

CONTEMPORARY ONE-ACT PLAYS

By J. M. Barrie

Freeditorial 

I. THE THEME OF THE ONE-ACT PLAY

The one-act play, like the short story, is a work of literary art, and must be approached as such. Just like a painting or a poem or a fine public building, the one-act play aims at making a *singleness of effect* upon the reader or observer. One does not judge a statue, or a poem, or any other work of art, by the appearance of any isolated part of it, but by the sum-total effect of the whole. The fundamental aim of a one-act play is that it shall so present a singleness of effect to the reader or to the assembled group who have gathered to witness a performance of it, that the reader or observer will be provoked to emotional response thereto.

Thus, when a student reads a play like George Middleton's *Tradition*, he is made to see and feel that the life of a daughter has been handicapped and the longings of a mother smothered because of the conventional narrowness of an otherwise loving father. This is the singleness of effect of the play; this is its theme. This is precisely what the author of the play wished his reader or observer to see and feel. When one reads Bosworth Crocker's *The Last Straw*, one feels that a reasonably good and worthy man, because of his sensitiveness to criticism, has been driven to despair and to a tragic end by the malicious gossip of neighbors. One's sense of pity at his misfortune is aroused. This is what the author intended to do. This idea and effect is the theme of the play. And when the student reads Paul Hervieu's *Modesty*, he feels that a woman, even though she may lead herself into thinking she prefers brutal frankness, instinctively likes affection and even flattery. This is the effect produced by the play; this is its intent; this is its theme.

In approaching a one-act play, then, the very first consideration should be to determine what the purpose and intent of the play is—to determine its theme. This demands that the play be read through complete at one sitting and that no premature conclusions be drawn. Once the play is read, it is well to subject the play to certain leading questions. What has the author intended that his reader or hearer shall understand, think, or feel? What is the play about? What is its object and purpose? Is it a precept or an observation found in life, or is it a bit of fancy? Is it artificially didactic and

moralizing? With what fundamental element in human nature does it have to do: Love? Patriotism? Fear? Egotism and self-centredness? Sacrifice? Faithfulness? Or what?

A word of warning should be given. The student should not get the idea that by theme is meant the moral of the play. A good play may be thoroughly moral without its descending to commonplace moralizing. Good plays concern themselves with the presentation of the fundamentals of life rather than a creed of morals, theories, and propagandas. Art concerns itself with larger things than didactic and argumentative moralizing.

II. THE TECHNIC OF THE ONE-ACT PLAY

Once the student satisfies himself as to the singleness of effect or theme of the play, he will do well to set himself to the task of seeing just how the dramatist has achieved this effect. He should keep in mind that the playwright is a skilled workman; that he has predetermined for himself just what he wishes his audience to think, feel, or understand, and has marshalled all his materials to that end. The way by which he accomplishes that end is his technic. Technic is but the practical method by which an artist can most effectively convey his message to his public. In a play the materials that the dramatist uses to this end are character, plot, dialogue, and stage direction. If he is skilled he will use these elements in such a way that the result will be an artistic whole, a singleness of effect, an organized unit that will exemplify and express his theme.

A. THE CHARACTERS IN THE ONE-ACT PLAY.—Generally speaking, drama grows out of character. Farce, melodrama, and extravaganza usually consist of situation rather than of character. In any event, the student should avail himself of every means to understand the characters in the play under discussion. His real appreciation of the play will be in direct ratio almost to his understanding of the persons in the drama. Any attention given to this end will be energy well spent. The student should get into the very heart of the characters, as it were.

Thus, ADONIJAH, in Beulah Bornstead's *The Diabolical Circle*, is a narrow, self-centred, Puritan egotist who has little about his personality to appeal to the romantic and vivacious BETTY. LADY SIMS, in Sir James M. Barrie's *The Twelve-Pound Look*, is a woman who really is pathetic in her longing for some human independence in the presence of her self-centred husband, "SIR" HARRY SIMS. And MANIKIN and MINIKIN, in Alfred Kreymborg's *Manikin and Minikin*, are conventionalized puppets representing the light yet half-serious bickerings, jealousies, and quarrellings of human nature.

The student will do well to characterize the *dramatis personæ* deliberately and specifically. He should not now value himself for working fast; for things done in a hurry usually lack depth. He must not be content with vague and thin generalities. In

analyzing a character it might be well to apply some specific questions similar to the following: Just what is the elemental human quality in the character? Loving? Trusting? Egotistic? Superstitious? Revengeful? Treacherous? Selfish? Discontented? Optimistic? Romantic? Or what? How does the dramatist characterize them: By action? By dialogue? By spirit of likes and dislikes? By racial trait? By religion? By peculiarity of manner, speech, appearance? Are the characters really dramatic: are they impelled to strong emotional reaction upon each other and upon situation? Do they provoke one's dramatic sympathy? Do they make one feel their own point of view and their own motives for conduct?

B. THE PLOT OF THE ONE-ACT PLAY.—Plot and character are integrally interlinked. Plot is not merely story taken from every-day life, where seldom do events occur in a series of closely following minor crucial moments leading to a climax. The dramatist so constructs his material that there is a sequential and causal interplay of dramatic forces, ending in some major crisis or crucial moment. Plot may be said to be the framework and constructed story by which a dramatist exemplifies his theme. It does not exist for its own end, but is one of the fundamental means whereby the playwright gets his singleness of effect, or theme, to his reader or hearer. From the story material at his disposal the playwright constructs his plot to this very end.

Careful attention should be given to the plot. The student should question it carefully. Do the plot materials seem to have been taken from actual life? Or do they seem to be invented? Is the plot well suited to exemplifying the theme? Reconstruct the story out of which the plot may have been built. Since the plot of a one-act play is highly simplified, determine whether there are any complexities, any irrelevancies, any digressions. Does the plot have a well-defined beginning, middle, and end?

1. *The Beginning of the One-Act Play.*—Having but a relatively short time at its disposal, usually about thirty minutes and seldom more than forty-five minutes, the beginning of a one-act play is very short. It is characterized by condensation, compactness, and brevity. Seldom is the beginning more than a half-page in length; often the play is got under way in two or three speeches. The student will do

well to practise to the end that he will recognize instantly when the dramatic background of a one-act play has been laid.

Whatever else may characterize the beginning, it must be dramatically effective. Instantly it must catch the powers of perception by making them aware of the initial situation out of which the subsequent dramatic action will develop. A good beginning makes one *feel* that suddenly he has come face to face with a situation which cannot be solved without an interplay of dramatic forces to a given final result.

Thus, when one reads Althea Thurston's *The Exchange*, one is made suddenly to feel that human beings are discontent with their shortcomings and possessed qualities, and that they always feel that they would be happier if they possessed something other than what they have. The JUDGE, who handles the cases as they come in for exchange, is disgusted with the vanities of humankind, and is ready to clear his hands of the whole matter. Here is a situation; it is the beginning of the play. In the beginning of Lady Gregory's *Hyacinth Halvey* one is brought suddenly to the realization that HYACINTH HALVEY instinctively rebels against the highly colored and artificially created good name that has been unwittingly superimposed upon him. This situation, suddenly presented, is the beginning of the play. Out of this initial situation the subsequent dramatic action evolves.

Is the beginning too short? Too long? Does it make the initial dramatic situation clear? How has the playwright made it clear and effective? Just where is the end of the beginning? Although the beginning and the subsequent plot development are well blended together, so that there is no halting where the beginning ends, usually one can detect where the one ends and the other begins. It is a good idea, for the purpose of developing a sense of the organic structure of the one-act play, to draw a line across the page of the play, just where the one ends and the other begins.

The *setting* of the play is a part of the beginning. Is the setting realistic? Romantic? Fantastic or bizarre? Are the details of stage design, properties, and especially the atmosphere and color scheme in harmony with the tone of the play itself? Is the setting really an organic part of the play or is it something apart from it? Note that

the setting is usually written in the third person, present tense, and in italics.

2. *The Middle of the One-Act Play.*—The middle of a one-act play is concerned primarily with the main crucial moment or climax and the dramatic movement that from the beginning leads up to it. A good play consists of a series of minor crises leading up to a major crisis or crucial moment. It is for this crucial moment that the play exists; it is for this big scene precisely that the play has been written. Indeed, the play succeeds or fails as the crucial moment is strongly dramatic or flabbily weak. This is the part of the play that is strongest in dramatic tension, strongest in emotional functioning.

A study of Sir James M. Barrie's *The Twelve-Pound Look* shows that the crucial moment comes at the point where "SIR" HARRY SIMS in his self-centred egotism discovers that his wife's, LADY SIMS'S, heart-longing could easily be satisfied if she were permitted no other freedom than merely operating a typewriter. In Althea Thurston's *The Exchange* the crucial moment comes when the several characters, who unwittingly had exchanged one ill for a worse one, find that they can never re-exchange, and that they must endure the torments and displeasure of the newly acquired ill throughout life.

Just where is the crucial moment or climax in the play under consideration? Determine the several minor crises that lead up to the crucial moment. Is the crucial moment delayed too long for good dramatic effect? Or is it reached too soon, so that the play is too short and too sudden in reaching the climax? Does it make one *feel* that some vital result has been attained in the plot movement? Is it characterized by strong situation and by strong emotional reactions of character on character or of character on situation?

For purposes of impressing a sense the organic structure of a one-act play, it is a good plan to draw a horizontal line across the page at the close of the crucial moment. Keep in mind, however, that the crucial moment is *not* the end of the play as it appears on the printed page or as it is acted on the stage.

3. *The End of the One-Act Play.*—The end of the one-act play is an important consideration. Too often it is entirely lost sight of. It is the

part that frequently makes or mars a play. When the crucial moment or climax has been reached, the plot action of the play is completed, but the play is not yet completed. The play needs yet to be rounded out into an artistic and dramatic whole. In life the actual crisis in human affairs is not often our chiefest interest, but the reaction of characters immediately *after* the crisis has occurred. Thus, in a play, the emotional reaction of the characters on the crucial moment and the more or less sudden readjustment between characters after the crucial moment must be presented. For this very purpose the end of the one-act play is constructed. The end is of need very short—usually even shorter than the beginning. Usually the end consists of but a speech or two, or sometimes only of pantomime that more effectively expresses the emotional reactions of the characters on the crucial moment than dialogue.

Thus, in Sir James M. Barrie's *The Twelve-Pound Look*, the end consists of but pantomime, in which "SIR" HARRY expresses his emotional reaction upon his wife's longing for the human liberty that even the operating of a typewriter would provide her. The end of Bosworth Crocker's *The Last Straw* comes immediately after the pistol-shot is heard in the adjoining room and MRS. BAUER'S voice is heard: "Fritz! Fritz! Speak to me! Look at me, Fritz! You didn't do it, Fritz! I know you didn't do it!" etc.

Is the end of the play under consideration in terms of dialogue? In pantomime? Or both? Is it too long? Too short? Is it dramatic? Is it conclusive and satisfying?

C. DIALOGUE OF THE ONE-ACT PLAY.—Dialogue, like plot and characterization, is another means whereby the theme of the play is got to the reader or audience. Good dramatic dialogue is constructed to this very end. It is not the commonplace, rambling, uncertain, and realistic question and answer of every-day life. Usually good dramatic dialogue is crisp, direct, condensed. It is the substance but not the form of ordinary conversation. Its chiefest characteristic is spontaneity.

The highest type of dramatic dialogue is that which expresses the ideas and emotions of characters at the points of highest emotional functioning. It will readily be seen, then, that not all dialogue in a play is necessarily dramatic. In truth, the best dramatic dialogue

occurs in conjunction with the series of minor crises and the crucial moment that go to make up the dramatic movement of the play. Often there is much dialogue in a play that essentially is not dramatic at all.

In analyzing dramatic dialogue it is well to inquire whether in the play it serves (1) to express the ideas and emotions of characters at points of highest emotional functioning, (2) to advance the plot, (3) to reveal character, or (4) what. Is it brief, clear, direct, spontaneous? Or is it careless, loose, insipid? Wit, repartee? Didactic, moralizing? Satirical, cynical?

D. STAGE-BUSINESS AND STAGE-DIRECTION IN THE ONE-ACT PLAY. — The stage-business and stage-direction, usually printed in italics, of a play are an essential part of a drama. They must not be ignored in either reading or staging a play. The novel or short story generally uses narration and description to achieve its desired result; a play, on the contrary, uses dialogue and concrete objective pantomime that may be seen readily with the eye. A play is not a story narrated in chronological order of events, but it is a story so handled and so constructed that it can be acted on a stage by actors before an audience. It is a series of minor crises leading to a major crisis, presented to a reader or to an audience by characters, dialogue, and stage-business and pantomime. For purposes of indicating the pantomimic action of the play, the dramatist resorts to stage-business and stage-direction.

Does the stage-direction aid in making (1) the dialogue, (2) the plot, (3) the dramatic action, or (4) the character more clear? Does it shorten the play? Does it express idea, emotion, or situations more effectively than could dialogue, if it were used?

And, finally, do not judge any play until all the evidence is in, until you have thoroughly mastered every detail and have fully conceived the *author's idea and purpose*. It is not a question whether *you* would have selected such a theme or whether *you* would have handled it in the same way in which the author did; but the point is does the *author* in *his* way make *his* theme clear to you. The author has conceived a dramatic problem in his *own mind* and has set it forth in *his own way*. The question is, does he make you see his result and his method?

Do you like the play? Or do you not like it? State your reason in either case. Is it because of the author? Is it because of the theme? Is it because of the technic – the way he gets his intent to his reader or audience? Is it because of your own likes or dislikes; preconceived notions or prejudices? Is it because of the acting? Of the staging or setting? Does it uplift or depress? Does it provoke you to emotional functioning?

"Though old the thought and oft expressed,
'Tis his at last who says it best."

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

BY

SIR JAMES M. BARRIE

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SIR JAMES M. BARRIE

Sir James M. Barrie is rated as the foremost English dramatist of the day; and his plays, taken together, make the most significant contribution to English drama since Sheridan. Practically his entire life has been given to the writing of novels and plays, many of the latter having their heroines conceived especially for Maude Adams, one of America's greatest actresses. He was born in Kirriemuir, Scotland, in 1860. He received his education at Dumfries and Edinburgh University. His first work in journalism and letters was done at Nottingham, but soon he took up his work in London, where he now resides.

Sir James M. Barrie's literary labors have been very fruitful. His *The Professor's Love Story*, *The Little Minister*, *Quality Street*, *The Admirable Crichton*, *Peter Pan*, *What Every Woman Knows*, and *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire* are well known to every one.

In 1914 there appeared a volume of one-act plays, *Half Hours*, the most important of which is *The Twelve-Pound Look*. And in 1918 appeared a volume, *Echoes of the War*, the most important one-act play therein being *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals*.

Barrie is a great playwright because he is so thoroughly human. All the little whimsicalities, sentiments, little loves, and heart-longings of human beings are ever present in his plays. He is no reformer, no propagandist. He appeals to the emotions rather than to the intellect. He continues the romantic tradition in English drama and gives us plays that are wholesome, tender, and human. And with all this, he has the added saving grace of a most absorbing humor.

While Barrie is not a devotee of the well-made play, his *The Twelve-Pound Look* is one of the most nearly perfect one-act plays of contemporary drama. His interest in human personalities is not more manifest in any of his plays than in *LADY SIMS* and *"SIR" HARRY SIMS* in this play.

CHARACTERS

"Sir" Harry Sims

Lady Sims

Kate

Tombes

THE TWELVE-POUND LOOK

If quite convenient (as they say about checks) you are to conceive that the scene is laid in your own house, and that HARRY SIMS is you. Perhaps the ornamentation of the house is a trifle ostentatious, but if you cavil at that we are willing to redecorate: you don't get out of being HARRY SIMS on a mere matter of plush and dados. It pleases us to make him a city man, but (rather than lose you) he can be turned with a scrape of the pen into a K.C., fashionable doctor, Secretary of State, or what you will. We conceive him of a pleasant rotundity with a thick red neck, but we shall waive that point if you know him to be thin.

It is that day in your career when everything went wrong just when everything seemed to be superlatively right.

In HARRY'S case it was a woman who did the mischief. She came to him in his great hour and told him she did not admire him. Of course he turned her out of the house and was soon himself again, but it spoiled the morning for him. This is the subject of the play, and quite enough too.

HARRY is to receive the honor of knighthood in a few days, and we discover him in the sumptuous "snuggery" of his home in Kensington (or is it Westminster?), rehearsing the ceremony with his wife. They have been at it all the morning, a pleasing occupation. MRS. SIMS (as we may call her for the last time, as it were, and strictly as a good-natured joke) is wearing her

presentation gown, and personates the august one who is about to dub her HARRY knight. She is seated regally. Her jewelled shoulders proclaim aloud her husband's generosity. She must be an extraordinarily proud and happy woman, yet she has a drawn face and shrinking ways, as if there were some one near her of whom she is afraid. She claps her hands, as the signal to HARRY. He enters bowing, and with a graceful swerve of the leg. He is only partly in costume, the sword and the real stockings not having arrived yet. With a gliding motion that is only delayed while one leg makes up on the other, he reaches his wife, and, going on one knee, raises her hand superbly to his lips. She taps him on the shoulder with a paper-knife and says huskily: "Rise, Sir Harry." He rises, bows, and glides about the room, going on his knees to various articles of furniture, and rises from each a knight. It is a radiant domestic scene, and HARRY is as dignified as if he knew that royalty was rehearsing it at the other end.

SIR HARRY. [*Complacently.*] Did that seem all right, eh?

LADY SIMS. [*Much relieved.*] I think perfect.

SIR HARRY. But was it dignified?

LADY SIMS. Oh, very. And it will be still more so when you have the sword.

SIR HARRY. The sword will lend it an air. There are really the five moments—[*suiting the action to the word*—the glide—the dip—the kiss—the tap—and you back out a knight. It's short, but it's a very beautiful ceremony. [*Kindly.*] Anything you can suggest?

LADY SIMS. No—oh, no. [*Nervously, seeing him pause to kiss the tassel of a cushion.*] You don't think you have practised till you know what to do almost too well?

[*He has been in a blissful temper, but such niggling criticism would try any man.*

SIR HARRY. I do not. Don't talk nonsense. Wait till your opinion is asked for.

LADY SIMS. [*Abashed.*] I'm sorry, Harry. [*A perfect butler appears and presents a card.*] "The Flora Typewriting Agency."

SIR HARRY. Ah, yes. I telephoned them to send some one. A woman, I suppose, Tombes?

TOMBES. Yes, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. Show her in here. [*He has very lately become a stickler for etiquette.*] And, Tombes, strictly speaking, you know, I am not Sir Harry till Thursday.

TOMBES. Beg pardon, sir, but it is such a satisfaction to us.

SIR HARRY. [*Good-naturedly.*] Ah, they like it down-stairs, do they?

TOMBES. [*Unbending.*] Especially the females, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. Exactly. You can show her in, Tombes. [*The butler departs on his mighty task.*] You can tell the woman what she is wanted for, Emmy, while I change. [*He is too modest to boast about himself, and prefers to keep a wife in the house for that purpose.*] You can tell her the sort of things about me that will come better from you. [*Smiling happily.*] You heard what Tombes said: "Especially the females." And he is right. Success! The women like it even better than the men. And rightly. For they share. *You share, Lady Sims.* Not a woman will see that gown without being sick with envy of it. I know them. Have all our lady friends in to see it. It will make them ill for a week.

[*These sentiments carry him off light-heartedly, and presently the disturbing element is shown in. She is a mere typist, dressed in uncommonly good taste, but at contemptibly small expense, and she is carrying her typewriter in a friendly way rather than as a badge of slavery, as of course it is. Her eye is clear; and in odd contrast to LADY SIMS, she is self-reliant and serene.*]

KATE. [*Respectfully, but she should have waited to be spoken to.*] Good morning, madam.

LADY SIMS. [*In her nervous way, and scarcely noticing that the typist is a little too ready with her tongue.*] Good morning. [*As a first impression she rather likes the woman, and the woman, though it is scarcely worth mentioning, rather likes her.* LADY SIMS has a maid for

buttoning and unbuttoning her, and probably another for waiting on the maid, and she gazes with a little envy perhaps at a woman who does things for herself.] Is that the typewriting machine?

KATE. [*Who is getting it ready for use.*] Yes. [*Not "Yes, madam" as it ought to be.*] I suppose if I am to work here I may take this off. I get on better without it. [*She is referring to her hat.*

LADY SIMS. Certainly. [*But the hat is already off.*] I ought to apologize for my gown. I am to be presented this week, and I was trying it on.

[Her tone is not really apologetic. She is rather clinging to the glory of her gown, wistfully, as if not absolutely certain, you know, that it is a glory.]

KATE. It is beautiful, if I may presume to say so.

[She frankly admires it. She probably has a best and a second best of her own; that sort of thing.]

LADY SIMS. [*With a flush of pride in the gown.*] Yes, it is very beautiful. [*The beauty of it gives her courage.*] Sit down, please.

