



Regency Fair

or, The Labours of Fidelity

Scenario for a Comedy Ballet in Three Acts

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Regency Fair

Most full-length ballets focus on the interactions of romantic protagonists. However, in this instance, the protagonists are a father and daughter, each of whom is headstrong and finds the other a considerable source of vexation! Mr Knatchbull, dashing, gregarious and a lady's man, finds himself increasingly competing with his daughter to be the centre of social attention. Refusing Harriet permission to marry her sweetheart, Benedict, is one of few means left to Mr Knatchbull to assert his paternal authority over her.

The brightly extrovert Harriet finds her father just as much of a trial, but at the story's outset she assumes, naively, that he is at least a faithful husband to his wife, Harriet's long-suffering and unflappable mother. When Harriet discovers otherwise, she is obliged to reassess what this means for her expectations of her parents and society at large. While she turns the situation to her immediate advantage, she grows in worldliness through her realization that it may sometimes best to turn a blind eye to romantic improprieties. At the ballet's conclusion, Harriet is not without sympathy for her father, even if she is rather pleased to see him get his comeuppance.

The role of Mr Knatchbull was originally conceived as one for a mature principal male dancer. The role does not necessarily demand virtuoso leaps and turns (which could be given, instead, to Benedict), but nor is it intended to be purely a 'character' role either.



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A Comedy Ballet in Three Acts

Cast of Characters:

Harriet Knatchbull
Mr Knatchbull
Mrs Knatchbull
Benedict, a illustrator of satires and Harriet's sweetheart
Calliope Ginhurst, a popular actress
Mr Cody, antiquarian and explorer
Lady Bessington
Lady Bessington's daughter
Lady Bessington's son-in-law
Two Misses Tibblers, good-natured, eccentric spinsters
Friends of Harriet and Benedict
Gentlemen friends of Mr Knatchbull
Print seller, shop keepers, servants, ball guests, crowd members, etc.

The action takes place in London during the Regency period, c.1810-1820.

Act 1, Scene 1: Outside the Print Shop

In a fashionable London street, a crowd gathers to peer into the windows of a print shop, laughing and pointing at the latest illustrations displayed for sale. Into this scene enters the Knatchbull family, comprising Mr Knatchbull, a self-styled man-about-town, his kindly though jaded wife, and their gregarious daughter Harriet. The shop's display attracts the interest of Harriet and her father. Mr Knatchbull would rather divert his womenfolk's gaze away from the windows—ostensibly to protect their feminine sensibilities from the more lascivious images on view. He is a rather keen collector of prints himself, and has no inclination to share his hobby with his wife or daughter.

As it happens, Harriet is soon distracted by her girlfriends, and is also keeping an eye out for her sweetheart, Benedict, who is forging a career for himself as satire illustrator. Mr Knatchbull waits until he sees Harriet, her friends and Mrs Knatchbull step into a nearby millinery store. Pretending to head in the direction of a wine merchant, he now takes the opportunity to slip into the print shop. A few moments later, one large print (a rather lewd illustration which has attracted much attention) disappears from the window, evidently having been purchased by him.

Harriet, whose interest in the millinery store is as feigned as her father's interest in the wine merchant, steals back into the street and is delighted to see Benedict approaching. Benedict bears with him a folio of his latest illustrations to sell, and is happy to let Harriet view his work. They grab a few moments together, until Harriet's mother re-emerges from the milliner's doorway and Harriet leaves Benedict to his errand.

As Benedict goes to enter the print shop he walks straight into Mr Knatchbull exiting with his purchase. Mr Knatchbull deliberately snubs the younger man, aware of Harriet's attachment to him. When the Knatchbull family reunites in the street, Harriet makes enquiry of her father's purchase, but he merely rebukes her curiosity by tapping her on the nose in a patronising manner. Dismissed,

Harriet turns away and her girlfriends tease her with the same gesture. The Knatchbulls make to leave, and Harriet manages one last wave to Benedict before disappearing after her parents.

