. It is true at this moment as you stand there a flaming, glaring example of sex appeal. Every garment on your body was designed for that one purpose—sex appeal. Look at that skirt, caught and hung in sensuous folds that first hide, then reveal and always suggest the limbs beneath. Slashed in front that a silk stockinged feminine ankle may be seen, it's femininity exaggerated by the artificial high heel.

Helen—That is the style.

Jack—And what is style? The latest trick and device by which the female figure may be violently suggested to the eye. And why the neck uncovered so low? Is it for comfort? For convenience? No, because woman has learned by experience that the rounded bosom suggests maternity, fires man's imagination and appeals mightily.

Helen—The women who wear the gowns you dislike do not design them.

Jack—Well, for that matter, the murderer doesn't design his revolver—nor the drunkard distil his own whiskey. It is the motive behind the thing that counts.

Helen—What do you mean?

Jack—I mean that you women affect to despise the physical side of man and yet you eternally play for it.

Helen—We are forced to play for it. The dress, the styles, the sex appeal, as you call it, is man's own creation, the result of his own demand. Suppose I do use my ankles to attract men—suppose all women use their sex appeal weapons to influence them.

Jack—They do.

Helen—Well, what if they do? Why shouldn't they?

Jack—Only this, when you fish for suckers look out for sharks.

Helen—If this power is wrong and not to be used why was it given us? Why shouldn't we use it? Why may not women use the anly weapon she has upon man, the one creature in all the animal world weak enough for her to prey upon?

Jack—No reason at all. They are her weapons. And good weapons they are. A beautiful woman certainly goes heavily armed. It's all right. It's fair—it's all in the game, yet how you would cry out if I should use strength and brute force, the weapons God has given me in the little duel of the sexes!

Helen—If it hadn't been for this miserable wager I think you and I might have been wonderful friends.

Jack—No, I hardly think so.

Helen—Well, Mr. Craigen, I won't say you're a brute. You are primitive and simple. You understand a little about women in the mass, but you know nothing of her as an individual. What you ought to do is to catch one and chain her up somewhere or put her under a bell glass and study her. Then you'd learn something. But the only way you will ever get one, I am afraid, is your Patagonian method of smoothing the knobs from one side of your club and dragging her off by the hair of her head.

Jack—Do you think I could learn anything more about you if I chained you up under a bell glass?

Helen—You have lots of things to learn, Mr. Craigen. I felt rather badly because I thought I had hurt you. But I don't take you seriously any more. Good night. Oh, haven't you left your car at the door?

Jack—Do you know, Miss Steele, there are forty gallons of gasolene in that car, and before morning, with a little luck, I hope to have a subject under the bell glass. (Jack throws overcoat he carries on his arm over her head. Helen gives one scream before he stifles her cries. He presses electric switch. Lights out. Carries Helen out to car.)

The members of the house party rush on the scene. Keen, a reporter, who has come upon the scene, shouts, "A man threw a woman into a car and drove away like the devil."

Tracy—When?

Keen—Right now. I just saw it. She was all wrapped up like a body——

Parker—Go after him. Stop him, stop him!

Tracey—I'll stop him.

Cannell—Hold on, what are you going to do?

Tracey—I'm going to catch that dangerous friend of yours and wring his damned neck.

The second act is laid in Craigen's lodge in the Adirondacks, to which Craigen brings Helen. She endeavors to escape by smashing the window. He releases his dog from chain attached to the wall and snaps the dog collar around her ankle.

Craigen—Now, Helen, you won't run around and hurt yourself.

Helen—Jack, you told me to-night that you loved me. If you did really love me there must be some little shred of pity left in your heart, no matter what I have done, just a little foregiveness somewhere. You couldn't treat me like this if you had truly cared. Love could never be so cruel.

Craigen—You mean story book love. That is always sweet, gentle, unselfish and insipid. The truth is, Helen, real love, like all the big natural forces, is cruel to triflers, so cruel that it sometimes kills, just as we might have been killed when you trifled with the steering wheel going sixty miles an hour. I guess I'd better run that car in out of the rain and take a look at her. (Crosses to door. Man's head sticks down through trap in ceiling. Helen sees him and screams. Craigen turns quickly. Head withdraws.)

Craigen—What's the matter?

Helen—Oh, nothing. I was frightened.

Craigen—It's all right. I'm not going away. I'll be right back. (Exit Craigen.)

Helen (to Napoleon)—Ps-s-st! Come down, come down and help me. (Nap nods, disappears, enters descending stairs. He is a short man, a little past middle age. He is dressed in slouch Napoleon effect hat, Prince Albert coat, tall black riding boots, covered with mud. His appearance and attitude suggest Napoleon Bonaparte. Crosses down right, poses with hand on breast, crosses centre and stands looking at her with arms folded.)

Helen—There, quick, release me before he comes. Break the chain; no, cut this strap. Quick! Don't you see I'm a captive, I'm a prisoner? Oh, won't you help me?