KATE. [*The sort of woman who would have sat down in any case.*] I suppose it is some copying you want done? I got no particulars. I was told to come to this address, but that was all.

LADY SIMS. [*Almost with the humility of a servant.*] Oh, it is not work for me, it is for my husband, and what he needs is not exactly copying. [*Swelling, for she is proud of HARRY.*] He wants a number of letters answered—hundreds of them—letters and telegrams of congratulation.

KATE. [*As if it were all in the day's work.*] Yes?

LADY SIMS. [*Remembering that HARRY expects every wife to do her duty.*] My husband is a remarkable man. He is about to be knighted. [*Pause, but KATE does not fall to the floor.*] He is to be knighted for his services to—[*on reflection*—for his services. [*She is conscious that she is not doing HARRY justice.*] He can explain it so much better than I can.

KATE. [*In her businesslike way.*] And I am to answer the congratulations?

LADY SIMS. [*Afraid that it will be a hard task.*] Yes.

KATE. [*Blithely*] It is work I have had some experience of.

[*She proceeds to type.*

LADY SIMS. But you can't begin till you know what he wants to say.

KATE. Only a specimen letter. Won't it be the usual thing?

LADY SIMS. [*To whom this is a new idea.*] Is there a usual thing?

KATE. Oh, yes.

[*She continues to type, and LADY SIMS, half-mesmerized, gazes at her nimble fingers. The useless woman watches the useful one, and she sighs, she could not tell why.*

LADY SIMS. How quickly you do it! It must be delightful to be able to do something, and to do it well.

KATE. [*Thankfully.*] Yes, it is delightful.

LADY SIMS [*Again remembering the source of all her greatness.*] But, excuse me, I don't think that will be any use. My husband wants me to explain to you that his is an exceptional case. He did not try to get this honor in any way. It was a complete surprise to him — —

KATE. [*Who is a practical KATE and no dealer in sarcasm.*] That is what I have written.

LADY SIMS. [*In whom sarcasm would meet a dead wall.*] But how could you know?

KATE. I only guessed.

LADY SIMS. Is that the usual thing?

KATE. Oh, yes.

LADY SIMS. They don't try to get it?

KATE. I don't know. That is what we are told to say in the letters.

[To her at present the only important thing about the letters is that they are ten shillings the hundred.]

LADY SIMS. *[Returning to surer ground.]* I should explain that my husband is not a man who cares for honors. So long as he does his duty — —

KATE. Yes, I have been putting that in.

LADY SIMS. Have you? But he particularly wants it to be known that he would have declined a title were it not — —

KATE. I have got it here.

LADY SIMS. What have you got?

KATE. *[Reading.]* "Indeed, I would have asked to be allowed to decline had it not been that I want to please my wife."

LADY SIMS. *[Heavily.]* But how could you know it was that?

KATE. Is it?

LADY SIMS. *[Who, after all, is the one with the right to ask questions.]* Do they all accept it for that reason?

KATE. That is what we are told to say in the letters.

LADY SIMS. *[Thoughtlessly.]* It is quite as if you knew my husband.

KATE. I assure you, I don't even know his name.

LADY SIMS. *[Suddenly showing that she knows him.]* Oh, he wouldn't like that!

[And it is here that HARRY re-enters in his city garments, looking so gay, feeling so jolly, that we bleed for him. However, the annoying KATHERINE is to get a shock also.]

LADY SIMS. This is the lady, Harry.

SIR HARRY. [*Shooting his cuffs.*] Yes, yes. Good morning, my dear.

[*Then they see each other, and their mouths open, but not for words. After the first surprise KATE seems to find some humor in the situation, but HARRY lowers like a thunder-cloud.*]

LADY SIMS. [*Who has seen nothing.*] I have been trying to explain to her — —

SIR HARRY. Eh—what? [*He controls himself.*] Leave it to me, Emmy; I'll attend to her.

[*LADY SIMS goes, with a dread fear that somehow she has vexed her lord, and then HARRY attends to the intruder.*]

SIR HARRY. [*With concentrated scorn.*] You!

KATE. [*As if agreeing with him.*] Yes, it's funny.

SIR HARRY. The shamelessness of your daring to come here.

KATE. Believe me, it is not less a surprise to me than it is to you. I was sent here in the ordinary way of business. I was given only the number of the house. I was not told the name.

SIR HARRY. [*Withering her.*] The ordinary way of business! This is what you have fallen to — a typist!

KATE. [*Unwithered.*] Think of it!

SIR HARRY. After going through worse straits, I'll be bound.

KATE. [*With some grim memories.*] Much worse straits.

SIR HARRY. [*Alas, laughing coarsely.*] My congratulations!

KATE. Thank you, Harry.

SIR HARRY. [*Who is annoyed, as any man would be, not to find her abject.*] Eh? What was that you called me, madam?

KATE. Isn't it Harry? On my soul, I almost forget.

SIR HARRY. It isn't Harry to you. My name is Sims, if you please.

KATE. Yes, I had not forgotten that. It was my name, too, you see.

SIR HARRY. [*In his best manner.*] It was your name till you forfeited the right to bear it.

KATE. Exactly.

SIR HARRY. [*Gloating.*] I was furious to find you here, but on second thoughts it pleases me. [*From the depths of his moral nature.*] There is a grim justice in this.

KATE. [*Sympathetically.*] Tell me?

SIR HARRY. Do you know what you were brought here to do?

KATE. I have just been learning. You have been made a knight, and I was summoned to answer the messages of congratulation.

SIR HARRY. That's it, that's it. You come on this day as my servant!

KATE. I, who might have been Lady Sims.

SIR HARRY. And you are her typist instead. And she has four men-servants. Oh, I am glad you saw her in her presentation gown.

KATE. I wonder if she would let me do her washing, Sir Harry?

[*Her want of taste disgusts him.*]

SIR HARRY. [*With dignity.*] You can go. The mere thought that only a few flights of stairs separates such as you from my innocent children — —

[*He will never know why a new light has come into her face.*]

KATE. [*Slowly.*] You have children?

SIR HARRY. [*Inflated.*] Two. [*He wonders why she is so long in answering.*]

KATE. [*Resorting to impertinence.*] Such a nice number.

SIR HARRY. [*With an extra turn of the screw.*] Both boys.

KATE. Successful in everything. Are they like you, Sir Harry?

SIR HARRY. [*Expanding.*] They are very like me.

KATE. That's nice. [*Even on such a subject as this she can be ribald.*]

SIR HARRY. Will you please to go.

KATE. Heigho! What shall I say to my employer?

SIR HARRY. That is no affair of mine.

KATE. What will you say to Lady Sims?

SIR HARRY. I flatter myself that whatever I say, Lady Sims will accept without comment.

[*She smiles, heaven knows why, unless her next remark explains it.*]

KATE. Still the same Harry.

SIR HARRY. What do you mean?

KATE. Only that you have the old confidence in your profound knowledge of the sex.

SIR HARRY. [*Beginning to think as little of her intellect as of her morals.*] I suppose I know my wife.

KATE. [*Hopelessly dense.*] I suppose so. I was only remembering that you used to think you knew her in the days when I was the lady. [*He is merely wasting his time on her, and he indicates the door. She is not sufficiently the lady to retire worsted.*] Well, good-by, Sir Harry. Won't you ring, and the four men-servants will show me out?

[*But he hesitates.*

SIR HARRY. [*In spite of himself.*] As you are here, there is something I want to get out of you. [*Wishing he could ask it less eagerly.*] Tell me, who was the man?

[*The strange woman – it is evident now that she has always been strange to him – smiles tolerantly.*

KATE. You never found out?

SIR HARRY. I could never be sure.

KATE. [*Reflectively.*] I thought that would worry you.

SIR HARRY. [*Sneering.*] It's plain that he soon left you.

KATE. Very soon.

SIR HARRY. As I could have told you. [*But still she surveys him with the smile of Mona Lisa. The badgered man has to entreat.*] Who was he? It was fourteen years ago, and cannot matter to any of us now. Kate, tell me who he was?

[*It is his first youthful moment, and perhaps because of that she does not wish to hurt him.*

KATE. [*Shaking a motherly head.*] Better not ask.

SIR HARRY. I do ask. Tell me.

KATE. It is kinder not to tell you.

SIR HARRY. [*Violently.*] Then, by James, it was one of my own pals. Was it Bernard Roche? [*She shakes her head.*] It may have been some one who comes to my house still.

KATE. I think not. [*Reflecting.*] Fourteen years! You found my letter that night when you went home?

SIR HARRY. [*Impatient.*] Yes.

KATE. I propped it against the decanters. I thought you would be sure to see it there. It was a room not unlike this, and the furniture was arranged in the same attractive way. How it all comes back to me. Don't you see me, Harry, in hat and cloak, putting the letter there, taking a last look round, and then stealing out into the night to meet — —

SIR HARRY. Whom?

KATE. Him. Hours pass, no sound in the room but the tick-tack of the clock, and then about midnight you return alone. You take — —

SIR HARRY. [*Gruffly.*] I wasn't alone.

KATE. [*The picture spoiled.*] No? Oh. [*Plaintively.*] Here have I all these years been conceiving it wrongly. [*She studies his face.*] I believe something interesting happened.

SIR HARRY. [*Growling.*] Something confoundedly annoying.

KATE. [*Coaxing.*] Do tell me.

SIR HARRY. We won't go into that. Who was the man? Surely a husband has a right to know with whom his wife bolted.

KATE. [*Who is detestably ready with her tongue.*] Surely the wife has a right to know how he took it. [*The woman's love of bargaining comes to her aid.*] A fair exchange. You tell me what happened, and I will tell you who he was.

SIR HARRY. You will? Very well.

[*It is the first point on which they have agreed, and, forgetting himself, he takes a place beside her on the fire-seat. He is thinking only of what he is to tell her, but she, womanlike, is conscious of their proximity.*]

KATE. [*Tastelessly.*] Quite like old times. [*He moves away from her indignantly.*] Go on, Harry.

SIR HARRY. [*Who has a manful shrinking from saying anything that is to his disadvantage.*] Well, as you know, I was dining at the club that night.

KATE. Yes.

SIR HARRY. Jack Lamb drove me home. Mabbett Green was with us, and I asked them to come in for a few minutes.

KATE. Jack Lamb, Mabbett Green? I think I remember them. Jack was in Parliament.

SIR HARRY. No, that was Mabbett. They came into the house with me and — [*with sudden horror*] — was it him?

KATE. [*Bewildered.*] Who?

SIR HARRY. Mabbett?

KATE. What?

SIR HARRY. The man?

KATE. What man? [*Understanding.*] Oh, no. I thought you said he came into the house with you.

SIR HARRY. It might have been a blind.

KATE. Well, it wasn't. Go on.

SIR HARRY. They came in to finish a talk we had been having at the club.

KATE. An interesting talk, evidently.

SIR HARRY. The papers had been full that evening of the elopement of some countess woman with a fiddler. What was her name?

KATE. Does it matter?

SIR HARRY. No. [*Thus ends the countess.*] We had been discussing the thing and — [*he pulls a wry face*] — and I had been rather warm —

KATE. [*With horrid relish.*] I begin to see. You had been saying it served the husband right, that the man who could not look after his

wife deserved to lose her. It was one of your favorite subjects. Oh, Harry, say it was that!

SIR HARRY. [*Sourly.*] It may have been something like that.

KATE. And all the time the letter was there, waiting; and none of you knew except the clock. Harry, it is sweet of you to tell me. [*His face is not sweet. The illiterate woman has used the wrong adjective.*] I forget what I said precisely in the letter.

SIR HARRY. [*Pulverizing her.*] So do I. But I have it still.

KATE. [*Not pulverized.*] Do let me see it again.

[*She has observed his eye wandering to the desk.*]

SIR HARRY. You are welcome to it as a gift.

[*The fateful letter, a poor little dead thing, is brought to light from a locked drawer.*]

KATE. [*Taking it.*] Yes, this is it. Harry, how you did crumple it! [*She reads, not without curiosity.*] "Dear husband—I call you that for the last time—I am off. I am what you call making a bolt of it. I won't try to excuse myself nor to explain, for you would not accept the excuses nor understand the explanation. It will be a little shock to you, but only to your pride; what will astound you is that any woman could be such a fool as to leave such a man as you. I am taking nothing with me that belongs to you. May you be very happy.—Your ungrateful KATE. P.S.—You need not try to find out who he is. You will try, but you won't succeed." [*She folds the nasty little thing up.*] I may really have it for my very own?

SIR HARRY. You really may.

KATE. [*Impudently.*] If you would care for a typed copy — —?

SIR HARRY. [*In a voice with which he used to frighten his grandmother.*] None of your sauce! [*Winning.*] I had to let them see it in the end.

KATE. I can picture Jack Lamb eating it.

SIR HARRY. A penniless parson's daughter.

KATE. That is all I was.

SIR HARRY. We searched for the two of you high and low.

KATE. Private detectives?

SIR HARRY. They couldn't get on the track of you.

KATE. [*Smiling.*] No?

SIR HARRY. But at last the courts let me serve the papers by advertisement on a man unknown, and I got my freedom.

KATE. So I saw. It was the last I heard of you.

SIR HARRY. [*Each word a blow for her.*] And I married again just as soon as ever I could.

KATE. They say that is always a compliment to the first wife.

SIR HARRY. [*Violently.*] I showed them.

KATE. You soon let them see that if one woman was a fool, you still had the pick of the basket to choose from.

SIR HARRY. By James, I did.

KATE. [*Bringing him to earth again.*] But still, you wondered who he was.

SIR HARRY. I suspected everybody—even my pals. I felt like jumping at their throats and crying: "It's you!"

KATE. You had been so admirable to me, an instinct told you that I was sure to choose another of the same.

SIR HARRY. I thought, it can't be money, so it must be looks. Some dolly face. [*He stares at her in perplexity.*] He must have had something wonderful about him to make you willing to give up all that you had with me.

KATE. [*As if he was the stupid one.*] Poor Harry.

SIR HARRY. And it couldn't have been going on for long, for I would have noticed the change in you.

KATE. Would you?

SIR HARRY. I knew you so well.

KATE. You amazing man.

SIR HARRY. So who was he? Out with it.

KATE. You are determined to know?

SIR HARRY. Your promise. You gave your word.

KATE. If I must—[*She is the villain of the piece, but it must be conceded that in this matter she is reluctant to pain him.*] I am sorry I promised. [*Looking at him steadily.*] There was no one, Harry; no one at all.

SIR HARRY.. [*Rising.*] If you think you can play with me — —

KATE. I told you that you wouldn't like it.

SIR HARRY. [*Rasping.*] It is unbelievable.

KATE. I suppose it is; but it is true.

SIR HARRY. Your letter itself gives you the lie.

KATE. That was intentional. I saw that if the truth were known you might have a difficulty in getting your freedom; and as I was getting mine it seemed fair that you should have yours also. So I wrote my good-by in words that would be taken to mean what you thought they meant, and I knew the law would back you in your opinion. For the law, like you, Harry, has a profound understanding of women.

SIR HARRY. [*Trying to straighten, himself.*] I don't believe you yet.

KATE. [*Looking not unkindly into the soul of this man.*] Perhaps that is the best way to take it. It is less unflattering than the truth. But you were the only one. [*Summing up her life.*] You sufficed.

SIR HARRY. Then what mad impulse — —

KATE. It was no impulse, Harry. I had thought it out for a year.

SIR HARRY. A year? [*Dazed.*] One would think to hear you that I hadn't been a good husband to you.

KATE. [*With a sad smile.*] You were a good husband according to your lights.

SIR HARRY. [*Stoutly.*] I think so.

KATE. And a moral man, and chatty, and quite the philanthropist.

SIR HARRY. [*On sure ground.*] All women envied you.

KATE. How you loved me to be envied.

SIR HARRY. I swaddled you in luxury.

KATE. [*Making her great revelation.*] That was it.

SIR HARRY. [*Blankly.*] What?

KATE. [*Who can be serene because it is all over.*] How you beamed at me when I sat at the head of your fat dinners in my fat jewelry, surrounded by our fat friends.

SIR HARRY. [*Aggrieved.*] They weren't so fat.

KATE. [*A side issue.*] All except those who were so thin. Have you ever noticed, Harry, that many jewels make women either incredibly fat or incredibly thin?

SIR HARRY. [*Shouting.*] I have not. [*Is it worth while to argue with her any longer?*] We had all the most interesting society of the day. It wasn't only business men. There were politicians, painters, writers — —

KATE. Only the glorious, dazzling successes. Oh, the fat talk while we ate too much—about who had made a hit and who was slipping back, and what the noo house cost and the noo motor and the gold soup-plates, and who was to be the noo knight.

SIR HARRY. [*Who it will be observed is unanswerable from first to last.*] Was anybody getting on better than me, and consequently you?

KATE. Consequently me! Oh, Harry, you and your sublime religion.

SIR HARRY. [*Honest heart.*] My religion? I never was one to talk about religion, but — —

KATE. Pooh, Harry, you don't even know what your religion was and is and will be till the day of your expensive funeral. [*And here is the lesson that life has taught her.*] One's religion is whatever he is most interested in, and yours is Success.

SIR HARRY. [*Quoting from his morning paper.*] Ambition—it is the last infirmity of noble minds.

KATE. Noble minds!

SIR HARRY. [*At last grasping what she is talking about.*] You are not saying that you left me because of my success?

KATE. Yes, that was it. [*And now she stands revealed to him.*] I couldn't endure it. If a failure had come now and then—but your success was suffocating me. [*She is rigid with emotion.*] The passionate craving I had to be done with it, to find myself among people who had not got on.

SIR HARRY. [*With proper spirit.*] There are plenty of them.

KATE. There were none in our set. When they began to go downhill they rolled out of our sight.

SIR HARRY. [*Clenching it.*] I tell you I am worth a quarter of a million.

KATE [*Unabashed.*] That is what you are worth to yourself. I'll tell you what you are worth to me: exactly twelve pounds. For I made up my mind that I could launch myself on the world alone if I first proved my mettle by earning twelve pounds; and as soon as I had earned it I left you.

SIR HARRY. [*In the scales.*] Twelve pounds!

KATE. That is your value to a woman. If she can't make it she has to stick to you.

SIR HARRY. [*Remembering perhaps a rectory garden.*] You valued me at more than that when you married me.

KATE. [*Seeing it also.*] Ah, I didn't know you then. If only you had been a man, Harry.

SIR HARRY. A man? What do you mean by a man?

KATE. [*Leaving the garden.*] Haven't you heard of them? They are something fine; and every woman is loath to admit to herself that her husband is not one. When she marries, even though she has been a very trivial person, there is in her some vague stirring toward a worthy life, as well as a fear of her capacity for evil. She knows her chance lies in him. If there is something good in him, what is good in her finds it, and they join forces against the baser parts. So I didn't give you up willingly, Harry. I invented all sorts of theories to explain you. Your hardness—I said it was a fine want of mawkishness. Your coarseness—I said it goes with strength. Your contempt for the weak—I called it virility. Your want of ideals was clear-sightedness. Your ignoble views of women—I tried to think them funny. Oh, I clung to you to save myself. But I had to let go; you had only the one quality, Harry, success; you had it so strong that it swallowed all the others.

SIR HARRY. [*Not to be diverted from the main issue.*] How did you earn that twelve pounds?

KATE. It took me nearly six months; but I earned it fairly. [*She presses her hand on the typewriter as lovingly as many a woman has pressed a rose.*] I learned this. I hired it and taught myself. I got some

work through a friend, and with my first twelve pounds I paid for my machine. Then I considered that I was free to go, and I went.

SIR HARRY. All this going on in my house while you were living in the lap of luxury! [*She nods.*] By God, you were determined.

KATE. [*Briefly.*] By God, I was.

SIR HARRY. [*Staring.*] How you must have hated me.

KATE. [*Smiling at the childish word.*] Not a bit—after I saw that there was a way out. From that hour you amused me, Harry; I was even sorry for you, for I saw that you couldn't help yourself. Success is just a fatal gift.

SIR HARRY. Oh, thank you.

KATE. [*Thinking, dear friends in front, of you and me perhaps.*] Yes, and some of your most successful friends knew it. One or two of them used to look very sad at times, as if they thought they might have come to something if they hadn't got on.

SIR HARRY. [*Who has a horror of sacrilege.*] The battered crew you live among now—what are they but folk who have tried to succeed and failed?

KATE. That's it; they try, but they fail.

SIR HARRY. And always will fail.

KATE. Always. Poor souls—I say of them. Poor soul—they say of me. It keeps us human. That is why I never tire of them.

SIR HARRY. [*Comprehensively.*] Bah! Kate, I tell you I'll be worth half a million yet.

KATE. I'm sure you will. You're getting stout, Harry.

SIR HARRY. No, I'm not.

KATE. What was the name of that fat old fellow who used to fall asleep at our dinner-parties?

SIR HARRY. If you mean Sir William Crackley — —

KATE. That was the man. Sir William was to me a perfect picture of the grand success. He had got on so well that he was very, very stout, and when he sat on a chair it was thus [*her hands meeting in front of her*] — as if he were holding his success together. That is what you are working for, Harry. You will have that and the half million about the same time.