Act 1, Scene 2: The Knatchbulls' Drawing Room

Harriet and her mother are passing time at home. While Mrs Knatchbull plays alone at cards, Harriet lies reading on the chaise lounge, but grows bored and is much preoccupied by her thoughts. She distracts her mother from cards and Mrs Knatchbull attempts to lighten her daughter's mood by encouraging her to dance. But Harriet's thoughts are of Benedict and her mother's affection only heightens Harriet's discontent. When Harriet declares she loves Benedict, Mrs Knatchbull is at a loss as to what to do, for, while she has no objection to the match herself, she knows Mr Knatchbull to be obstinately against it. Mother and daughter are both grieved by their predicaments.

Mr Knatchbull saunters in and senses immediately that he has entered in the middle of something. Tactlessly, he ignores his womenfolk and sets to reading a newspaper. Harriet interposes and politely raises the matter of Benedict, valiantly turning on all her daughterly charm and obsequious geniality. Mr Knatchbull exercises his paternal prerogative to refuse her request once more, and Harriet, infuriated by his high-handedness, runs from the room.

Mr Knatchbull is exasperated by his daughter's wheedling and demands. Harriet's distress has left Mrs Knatchbull feeling even more miserable. Seeing his wife disconsolate, Mr Knatchbull makes the effort to soothe her feelings with a token show of conjugal affection. But Mrs Knatchbull bats him off, all too familiar to her husband's superficial affections.

The glum couple are interrupted by the arrival of Lady Bessington who gushes into the drawing room accompanied by her party. Among those in the group are Lady Bessington's adult daughter, her daughter's husband, and friends of Harriet. Lady Bessington has come to invite the Knatchbulls to attend a private ball at her house and to introduce them to Mr Cody, a curious fellow who is an explorer and antiquarian recently returned from archaeological expeditions. Her ladyship greets the Knatchbulls effusively and enquires of Harriet's whereabouts, to which Mr Knatchbull responds that his daughter is in a temper. Taking Mr Knatchbull's arm, Lady Bessington thrusts the party invitation in the direction of Mrs Knatchbull's chest, having forgotten that she is yet to introduce the Knatchbulls to Mr Cody. Mrs Knatchbull and Mr Cody are left to awkwardly introduce themselves before being absorbed into the general social proceedings.

Mr Cody is courteously polite and attentive to everyone, especially Mrs Knatchbull. He and Mr Knatchbull do not appear to have a great deal in common, but the visit draws to an end with everyone on friendly terms. Harriet belatedly reappears just as the visitors are preparing to take their leave, and Lady Bessington is very pleased to see her. Harriet's girlfriends take the opportunity to draw Harriet aside and tell her that Benedict will also be at the ball. Harriet is delighted and, after the visitors depart, her parents are left bewildered by their daughter's abrupt change of mood.

Act 2, Scene 1: Lady Bessington's Ball

The curtain rises to reveal Lady Bessington, the Knatchbulls, the Tibbler Sisters and Lady Bessington's daughter and her husband at the front of the stage. The four parties are making their final preparations for the ball, aided by maids and servants. Dresses are straightened, lint picked off, and reassuring kisses given. The front cloth rises to reveal the ball in progress, and the characters sweep upstage to join the dancers.

After a general dance, the popular actress Calliope Ginhurst makes a glamorous entrance, receiving a warm welcome from Lady Bessington, and attracting the interest of men and women present. Lady Bessington busies herself introducing Calliope to everyone, and when Mr Knatchbull is presented to her, they feign never to have met. Mr Knatchbull hastily puts himself forward as the actress's dance

partner, and does his best to shut out Harriet and his wife from Calliope's notice when it is their turn to be introduced.

When Mr Knatchbull and his mistress retire to another room, Harriet and Benedict take the opportunity to reunite, and dance together amid their friends and the other guests.

A gentleman at the ball proposes a game of charades and the company draws round to watch. One of the Miss Tibblers enthusiastically takes first turn, but her gestures prove indecipherable to everyone. Her sister tries next and leaves everyone equally baffled. Luckily, the situation is relieved by the announcement of supper.