Nap—Help you? I'll do more than help. I'll take this place by storm. I'll sweep the entire country.

Helen—Who are you?

Nap—I am Napoleon. My army is encamped in Quatre Bras.

Helen—Napoleon?

Nap—Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France. "Allous avon de la partre—le jour et gloir est arrivez. Marchon, marchon mou countrie ous."

Helen—A crazy man! Oh, my God, he's crazy!

Nap—Ah, somebody told you. I can't make anybody believe me. Say, where's he gone? Where's your keeper gone? (This sudden introduction of "Boney," an escaped lunatic, into the plot merely makes the house more a place of terror to Helen. She tries every ruse to escape.)

Helen—For the last time, will you unlock this?

Craigen—No, I've changed my mind. (Helen in fury stands up and tugs at chain with her ankle. Craigen seizes her in his arms.)

Jack—Here, don't do that, you'll just break your pretty little ankle. (Helen strikes at him.)

Craigen—I wouldn't have you break that for the world. (Helen beats him on the head with her fists.) Here, hold on, you'll hurt your pretty little hands. I love your hands and your shoulders and your beautiful eyes and your lips. I'm going to kiss those lips, Helen. I'm going to kiss you. (He kisses and releases her. Helen sways unsteadily, wipes her lips with a handkerchief in a dazed sort of way and drops it to the floor. Staggers against table and grasping for support her hand seizes telephone. Jack sees she is about to faint, jumps forward and catches her. She hangs limp in his arms.)

Craigen—Helen, Helen, it's all right. Don't be frightened. Don't faint, Helen, Helen. (She suddenly straightens up and strikes him with the telephone. He staggers a moment, then pitches forward into the corner. Helen stares a moment and then by stretching the full length of the chain is able to reach his foot. She drags him to her, pulls out his keys and hastily unlocks the dog collar and frees herself. Throws keys on table. Crosses quickly to the door, hesitates at door and walks back.)

Helen—Jack! Jack! (Crosses slowly toward him, repeating his name. She touches him and tries to turn him over.) Jack! Jack! I didn't mean it! You're frightening me. Jack! Don't! Do you hear me? Jack, I'm talking to you, Jack. I'm right here beside you on the floor trying to make you forgive me. I didn't mean it. You know I didn't mean it! You made me do it! Oh, God, what have I done! (She drops over him.)

Act three is laid in the same scene. Boney is mistaken for Craigen by Fitzpatrick, the reporter, who is also on the wild chase to find the kidnapped girl. Fitzpatrick believes that Craigen is pretending a mild form of lunacy in order to throw people off the scent.

Fitz—Mr. Craigen, Tracey is only a little way behind me.

Nap—Is that so? (Nap gets gun from stand, ramrod from mantel, coffee beans and salt cellar.)

Fitz—Yes, and he swears he'll shoot you on sight!

Nap—Is that so? (During scene Nap loads gun with salt and coffee beans.)

Fitz—I'm Fitzpatrick of the *Star*.

Nap—Is that so?

Fitz—Yes, that's so. What are you trying to do, kid me? Look here, man, you don't seem to take the thing seriously. You've kicked up a hell of a mess and Tracey is on his way here to get you.

Nap—Is that so?

Fitz—Aw, say, quit it, will you? I've taken a devil of a lot of pains to get here ahead of Tracey and warn you. Now all I want is a few facts before the other papers get it, and say, can I use your telephone?

Nap—There it is.

Fitz—Thanks (Then into telephone) Beekman, 2,000. Now, first, where's the girl?

Nap—I don't know. She's gone.

Fitz—Gone where?

Nap—I don't know.

Fitz (into phone)—Hello! give me the night desk. Hello! is this you, Speed? Fitz talking. I'm at Craigen's place. Yes, he's here. I'm talking to him. Wait a minute. (Looks up.) Are you married?

Nap—Nope.

Fitz—No, they're not married. Says he doesn't know where she is. He thinks he's kidding me. Hold the wire open and I'll give you some pretty soon. (To Nap)—You say she isn't here, eh? Well, what's up there? (Points up.)

Nap (pointing up)—Up there?

Fitz—Yes.

Nap—Ceiling.

Fitz—Aw, cut it! What's up there?

Nap—You mean way up there?

Fitz—Yes; way up there.

Nap—Wa—a—ay up there?

Fitz—Yes.

Nap—God!

Fitz (into telephone)—Hello, Speed, he's kidding me. Miss Steele's around here, all right. (To Nap)—Are you going to stay here and meet Tracey? (Nap stands as if listening to something and ignores question.)

Fitz—I say! What about Tracey?

Nap—S—s—sh! (Continues rapt attitude of listening—somebody is heard singing the "Marseillaise" in the distance.)

Fitz—what's that?

Nap—S—s—sh! The Marseillaise (He begins to stride up and down.)

Fitz—Who's coming?