SIR HARRY. [*Who has surely been very patient.*] Will you please to leave my house?

KATE. [*Putting on her gloves, soiled things.*] But don't let us part in anger. How do you think I am looking, Harry, compared to the dull, inert thing that used to roll round in your padded carriages?

SIR HARRY. [*In masterly fashion.*] I forget what you were like. I'm very sure you never could have held a candle to the present Lady Sims.

KATE. That is a picture of her, is it not?

SIR HARRY. [*Seizing his chance again.*] In her wedding-gown. Painted by an R.A.

KATE. [*Wickedly.*] A knight?

SIR HARRY. [*Deceived.*] Yes.

KATE. [*Who likes LADY SIMS — a piece of presumption on her part.*] It is a very pretty face.

SIR HARRY. [*With the pride of possession.*] Acknowledged to be a beauty everywhere.

KATE. There is a merry look in the eyes, and character in the chin.

SIR HARRY. [*Like an auctioneer.*] Noted for her wit.

KATE. All her life before her when that was painted. It is a *spirituelle* face too. [*Suddenly she turns on him with anger, for the first and only time in the play.*] Oh, Harry, you brute!

SIR HARRY. [*Staggered.*] Eh? What?

KATE. That dear creature, capable of becoming a noble wife and mother — she is the spiritless woman of no account that I saw here a few minutes ago. I forgive you for myself, for I escaped, but that poor lost soul, oh, Harry, Harry.

SIR HARRY. [*Waving her to the door.*] I'll thank you — If ever there was a woman proud of her husband and happy in her married life, that woman is Lady Sims.

KATE. I wonder.

SIR HARRY. Then you needn't wonder.

KATE. [*Slowly.*] If I was a husband — it is my advice to all of them — I would often watch my wife quietly to see whether the twelve-pound look was not coming into her eyes. Two boys, did you say, and both like you?

SIR HARRY. What is that to you?

KATE. [*With glistening eyes.*] I was only thinking that somewhere there are two little girls who, when they grow up — the dear, pretty girls who are all meant for the men that don't get on! Well, good-bye, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. [*Showing a little human weakness, it is to be feared.*] Say first that you're sorry.

KATE. For what?

SIR HARRY. That you left me. Say you regret it bitterly. You know you do. [*She smiles and shakes her head. He is pettish. He makes a terrible announcement.*] You have spoiled the day for me.

KATE. [*To hearten him.*] I am sorry for that; but it is only a pin-prick, Harry. I suppose it is a little jarring in the moment of your triumph to find that there is — one old friend — who does not think you a success; but you will soon forget it. Who cares what a typist thinks?

SIR HARRY. [*Heartened.*] Nobody. A typist at eighteen shillings a week!

KATE. [*Proudly.*] Not a bit of it, Harry. I double that.

SIR HARRY. [*Neatly.*] Magnificent!

[*There is a timid knock at the door.*]

LADY SIMS. May I come in?

SIR HARRY. [*Rather appealingly.*] It is Lady Sims.

KATE. I won't tell. She is afraid to come into her husband's room without knocking!

SIR HARRY. She is not. [*Uxoriously.*] Come in, dearest.

[*Dearest enters, carrying the sword. She might have had the sense not to bring it in while this annoying person is here.*]

LADY SIMS. [*Thinking she has brought her welcome with her.*] Harry, the sword has come.

SIR HARRY. [*Who will dote on it presently.*] Oh, all right.

LADY SIMS. But I thought you were so eager to practise with it.

[*The person smiles at this. He wishes he had not looked to see if she was smiling.*]

SIR HARRY. [*Sharply.*] Put it down.

[*LADY SIMS flushes a little as she lays the sword aside.*]

KATE. [*With her confounded courtesy.*] It is a beautiful sword, if I may say so.

LADY SIMS. [*Helped.*] Yes.

[*The person thinks she can put him in the wrong, does she? He'll show her.*]

SIR HARRY. [*With one eye on KATE.*] Emmy, the one thing your neck needs is more jewels.

LADY SIMS. [*Faltering.*] More!

SIR HARRY. Some ropes of pearls. I'll see to it. It's a bagatelle to me. [*KATE conceals her chagrin, so she had better be shown the door. He rings.*] I won't detain you any longer, miss.

KATE. Thank you.

LADY SIMS. Going already? You have been very quick.

SIR HARRY. The person doesn't suit, Emmy.

LADY SIMS. I'm sorry.

KATE. So am I, madam, but it can't be helped. Good-by, your ladyship – good-by, Sir Harry.

[*There is a suspicion of an impertinent courtesy, and she is escorted off the premises by TOMBES. The air of the room is purified by her going. SIR HARRY notices it at once.*

LADY SIMS. [*Whose tendency is to say the wrong thing.*] She seemed such a capable woman.

SIR HARRY. [*On his hearth.*] I don't like her style at all.

LADY SIMS. [*Meekly.*] Of course you know best.

[*This is the right kind of woman.*

SIR HARRY. [*Rather anxious for corroboration.*] Lord, how she winced when I said I was to give you those ropes of pearls.

LADY SIMS. Did she? I didn't notice. I suppose so.

SIR HARRY. [*Frowning.*] Suppose? Surely I know enough about women to know that.

LADY SIMS. Yes, oh yes.

SIR HARRY. [*Odd that so confident a man should ask this.*] Emmy, I know you well, don't I? I can read you like a book, eh?

LADY SIMS. [*Nervously.*] Yes, Harry.

SIR HARRY. [*Jovially, but with an inquiring eye.*] What a different existence yours is from that poor lonely wretch's.

LADY SIMS. Yes, but she has a very contented face.

SIR HARRY. [*With a stamp of his foot.*] All put on. What?

LADY SIMS. [*Timidly.*] I didn't say anything.

SIR HARRY. [*Snapping.*] One would think you envied her.

LADY SIMS. Envied? Oh, no – but I thought she looked so alive. It was while she was working the machine.

SIR HARRY. Alive! That's no life. It is you that are alive. [*Curtly.*] I'm busy, Emmy.

[*He sits at his writing-table.*]

LADY SIMS. [*Dutifully.*] I'm sorry; I'll go, Harry. [*Inconsequentially.*] Are they very expensive?

SIR HARRY. What?

LADY SIMS. Those machines?

[*When she has gone the possible meaning of her question startles him. The curtain hides him from us, but we may be sure that he will soon be bland again. We have a comfortable feeling, you and I, that there is nothing of HARRY SIMS in us.*]

TRADITION

BY

GEORGE MIDDLETON

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GEORGE MIDDLETON

George Middleton, one of the first to write and publish a volume of one-act plays in America, was born in Paterson, New Jersey, 1880. He was graduated from Columbia University in 1902. Since 1921 he has been literary editor of *La Follette's Weekly*, and, in addition, has been a frequent contributor to magazines and reviews on dramatic and literary subjects. During the last few years he has spent much of his time abroad.

George Middleton's chiefest interest has been in the one-act play. He has been an ardent champion of the shorter form of drama. Among his three volumes of one-act plays are *Embers* (including *The Failures*, *The Gargoyle*, *In His House*, *Madonna*, and *The Man Masterful*), *Tradition* (including *On Bail*, *Their Wife*, *Waiting*, *The Cheat of Pity*, and *Mothers*), and *Possession* (including *The Grove*, *A Good Woman*, *The Black Tie*, *Circles*, and *The Unborn*). Other one-act plays are *Criminals* and *The Reason*. His longer plays are *Nowadays* and *The Road Together*. Mr. Middleton has lectured widely on the one-act play before colleges, in Little Theatres, and clubs. Perhaps his most notable article is *The Neglected One-Act Play*, which appeared in *The New York Dramatic Mirror* in 1912.

Tradition is one of Mr. Middleton's best and most popular one-act plays; and it most nearly conforms to the organic technic of the one-act play.

FIRST PERFORMANCE AT THE BERKELEY THEATRE, NEW
YORK CITY, JANUARY 24, 1913.
(Produced under the personal direction of Mr. FRANK REICHER.)

THE PEOPLE

GEORGE OLLIVANT	MR. GEORGE W. WILSON
EMILY, <i>his wife</i>	MISS ALICE LEIGH
MARY, <i>his daughter, an actress</i>	MISS FOLA LA FOLLETTE

TRADITION

SCENE: *The sitting-room at the OLLIVANTS' in a small town up-State. It is an evening late in the spring.*

A simple room is disclosed, bearing the traces of another generation. Old-fashioned window-doors at the right, overlooking the garden, open on a porch; another door in back opening on the hall-way. A large fire-place at the left, now concealed by an embroidered screen; the horsehair furniture, several terra-cotta statuettes, and a woodcut or two on the walls create the subtle atmosphere of the past. There is a lamp on the table, and another on a bracket by the door in back. Moonlight filters through the window-doors.

The OLLIVANTS are discovered together. MARY, a rather plain woman of about twenty-five, with a suggestion of quick sensibilities, is standing, lost in thought, looking out into the garden. Her mother, EMILY, nearing fifty, quiet and subdued in manner, is seated at the table trimming a hat. Occasionally she looks at MARY, stops her work, glances at her husband, closes her eyes as though tired, and then resumes. The silence continues for some time, broken only by the rattle of the town paper which GEORGE OLLIVANT is reading. He is well on in middle life, with a strong, determined face not entirely without elements of kindness and deep feeling. When he finishes, he folds the paper, puts it on the table, knocks the ashes

carefully from his pipe into his hand, and throws them behind the screen; takes off his spectacles and wipes them as he, too, looks over toward his daughter, still gazing absently into the garden. Finally, after a slight hesitation, he goes to her and puts his arm about her; she is startled but smiles sweetly.

OLLIVANT. [*Affectionately.*] Glad to be home again, Mary?

MARY. [*Evasively.*] The garden is so pretty.

OLLIVANT. Hasn't changed much, eh?

MARY. It seems different; perhaps it's the night.

OLLIVANT. I guess it isn't up to its usual standard. Haven't seen your mother there so often this spring.

EMILY. [*Quietly.*] This dry spell is not good for flowers.

OLLIVANT. It's only the cultivated flowers that need care; can't help thinking that when I see the wild ones so hardy in my fields on the hill. [*Turning to EMILY and patting her.*] Is there any of that spray mixture left, Emily, dear?

EMILY. I haven't looked lately.

OLLIVANT. I'll order some to-morrow. [*Taking up his pipe again and looking for the tobacco.*] Think it would be a good idea, daughter, if you'd spray those rosebushes every couple of weeks. The bugs are a pest this spring. Where's my tobacco?

EMILY. On the mantel.

OLLIVANT. Wish you would always leave it on the table; you know how I hate to have things changed.

[*OLLIVANT goes to the mantel, filling his pipe, and while his back is turned, MARY makes a quick questioning gesture to her mother, who sighs helplessly. MARY ponders a moment.*]

MARY. How's Ben been doing these two years, father?

OLLIVANT. Hasn't your brother written you?

MARY. Only once – when I left home; he disapproved, too.

OLLIVANT. Had an older brother's feeling of wanting to take care of you, Mary.

MARY. Yes; I know. How's he doing?

OLLIVANT. He's commencing to get on his feet. Takes time and money for any one to get started these days.

MARY. But he's still in partnership with Bert Taylor, isn't he?

OLLIVANT. Yes. He'd have been somewhere if he'd worked in with me as I did with *my* father. Things should be handed down. Offered him the chance, tried to make him take it, as your mother knows; but that college chum – nice enough fellow, I've heard – turned his head another way. [*Lighting his pipe and puffing slowly.*] It's best to humor a young fellow's ideas if he sticks them out, but I'd like to have had us all here together now. The place is big enough even if he should want to marry. Your mother and I came here, you know, when your grandfather was still alive.

MARY. Then Ben isn't making any money?

OLLIVANT. [*Reluctantly.*] Not yet – to speak of.

EMILY. [*Quietly.*] But he's promised to pay his father back, Mary.

MARY. I see. [*Thoughtfully.*] College and then more help to get started, because he's a man.

OLLIVANT. [*Complacently.*] He'll have to support a family some day; I've had to keep that in mind.

MARY. I'd like to have a real talk with him.

OLLIVANT. When did his letter say he'd be coming for a visit, Emily?

EMILY. The fifteenth.

MARY. Not till then? That's too bad.

OLLIVANT. Eh?

MARY. [*After exchanging a quick glance with her mother and gaining courage.*] Father, I hope you didn't misunderstand my coming back?

OLLIVANT. Not at all. We all make mistakes—especially when we're young. Perhaps I was a bit hasty when you left home, but I knew you'd soon see I was right. I didn't think it would take you two years—but perhaps if I'd written you before you'd have come sooner. I told your mother I'd like to make it easy for you to come home.

MARY. Mother suggested that you write me?

OLLIVANT. Well, I suppose you might put it that way. I always felt she thought I was a bit hard on you, but I'm not one to back down easily.

MARY. Don't blame me then, father, if I showed I was your daughter.

OLLIVANT. Let's forget my feeling; but naturally I was set back.

MARY. Because you didn't take my going seriously until I was actually leaving.

OLLIVANT. I couldn't get it into my head then, and I can't now, how any girl would want to leave a home like this, where you have everything. You don't know how lucky you are—or maybe you have realized it. Look about you and see what other girls have. Is it like this? Trees, flowers, and a lake view that's the best in the county. Why, one can breathe here and even taste the air. Every time I come back from a business trip it makes a new man of me. Ask your mother. Eh, Emily? When I sit out there on the porch in the cool evenings it makes me feel at ease with the world to know that the place is *mine* and that I've raised a family and can take care of them all. Ben had to go, I suppose—it's the way with sons; but I thought you, at least, would stay here, daughter, in this old house where you were born, where I was born, where all your early associations — —

MARY. [*Shuddering.*] I hate associations.

OLLIVANT. [*Eying her.*] Well, I'd like to know where you get *that* from. Not from your mother and me. *We* like them, don't we, Emily? Why, your mother's hardly ever even left here—but you had to up and get out.

MARY. Yes. That's right, father; I *had* to.

OLLIVANT. [*He stops smoking and looks at her sharply.*] Had to? Who made you?

MARY. [*Reluctantly.*] It was something inside me.

OLLIVANT. [*In spite of himself.*] Tush—that foolishness.

MARY. [*Quickly.*] Don't make it hard for us again.

OLLIVANT. I made it hard, Mary? Because I objected to your leaving your mother here alone?

MARY. I remember; you said I was a foolish, "stage-struck" girl.

OLLIVANT. Well, you're over *that*, aren't you?

MARY. That's just where you are mistaken, father. [*Slowly.*] That's why I asked you if you hadn't misunderstood my coming back.

OLLIVANT. [*Suspiciously.*] Then why did you come at all?

MARY. I'm human; I wanted to see you and mother, so I came when you generously wrote me. I'm not going to stay and spray the roses.

OLLIVANT. [*He eyes her tensely and controls himself with an effort.*] So you are not going to stay with your mother and me?

MARY. [*Affectionately.*] I'll come see you as often as I can and — —

OLLIVANT.—and make a hotel of your home? [*MARY is silent.*] Don't you see your mother is getting older and needs somebody to be here?

EMILY. [*With a quiet assurance.*] I have never been so well and contented.

OLLIVANT. [*Tenderly.*] I know better, Emily; can't I see you're getting thinner and older? [*Stopping her protests.*] Now, let me manage this, dear. It's a girl's place to stay at home. You know my feelings about that. Suppose anything should happen to your mother, what would I do?

MARY. So it's not mother alone you are thinking of?

OLLIVANT. [*Tersely.*] I'm thinking of your place at home—doing a woman's work. I'm not proud of having my daughter off earning her own living as though I couldn't support her.

EMILY. George!

MARY. I thought it was only because I was on the stage.

OLLIVANT. Well, it's not the most heavenly place, is it? A lot of narrow-minded fools here in town thought I was crazy to *let* you go; I knew how they felt; I grinned and bore it. You were my daughter and I loved you, and I didn't want them to think any less of you by their finding out you were leaving against my wish.

MARY. [*Slowly, with comprehension.*] That's what hurt you.

OLLIVANT. Well, I blamed myself a bit for taking you to plays and liking them myself.

MARY. People here will soon forget about me and merely be sorry for you.

OLLIVANT. [*Persuasively.*] Why, Mary. I've made it easy for you to stay. I told every one you were coming home for good. They'll think me a fool if — —

MARY. [*Tenderly.*] You meant what was dear and good, father; but you had no right to say that. I'm sorry.

OLLIVANT. I did it because I thought you had come to your senses.

MARY. [*Firmly.*] I never saw so clearly as I do now.

OLLIVANT. [*Bluntly.*] Then you're stubborn—plain stubborn—not to admit failure.

MARY. [*Startled.*] Failure?

OLLIVANT. I know what the newspapers said; Ben sent them to me.

MARY. Which ones?

OLLIVANT. Why, all of them, I guess.

MARY. Did he send you the good ones?

OLLIVANT. Were there any?

MARY. Oh, I see. So Ben carefully picked out only those which would please you.

OLLIVANT. [*Sarcastically.*] Please me?

MARY. Yes; because you and he didn't want me to succeed; because you thought failure would bring me home. But don't you think I'll let some cub reporter settle things for me. I'll never come home through failure—never.

OLLIVANT. [*Kindly.*] Ben and I only want to protect you, Mary.

MARY. Why do men always want to protect women?

OLLIVANT. Because we know the world.

MARY. Yes; but you don't know *me*. Father, you still think I'm only a foolish, stage-struck girl, and want flowers and men and my name in big letters. It isn't that.

OLLIVANT. Well, what is it, then?

MARY. Oh—I want to be an artist. I don't suppose you can understand it; I didn't, myself, at first. I was born with it, but didn't know what it was till that first time you took me to the theatre.

OLLIVANT. So it was all my fault?

MARY. It isn't anybody's fault; it's just a fact. I knew from that day what I wanted to do. I wanted to act—to create. I don't care whether I play a leading lady or a scrub-woman, if I can do it with truth and beauty.

OLLIVANT. Well, you haven't done much of either, have you? What have you got to show for our unhappiness? What have you got ahead of you?

MARY. Nothing—definite.

OLLIVANT. [*Incredulously.*] Yet, you're going to keep at it?

MARY. Yes.

OLLIVANT. What do you think of that, Emily?

MARY. I am going to the city Monday.

OLLIVANT. [*Persistently.*] But what will you do when you get there?

MARY. What I've done before: hunt a job, tramp the streets, call at the offices, be snubbed and insulted by office-boys—keep at it till I get something to do.

OLLIVANT. Come, come, Mary; don't make me lose patience. Put your pride in your pocket. You've had your fling. You've tried and failed. Give it all up and stay home here where you can be comfortable.

MARY. [*With intense feeling.*] Father, I can't give it up. It doesn't make any difference how they treat me, how many times I get my "notice" and don't even make good according to their standards. I can't give it up. I simply can't. It keeps gnawing inside me and driving me on. It's there—always there, and I know if I keep at work I will succeed. I know it; I know it.

[*MARY throws herself into the chair, much stirred. EMILY'S eyes have eagerly followed her throughout this as though responding sympathetically, but OLLIVANT has stood in silence, watching her apparently without comprehension.*]

OLLIVANT. [*Not without kindness.*] Something inside. Huh! Have you any clear idea what she's talking about, Emily?

[MARY gives a short, hurt cry and goes quickly to the window, looking out and controlling herself with an effort.]

EMILY. [*Softly, as she looks at MARY.*] I think I understand.

OLLIVANT. I don't. Something inside. I never had anything like that bothering me. What's it all mean?

EMILY. [*Quietly.*] So many people use the same words, but cannot understand each other.

OLLIVANT. Well, you seem to think it's mighty important Mary, whatever it is; but it's too much for me. If you had something to show for it I wouldn't mind. But you're just where you started and you might as well give up.

EMILY. George!

OLLIVANT. Now I don't know much about the stage, Emily, but Ben does. He says you're not made for an actress, Mary; you haven't got a chance.

MARY. [*Turning.*] Father!

OLLIVANT. Can't you see your failure isn't your own fault? If you were a beauty like Helen Safford or some of those other "stars" — but you're not pretty, why, you're not even good-looking and — —

MARY. [*With bitter vehemence.*] Oh, don't go any further. I know all that. But I don't care how I look off the stage if only I can grow beautiful on it. I'll create with so much inner power and beauty that people will forget how I look and only see what I think and feel. I can do it; I have done it; I've made audiences feel and even got my "notice" because the stage-manager said I was "too natural." Helen Safford — what's she? A professional beauty with everything outside and nothing in. You think of her eyes, her mouth, and her profile; but does she touch you so you remember? I know her work. Wait till I get a chance to play a scene with her — which they may give me because I'm not good-looking — I'll make them forget she's on the

stage the first ten minutes—yes, and you and Ben, too, if you'll come. Helen Safford? Huh! Why, people will remember me when she's only a lithograph.

OLLIVANT. Well, then, why haven't you had your chance?