As the guests go out, Mr Knatchbull and Calliope re-emerge and, thinking themselves unobserved, indulge in an elegant show of ardour for each other. Unbeknownst to them, they are spied by Benedict. When the pair go out to join the others at supper, Benedict is left to ponder his next move. He is not altogether surprised by Mr Knatchbull's conduct, but does not know if Harriet is aware of her father's infidelity. Harriet comes to find Benedict and, sensing something is amiss, persuades him to tell her. At first she refuses to believe Benedict—after all, her father may be a pest and a cad, but she hasn't imagined him to be adulterous to boot. But she trusts Benedict, and reluctantly believes him.

When the guests return, the pair keeps a close eye on Mr Knatchbull and the actress. Mr Knatchbull perceives that he seems to be under surveillance and is not pleased. Exasperated, he accosts Harriet to ask what is going on. She feigns innocence and Mr Knatchbull, in a fit of pique, reminds her that he will never allow her marriage to Benedict. Harriet is crestfallen, but as the party breaks up Benedict whispers a plan to her.

Act 2, Scene 2: The Actress's Dressing Room

Backstage at the playhouse, Calliope Ginhurst is unwinding after another successful performance, waited on by her maid. A crowd of admirers, mostly gentlemen, is gathered outside her door and, when they are finally admitted, Benedict and Harriet sneak in behind them. While Calliope copes with all the adulation, Benedict helps Harriet to find a hiding place, and she conceals herself in a wardrobe. Before Benedict can find a place for himself, he is spotted by Calliope's maid as she shoos out the gentlemen, and Mr Knatchbull arrives at the same instant. Mr Knatchbull gleefully sees Benedict banished from the room. Left alone with his mistress, Mr Knatchbull presents Calliope with a fan and they are soon much involved in each other. As their passion mounts, the wardrobe suddenly shudders. They pause, resume, but a moment later it happens again. When the shuddering continues, Mr Knatchbull is obliged to investigate. Harriet is on the brink of being discovered when Calliope's maid enters to announce that the actress's carriage is waiting outside. When the room is clear again, Benedict sneaks back to rescue the outraged Harriet, who seizes Calliope's fan, ready to take her father to task.

Act 3, Scene 1: Mr Knatchbull's Study

Mr Knatchbull is reclining in his study, surrounded by his prints and various pieces of ancestral paraphernalia, when Harriet determinedly enters. She acknowledges him stiffly and produces the fan. Mr Knatchbull feigns ignorance, blusters and, as his anxiety rises, tries to intimidate his daughter. Harriet keeps him at bay with the fan pointed weapon-like at him, and a comic battle ensues as Mr Knatchbull attempts to gain the upper hand. When he reaches for a riding crop, she reaches down a crusty old rapier; when he grabs a poker from beside the fire, she ambitiously tries to grasp an ancient spear, fails under its weight, and is forced to adapt the fan to her purpose, alternately using it like a matador's cape and going fan-tip to poker-end with her father.

Just as Mr Knatchbull has her backed up next to the study door, ready for the *coup de grâce*, there is a noise outside. Harriet pulls the door open to cover herself, letting in Mrs Knatchbull and a band of Mr Knatchbull's gentleman friends. Mrs Knatchbull never bats an eyelid at her husband's strange expression and poised poker. Mr Knatchbull is forced to make his excuses for greeting the visitors so strangely. Meanwhile Harriet insinuates herself with the adults and continues to taunt her father at a distance with the fan. At length, Mrs Knatchbull takes notice and asks Harriet what she is doing dallying with the fan. Harriet tells her it came from Mr Knatchbull. The company expectantly turn to Mr Knatchbull for his explanation. Harriet seizes the moment to gesture that the fan is a gift, because her father has just granted permission for Harriet to marry Benedict. The company's delighted response leaves Mr Knatchbull no option but to go along with her story.

Act 3, Scene 2: Outside the Lecture Hall

Local people are gathering outside the hall for Mr Cody's lecture on his expedition. Mr and Mrs Knatchbull enter the scene, and so too does Harriet—all very ladylike—on Benedict's arm. Mr Cody slips out from the lecture venue to greet his guests, being particularly attentive to Mrs Knatchbull, who glows at his approach. He also greets Harriet and Benedict, now happily engaged, and the young couple take centre stage as the crowd approves their impending nuptials.