Nap—De Rougemont's light cavalry.

Fitz—What in the devil are you talking about?

Nap—Silence! (Fitz listens in amazement. Singing grows louder and closer and finally is just outside the door. Raps sound on door, simulating the taps of a drum. Nap advances and throws open the door with an air of command, revealing McMahon and assistant from Sunny Vale Sanatorium in uniform.)

• • • • •

(Jack crosses to table, picks up letter and reads aloud.) "Forgive me, I couldn't help it; it was the only way.—Helen." (Picks up and weighs telephone.) I didn't think you'd do it. The poor little devil. But it wasn't the only way. If you had only known. I'll marry that girl, if it takes my undivided attention for the rest of my life. (He crosses, picks up robe, starts for door, pauses, remembers something, crosses to trunk, takes out keys, opens trunk and takes out Helen's shoes. As he is opening trunk Tracey looks in at window, opens door cautiously and enters with gun levelled at Jack. Jack turns with slippers and sees Tracey.)

Tracey—What have you got there, Craigen?

Jack—Slippers, Mr. Tracey.

Tracey—Her slippers, by God!

Jack—Yes, Mr. Tracey.

Tracey—Is she in there?

Jack—No.

Tracey—You're a liar. What's that rope for? She is in there.

Jack—All right, see for yourself.

Tracey—You stand where you are. (Opens door, looks in and returns toward Jack.) Now we'll go upstairs.

Jack—She's not up there.

Tracey—Go ahead upstairs. (Jack goes up followed by Tracey.) And be careful how you move. (They go upstairs and are heard tramping around.)

Jack—Well, are you satisfied she isn't here?

Tracey—Stand over there. (Jack moves) in front of the table. (Jack moves again and picks up slipper from table.) Put that down. (Jack obeys.) Now, then, what have you done with her?

Jack—I don't know, Tracey. She is not here.

Tracey—I'll give you just [illegible] minutes to know before I kill you.

Jack—How are you going to tell the minutes? That clock isn't running.

Tracey—Well, I'm not fool enough to take out my watch. I'll just count [illegible] before I pull this trigger.

Jack—Make it a hundred and [illegible] have time for a smoke. (Moves [illegible] hand toward tobacco bag.)

Tracey—Quit that. What are you [illegible]ing?

Jack—Why, it's just a bag of to[illegible] Bull Durham, see? (Jack throws [illegible]bacco in Tracey's eyes, jumps forward and wrests revolver from other's hand. Tracey groans and sinks into [illegible]. Jack brings basin and places [illegible] him.)

Jack—Now, Mr. Tracey, when [illegible] washed your eyes you may be able to see things as they are.

Tracey—(Mutters) I'll get you for this.

Jack—Does it smart much?

Tracey—I'll kill you for this just the same.

Jack—Tracey, don't be a fool. I didn't come here just to kill me. I came to find out what happened to Miss Steele.

Tracey—You brought her here, didn't you?

Jack—Yes, I brought her here.

Tracey—And now she's gone.

Jack—Yes, she's gone.

Tracey—Without her slippers. I suppose you consider this lying like a gentleman. What happened here? For God's sake, Craigen, can't you see where I stand? Can't you understand I've got to know the truth? Put yourself in my place. Haven't I a right to know?

Jack—Got to know?

Tracey—Yes, got to know. If Miss Steele is my wife. (Jack stands petrified a moment, then turns back deliberately on Tracey and stands by the out window. Comes down stairs and stands looking at Tracey.)

Jack—Tracey, I didn't know Miss Steele was your wife. I owe you the humblest apology a man can make. The simple truth is this: I brought your wife here by force to frighten her and chained her to that ring to keep her from running away—and when I came to kiss her she struck me down with that telephone. When I came to my room—she was gone. Some one had dazed my head. I did all this because I thought I was teaching a selfish girl a lesson that it was dangerous to trifle with a man's affections. That's all, Tracey. No harm has come to your wife here.

Finally Tracey, convinced, goes. Shortly after Helen, her gown smeared with mud, returns. She explains that she has gone over the hills in search of a doctor, believing that Jack had seriously injured Jack. Jack says, "Helen, you had better go to your husband."

Helen—He isn't my husband. He never was my husband. He never will be my husband.

Jack—Then why did he say that?

Helen—He told a lie to get the [illegible]. Jack, won't you forgive me?

Jack—Helen, I'd forgive you anything, but tell me, why did you do it?

Helen—Why did I do it? Why do you think I did it? You are so [illegible], Jack, dear, and so stupid. I did it for the best reason in the world. I wanted you.

Jack—Helen! (He embraces her.)

The door bursts open. Stephen Weatherbee rushes in between them and endeavors to protect Helen.

Stephen—Stand back. (To Helen) I have come to save you.

Helen (Goes to Jack)—I don't want to be saved.

The firelight proposal.

Chaining the kidnapped girl.

Some costumes in "The Misleading Lady."