MARY. [*Quickly.*] Because most managers feel the way you and Ben do. And not having a lovely profile and a fashion-plate figure stands between me and a chance even to read a part, let alone play it. That's what eats the heart out of me, mother; and makes me hate my face every time I sit down to put on the grease paint.

OLLIVANT. Well, don't blame me for that.

MARY. [*Going to her mother, who takes her hand.*] You can laugh at me, father; you don't understand. It's foolish to talk. But, oh, mother, why is such beauty given to women like Helen Safford who have no inner need of it, and here am I, with a real creative gift, wrapped up in a nondescript package which stands between me and everything I want to do? [*With determination.*] But I will—ultimately I will make good, in spite of my looks; others have. And what I've suffered will make me a greater artist.

OLLIVANT. [*In a matter-of-fact tone.*] Are you sure all this isn't overconfidence and vanity?

MARY. I don't care what you call it. It's what keeps me working.

OLLIVANT. [*Quickly.*] Working? But how can you work without an engagement?

MARY. That *is* the hard part of our life; waiting, waiting for a chance to work. But don't think I stand still when I haven't an engagement. I don't dare. That's why I keep at my voice work and dancing and — —

OLLIVANT. [*Suddenly interrupting.*] Dancing and voice work when you have no engagements. Would you mind telling me who is paying the bills?

MARY. [*Indignantly.*] Father!

OLLIVANT. I think I have the right to ask that.

MARY. Have you?

OLLIVANT. I am your father.

MARY. [*With quiet dignity.*] You thought you'd force me here at home to do as you wished because you paid for my food and clothes; when you took that from me you *ceased* to have that right. Don't forget since I left you've not helped me with my work or given me a penny.

OLLIVANT. [*Suspiciously.*] Mary.... No, that's not why you went away from home?

MARY. No.

OLLIVANT. Or you met some man *there* and....

MARY. No.

OLLIVANT. There is some man.

MARY. Why a *man*?

OLLIVANT. Damn them; I know them. [*Breaking.*] Good God, Mary, dear, you haven't ...? Answer me, daughter.

MARY. [*Calmly.*] No, there's been no need of that.

[*He has been violently shaken at the thought, looks at her intently, believes her, and then continues in a subdued manner.*]

OLLIVANT. Then who helped you? Ben?

MARY. How could he help me? Are men the only ones who help women?

EMILY. [*Quietly.*] Tell him, Mary; it's best now.

OLLIVANT. [*Turning slowly to her in surprise.*] You knew and have kept it from me?

EMILY. [*Calmly, as she puts down the hat she has been trimming.*] I found I hadn't lost my old skill, though it's been a good many years since I held a brush—since before we were married, George. I had an idea I thought would sell: paper dolls with little hand-painted dresses on separate sheets; they were so much softer than the printed kind, and children like anything soft. I wrote to Mr. Aylwin—you remember—he was so kind to me years before. He had called here once before when you were away and asked after my work. He used to think I had such promise. He found an opportunity to use the dolls as a specialty, and when I explained he induced some other firms to use all I can paint, too. They pay me very well. I made enough each month to help Mary when she went behind.

OLLIVANT. [*Incredulously.*] You! After you heard me say when she left I wouldn't give her a cent?

EMILY. [*Looking fondly at MARY.*] You were keeping Ben, weren't you?

OLLIVANT. But—that's—that's different.

EMILY. I didn't see why we shouldn't help *both* our children.

OLLIVANT. [*Perplexed by this he turns to MARY.*] And you took it?

MARY. Yes.

OLLIVANT. You knew how she got the money?

MARY. Yes.

OLLIVANT. Your mother working herself sick for you, and you took it?

EMILY. I told you I've never been so happy.

MARY. [*Simply.*] I couldn't bargain with what I felt. I had to study. I'd have taken anything, gotten it anywhere. I had to live. You didn't help me. Ben and I both went against your will, but you helped him because he was your son. I was only your daughter.

[OLLIVANT *eyes her and seems to be struggling with himself. He is silent a long while as they both watch him. Finally, after several efforts he speaks with emotion.*]

OLLIVANT. Mary, I—I didn't realize how much you meant to me till—till I thought of what might have happened to you without my help. Would—would you have stayed on in the city if—if your mother hadn't helped you?

MARY. [*Firmly.*] Yes, father; I would have stayed on.

OLLIVANT. [*After a pause.*] Then I guess what you *feel* is stronger than all your mother and I tried to teach you.... Are you too proud to take help from me—now?

MARY. [*Simply.*] No, father; till I succeed. Then I'll pay you back like Ben promised.

OLLIVANT. [*Hurt.*] You don't think it was the money, daughter? It would have cost to keep you here. It wasn't that.

MARY. No; it was your father speaking and his father and his father. [*Looking away wistfully.*] And perhaps I was speaking for those before me who were silent or couldn't be heard.

OLLIVANT. [*With sincerity.*] I don't exactly understand *that* any more than the feeling you spoke of driving you from home. But I do see what you mean about brothers and sisters. You seem to think boys and girls are the same. But they're not. Men and women are different. You may not know it, but your mother had foolish ideas like you have when I first knew her. She was poor and didn't have a mother to support her, and she had to work for a living. She'd about given up when I met her—trying to work at night to feed herself in the day while studying. But she was sensible; when a good man came along who could support her she married him and settled down. Look how happy she's been here with a home of her own that is a home—with associations and children. Where would she be, struggling to-day trying to paint pictures for a living? Why, there's lots of men who can paint pictures, and too few good wives for hard-working, decent men who want a family—which is God's law. You'll find that out one of these days and you'll give yourself as she

did. Some day a man will come and you'll want to marry him. How could you if you keep on with your work, going about the country?

MARY. [*Quietly.*] You leave mother at times, don't you?

OLLIVANT. I've got to.

MARY. So may I.

OLLIVANT. And the children?

MARY. They'd have a share of my life.

OLLIVANT. A mighty big share if you're human, I tell you. Ask your mother if you think they're easy coming and bringing up.

MARY. And now they've left her. Dear mother, what has she to do?

OLLIVANT. Well, if you ever get a husband with those ideas of yours you'll see what a wife has to do. [*He goes to her.*] Mary, it isn't easy, all this you've been saying. But your mother and I are left alone, and perhaps we *have* got different views than you. But if ever you do see it our way, and give up or fail -- well, come back to us, understand?

MARY. [*Going to him and kissing him.*] I understand how hard it was for you to say that. And remember I may come back a success.

OLLIVANT. Yes. I suppose they all think that; it's what keeps them going. But some day, when you're in love and marry, you'll see it all differently.

MARY. Father, what if the man does not come -- or the children?

OLLIVANT. Why -- [*He halts as though unable to answer her.*] Nonsense. He'll come, never fear; they always do.

MARY. I wonder.

OLLIVANT. [*He goes affectionately to EMILY, who has been staring before her during this.*] Emily, dear. No wonder the flowers have been

neglected. Well, you'll have time to spray those roses yourself. I'll get the spray mixture to-morrow. [*Kisses her tenderly.*] Painting paper dolls with a change of clothes! When I might have been sending her the money without ever feeling it. No more of that, dear; you don't have to now. I shan't let you get tired and sick. That's one thing I draw the line at. [*He pats her again, looks at his watch, and then goes slowly over to the window-doors.*] Well, it's getting late. I'll lock up. [*Looking up at sky.*] Paper says it will rain to-morrow.

EMILY. [*Very quietly so only MARY can hear.*] At the art school they said I had a lovely sense of color. Your father is so kind; but he doesn't know how much I enjoyed painting again—even those paper dolls.

MARY. [*Comprehending in surprise.*] Mother! You, too?

EMILY. [*Fearing lest OLLIVANT should hear.*] Sh!

[*OLLIVANT closes the doors and eyes the women thoughtfully.*]

OLLIVANT. Better fasten the other windows when you come. Good-night.

[*He goes out slowly as mother and daughter sit there together.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE EXCHANGE

BY

ALTHEA THURSTON

The Exchange is reprinted by permission of Althea Thurston. This play is one of the farces written in the Course in Dramatic Composition (English 109) in the University of Utah. For permission to perform, address B. Roland Lewis, Department of English, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

ALTHEA THURSTON

Althea Cooms-Thurston, one of the promising writers of the younger set of American dramatists, was born in Iowa, but soon moved with her parents to Colorado, where she spent her girlhood. She was educated in the public schools of Colorado Springs and Denver. Her collegiate training was received in the University of Utah, Salt Lake City. In 1902 she married Walter R. Thurston, a well-known engineer. At present she resides in Dallas, Texas.

Mrs. Thurston has travelled widely and has resided for periods of time in Mexico City and Havana, Cuba. She is an able linguist and has made a special study of her native English tongue and of Spanish and French, all of which she uses fluently.

From childhood she has shown dramatic ability. Her dramatic composition has been more or less directly associated with the courses in playwriting and the history of the drama which she completed in the University of Utah. Among her one-act plays are *When a Man's Hungry*, *And the Devil Laughs*, and *The Exchange*.

Mrs. Thurston has an aptitude for delicate and satirical farce. *The Exchange* is an excellent example of farce-comedy in the contemporary one-act play.

CHARACTERS

JUDGE, *the exchanger of miseries*

IMP, *office boy to the JUDGE*

A POOR MAN

A VAIN WOMAN

A RICH CITIZEN

THE EXCHANGE

SCENE I

The curtain rises upon an office scene. Seemingly there is nothing unusual about this office: it has tables, chairs, a filing cabinet, and a hat-rack. A portion of the office is railed off at the right. Within this enclosed space is a commodious desk and swivel-chair; and the filing cabinet stands against the wall. This railed-off portion of the office belongs, exclusively, to the JUDGE. Here he is wont to spend many hours – sometimes to read or write, and again, perhaps, he will just sit and ponder upon the vagaries of mankind. The JUDGE is a tall, spare man with rather long gray hair, which shows beneath the skull-cap that he always wears. When we first see him, he is reading a letter, and evidently he is not pleased, for he is tapping with impatient fingers upon his desk.

At the left of the stage is a heavily curtained door which leads to an inner room. At centre rear is another door which evidently leads to the street, as it is through this door that the POOR MAN, the VAIN WOMAN, and the RICH CITIZEN will presently enter, each upon his special quest. The hat-rack stands near the street door, and we glimpse a soft black hat and a long black overcoat hanging upon it.

Down stage to the left is a flat-topped desk, littered with papers and letters. This desk has two large drawers, wherein a number of miscellaneous articles might be kept. It is at this desk that we catch our first glimpse of IMP. He is busily writing in a huge ledger, and he seems to be enjoying his work, for he chuckles the while. IMP is a little rogue; he looks it and acts it, and we feel that he has a Mephistophelian spirit. He wears a dark-green tight-fitting uniform, trimmed with red braid. His saucy little round cap is always cocked over one eye. He is ever chuckling impishly, and we feel that he is slyly gleeful over the weaknesses of mankind and the difficulties that beset them.

IMP. [*Throws down his pen, chuckles, and half standing on the rungs of his chair and balancing himself against his desk, surveys the ledger.*] Your honor, I've all the miseries listed to date and a fine lot there is to choose from. Everything from bunions to old wives for exchange.

JUDGE. [*Scowls and impatiently taps the letter he is reading.*] Here is another one. A woman suspects her husband of a misalliance. Wants to catch him, but is so crippled with rheumatism she can't get about. Wants us to exchange her rheumatism for something that won't interfere with either her walking or her eyesight.

IMP. [*Referring to the ledger and running his finger along the lines.*] We have a defective heart or a lazy liver that we could give her.

JUDGE. [*Irritably tossing the letter over to IMP.*] She would not be satisfied. People never are. They always want to change their miseries, but never their vices. Each thinks his own cross heavier than others have to bear, but he is very willing to make light of his own weaknesses and shortcomings. He thinks they are not half so bad as his neighbor's. I have tried for years to aid distressed humanity, but I can't satisfy them. I am growing tired of it all, Imp. People need a lesson and they're going to get it, too. I am going to—
—

[*Knock is heard at the street door. JUDGE sighs, turns to his desk and begins to write. IMP sweeps the litter of papers on his desk into a drawer, closes ledger, and goes to answer knock.*]

IMP. Here comes another misery.

[*IMP opens the door to admit the POOR MAN, who is very shabbily dressed. He hesitates, looks around the room as if he were in the wrong place, and then addresses IMP in a loud whisper.*]

POOR MAN. [*Indicating the JUDGE with a motion of his head.*] Is that him?

IMP. [*Whispering loudly his reply.*] Yes, that is his honor.

POOR MAN. [*Still whispering and showing signs of nervousness.*] Do I dare speak to him?

IMP. [*Enjoying the situation and still whispering.*] Yes, but be careful what you say.

POOR MAN. [*Takes off his hat, approaches slowly to the railing, and speaks humbly.*] Your honor. I—[*Swallows hard, clears throat.*] Your honor, I've a little favor—to ask of you.

JUDGE. [*Looking coldly at the POOR MAN.*] Well?

POOR MAN. You see, your honor, I've been poor all my life. I've never had much fun. I don't ask for a lot of money, but—I would like enough so that I could have some swell clothes, and—so that I could eat, drink, and be merry with the boys. You know, I just want to have a good time. Do you think you could fix it for me, Judge?

JUDGE. [*Gazes at him sternly for a moment.*] So you just want to have a good time? Want me to take away your poverty? I suppose you have no moral weakness you want to change, no defects in your character that you want to better?

POOR MAN. [*Stammering and twirling his hat.*] Why, w-hy, Judge, I—I am not a bad man. Of—of course, I have my faults, but then—I've never committed any crimes. I guess I stack up pretty fair as men go. I'm just awful tired of being poor and never having any fun. Couldn't you help me out on that point, Judge?

JUDGE. [*Sighs wearily and turns to IMP.*] Bring me the ledger.

[*IMP gives him the ledger in which he has been writing. JUDGE opens it, and then speaks sharply to the POOR MAN.*]

JUDGE. You understand, do you, my good man, that if I take away your poverty and give you enough money for your good time, you will have to accept another misery?

POOR MAN. [*Eagerly.*] Yes, your honor, that's all right. I'm willing.

JUDGE. [*Scanning ledger.*] Very well. Let us see. Here is paralysis.

POOR MAN. [*Hesitatingly.*] Well. I—I couldn't have a—very good time, if—if I was paralyzed.

JUDGE. [*Shortly.*] No. I suppose not. How about a glass eye?

POOR MAN. [*Anxiously.*] Please, your honor, if I'm going to have a good time I need two good eyes. I don't want to miss anything.

JUDGE. [*Wearily turning over the leaves of the ledger.*] A man left his wife here for exchange, perhaps you would like her.

POOR MAN. [*Shifting from one foot to the other and nervously twirling his hat.*] Oh, Judge, oh, no, please, no. I don't want anybody's old cast-off wife.

JUDGE. [*Becoming exasperated.*] Well, choose something, and be quick about it. Here is lumbago, gout, fatness, old age, and — —

IMP. [*Interrupting, and walking quickly over to the railing.*] Excuse me, Judge, but maybe the gentleman would like the indigestion that Mr. Potter left when he took old Mrs. Pratt's fallen arches.

POOR MAN. [*Eagerly.*] Indigestion? Sure! That will be fine! I won't mind a little thing like indigestion if I can get rid of my poverty.

JUDGE. [*Sternly.*] Very well. Raise your right hand. Repeat after me: "I swear to accept indigestion for better or for worse as my portion of the world's miseries, so help me God."

POOR MAN. [*Solemnly.*] "I swear to accept indigestion for better or for worse as my portion of the world's miseries, so help me God."

JUDGE. [*To IMP.*] Show this gentleman to the changing-room.

[*POOR MAN follows IMP, who conducts him to the heavily curtained door. The POOR MAN throws out his chest and swaggers a bit, as a man might who had suddenly come into a fortune. IMP swaggers along with him.*]

IMP. Won't you have a grand time, though. I'll get you a menu card, so that you can be picking out your dinner.

POOR MAN. [*Joyfully slapping IMP on the back.*] Good idea, and I'll pick out a regular banquet.

[*Pausing a moment before he passes through the curtains, he smiles and smacks his lips in anticipation. Exit.*]

JUDGE. [*Speaks disgustedly to IMP.*] There you are! He's perfectly satisfied with his morals. Has no defects in his character. Just wants to have a good time.

[*Sighs heavily and turns back to his writing. IMP nods his head in agreement and chuckles slyly.*]

[*The street door opens slowly and the VAIN WOMAN stands upon the threshold. She does not enter at once, but stands posing – presumably she desires to attract attention, and she is worthy of it. She has a superb figure, and her rich gowning enhances it. Her fair face reveals a shallow prettiness, but the wrinkles of age are beginning to leave telltale lines upon its smoothness. As IMP hurries forward to usher her in, she sweeps grandly past him to the centre of the stage. IMP stops near the door, with his hands on his hips, staring after her, then takes a few steps in imitation of her. She turns around slowly and, sauntering over to the railing, coughs affectedly, and as the JUDGE rises and bows curtly, she speaks in a coaxing manner.*]

VAIN WOMAN. Judge, I have heard that you are very kind, and I have been told that you help people out of their troubles, so I have a little favor to ask of you.

JUDGE. [*Coldly.*] Yes, I supposed so; go on.

VAIN WOMAN. [*Archly.*] Well, you know that I am a famous beauty; in fact, both my face and my form are considered very lovely. [*She turns around slowly that he may see for himself.*] Great and celebrated men have worshipped at my feet. I simply cannot live without admiration. It is my very life. But, Judge [*plaintively*], horrid wrinkles are beginning to show in my face. [*Intensely.*] Oh, I would give anything, do anything, to have a smooth, youthful face once more. Please, oh, please, won't you take away these wrinkles [*touching her face with her fingers*] and give me something in their stead.

JUDGE. [*Looking directly at her and speaking coldly.*] Are you satisfied with yourself in other ways? Is your character as beautiful as your face? Have you no faults or weaknesses that you want exchanged?

VAIN WOMAN. [*Uncertainly.*] Why, I—don't know what you mean. I am just as good as any other woman and lots better than some I know. I go to church, and I subscribe to the charities, and I belong to the best clubs. [*Anxiously.*] Oh, please, Judge, it's these wrinkles that make me so unhappy. Won't you exchange them? You don't want me to be unhappy, do you? Please take them away.

JUDGE. [*Wearily looking over the ledger.*] Oh, very well, I'll see what I can do for you. [*To IMP.*] Fetch a chair for this lady.

[*IMP gives her a chair and she sits facing front. IMP returns to his desk, perches himself upon it and watches the VAIN WOMAN interestedly. JUDGE turns over the leaves of the ledger.*]

JUDGE. I have a goitre that I could exchange for your wrinkles.

VAIN WOMAN. [*Protestingly, clasping her hands to her throat.*] Oh, heavens, no! That would ruin my beautiful throat. See. [*Throwing back her fur and exposing her neck in a low-cut gown.*] I have a lovely neck. [*IMP makes an exaggerated attempt to see.*]

JUDGE. [*Glances coldly at her and then scans ledger again.*] Well, how about hay-fever?

VAIN WOMAN. [*Reproachfully.*] Oh, Judge, how can you suggest such a thing! Watery eyes and a red nose, the worst enemy of beauty there is. I simply couldn't think of it. I want something that won't show.

JUDGE. [*Disgustedly turns to filing cabinet and looks through a series of cards, withdraws one, and turns back to VAIN WOMAN.*] Perhaps this will suit you. [*Refers to card.*] A woman has grown very tired of her husband and wants to exchange him for some other burden.

VAIN WOMAN. [*Indignantly.*] What! I accept a man that some other woman doesn't want! Certainly not! I prefer one that some other woman does want.

JUDGE. [*Irritated, puts the card back in its place, and turns upon the VAIN WOMAN crossly.*] I fear that I cannot please you and I do not have time to — —

IMP. [*Interrupts and runs over to the railing, speaking soothingly to the JUDGE.*] Excuse me, Judge, but maybe the lady would like deafness in exchange for her wrinkles. Deafness wouldn't show, so it couldn't spoil her face or her elegant figure.

JUDGE. [*Wearily.*] No, it won't show. Deafness ought to be a good thing for you.

VAIN WOMAN. [*Consideringly.*] Why — yes — that might do. But — well, it wouldn't show. I've a notion to take it. [*Pause — she seems to consider and meditate. The JUDGE stares at her coldly. IMP grins impudently. She rises leisurely, sighs.*] All right. I'll accept it.

JUDGE. [*Sharply.*] Hold up your right hand. [*She raises hand.*] Do you swear to accept deafness for better or for worse, as your portion of the world's miseries, so help you God?

VAIN WOMAN. [*Sweetly.*] Oh, yes. I do, Judge.

JUDGE. [*To IMP.*] Show the lady to the changing-room.

IMP. [*Escorts her to the curtained door with rather mock deference.*] No, deafness won't show at all, and you'll have 'em all crazy about you. [*Draws aside curtains for her to pass.*] Take second booth to your right.