Just as the lecture hall opens to admit everyone, Calliope Ginhurst enters, attracting attention wherever she goes as always. Mr Knatchbull goes to greet her, and is stunned when she slights him; Calliope has since taken up with another wealthy gentleman admirer.

Suddenly Mr Knatchbull is conscious of his abandonment. His wife has gone inside on the arm of Mr Cody; Calliope has dropped him; and Harriet now has Benedict. He remains outside as everyone disappears, forlornly contemplating the waning of his charm and vigour. Yet just as he seems at his most bereft, the two Tibbler sisters come by, running late for the lecture. Seeing Mr Knatchbull looking lost and despondent, they pause to offer sympathy and kindness. Mr Knatchbull warms to this sudden female attention. He gives a sly smile. Perhaps he is not at the end of his powers after all...? He takes a delighted sister on each arm, radiating charm as the curtain lowers.



Some suggestions for each scene

<p>Act 1, scene 1</p>	<p><i>The opening scene shows the facades of various shops in an upmarket part of town, with the print shop's windows centremost. There is opportunity for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a range of distinctive characters representing various classes, eg. well-heeled bystanders, tradespeople, minor nobility, boy(s) distributing handbills, etc. - the images in the print shop window to elicit a range of responses such as indifference, laughter, imitation and offense. - a nice buoyant entry for Harriet - a solidly dapper entry for Mr Knatchbull - a first pas de deux for Harriet and Benedict
<p>Act 1, scene 2</p>	<p><i>Drawing room in the Knatchbulls' house, feminine space with comfortable furnishings. Opportunity for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a ruminative solo for Harriet with just a hint of petulance - dance groupings formed by Lady Bessington's party with Mr Cody prominent and Mr Knatchbull less so.
<p>Act 2, scene 1</p>	<p><i>Front cloth curtain rising to reveal ballroom, sumptuous, warm. Opportunity for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - some of the central characters (Lady Bessington, the Tibbler sisters) to make their ball preparations at the front of the stage in high comic pantomime. Others, like Mrs Knatchbull and Lady Bessington's daughter, to provide a foil by playing it straight. - Mrs Knatchbull to be partnered by Mr Cody in the ball dances - an earnestly romantic pas de deux for Harriet and Benedict - comic punctuation by the Tibbler sisters, especially in the Charades game - a debonair rather than amorous pas de deux for Mr Knatchbull and Calliope - perhaps a 'mulling over' solo for Benedict after he observes the above.
<p>Act 2, scene 2</p>	<p><i>Actress's dressing room, slightly cluttered with baskets, costumes, etc, providing near-possible hiding spaces. Opportunity for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a dance for Calliope with her fawning admirers in close formation. - a comically amorous pas de deux and byplay for Mr Knatchbull and Calliope - the near-discovery of Harriet, e.g. doors of the wardrobe might be flung open and glimpsed Harriet hiding among dresses, her feet perhaps visible to the audience (wardrobe as hiding place offered as a suggestion only) - a choreography of pantomimed 'outrage' for Harriet when she exits the wardrobe, shifting to mood of 'firm resolve' with Benedict's encouragement.
<p>Act 3, scene 1</p>	<p><i>Gentleman's study with prints and bits of ancestral paraphernalia dotted about (e.g. swords/shields/hunting horns on the wall, old suit of armour, etc.). Opportunity for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a pantomime battle between Harriet and Mr Knatchbull that incorporates some fairly fleet footwork on Harriet's part and riffs on martial stances for them both.
<p>Act 3, scene 2</p>	<p><i>Town square with lecture hall at rear and perhaps an ale house to one side. Opportunity for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a 'blossoming romance' duet for Mrs Knatchbull and Mr Cody. - a final 'all-things-amicably-resolved' pas de deux for Harriet and Benedict. - a tableaux freeze towards the end of the scene when Harriet imagines everyone's infidelities, e.g. groupings/couples in the crowd suddenly breakup as individuals take up flirtatious poses towards other adjacent parties. - a suitably 'despondent' solo for Mr Knatchbull. - jig-like choreography for Mr Knatchbull and Tibbler sisters as the curtain falls.