[*VAIN WOMAN stands posing a moment. She smiles radiantly and pats her cheeks softly with her hands, then with a long-drawn sigh of happiness, she exits. IMP bows low and mockingly after her vanishing form, his hand on his heart.*]

JUDGE. [*Sarcastically.*] Do her faults or shortcomings trouble her? Not at all! Perfectly satisfied with herself, except for a few wrinkles in her face. Vain women! Bah!

IMP. Yes, sir; women have queer notions.

[*An imperative rap at the street-door, immediately followed by the rapper's abrupt entrance. We see an important-appearing personage. His*

arrogant bearing and commanding pose lead us to believe that he is accustomed to prompt attention. It is the RICH CITIZEN, exceedingly well groomed. His manner is lordly, but he addresses the JUDGE in a bored tone. When IMP scampers to meet him, the RICH CITIZEN hands him his hat and cane and turns at once to the JUDGE. IMP examines the hat and cane critically, hangs them on the hat-rack, and returns to his desk, where he again perches to watch the RICH CITIZEN.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Lighting a cigarette.*] I am addressing the Judge, am I not?

JUDGE. [*Shortly.*] You are.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Languidly, between puffs of his cigarette.*] Well, Judge, life has become rather boresome, so I thought I would drop in and ask you to do me a small favor.

JUDGE. [*Wearily.*] Yes? We—What is your grievance?

RICH CITIZEN. [*Nonchalantly.*] Oh, I wouldn't say grievance exactly. You see, my dear Judge, it is this way. I am a very rich and influential citizen, a prominent member of society, and I am very much sought after.

JUDGE. [*Frigidly.*] Oh, indeed!

RICH CITIZEN. [*In a very bored manner.*] Yes. Women run after me day and night. Ambitious mothers throw their marriageable daughters at my head. Men seek my advice on all matters. I am compelled to head this and that committee.

[*Smokes languidly.*

JUDGE. [*Sharply.*] Well, go on.

RICH CITIZEN. Really, Judge, my prestige has become a burden. I want to get away from it all. I would like to become a plain, ordinary man with an humble vocation, the humbler the better, so that people will cease bothering me.

JUDGE. [*Sarcastically.*] Is your prestige all that troubles you? Don't worry about your morals, I suppose. Satisfied with your habits and character?

RICH CITIZEN. [*Coldly.*] What have my habits or morals got to do with my request? [*Scornfully.*] Certainly I am not one of your saintly men. I live as a man of my station should live, and I think I measure up very well with the best of them. I am simply bored and I would like a change. I would like to be a plain man with an humble calling.

JUDGE. [*Ironically.*] I'll see what we have in humble callings. [*He looks at the ledger, turning the leaves over slowly.*] We have several bartenders' vocations.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Wearily smoking.*] No. Too many people about all the time, and too much noise.

JUDGE. Well, here's a janitor's job open to you.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Impatiently throwing away his cigarette.*] No. I don't like that, either. Too confining. Too many people bickering at you all the time. I want to get out in the open, away from crowds.

JUDGE. [*Sighing, and turning over the leaves of the ledger, then hopefully.*] Here's the very thing for you, then—postman in a rural district.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Showing vexation.*] No, no, no. Too many old women that want to gossip. I tell you, I want to get away from women. Haven't you something peaceful and quiet; something that would take me out in the quiet of the early morning, when the birds are singing?

JUDGE. [*Closing ledger with a bang, and rising.*] Well, you're too particular, and I have not time to bother with you. I bid you good after — —

IMP. [*Slides from his desk, runs to railing, and speaks suavely.*] Excuse me, Judge, but maybe the gentleman would like the vocation of milkman. That is early-morning work. And, you remember, a milkman left his job here when he took that old, worn-out senator's position.

JUDGE. [*Sharply, to RICH CITIZEN.*] Well, how about it? Does a milkman's vocation suit you? It's early-morning hours, fresh air, and no people about.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Musingly.*] Well, the very simplicity and quietness of it is its charm. It rather appeals to me. [*He ponders a moment.*] Yes, by Jove, I'll take it.

JUDGE. [*Sternly.*] Hold up your right hand. "Do you solemnly swear to accept, for better or for worse, the vocation of milkman as your lot in life, so help you God?"

RICH CITIZEN. I do.

JUDGE. [*To IMP.*] Show this gentleman to the changing-room.

IMP. [*While escorting him to the curtained door.*] Yes, sir, you will lead the simple life. Fresh air, fresh milk, no people, just cows – and they can't talk. [*Holding aside the curtains.*] Third booth, sir.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Musingly.*] The simple life – peace and quietness.

[*Exit.*]

JUDGE. [*In disgust.*] It's no use, Imp. They all cling to their vices, but they are very keen to change some little cross or condition that vexes them – or think vexes them.

IMP. It's strange that people always want something different from what they have.

[*IMP opens a drawer in his desk and takes out a bottle, evidently filled with tablets, which he holds up, shaking it and chuckling. He hunts in the drawer again, and this time brings forth a huge ear-trumpet, which he chucklingly places on his table beside the bottle of tablets.*]

JUDGE. Don't let any more in, Imp. I can't stand another one to-day. I am going to write a letter and then go home.

IMP. All right, sir.

JUDGE. I am feeling very tired; what I really need is a vacation. A sea-trip would put me right. By the way, Imp, where is that transatlantic folder that I told you to get?

[IMP picks up the folder from his desk and takes it to the JUDGE, who studies it attentively. IMP returns to his own desk, where he again looks in a drawer and brings forth a menu card, which he glances over, grinning mischievously.]

[The former POOR MAN re-enters from the changing-room. He is well dressed, and taking a well-filled wallet from his pocket, he looks at it gloatingly. However, from time to time, a shade of annoyance passes over his face, and he puts his hand to the pit of his stomach. IMP runs to meet him, and hands him the menu that he has been reading.]

IMP. Here's a menu from the Gargoyle. Say, you sure do look swell!

[Looking him over admiringly.]

FORMER POOR MAN. *[Grinning happily.]* Some class to me now, eh! *[Looking at menu.]* And you watch me pick out a real dinner. *[Sits down at left front.]* First, I'll have a cocktail, then—let's see—I'll have—another cocktail. Next, oysters, and *[he frowns and presses his hand to the pit of his stomach, keeping up a massaging motion]*—green-turtle soup, sand dabs—chicken breasts—

[They become absorbed over the menu.]

[The VAIN WOMAN re-enters from the changing-room. She now has a smooth face, and she is looking at herself in a hand-glass, smiling and touching her face delightedly. She walks over to the railing, and leans over it to the JUDGE. He looks up questioningly.]

VAIN WOMAN. *[Smiling.]* Oh, I am so happy again. Am I not beautiful?

JUDGE. *[Pityingly.]* You are a vain, foolish woman.

[Since she is deaf, she does not hear his words, but thinks he is complimenting her. She smiles at him coyly.]

VAIN WOMAN. Ah, Judge, you too are susceptible to my charms.

[The JUDGE, in great exasperation, puts away his papers, thrusts the transatlantic folder in his pocket, hastily closes his desk, and hurries to the hat-rack, puts on his overcoat, slips his skull-cap into his pocket and puts on his soft black hat. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders and a wave of his hand indicative of disgust, he slips quietly out.]

[The VAIN WOMAN saunters past the FORMER POOR MAN, stops near him, posing, and begins to put on her gloves. He looks at her admiringly, then, getting to his feet, makes an elaborate but awkward bow.]

FORMER POOR MAN. Excuse me, lady, but I've had a big piece of luck to-day, and I want to celebrate, so I am having a big dinner. Won't you join me and help me have a good time?

VAIN WOMAN. *[Looking at him blankly, and trying to fathom what he has said.]* Oh — why, what did you say?

FORMER POOR MAN. *[Hesitating, and a bit surprised.]* Why — er — I said that I had a big piece of luck to-day, and I am going to celebrate. I am having a fine dinner, and I just asked if — if — you wouldn't have dinner with me.

VAIN WOMAN. *[Still looking blank and a little confused, then smiling archly and acting as though she had been hearing compliments, she speaks affectedly.]* Really, do you think so? *[Looking down and smoothing her dress.]* But, then, every one tells me that I am.

FORMER POOR MAN. *[Puzzled, turns to IMP for help.]* Just what is her trouble, Nut?

IMP. *[Secretly gleeful.]* She is stone-deaf. You had better write it.

FORMER POOR MAN. Never! No deaf ones for me.

[Turns away and consults menu again. VAIN WOMAN poses and frequently looks in hand-glass to reassure herself.]

[FORMER RICH CITIZEN re-enters from the changing-room. He is dressed in shabby overalls, jumper, and an old hat. He has a pipe in his mouth. He walks arrogantly over to the FORMER POOR MAN and addresses him.]

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. Give me a light.

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Trying to live up to his fine clothes and wallet full of money, looks the FORMER RICH CITIZEN over snubbingly.*] Say, who do you think you are? You light out, see?

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. [*Very much surprised, stands nonplussed a moment.*] Well, upon my word, I—I—

[*He stops short in his speech, walks haughtily over to the railing, where he stands glowering at the FORMER POOR MAN. The FORMER POOR MAN starts for the street door, but IMP runs after him, waving the bottle of tablets.*

IMP. I'll sell you these for two bits.

FORMER POOR MAN. What is that?

IMP. [*Grinning.*] Indigestion tablets.

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Puts his hand to his stomach and laughs a little lamely.*] Keep 'em; I don't need 'em.

[*VAIN WOMAN fastens her fur and starts for the street-door, giving the FORMER RICH CITIZEN a snubbing look as she passes him. IMP stops her and offers the ear-trumpet.*

IMP. You might need this; I'll sell it for a dollar.

[*She does not hear what he says, but she looks her scorn at the ear-trumpet and walks proudly out.*

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. [*Fumbling at his pocket, as if to find a watch.*] Boy, what time is it? I haven't my watch.

IMP. [*Grinning mischievously.*] Time to milk the cows.

[*The FORMER RICH CITIZEN starts angrily toward IMP, then evidently thinking better of it, shrugs his shoulders and stalks majestically to the street-door. He pauses with it partly open, turns as if to speak to IMP, drawing himself up haughtily—a ludicrous figure in his shabby outfit—then he goes abruptly out, slamming the door.*

[IMP doubles himself up in a paroxysm of glee as the curtain falls.]

SCENE II

A fortnight has passed. The curtain rises upon the same stage-setting. The JUDGE is not about, but we see IMP asleep in a chair. All seems quiet and serene. But suddenly the street-door opens noisily, and the FORMER POOR MAN bursts into the room. He is panting, as though he had been running. He is haggard and seems in great pain, for occasionally he moans. He looks wildly about the room, and seeing IMP asleep in the chair, he rushes to him and shakes him roughly. IMP wakes slowly, yawning and rubbing his eyes.

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Frantically.*] The Judge, where is he? I must see him at once.

IMP. [*Yawning.*] You're too early. He isn't down yet.

[*Settles himself to go to sleep again.*]

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Walking the floor, and holding his hands to his stomach.*] Don't go to sleep again. I'm nearly crazy. What time does the Judge get here? Where does he live? Can't we send for him?

IMP. [*Indifferently.*] Oh, he is liable to come any minute—and then he may not come for an hour or two.

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Pacing the floor, moaning and rubbing his stomach.*] Oh, I can't stand it much longer. It's driving me wild, I tell you. I do wish the Judge would come.

IMP. [*Getting up from his chair and keeping step with the FORMER POOR MAN.*] What's the matter? I thought all you wanted was to eat, drink, and be merry.

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Frantically waving his arms.*] Eat, drink, and be merry be— —! Everything I eat gives me indigestion something awful; everything I drink gives it to me worse. How can I be merry when I am in this torment all the time? I tell you this pain is driving me mad. I want to get rid of it quick. Oh, why doesn't the Judge come?

IMP. What's the Judge got to do with it?

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Pathetically.*] I am going to beg him to take back this indigestion and give me back my poverty. It was not so bad, after all; not nearly so bad as this pain in my stomach.

[*The street-door opens slowly, and a sorrowful woman enters. She is weeping softly. It is the VAIN WOMAN. Gone is her posing and her proud manner. She walks humbly to the railing, and not seeing the JUDGE, she turns to IMP. The FORMER POOR MAN looks at the VAIN WOMAN, frowningly muttering: "What's she here for?" Then he sits down at the left and rocks back and forth in misery.*

VAIN WOMAN. [*Tearfully.*] I must see the Judge right away, please.

IMP. [*Languidly.*] He isn't down yet. You're too earl — —

VAIN WOMAN. [*Interrupting.*] Tell him that it is very important, that I am in great distress and that he must see me at once.

IMP. [*Loudly.*] I said that he was not down yet.

[*Seeing that she does not understand, he takes a writing-pad from his desk, scribbles a few words, and standing in front of her, holds it up for her to read.*

VAIN WOMAN. [*After reading.*] Oh, when will he be here? Can't you get him to come right away? Oh, I am so unhappy.

[*She walks the floor in agitation.*

[*The FORMER POOR MAN grunts in irritation and turns his back on her.*

VAIN WOMAN. I cannot hear a word that is said to me. No one seems to want me around, and I am not invited out any more. I have the feeling that people are making fun of me instead of praising my beauty. Oh, it is dreadful to be deaf. [*Getting hysterical.*] I want the Judge to take away this deafness. I would rather have my wrinkles.

[*IMP shakes his head in pretended sympathy, saying: "Too bad, too bad."*

[She misunderstands and cries out.

VAIN WOMAN. Has the Judge given away my wrinkles? I want them back. I want my very own wrinkles, too. Wrinkles are distinguished-looking. *[Beginning to sob.]* I don't want to be deaf any longer.

IMP. *[Running over to the FORMER POOR MAN.]* Say, this lady feels very bad. Can't you cheer her up a little?

FORMER POOR MAN. *[Who is still rocking back and forth with his own misery, looks up at IMP in disgust.]* Cheer—her—up! Me? What's the joke?

[The VAIN WOMAN walks to the curtained door, looks in as if seeking something, then returns to a chair, where she sits, weeping softly.

[A peculiar thumping is heard at the street-door. The FORMER POOR MAN jumps to his feet in expectancy, hoping it is the JUDGE. IMP, also, stands waiting. The door opens as though the person that opened it did so with difficulty. The FORMER RICH CITIZEN hobbles in. He is ragged and dirty, and one foot is bandaged, which causes him to use a crutch. He carries a large milk-can. He hobbles painfully to the centre of the stage. The FORMER POOR MAN grunts with disappointment, and sits down again, rubbing away at his stomach. The VAIN WOMAN sits with bowed head, silently weeping. The FORMER RICH CITIZEN looks about, then addresses IMP in a rather husky voice.

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. I wish to see the Judge at once. It is most urgent.

IMP. *[With an ill-concealed smile.]* You can't see the Judge at once.

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. *[Impatiently.]* Why not? I told you it was most urgent.

IMP. *[Grinning openly.]* Because he isn't here. He hasn't come in yet. What's your trouble?

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. *[Vehemently.]* Trouble! Everything's the trouble! I have been abused, insulted, overworked—even the cows have kicked me. *[Looking down at his bandaged foot.]* I can't stand it. I

won't stand it. I want back my proper place in the world, where I am respected, and where I can rest and sleep and mingle with my kind.

[He hobbles to a chair and sits down wearily.]

FORMER POOR MAN. *[Getting up from his chair, walks over to the FORMER RICH CITIZEN, waggles his finger in his face and speaks fretfully.]* What cause have you to squeal so? If you had indigestion like I have all the time, you might be entitled to raise a holler. Why, I can't eat a thing without having the most awful pain right here *[puts his hand to the pit of his stomach]*, and when I take a drink, oh, heavens, it — —

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. *[Interrupting contemptuously.]* You big baby, howling about the stomachache. If you had a man-sized trouble, there might be some excuse for you. Now I, who have been used to wealth and respect, have been subjected to the most gruelling ordeals; why, in that dairy there were a million cows, and they kicked me, and horned me, and I — —

VAIN WOMAN. *[Walks over to them, interrupting their talk, and speaks in a voice punctuated with sniffing sobs.]* Have — *[sniff]* either of you gentlemen *[sniff]* ever been deaf? *[Sniff, sniff.]* It is a terrible thing *[sniff]* for a beautiful woman like I am *[sniff]* to have such an affliction.

[Sniff, sniff, sniff.]

[FORMER RICH CITIZEN shrugs his shoulders indifferently and limps to the other side of the stage, where he sits.]

FORMER POOR MAN. *[Stalks over to the railing, where he leans limply.]* Lord deliver me from a sniffing woman.

[IMP, who is perched on his desk, chuckles wickedly of their sufferings. VAIN WOMAN sinks dejectedly into the chair vacated by the FORMER RICH CITIZEN.]

[A knock is heard at the street-door. The FORMER POOR MAN and the FORMER RICH CITIZEN start forward eagerly, expecting the JUDGE. Even the VAIN WOMAN, seeing the others rise, gets to her feet]

hopefully. IMP hastily slides from his desk and, pulling down his tight little jacket and cocking his round little cap a little more over one eye, goes to see who knocks. A messenger hands him a letter and silently departs.

IMP. [*Importantly.*] Letter for me from the Judge.

FORMER POOR MAN. A letter! Why doesn't he come himself?

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. Send for him, boy.

IMP. [*Grins at FORMER RICH CITIZEN in an insolent manner.*] Well, well, I wonder what the Judge is writing to me for. It's queer he would send me a letter.

[He looks the letter over carefully, both sides; holds it up to the light, smells it, shakes it. The two men and the woman grow more and more nervous.

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Extremely irritated.*] For goodness' sake, open it and read it.

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. Yes, yes, and don't be so long about it.

[VAIN WOMAN simply stands pathetically and waits. IMP walks over to his desk, hunts for a knife, finally finds one; looks letter over again, then slowly slits the envelope and draws out letter, which he reads silently to himself. They are breathlessly waiting. IMP whistles softly to himself.

IMP. Well, what do you think of that!

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Excitedly.*] What is it—why don't you tell us?

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. [*Pounding with his crutch on the floor.*] Come, come, don't keep me waiting like this.

IMP. [*Reads letter again, silently, chuckling.*] All right. Here it is. [*Reads.*]

"MY DEAR IMP:

"I have tried faithfully for years to aid distressed humanity, but they are an ungrateful lot of fools, and I wash my hands of them.

When this letter reaches you I will be on the high seas, and I am never coming back. So write 'Finis' in the big old ledger of miseries, and shut up shop, for the Exchange is closed — forever.

Yours in disgust, THE JUDGE."

[They all stand dazed a moment. The VAIN WOMAN, sensing that something terrible has happened, rushes from one to the other, saying: "What is it? What has happened?" IMP gives her the letter to read.]

FORMER POOR MAN. *[In a perfect frenzy.]* My God! Indigestion all the rest of my days.

VAIN WOMAN. *[After reading letter collapses in a chair, hysterically sobbing out.]* Deaf, always deaf! Oh, what shall I do!

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. *[Leaning heavily on his crutch and shaking his free hand, clenched in anger.]* This is an outrage. I am rich and have influence, and I shall take steps to — to — —

[IMP laughs mockingly. The man looks down at his milk-spattered clothes, his bandaged foot, and, letting his crutch fall to the floor, sinks dejectedly into a chair, burying his face in his hands.]

[IMP dangles his keys and opens the street-door, as an invitation for them to go. The FORMER POOR MAN is the first to start, moving dazedly and breathing hard. IMP offers him the bottle of indigestion tablets; the man grasps them, eagerly, tipping IMP, who chuckles as he pockets the money. The FORMER POOR MAN takes a tablet as he exits. The VAIN WOMAN, bowed with sorrow, moves slowly toward the door. IMP touches her arm and offers the ear-trumpet. She accepts it, with a wild sob, tipping IMP, who again chuckles as he pockets the money. The last we see of the VAIN WOMAN, she is trying to hold the ear-trumpet to her ear, and exits, sobbing. The FORMER RICH CITIZEN still sits in his chair, his head in his hands. IMP picks up the milk-can, and, tapping the man not too gently on the shoulder, thrusts the milk-can at him and makes a significant gesture, indicative of—THIS WAY OUT. The man rises dejectedly, picks up

his crutch, takes the milk-can, and hobbles painfully toward the door. IMP doubles himself up in wild Mephistophelian glee as the

CURTAIN FALLS

SAM AVERAGE

BY

PERCY MACKAYE

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PERCY MACKAYE

Percy Mackaye, who was born in New York City in 1875, is one of the few Americans whose interest has been almost wholly in the theatre. As a lecturer, writer, and champion of real art in drama, he has had few if any equals. He inherited his interest in drama from his father, Steele Mackaye, author of *Hazel Kirke*. He was educated at Harvard, where he studied under Professor George Pierce Baker, and at Leipzig. He has travelled extensively in Europe and at various times has resided in Rome, Switzerland, and London. In 1914 Dartmouth conferred upon him the honorary Master of Arts degree. At present he holds a fellowship in dramatic literature in Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

Mr. Mackaye's efforts in the dramatic field have been varied. Masques, pageants, operas, and plays are to his credit. *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, *The Scarecrow*, *Jeanne D'Arc*, *Mater*, *Anti-Matrimony*, *Sanctuary*, *Saint Louis Masque*, and *Caliban* are among his better-known works.

In 1912 appeared his *Yankee Fantasies*, of which *Sam Average* and *Gettysburg* are the more noteworthy.

In all of Mr. Mackaye's work he possesses what many dramatists lack—a definite ideal. He aims at an artistic and literary effect. His *Sam Average* is a real contribution to American patriotic drama.

CHARACTERS

ANDREW

JOEL

ELLEN

SAM AVERAGE

SAM AVERAGE

An intrenchment in Canada, near Niagara Falls, in the year 1814. Night, shortly before dawn.

On the right, the dull glow of a smouldering wood fire ruddies the earthen embankment, the low-stretched outline of which forms, with darkness, the scenic background.

Near the centre, left, against the dark, a flag with stars floats from its standard.

Beside the fire, ANDREW, reclined, gazes at a small frame in his hand; near him is a knapsack, with contents emptied beside it.

On the embankment, JOEL, with a gun, paces back and forth, a blanket thrown about his shoulders.

JOEL. [*With a singing call.*] Four o'clock!—All's well!

[*Jumping down from the embankment, he approaches the fire.*]

ANDREW. By God, Joel, it's bitter.

JOEL. [*Rubbing his hands over the coals.*] A mite sharpish.

ANDREW. [*Looks up eagerly.*] What?

JOEL. Cuts sharp, for Thanksgivin'.

ANDREW. [*Sinks back, gloomily.*] Oh! [*A pause.*] I wondered you should agree with me. You meant the weather. I meant —

[*A pause again.*

JOEL. Well, Andy, what'd you mean?

ANDREW. Life.

JOEL. Shucks!

ANDREW. [*To himself.*] Living!

JOEL. [*Sauntering over left, listens.*] Hear a rooster crow?

ANDREW. No. What are you doing?

JOEL. Tiltin' the flag over crooked in the dirt. That's our signal.

ANDREW. Nothing could be more appropriate, unless we buried it — buried it in the dirt!

JOEL. She's to find us where the flag's turned down. I fixed that with the sergeant all right. The rooster crowin' 's *her* watchword for us.

ANDREW. An eagle screaming, Joel: that would have been better. [*Rising.*] Ah!

[*He laughs painfully.*

JOEL. Hush up, Andy! The nearest men ain't two rods away. You'll wake 'em. Pitch it low.

ANDREW. Don't be alarmed. I'm coward enough.

JOEL. 'Course, though, there ain't much danger. I'm sentinel this end, and the sergeant has the tip at t'other. Besides, you may call it the reg'lar thing. There's been two thousand deserters already in this tuppenny-ha'penny war, and none on 'em the worse off. When a man don't get his pay for nine months — well, he ups and takes his

vacation. Why not? When Nell joins us, we'll hike up the Niagara, cross over to Tonawanda, and take our breakfast in Buffalo. By that time the boys here will be marchin' away toward Lundy's Lane.

ANDREW. [*Walks back and forth, shivering.*] I'm afraid.

JOEL. 'Fraid? Bosh!

ANDREW. I'm afraid to face — —

JOEL. Face what? We won't get caught.

ANDREW. Your sister — my wife.

JOEL. Nell! Why, ain't she comin' here just a-purpose to get you? Ain't there reason enough, Lord knows? Ain't you made up your mind to light out home anyhow?

ANDREW. Yes. That's just what she'll never forgive me for. In her heart she'll never think of me the same. For she knows as well as I what pledge I'll be breaking — what sacred pledge.

JOEL. What you mean?

ANDREW. No matter, no matter; this is gush.

[*He returns to the fire and begins to fumble over the contents of his knapsack.* JOEL watches him idly.

JOEL. One of *her* curls?

ANDREW. [*Looking at a lock of hair in the firelight.*] No; the baby's, little Andy's. Some day they'll tell him how his father — —

[*He winces, and puts the lock away.*

JOEL. [*Going toward the embankment.*] Listen!

ANDREW. [*Ties up the package, muttering.*] Son of a traitor!

JOEL. [*Tiptoeing back.*] It's crowed — that's her.

[Leaping to his feet, ANDREW stares toward the embankment where the flag is dipped; then turns his back to it, closing his eyes and gripping his hands.]

[After a pause, silently the figure of a young woman emerges from the dark and stands on the embankment. She is bareheaded and ill clad.]

[JOEL touches ANDREW, who turns and looks toward her. Silently she steals down to him and they embrace.]

ANDREW. My Nell!

ELLEN. Nearly a year — —

ANDREW. Now, at last!

ELLEN. Hold me close, Andy.

ANDREW. You're better?

ELLEN. Let's forget — just for now.

ANDREW. Is he grown much?

ELLEN. Grown? You should see him! But so ill! What could I do? You see — —

ANDREW. I know, I know.

ELLEN. The money was all gone. They turned me out at the old place, and then — —

ANDREW. I know, dear.

ELLEN. I got sewing, but when the smallpox — —

ANDREW. I have all your letters, Nell. Come, help me to pack.

ELLEN. What! You're really decided — —

JOEL. *[Approaching.]* Hello, Sis!

ELLEN. [*Absently.*] Ah, Joel; that you? [*Eagerly, following ANDREW to the knapsack.*] But, my dear — —

ANDREW. Just these few things, and we're off.

ELLEN. [*Agitated.*] Wait, wait! You don't know yet why I've come — instead of writing.

ANDREW. I can guess.

ELLEN. But you can't; that's — what's so hard! I have to tell you something, and then — — [*Slowly.*] I must know from your own eyes, from yourself, that you wish to do this, Andrew; that you think it is *right*.

ANDREW. [*Gently.*] I guessed that.

ELLEN. This is what I must tell you. It's not just the sickness, it's not only the baby, not the money gone — and all that; it's — it's — —

ANDREW. [*Murmurs.*] My God!

ELLEN. It's what all that brings — the helplessness. I've been insulted. Andy — [*Her voice breaks.*] I want a protector.

ANDREW. [*Taking her in his arms, where she sobs.*] There, dear!

ELLEN. [*With a low moan.*] You know.

ANDREW. I know. Come, now; we'll go.

ELLEN. [*Her face lighting up.*] Oh! and you *dare*! It's *right*?

ANDREW. [*Moving from her, with a hoarse laugh.*] Dare? Dare I be damned by God and all his angels? Ha! Come, we're slow.

JOEL. Time enough.

ELLEN. [*Sinking upon JOEL'S knapsack as a seat, leans her head on her hands, and looks strangely at ANDREW.*] I'd better have written, I'm afraid.

ANDREW. [*Controlling his emotion.*] Now, don't take it that way. I've considered it all.

ELLEN. [*With deep quiet.*] Blasphemously?

ANDREW. Reasonably, my brave wife. When I enlisted, I did so in a dream. I dreamed I was called to love and serve our country. But that dream is shattered. This sordid war, this political murder, has not one single principle of humanity to excuse its bloody sacrilege. It doesn't deserve my loyalty — our loyalty.

ELLEN. Are you saying this — for my sake? What of "God and his angels"?

ANDREW. [*Not looking at her.*] If we had a just cause — a cause of liberty like that in Seventy-six; if to serve one's country meant to serve God and his angels — then, yes; a man might put away wife and child. He might say: "I will not be a husband, a father; I will be a patriot." But now — like this — tangled in a web of spiders — caught in a grab-net of politicians — and you, you and our baby-boy, like this — hell let in on our home — no, Country be cursed!

ELLEN. [*Slowly.*] So, then, when little Andy grows up — —

ANDREW. [*Groaning.*] I say that the only thing — —

ELLEN. I am to tell him — —

ANDREW. [*Defiantly.*] Tell him his father deserted his country, and thanked God for the chance. [*Looking about him passionately.*] Here! [*He tears a part of the flag from its standard, and reaches it toward her.*] You're cold; put this round you.

[*As he is putting the strip of colored silk about her shoulders, there rises, faint yet close by, a sound of fifes and flutes, playing the merry march-strains of "Yankee Doodle."*]

[*At the same time there enters along the embankment, dimly, enveloped in a great cloak, a tall FIGURE, which pauses beside the standard of the torn flag, silhouetted against the first pale streaks of the dawn.*]

ELLEN. [*Gazing at ANDREW.*] What's the matter?

ANDREW. [*Listening.*] Who are they? Where is it?

JOEL. [*Starts, alertly.*] He hears something.

ANDREW. Why should they play before daybreak?

ELLEN. Andy — —

JOEL. [*Whispers.*] Ssh! Look out! We're spied on!

[*He points to the embankment. ANDREW and ELLEN draw back.*

THE FIGURE. [*Straightening the flag-standard, and leaning on it.*] Desartin'?

ANDREW. [*Puts ELLEN behind him.*] Who's there? The watchword!

THE FIGURE. God save the smart folks!

JOEL. [*To ANDREW.*] He's on to us. Pickle him quiet, or it's court martial! [*Showing a long knife.*] Shall I give him this?

ANDREW. [*Taking it from him.*] No. I will.

ELLEN. [*Seizing his arm.*] Andrew!

ANDREW. Let go.

[*THE FIGURE, descending into the intrenchment, approaches with face muffled. JOEL draws ELLEN away. ANDREW moves toward THE FIGURE slowly. They meet and pause.*

ANDREW. You're a spy!

[*With a quick flash, ANDREW raises the knife to strike, but pauses, staring. THE FIGURE, throwing up one arm to ward the blow, reveals — through the parted cloak — a glint of stars in the firelight.*

THE FIGURE. Steady, boys; I'm one of ye. The sergeant told me to drop round.

JOEL. Oh, the sergeant! That's all right, then.

ANDREW. [*Dropping the knife.*] Who are you?

THE FIGURE. Who be I? My name, ye mean? My name's Average—Sam Average. Univarsal Sam, some o' my prophetic friends calls me.

ANDREW. What are you doing here—now?

THE FIGURE. Oh, tendin' to business.

JOEL. Tendin' to *other* folks' business, eh?

THE FIGURE. [*With a touch of weariness.*] Ye-es; reckon that *is* my business. Some other folks is me.

JOEL. [*Grimacing to ELLEN.*] Cracked!

THE FIGURE. [*To ANDREW.*] You're a mite back'ard in wages, ain't ye?

ANDREW. Nine months. What of that?

THE FIGURE. That's what I dropped round for. Seems like when a man's endoored and fit, like you have, for his country, and calc'lates he'll quit, he ought to be takin' a little suthin' hom' for Thanksgivin'. So I fetched round your pay.

ANDREW. My pay! You?

THE FIGURE. Yes; I'm the paymaster.

ELLEN. [*Coming forward, eagerly.*] Andy! The money, is it?

THE FIGURE. [*Bows with a grave, old-fashioned stateliness.*] Your sarvent, ma'am!

ANDREW. [*Speaking low.*] Keep back, Nell. [*To THE FIGURE.*] You— you were saying— —

THE FIGURE. I were about to say how gold bein' scarce down to the Treasury, I fetched ye some s'curities instead; some national I.O.U.'s, as ye might say. [*He takes out an old powder-horn, and rattles it*

quietly.] That's them. [*Pouring from the horn into his palm some glistening, golden grains.*] Here they be.

ELLEN. [*Peering, with JOEL.*] Gold, Andy!

JOEL. [*With a snigger.*] Gold — nothin'! That's corn — just Injun corn. Ha!

THE FIGURE. [*Bowing gravely.*] It's the quality, ma'am, what counts, as ye might say.

JOEL. [*Behind his hand.*] His top-loft leaks!

THE FIGURE. These here karnels, now, were give' me down Plymouth way, in Massachusetts, the fust Thanksgivin' seems like I can remember. 'Twa'n't long after the famine we had thar. Me bein' some hungry, the red-folks fetched a hull-lot o' this round, with the compliments of their captin' — what were his name now? — Massasoit. This here's the last handful on't left. Thought ye might like some, bein' Thanksgivin'.

JOEL. [*In a low voice, to ELLEN.*] His screws are droppin' out. Come and pack. We've got to mark time and skip.

THE FIGURE. [*Without looking at JOEL.*] Eight or ten minutes still to spare, boys. The sergeant said — wait till ye hear his jew's-harp playin' of that new war tune, *The Star-Spangled Banner*. Then ye'll know the coast's clear.

JOEL. Gad, that's right, I remember now.

[*He draws ELLEN away to the knapsack, which they begin to pack. ANDREW has never removed his eyes from the tall form in the cloak.*]

[*Now, as THE FIGURE pours back the yellow grains from his palm into the powder-horn, he speaks, hesitatingly.*]

ANDREW. I think — I'd like some.

THE FIGURE. Some o' what?

ANDREW. Those — my pay.

THE FIGURE. [*Cheerfully.*] So. *Would ye?* [*Handing him the horn.*] Reckon that's enough?

ANDREW. [*Not taking it.*] That's what I want to make sure of—first.

THE FIGURE. Oh! So ye're hesitatin'!

ANDREW. Yes; but I want you to help me decide. Pardon me, sir. You're a stranger, yet somehow I feel I may ask your help. You've come just in time.

THE FIGURE. Queer I should a-dropped round jest now, wa'n't it? S'posin' we take a turn.

[Together they walk toward the embankment. By the knapsack ELLEN finds the little frame.]

ELLEN. [*To herself.*] My picture!

[She looks toward ANDREW affectionately. JOEL, lifting the knapsack, beckons to her.]

JOEL. There's more stuff over here.

[He goes off, right; ELLEN follows him.]

ANDREW. [*To THE FIGURE.*] I should like the judgment of your experience, sir. I can't quite see your face, yet you appear to be one who has had a great deal of experience.

THE FIGURE. Why, consid'able some.

ANDREW. Did you—happen to fight in the late war for independence?

THE FIGURE. Happen to? [*Laughing quietly.*] N-no, not fight; ye see—I was paymaster.

ANDREW. But you went through the war?

THE FIGURE. Ye-es, oh, yes; I went through it. I took out my fust reg'lar papers down to Philadelphie, in '76, seems like 'twas the fourth day o' July. But I was paymaster afore that.

ANDREW. Tell me: I've heard it said there were deserters even in those days, even from the roll-call of Washington. Is it true?

THE FIGURE. True, boy? Have ye ever watched a prairie-fire rollin' toward ye, billowin' with flame and smoke, and seed all the midget cowerin' prairie-dogs scootin' for their holes? Wall, that's the way I watched Howe's army sweepin' crosst the Jarsey marshes, and seed the desartin' little patriots, with their chins over their shoulders, skedaddlin' home'ards.

ANDREW. What—the Americans!

THE FIGURE. All but a handful on 'em—they as weren't canines, ye might say, but men. *They* set a back-fire goin' at Valley Forge. Most on 'em burnt their toes and fingers off, lightin' on't thar in the white frost, but they stuck it through and saved—wall, the prairie-dogs.

ANDREW. But they—those others. What reason did they give to God and their own souls for deserting?

THE FIGURE. To who?

ANDREW. To their consciences. What was their reason? It must have been a noble one in '76. *Their* reason *then*; don't you see, I must have it. I must know what reason real heroes gave for their acts. You were there. You can tell me.

THE FIGURE. *Real* heroes, eh? Look around ye, then. To-day's the heroic age, and the true brand o' hero is al'ays in the market. Look around ye!

ANDREW. What, here—in this war of jobsters, this petty campaign of monstrous boodle?

THE FIGURE. Thar we be!

ANDREW. Why, here are only a lot of cowardly half-men, like me—lovers of their own folks—their wives and babies at home. They'll make sacrifices for them. But real men like our fathers in '76: they looked in the beautiful face of Liberty, and sacrificed to *her*!

THE FIGURE. Our fathers, my boy, was jest as fond o' poetry as you be. They talked about the beautiful face o' Liberty same's you; but when the hom'made eyes and cheeks of their sweethearts and young uns took to cryin', they desarted their beautiful goddess and skun out hom'.

ANDREW. But there were some — —

THE FIGURE. Thar was some as didn't—yes; and thar's some as don't to-day. Those be the folks on my pay-roll. Why, look a-here: I calc'late I wouldn't fetch much on the beauty counter. My talk ain't rhyme stuff, nor the Muse o' Grammar wa'n't my schoolma'am. Th' ain't painter nor clay-sculptor would pictur' me jest like I stand. For the axe has hewed me, and the plough has furrered; and the arnin' of gold by my own elbow-grease has give' me the shrewd eye at a bargain. I manure my crops this side o' Jordan, and as for t'other shore, I'd ruther swap jokes with the Lord than listen to his sarmons. And yet for the likes o' me, jest for to arn my wages—ha, the many, many boys and gals that's gone to their grave-beds, and when I a-closed their eyes, the love-light was shinin' thar.

ANDREW. [*Who has listened with awe.*] What *are* you? What *are* you?

THE FIGURE. Me? I'm the paymaster.

ANDREW. I want to serve you—like those others.

THE FIGURE. Slow, slow, boy! Nobody sarves *me*.

ANDREW. But they died for you—the others.

THE FIGURE. No, 'twa'n't for me; 'twas for him as pays the wages; the one as works through me—the one higher up. I'm only the paymaster; kind of a needful makeshift—his obedient sarvant.

ANDREW. [*With increasing curiosity, seeks to peer in THE FIGURE'S face.*] But the one up higher — who is he?

THE FIGURE. [*Turning his head away.*] Would ye sarve him, think, if ye heerd his voice?

ANDREW. [*Ardently, drawing closer.*] And saw his face!

[*Drawing his cowl lower and taking ANDREW'S arm, THE FIGURE leads him up on the embankment, where they stand together.*

THE FIGURE. Hark a-yonder!

ANDREW. [*Listening.*] Is it thunder?

THE FIGURE. Have ye forgot?

ANDREW. The voice! I remember now — Niagara!

[*With awe, ANDREW looks toward THE FIGURE, who stands shrouded and still, facing the dawn. From far off comes a sound as of falling waters, and with that — a deep murmurous voice, which seems to issue from THE FIGURE'S cowl.*

THE VOICE. I am the Voice that was heard of your fathers, and your fathers' fathers. Mightier — mightier, I shall be heard of your sons. I am the Million in whom the one is lost, and I am the One in whom the millions are saved. Their ears shall be shut to my thunders, their eyes to my blinding stars. In shallow streams they shall tap my life-blood for gold. With dregs of coal and of copper they shall pollute me. In the mystery of my mountains they shall assail me; in the majesty of my forests, strike me down; with engine and derrick and millstone, bind me their slave. Some for a lust, some for a love, shall desert me. One and one, for his own, shall fall away. Yet one and one and one shall return to me for life; the deserter and the destroyer shall re-create me. Primeval, their life-blood is mine. My pouring waters are passion, my lightnings are laughter of man. I am the One in whom the millions are saved, and I am the Million in whom the one is lost.

ANDREW. [*Yearningly, to THE FIGURE.*] Your face!

[THE FIGURE *turns majestically away*. ANDREW *clings to him*.

ANDREW. Your face!

[*In the shadow of the flag* THE FIGURE *unmuffles for an instant*.

[*Peering, dazzled*, ANDREW *staggers back, with a low cry, and, covering his eyes, falls upon the embankment*.

[*From away, left, the thrumming of a jew's-harp is heard, playing "The Star-Spangled Banner."*

[*From the right enter* JOEL *and ELLEN*.

[*Descending from the embankment*, THE FIGURE *stands apart*.

JOEL. Well, Colonel Average, time's up.

ELLEN. [*Seeing ANDREW'S prostrate form, hastens to him.*] Andy! What's happened?

ANDREW. [*Rising slowly.*] Come here. I'll whisper it.

[*He leads her beside the embankment, beyond which the dawn is beginning to redden.*

JOEL. Yonder's the sergeant's jew's-harp. That's our signal, Nell. So long, colonel.

THE FIGURE. [*Nodding.*] So long, sonny.

ANDREW. [*Holding ELLEN'S hands, passionately.*] You understand? You *do*?

ELLEN. [*Looking in his eyes.*] I understand, dear.

[*They kiss each other.*

JOEL. [*Calls low.*] Come, you married turtles. The road's clear. Follow me now. Sneak.

[*Carrying his knapsack*, JOEL *climbs over the embankment and disappears*.

[The thrumming of the jew's-harp continues.]

[ELLEN, taking the strip of silk flag from her shoulders, ties it to the standard.]

ANDREW. *[Faintly.]* God bless you!

ELLEN. *[As they part hands.]* Good-by!

[THE FIGURE has remounted the embankment, where – in the distincter glow of the red dawn – the gray folds of his cloak, hanging from his shoulders, resemble the half-closed wings of an eagle, the beaked cowl falling, as a kind of visor, before his face, concealing it.]

THE FIGURE. Come, little gal.

[ELLEN goes to him, and hides her face in the great cloak. As she does so, he draws from it a paper, writes on it, and hands it to ANDREW, with the powder-horn.]

THE FIGURE. By the by, Andy, here's that s'curity. Them here's my initials; they're all what's needful. Jest file this in the right pigeonhole, and you'll draw your pay. Keep your upper lip, boy. I'll meet ye later, mebbe, at Lundy's Lane.

ANDREW. *[Wistfully.]* You'll take her home?

THE FIGURE. Yes; reckon she'll housekeep for your uncle till you get back; won't ye, Nellie? Come, don't cry, little gal. We'll soon git 'quainted. 'Tain't the fust time sweethearts has called me *Uncle*.

[Flinging back his great cloak, he throws one wing of it, with his arm, about her shoulders, thus with half its reverse side draping her with shining stripes and stars. By the same action his own figure is made partly visible – the legs clad in the tight, instep-strapped trousers (blue and white) of the Napoleonic era. Holding the girl gently to him – while her face turns back toward ANDREW – he leads her, silhouetted against the sunrise, along the embankment, and disappears.]

[Meantime, the thrumming twang of the jew's-harp grows sweeter, mellow, modulated with harmonies that, filling now the air with elusive

strains of the American war-hymn, mingle with the faint dawn-twitterings of birds.

[ANDREW stares silently after the departed forms; then, slowly coming down into the intrenchment, lifts from the ground his gun and ramrod, leans on the gun, and – reading the paper in his hand by the growing light – mutters it aloud:

U. S. A.

[Smiling sternly, he crumples the paper in his fist, makes a wad of it, and rams it into his gun-barrel.

HYACINTH HALVEY

BY

LADY AUGUSTA GREGORY

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LADY AUGUSTA GREGORY

Lady Augusta Gregory, one of the foremost figures in the Irish dramatic movement, was born at Roxborough, County Galway, Ireland, in 1859. "She was then a young woman," says one who has described her in her early married life, "very earnest, who divided her hair in the middle and wore it smooth on either side of a broad and handsome brow. Her eyes were always full of questions.... In her drawing-room were to be met men of assured reputation in literature and politics, and there was always the best reading of the times upon her tables." Lady Gregory has devoted her entire life to the cause of Irish literature. In 1911 she visited the United States and at a dinner given to her by *The Outlook* in New York City she said:

"I will not cease from mental strife
Or let the sword fall from my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In — Ireland's — fair and lovely land."

Lady Gregory, with William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge, has been the very life of the Irish drama. The literary association of these three has been highly fruitful. She helped to found the Irish National Theatre Society, and for a number of years has been the managing force of the celebrated Abbey Theatre in Dublin.

Lady Gregory's chief interest has been in peasant comedies and folk-plays. Her *Spreading the News*, *Hyacinth Halvey*, *The Rising of the Moon*, *The Workhouse Ward*, and *The Travelling Man* are well-known contributions to contemporary drama.

It is a noteworthy fact that most of the plays of the Irish dramatic movement are one-act plays. Much of Irish life lends itself admirably to one-act treatment. *Hyacinth Halvey* is one of Lady Gregory's best productions. This play contains a universal idea: reputation is in great measure a matter of "a password or an emotion." Hyacinth, having a good reputation thrust upon him, may do as he likes — his good name clings to him notwithstanding.

PERSONS

HYACINTH HALVEY

JAMES QUIRKE, *a butcher*

FARDY FARREL, *a telegraph boy*

SERGEANT CARDEN

MRS. DELANE, *postmistress at Cloon*

MISS JOYCE, *the priest's housekeeper*

HYACINTH HALVEY

SCENE: *Outside the post-office at the little town of Cloon. MRS. DELANE at post-office door. MR. QUIRKE sitting on a chair at butcher's door. A dead sheep hanging beside it, and a thrush in a cage above. FARDY FARRELL playing on a mouth-organ. Train-whistle heard.*

MRS. DELANE. There is the four-o'clock train, Mr. Quirke.

MR. QUIRKE. Is it now, Mrs. Delane, and I not long after rising? It makes a man drowsy to be doing the half of his work in the night-time. Going about the country, looking for little stags of sheep, striving to knock a few shillings together. That contract for the soldiers gives me a great deal to attend to.

MRS. DELANE. I suppose so. It's hard enough on myself to be down ready for the mail-car in the morning, sorting letters in the half-dark. It's often I haven't time to look who are the letters from — or the cards.

MR. QUIRKE. It would be a pity you not to know any little news might be knocking about. If you did not have information of what is

going on, who should have it? Was it you, ma'am, was telling me that the new sub-sanitary inspector would be arriving to-day?

MRS. DELANE. To-day it is he is coming, and it's likely he was in that train. There was a card about him to Sergeant Carden this morning.

MR. QUIRKE. A young chap from Carrow they were saying he was.

MRS. DELANE. So he is, one Hyacinth Halvey; and indeed if all that is said of him is true, or if a quarter of it is true, he will be a credit to this town.

MR. QUIRKE. Is that so?

MRS. DELANE. Testimonials he has by the score. To Father Gregan they were sent. Registered they were coming and going. Would you believe me telling you that they weighed up to three pounds?

MR. QUIRKE. There must be great bulk in them indeed.

MRS. DELANE. It is no wonder he to get the job. He must have a great character, so many persons to write for him as what there did.

FARDY. It would be a great thing to have a character like that.

MRS. DELANE. Indeed, I am thinking it will be long before you will get the like of it, Fardy Farrell.

FARDY. If I had the like of that of a character it is not here carrying messages I would be. It's in Noonan's Hotel I would be, driving cars.

MR. QUIRKE. Here is the priest's housekeeper coming.

MRS. DELANE. So she is; and there is the sergeant a little while after her.

[Enter MISS JOYCE.

MRS. DELANE. Good evening to you, Miss Joyce. What way is his reverence to-day? Did he get any ease from the cough?

MISS JOYCE. He did not, indeed, Mrs. Delane. He has it sticking to him yet. Smothering he is in the night-time. The most thing he comes short in is the voice.

MRS. DELANE. I am sorry, now, to hear that. He should mind himself well.

MISS JOYCE. It's easy to say let him mind himself. What do you say to him going to the meeting to-night?

[SERGEANT *comes in.*

MISS JOYCE. It's for his reverence's "Freeman" I am come, Mrs. Delane.

MRS. DELANE. Here it is ready. I was just throwing an eye on it to see was there any news. Good evening, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. [*Holding up a placard.*] I brought this notice, Mrs. Delane, the announcement of the meeting to be held to-night in the court-house. You might put it up here convenient to the window. I hope you are coming to it yourself?

MRS. DELANE. I will come, and welcome. I would do more than that for you, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. And you, Mr. Quirke.

MR. QUIRKE. I'll come, to be sure. I forget what's this the meeting is about.

SERGEANT. The Department of Agriculture is sending round a lecturer in furtherance of the moral development of the rural classes. [*Reads.*] "A lecture will be given this evening in Cloon Court-House, illustrated by magic-lantern slides—" Those will not be in it; I am informed they were all broken in the first journey, the railway company taking them to be eggs. The subject of the lecture is "The Building of Character."

MRS. DELANE. Very nice, indeed, I knew a girl lost her character, and she washed her feet in a blessed well after, and it dried up on the minute.

SERGEANT. The arrangements have all been left to me, the archdeacon being away. He knows I have a good intellect for things of the sort. But the loss of those slides puts a man out. The thing people will not see it is not likely it is the thing they will believe. I saw what they call tableaux—standing pictures, you know—one time in Dundrum— —

MRS. DELANE. Miss Joyce was saying Father Gregan is supporting you.

SERGEANT. I am accepting his assistance. No bigotry about me when there is a question of the welfare of any fellow creatures. Orange and green will stand together to-night, I, myself, and the station-master on the one side, your parish priest in the chair.

MISS JOYCE. If his reverence would mind me he would not quit the house to-night. He is no more fit to go speak at a meeting than [*pointing to the one hanging outside QUIRKE'S door*] that sheep.

SERGEANT. I am willing to take the responsibility. He will have no speaking to do at all, unless it might be to bid them give the lecturer a hearing. The loss of those slides now is a great annoyance to me—and no time for anything. The lecturer will be coming by the next train.

MISS JOYCE. Who is this coming up the street, Mrs. Delane?

MRS. DELANE. I wouldn't doubt it to be the new sub-sanitary inspector. Was I telling you of the weight of the testimonials he got, Miss Joyce?

MISS JOYCE. Sure, I heard the curate reading them to his reverence. He must be a wonder for principles.

MRS. DELANE. Indeed, it is what I was saying to myself, he must be a very saintly young man.

[Enter HYACINTH HALVEY. *He carries a small bag and a large brown-paper parcel. He stops and nods bashfully.*

HYACINTH. Good evening to you. I was bid to come to the post-office — —

SERGEANT. I suppose you are Hyacinth Halvey? I had a letter about you from the resident magistrate.

HYACINTH. I heard he was writing. It was my mother got a friend he deals with to ask him.

SERGEANT. He gives you a very high character.

HYACINTH. It is very kind of him, indeed, and he not knowing me at all. But, indeed, all the neighbors were very friendly. Anything any one could do to help me they did it.

MRS. DELANE. I'll engage it is the testimonials you have in your parcel? I know the wrapping-paper, but they grew in bulk since I handled them.

HYACINTH. Indeed, I was getting them to the last. There was not one refused me. It is what my mother was saying, a good character is no burden.

FARDY. I would believe that, indeed.

SERGEANT. Let us have a look at the testimonials.

[HYACINTH HALVEY *opens a parcel, and a large number of envelopes fall out.*

SERGEANT. [*Opening and reading one by one.*] "He possesses the fire of the Gael, the strength of the Norman, the vigor of the Dane, the stolidity of the Saxon — —"

HYACINTH. It was the chairman of the Poor Law Guardians wrote that.

SERGEANT. "A magnificent example to old and young — —"

HYACINTH. That was the secretary of the De Wet Hurling Club— —

SERGEANT. "A shining example of the value conferred by an eminently careful and high-class education— —"

HYACINTH. That was the national schoolmaster.

SERGEANT. "Devoted to the highest ideals of his motherland to such an extent as is compatible with a hitherto non-parliamentary career— —"

HYACINTH. That was the member for Carrow.

SERGEANT. "A splendid exponent of the purity of the race— —"

HYACINTH. The editor of the "Carrow Champion."

SERGEANT. "Admirably adapted for the efficient discharge of all possible duties that may in future be laid upon him— —"

HYACINTH. The new station-master.

SERGEANT. "A champion of every cause that can legitimately benefit his fellow creatures— " Why, look here, my man, you are the very one to come to our assistance to-night.

HYACINTH. I would be glad to do that. What way can I do it?

SERGEANT. You are a newcomer—your example would carry weight—you must stand up as a living proof of the beneficial effect of a high character, moral fibre, temperance—there is something about it here I am sure—(*Looks.*) I am sure I saw "unparalleled temperance" in some place— —

HYACINTH. It was my mother's cousin wrote that—I am no drinker, but I haven't the pledge taken— —

SERGEANT. You might take it for the purpose.

MR. QUIRKE. [*Eagerly.*] Here is an antitreating button. I was made a present of it by one of my customers—I'll give it to you [*sticks it in HYACINTH'S coat*] and welcome.

SERGEANT. That is it. You can wear the button on the platform—or a bit of blue ribbon—hundreds will follow your example—I know the boys from the Workhouse will— —

HYACINTH. I am in no way wishful to be an example— —

SERGEANT. I will read extracts from the testimonials. "There he is," I will say, "an example of one in early life who by his own unaided efforts and his high character has obtained a profitable situation." [*Slaps his side.*] I know what I'll do. I'll engage a few corner-boys from Noonan's bar, just as they are, greasy and sodden, to stand in a group—there will be the contrast—the sight will deter others from a similar fate—that's the way to do a tableau—I knew I could turn out a success.

HYACINTH. I wouldn't like to be a contrast— —

SERGEANT. [*Puts testimonials in his pocket.*] I will go now and engage those lads—sixpence each, and well worth it—nothing like an example for the rural classes.

[*Goes off, HYACINTH feebly trying to detain him.*]

MRS. DELANE. A very nice man, indeed. A little high up in himself, maybe. I'm not one that blames the police. Sure they have their own bread to earn like every other one. And indeed it is often they will let a thing pass.

MR. QUIRKE. [*Gloomily.*] Sometimes they will, and more times they will not.

MISS JOYCE. And where will you be finding a lodging, Mr. Halvey?

HYACINTH. I was going to ask that myself, ma'am. I don't know the town.

MISS JOYCE. I know of a good lodging, but it is only a very good man would be taken into it.

MRS. DELANE. Sure there could be no objection there to Mr. Halvey. There is no appearance on him but what is good, and the sergeant after taking him up the way he is doing.

MISS JOYCE. You will be near to the sergeant in the lodging I speak of. The house is convenient to the barracks.

HYACINTH. [*Doubtfully.*] To the barracks?

MISS JOYCE. Alongside of it, and the barrack-yard behind. And that's not all. It is opposite to the priest's house.

HYACINTH. Opposite, is it?

MISS JOYCE. A very respectable place, indeed, and a very clean room you will get. I know it well. The curate can see into it from his window.

HYACINTH. Can he now?

FARDY. There was a good many, I am thinking, went into that lodging and left it after.

MISS JOYCE. [*Sharply.*] It is a lodging you will never be let into or let stop in, Fardy. If they did go they were a good riddance.

FARDY. John Hart, the plumber, left it — —

MISS JOYCE. If he did it was because he dared not pass the police coming in, as he used, with a rabbit he was after snaring in his hand.

FARDY. The schoolmaster himself left it.

MISS JOYCE. He needn't have left it if he hadn't taken to card-playing. What way could you say your prayers, and shadows shuffling and dealing before you on the blind?

HYACINTH. I think maybe I'd best look around a bit before I'll settle in a lodging — —

MISS JOYCE. Not at all. You won't be wanting to pull down the blind.

MRS. DELANE. It is not likely *you* will be snaring rabbits.

MISS JOYCE. Or bringing in a bottle and taking an odd glass the way James Kelly did.

MRS. DELANE. Or writing threatening notices, and the police taking a view of you from the rear.

MISS JOYCE. Or going to roadside dances, or running after good-for-nothing young girls — —

HYACINTH. I give you my word I'm not so harmless as you think.

MRS. DELANE. Would you be putting a lie on these, Mr. Halvey? [*Touching testimonials.*] I know well the way you will be spending the evenings, writing letters to your relations — —

MISS JOYCE. Learning O'Growney's exercises — —

MRS. DELANE. Sticking post-cards in an album for the convent bazaar.

MISS JOYCE. Reading the "Catholic Young Man" — —

MRS. DELANE. Playing the melodies on a melodeon — —

MISS JOYCE. Looking at the pictures in the "Lives of the Saints." I'll hurry on and engage the room for you.

HYACINTH. Wait. Wait a minute — —

MISS JOYCE. No trouble at all. I told you it was just opposite.

[*Goes.*

MR. QUIRKE. I suppose I must go up-stairs and ready myself for the meeting. If it wasn't for the contract I have for the soldiers' barracks and the sergeant's good word, I wouldn't go anear it.

[Goes into shop.

MRS. DELANE. I should be making myself ready, too. I must be in good time to see you being made an example of, Mr. Halvey. It is I, myself, was the first to say it; you will be a credit to the town.

[Goes.

HYACINTH. [*In a tone of agony.*] I wish I had never seen Cloon.

FARDY. What is on you?

HYACINTH. I wish I had never left Carrow. I wish I had been drowned the first day I thought of it, and I'd be better off.

FARDY. What is it ails you?

HYACINTH. I wouldn't for the best pound ever I had be in this place to-day.

FARDY. I don't know what you are talking about.

HYACINTH. To have left Carrow, if it was a poor place, where I had my comrades, and an odd spree, and a game of cards—and a coursing-match coming on, and I promised a new greyhound from the city of Cork. I'll die in this place, the way I am, I'll be too much closed in.

FARDY. Sure it mightn't be as bad as what you think.

HYACINTH. Will you tell me, I ask you, what way can I undo it?

FARDY. What is it you are wanting to undo?

HYACINTH. Will you tell me what way can I get rid of my character?

FARDY. To get rid of it, is it?

HYACINTH. That is what I said. Aren't you after hearing the great character they are after putting on me?

FARDY. That is a good thing to have.

HYACINTH. It is not. It's the worst in the world. If I hadn't it, I wouldn't be like a prize marigold at a show, with every person praising me.

FARDY. If I had it, I wouldn't be like a head in a barrel, with every person making hits at me.

HYACINTH. If I hadn't it, I wouldn't be shoved into a room with all the clergy watching me and the police in the back yard.

FARDY. If I had it, I wouldn't be but a message-carrier now, and a clapper scaring birds in the summer-time.

HYACINTH. If I hadn't it, I wouldn't be wearing this button and brought up for an example at the meeting.

FARDY. [*Whistles.*] Maybe you're not so, what those papers make you out to be?

HYACINTH. How would I be what they make me out to be? Was there ever any person of that sort since the world was a world, unless it might be Saint Antony of Padua looking down from the chapel wall? If it is like that I was, isn't it in Mount Melleray I would be, or with the friars at Esker? Why would I be living in the world at all, or doing the world's work?

FARDY. [*Taking up parcel.*] Who would think, now, there would be so much lies in a small place like Carrow?

HYACINTH. It was my mother's cousin did it. He said I was not reared for laboring—he gave me a new suit and bid me never to come back again. I daren't go back to face him—the neighbors knew my mother had a long family—bad luck to them the day they gave me these. [*Tears letters and scatters them.*] I'm done with testimonials. They won't be here to bear witness against me.

FARDY. The sergeant thought them to be great. Sure he has the samples of them in his pocket. There's not one in the town but will know before morning that you are the next thing to an earthly saint.

HYACINTH. [*Stamping.*] I'll stop their mouths. I'll show them I can be a terror for badness. I'll do some injury. I'll commit some

crime. The first thing I'll do I'll go and get drunk. If I never did it before I'll do it now. I'll get drunk – then I'll make an assault – I tell you I'd think as little of taking a life as of blowing out a candle.

FARDY. If you get drunk you are done for. Sure that will be held up after as an excuse for any breaking of the law.

HYACINTH. I will break the law. Drunk or sober, I'll break it. I'll do something that will have no excuse. What would you say is the worst crime that any man can do?

FARDY. I don't know. I heard the sergeant saying one time it was to obstruct the police in the discharge of their duty – –

HYACINTH. That won't do. It's a patriot I would be then, worse than before, with my picture in the weeklies. It's a red crime I must commit that will make all respectable people quit minding me. What can I do? Search your mind now.

FARDY. It's what I heard the old people saying there could be no worse crime than to steal a sheep – –

HYACINTH. I'll steal a sheep – or a cow – or a horse – if that will leave me the way I was before.

FARDY. It's maybe in jail it will leave you.

HYACINTH. I don't care – I'll confess – I'll tell why I did it – I give you my word I would as soon be picking oakum or breaking stones as to be perched in the daylight the same as that bird, and all the town chirruping to me or bidding me chirrup – –

FARDY. There is reason in that, now.

HYACINTH. Help me, will you?

FARDY. Well, if it is to steal a sheep you want, you haven't far to go.

HYACINTH. [*Looking around wildly.*] Where is it? I see no sheep.

FARDY. Look around you.

HYACINTH. I see no living thing but that thrush — —

FARDY. Did I say it was living? What is that hanging on Quirke's rack?

HYACINTH. It's [*fingers it*] a sheep, sure enough — —

FARDY. Well, what ails you that you can't bring it away?

HYACINTH. It's a dead one — —

FARDY. What matter if it is?

HYACINTH. If it was living I could drive it before me — —

FARDY. You could. Is it to your own lodging you would drive it? Sure every one would take it to be a pet you brought from Carrow.

HYACINTH. I suppose they might.

FARDY. Miss Joyce sending in for news of it and it bleating behind the bed.

HYACINTH. [*Distracted.*] Stop! stop!

MRS. DELANE. [*From upper window.*] Fardy! Are you there, Fardy Farrell?

FARDY. I am, ma'am.

MRS. DELANE. [*From window.*] Look and tell me is that the telegraph I hear ticking?

FARDY. [*Looking in at door.*] It is, ma'am.

MRS. DELANE. Then botheration to it, and I not dressed or undressed. Wouldn't you say, now, it's to annoy me it is calling me down. I'm coming! I'm coming!

[*Disappears.*]

FARDY. Hurry on, now! Hurry! She'll be coming out on you. If you are going to do it, do it, and if you are not, let it alone.

HYACINTH. I'll do it! I'll do it!

FARDY. [*Lifting the sheep on his back.*] I'll give you a hand with it.

HYACINTH. [*Goes a step or two and turns round.*] You told me no place where I could hide it.

FARDY. You needn't go far. There is the church beyond at the side of the square. Go round to the ditch behind the wall — there's nettles in it.

HYACINTH. That'll do.

FARDY. She's coming out — run! run!

HYACINTH. [*Runs a step or two.*] It's slipping!

FARDY. Hoist it up. I'll give it a hoist!

[*HALVEY runs out.*

MRS. DELANE. [*Calling out.*] What are you doing, Fardy Farrell? Is it idling you are?

FARDY. Waiting I am, ma'am, for the message — —

MRS. DELANE. Never mind the message yet. Who said it was ready? [*Going to door.*] Go ask for the loan of — no, but ask news of — Here, now go bring that bag of Mr. Halvey's to the lodging Miss Joyce has taken — —

FARDY. I will, ma'am. [*Takes bag and goes out.*

MRS. DELANE. [*Coming out with a telegram in her hand.*] Nobody here? [*Looks round and calls cautiously.*] Mr. Quirke! Mr. Quirke! James Quirke!

MR. QUIRKE. [*Looking out of his upper window, with soap-suddy face.*] What is it, Mrs. Delane?

MRS. DELANE. [*Beckoning.*] Come down here till I tell you.

MR. QUIRKE. I cannot do that. I'm not fully shaved.

MRS. DELANE. You'd come if you knew the news I have.

MR. QUIRKE. Tell it to me now. I'm not so supple as I was.

MRS. DELANE. Whisper now, have you an enemy in any place?

MR. QUIRKE. It's likely I may have. A man in business — —

MRS. DELANE. I was thinking you had one.

MR. QUIRKE. Why would you think that at this time more than any other time?

MRS. DELANE. If you could know what is in this envelope you would know that, James Quirke.

MR. QUIRKE. Is that so? And what, now, is there in it?

MRS. DELANE. Who do you think now is it addressed to?

MR. QUIRKE. How would I know that, and I not seeing it?

MRS. DELANE. That is true. Well, it is a message from Dublin Castle to the sergeant of police!

MR. QUIRKE. To Sergeant Carden, is it?

MRS. DELANE. It is. And it concerns yourself.

MR. QUIRKE. Myself, is it? What accusation can they be bringing against me? I'm a peaceable man.

MRS. DELANE. Wait till you hear.

MR. QUIRKE. Maybe they think I was in that moonlighting case —

MRS. DELANE. That is not it — —

MR. QUIRKE. I was not in it — I was but in the neighboring field — cutting up a dead cow, that those never had a hand in — —

MRS. DELANE. You're out of it — —

MR. QUIRKE. They had their faces blackened. There is no man can say I recognized them.

MRS. DELANE. That's not what they're saying — —

MR. QUIRKE. I'll swear I did not hear their voices or know them if I did hear them.

MRS. DELANE. I tell you it has nothing to do with that. It might be better for you if it had.

MR. QUIRKE. What is it, so?

MRS. DELANE. It is an order to the sergeant, bidding him immediately to seize all suspicious meat in your house. There is an officer coming down. There are complaints from the Shannon Fort Barracks.

MR. QUIRKE. I'll engage it was that pork.

MRS. DELANE. What ailed it for them to find fault?

MR. QUIRKE. People are so hard to please nowadays, and I recommended them to salt it.

MRS. DELANE. They had a right to have minded your advice.

MR. QUIRKE. There was nothing on that pig at all but that it went mad on poor O'Grady that owned it.

MRS. DELANE. So I heard, and went killing all before it.

MR. QUIRKE. Sure it's only in the brain madness can be. I heard the doctor saying that.

MRS. DELANE. He should know.

MR. QUIRKE. I give you my word I cut the head off it. I went to the loss of it, throwing it to the eels in the river. If they had salted the meat, as I advised them, what harm would it have done to any person on earth?

MRS. DELANE. I hope no harm will come on poor Mrs. Quirke and the family.

MR. QUIRKE. Maybe it wasn't that but some other thing — —

MRS. DELANE. Here is Fardy. I must send the message to the sergeant. Well, Mr. Quirke, I'm glad I had the time to give you a warning.

MR. QUIRKE. I'm obliged to you, indeed. You were always very neighborly, Mrs. Delane. Don't be too quick now sending the message. There is just one article I would like to put away out of the house before the sergeant will come.

[Enter FARDY.]

MRS. DELANE. Here now, Fardy—that's not the way you're going to the barracks. Any one would think you were scaring birds yet. Put on your uniform.

[FARDY goes into office.]

MRS. DELANE. You have this message to bring to the sergeant of police. Get your cap now; it's under the counter.

[FARDY reappears, and she gives him telegram.]

FARDY. I'll bring it to the station. It's there he was going.

MRS. DELANE. You will not, but to the barracks. It can wait for him there.

[FARDY goes off. MR. QUIRKE has appeared at door.]

MR. QUIRKE. It was indeed a very neighborly act, Mrs. Delane, and I'm obliged to you. There is just *one* article to put out of the way. The sergeant may look about him then and welcome. It's well I cleared the premises on yesterday. A consignment to Birmingham I sent. The Lord be praised, isn't England a terrible country, with all it consumes?

MRS. DELANE. Indeed, you always treat the neighbors very decent, Mr. Quirke, not asking them to buy from you.

MR. QUIRKE. Just one article. [*Turns to rack.*] That sheep I brought in last night. It was for a charity, indeed, I bought it from the widow woman at Kiltartan Cross. Where would the poor make a profit out of their dead meat without me? Where now is it? Well, now, I could have sworn that that sheep was hanging there on the rack when I went in — —

MRS. DELANE. You must have put it in some other place.

MR. QUIRKE. [*Going in and searching and coming out.*] I did not; there is no other place for me to put it. Is it gone blind I am, or is it not in it, it is?

MRS. DELANE. It's not there now, anyway.

MR. QUIRKE. Didn't you take notice of it there, yourself, this morning?

MRS. DELANE. I have it in my mind that I did; but it's not there now.

MR. QUIRKE. There was no one here could bring it away?

MRS. DELANE. Is it me, myself, you suspect of taking it, James Quirke?

MR. QUIRKE. Where is it at all? It is certain it was not of itself it walked away. It was dead, and very dead, the time I bought it.

MRS. DELANE. I have a pleasant neighbor, indeed, that accuses me that I took his sheep. I wonder, indeed, you to say a thing like that! I to steal your sheep or your rack or anything that belongs to you or to your trade! Thank you, James Quirke. I am much obliged to you, indeed.

MR. QUIRKE. Ah, be quiet, woman; be quiet — —

MRS. DELANE. And let me tell you, James Quirke, that I would sooner starve and see every one belonging to me starve than to eat

the size of a thimble of any joint that ever was on your rack or that ever will be on it, whatever the soldiers may eat that have no other thing to get, or the English, that devour all sorts, or the poor ravenous people that's down by the sea!

[She turns to go into shop.]

MR. QUIRKE. *[Stopping her.]* Don't be talking foolishness, woman. Who said you took my meat? Give heed to me now. There must some other message have come. The sergeant must have got some other message.

MRS. DELANE. *[Sulkily.]* If there is any way for a message to come that is quicker than to come by the wires, tell me what it is, and I'll be obliged to you.

MR. QUIRKE. The sergeant was up here, making an excuse he was sticking up that notice. What was he doing here, I ask you?

MRS. DELANE. How would I know what brought him?

MR. QUIRKE. It is what he did; he made as if to go away—he turned back again and I shaving—he brought away the sheep—he will have it for evidence against me—

MRS. DELANE. *[Interested.]* That might be so.

MR. QUIRKE. I would sooner it to have been any other beast nearly ever I had upon the rack.

MRS. DELANE. Is that so?

MR. QUIRKE. I bade the Widow Early to kill it a fortnight ago—but she would not, she was that covetous!

MRS. DELANE. What was on it?

MR. QUIRKE. How would I know what was on it? Whatever was on it, it was the will of God put it upon it—wasted it was, and shivering and refusing its share.

MRS. DELANE. The poor thing.

MR. QUIRKE. Gone all to nothing—wore away like a flock of thread. It did not weigh as much as a lamb of two months.

MRS. DELANE. It is likely the inspector will bring it to Dublin?

MR. QUIRKE. The ribs of it streaky with the dint of patent medicines— —

MRS. DELANE. I wonder is it to the Petty Sessions you'll be brought or is it to the Assizes?

MR. QUIRKE. I'll speak up to them. I'll make my defense. What can the army expect at fippence a pound?

MRS. DELANE. It is likely there will be no bail allowed?

MR. QUIRKE. Would they be wanting me to give them good quality meat out of my own pocket? Is it to encourage them to fight the poor Indians and Africans they would have me? It's the Anti-Enlisting Societies should pay the fine for me.

MRS. DELANE. It's not a fine will be put on you, I'm afraid. It's five years in jail you will be apt to be getting. Well, I'll try and be a good neighbor to poor Mrs. Quirke.

[MR. QUIRKE, *who has been stamping up and down, sits down and weeps.* HALVEY *comes in and stands on one side.*

MR. QUIRKE. Hadn't I heart-scalding enough before, striving to rear five weak children?

MRS. DELANE. I suppose they will be sent to the Industrial Schools?

MR. QUIRKE. My poor wife— —

MRS. DELANE. I'm afraid the workhouse— —

MR. QUIRKE. And she out in an ass-car at this minute, helping me to follow my trade.

MRS. DELANE. I hope they will not arrest her along with you.

MR. QUIRKE. I'll give myself up to justice. I'll plead guilty! I'll be recommended to mercy!

MRS. DELANE. It might be best for you.

MR. QUIRKE. Who would think so great a misfortune could come upon a family through the bringing away of one sheep!

HYACINTH. [*Coming forward.*] Let you make yourself easy.

MR. QUIRKE. Easy! It's easy to say let you make yourself easy.

HYACINTH. I can tell you where it is.

MR. QUIRKE. Where what is?

HYACINTH. The sheep you are fretting after.

MR. QUIRKE. What do you know about it?

HYACINTH. I know everything about it.

MR. QUIRKE. I suppose the sergeant told you?

HYACINTH. He told me nothing.

MR. QUIRKE. I suppose the whole town knows it, so?

HYACINTH. No one knows it, as yet.

MR. QUIRKE. And the sergeant didn't see it?

HYACINTH. No one saw it or brought it away but myself.

MR. QUIRKE. Where did you put it at all?

HYACINTH. In the ditch behind the church wall. In among the nettles it is. Look at the way they have me stung.

[*Holds out hands.*]

MR. QUIRKE. In the ditch! The best hiding-place in the town.

HYACINTH. I never thought it would bring such great trouble upon you. You can't say, anyway, I did not tell you.

MR. QUIRKE. You, yourself, that brought it away and that hid it! I suppose it was coming in the train you got information about the message to the police.

HYACINTH. What now do you say to me?

MR. QUIRKE. Say! I say I am as glad to hear what you said as if it was the Lord telling me I'd be in heaven this minute.

HYACINTH. What are you going to do to me?

MR. QUIRKE. Do, is it? [*Grasps his hand.*] Any earthly thing you would wish me to do, I will do it.

HYACINTH. I suppose you will tell — —

MR. QUIRKE. Tell! It's I that will tell when all is quiet. It is I will give you the good name through the town!

HYACINTH. I don't well understand.

MR. QUIRKE. [*Embracing him.*] The man that preserved me!

HYACINTH. That preserved you?

MR. QUIRKE. That kept me from ruin!

HYACINTH. From ruin?

MR. QUIRKE. That saved me from disgrace!

HYACINTH. [*To MRS. DELANE.*] What is he saying at all?

MR. QUIRKE. From the inspector!

HYACINTH. What is he talking about?

MR. QUIRKE. From the magistrates!

HYACINTH. He is making some mistake.

MR. QUIRKE. From the Winter Assizes!

HYACINTH. Is he out of his wits?

MR. QUIRKE. Five years in jail!

HYACINTH. Hasn't he the queer talk?

MR. QUIRKE. The loss of the contract!

HYACINTH. Are my own wits gone astray?

MR. QUIRKE. What way can I repay you?

HYACINTH. [*Shouting.*] I tell you I took the sheep — —

MR. QUIRKE. You did, God reward you!

HYACINTH. I stole away with it — —

MR. QUIRKE. The blessing of the poor on you!

HYACINTH. I put it out of sight — —

MR. QUIRKE. The blessing of my five children — —

HYACINTH. I may as well say nothing — —

MRS. DELANE. Let you be quiet now, Quirke. Here's the sergeant coming to search the shop — —

[*SERGEANT comes in. QUIRKE leaves go of HALVEY, who arranges his hat, etc.*

SERGEANT. The department to blazes!

MRS. DELANE. What is it is putting you out?

SERGEANT. To go to the train to meet the lecturer, and there to get a message through the guard that he was unavoidably detained in the South, holding an inquest on the remains of a drake.

MRS. DELANE. The lecturer, is it?

SERGEANT. To be sure. What else would I be talking of? The lecturer has failed me, and where am I to go looking for a person that I would think fitting to take his place?

MRS. DELANE. And that's all? And you didn't get any message but the one?

SERGEANT. Is that all? I am surprised at you, Mrs. Delane. Isn't it enough to upset a man, within three-quarters of an hour of the time of the meeting? Where, I would ask you, am I to find a man that has education enough and wit enough and character enough to put up speaking on the platform on the minute?

MR. QUIRKE. [*Jumps up.*] It is I, myself, will tell you that.

SERGEANT. You!

MR. QUIRKE. [*Slapping HALVEY on the back.*] Look at here, Sergeant. There is not one word was said in all those papers about this young man before you but it is true. And there could be no good thing said of him that would be too good for him.

SERGEANT. It might not be a bad idea.

MR. QUIRKE. Whatever the paper said about him, Sergeant, I can say more again. It has come to my knowledge—by chance—that since he came to this town that young man has saved a whole family from destruction.

SERGEANT. That is much to his credit—helping the rural classes — —

MR. QUIRKE. A family and a long family, big and little, like sods of turf—and they depending on a—on one that might be on his way to dark trouble at this minute if it was not for his assistance. Believe me, he is the most sensible man, and the wittiest, and the kindest, and the best helper of the poor that ever stood before you in this square. Is not that so, Mrs. Delane?

MRS. DELANE. It is true, indeed. Where he gets his wisdom and his wit and his information from I don't know, unless it might be that he is gifted from above.

SERGEANT.. Well, Mrs. Delane, I think we have settled that question. Mr. Halvey, you will be the speaker at the meeting. The lecturer sent these notes – you can lengthen them into a speech. You can call to the people of Cloon to stand out, to begin the building of their character. I saw a lecturer do it one time at Dundrum. "Come up here," he said; "Dare to be a Daniel," he said – –

HYACINTH. I can't – I won't – –

SERGEANT. [*Looking at papers and thrusting them into his hand.*] You will find it quite easy. I will conduct you to the platform – these papers before you and a glass of water – that's settled. [*Turns to go.*] Follow me on to the court-house in half an hour – I must go to the barracks first – I heard there was a telegram – [*Calls back as he goes.*] Don't be late, Mrs. Delane. Mind, Quirke, you promised to come.

MRS. DELANE. Well, it's time for me to make an end of settling myself – and, indeed, Mr. Quirke, you'd best do the same.

MR. QUIRKE. [*Rubbing his cheek.*] I suppose so. I had best keep on good terms with him for the present. [*Turns.*] Well, now, I had a great escape this day.

[*Both go in as FARDY reappears, whistling.*]

HYACINTH. [*Sitting down.*] I don't know in the world what has come upon the world that the half of the people of it should be cracked!

FARDY. Weren't you found out yet?

HYACINTH. Found out, is it? I don't know what you mean by being found out.

FARDY. Didn't he miss the sheep?

HYACINTH. He did, and I told him it was I took it – and what happened I declare to goodness I don't know – Will you look at these?

[*Holds out notes.*]

FARDY. Papers! Are they more testimonials?

HYACINTH. They are what is worse. [*Gives a hoarse laugh.*] Will you come and see me on the platform—these in my hand—and I speaking—giving out advice. [FARDY *whistles.*] Why didn't you tell me, the time you advised me to steal a sheep, that in this town it would qualify a man to go preaching, and the priest in the chair looking on?

FARDY. The time I took a few apples that had fallen off a stall, they did not ask me to hold a meeting. They welted me well.

HYACINTH. [*Looking round.*] I would take apples if I could see them. I wish I had broke my neck before I left Carrow, and I'd be better off! I wish I had got six months the time I was caught setting snares—I wish I had robbed a church.

FARDY. Would a Protestant church do?

HYACINTH. I suppose it wouldn't be so great a sin.

FARDY. It's likely the sergeant would think worse of it. Anyway, if you want to rob one, it's the Protestant church is the handiest.

HYACINTH. [*Getting up.*] Show me what way to do it?

FARDY. [*Pointing.*] I was going around it a few minutes ago, to see might there be e'er a dog scenting the sheep, and I noticed the window being out.

HYACINTH. Out, out and out?

FARDY. It was, where they are putting colored glass in it for the distiller— —

HYACINTH. What good does that do me?

FARDY. Every good. You could go in by that window if you had some person to give you a hoist. Whatever riches there is to get in it then, you'll get them.

HYACINTH. I don't want riches. I'll give you all I will find if you will come and hoist me.

FARDY. Here is Miss Joyce coming to bring you to your lodging. Sure I brought your bag to it, the time you were away with the sheep — —

HYACINTH. Run! Run!

[They go off. Enter MISS JOYCE.]

MISS JOYCE. Are you here, Mrs. Delane? Where, can you tell me, is Mr. Halvey?

MRS. DELANE. *[Coming out dressed.]* It's likely he is gone on to the court-house. Did you hear he is to be in the chair and to make an address to the meeting?

MISS JOYCE. He is getting on fast. His reverence says he will be a good help in the parish. Who would think, now, there would be such a godly young man in a little place like Carrow!

[Enter SERGEANT in a hurry, with telegram.]

SERGEANT. What time did this telegram arrive, Mrs. Delane?

MRS. DELANE. I couldn't be rightly sure, Sergeant. But sure it's marked on it, unless the clock I have is gone wrong.

SERGEANT. It is marked on it. And I have the time I got it marked on my own watch.

MRS. DELANE. Well, now, I wonder none of the police would have followed you with it from the barracks — and they with so little to do — —

SERGEANT. *[Looking in at QUIRKE'S shop.]* Well, I am sorry to do what I have to do, but duty is duty.

[He ransacks shop. MRS. DELANE looks on. MR. QUIRKE puts his head out of window.]

MR. QUIRKE. What is that going on inside? [*No answer.*] Is there any one inside, I ask? [*No answer.*] It must be that dog of Tannian's — wait till I get at him.

MRS. DELANE. It is Sergeant Carden, Mr. Quirke. He would seem to be looking for something — —

[MR. QUIRKE *appears in shop*. SERGEANT *comes out, makes another dive, taking up sacks, etc.*

MR. QUIRKE. I'm greatly afraid I am just out of meat, Sergeant — and I'm sorry now to disoblige you, and you not being in the habit of dealing with me — —

SERGEANT. I should think not, indeed.

MR. QUIRKE. Looking for a tender little bit of lamb, I suppose you are, for Mrs. Carden and the youngsters?

SERGEANT. I am not.

MR. QUIRKE. If I had it now, I'd be proud to offer it to you, and make no charge. I'll be killing a good kid to-morrow. Mrs Carden might fancy a bit of it — —

SERGEANT. I have had orders to search your establishment for unwholesome meat, and I am come here to do it.

MR. QUIRKE. [*Sitting down with a smile.*] Is that so? Well, isn't it a wonder the schemers does be in the world.

SERGEANT. It is not the first time there have been complaints.

MR. QUIRKE. I suppose not. Well, it is on their own head it will fall at the last!

SERGEANT. I have found nothing so far.

MR. QUIRKE. I suppose not, indeed. What is there you could find, and it not in it?

SERGEANT. Have you no meat at all upon the premises?

MR. QUIRKE. I have, indeed, a nice barrel of bacon.

SERGEANT. What way did it die?

MR. QUIRKE. It would be hard for me to say that. American it is. How would I know what way they do be killing the pigs out there? Machinery, I suppose, they have — steam-hammers — —

SERGEANT. Is there nothing else here at all?

MR. QUIRKE. I give you my word, there is no meat, living or dead, in this place, but yourself and myself and that bird above in the cage.

SERGEANT. Well, I must tell the inspector I could find nothing. But mind yourself for the future.

MR. QUIRKE. Thank you, Sergeant. I will do that.

[Enter FARDY. He stops short.]

SERGEANT. It was you delayed that message to me, I suppose? You'd best mend your ways or I'll have something to say to you.

[Seizes and shakes him.]

FARDY. That's the way every one does be faulting me.

[Whimpers.]

[The SERGEANT gives him another shake. A half-crown falls out of his pocket.]

MISS JOYCE. *[Picking it up.]* A half-a-crown! Where, now, did you get that much, Fardy?

FARDY. Where did I get it, is it?

MISS JOYCE. I'll engage it was in no honest way you got it.

FARDY. I picked it up in the street — —

MISS JOYCE. If you did, why didn't you bring it to the sergeant or to his reverence?

MRS. DELANE. And some poor person, maybe, being at the loss of it.

MISS JOYCE. I'd best bring it to his reverence. Come with me, Fardy, till he will question you about it.

FARDY. It was not altogether in the street I found it — —

MISS JOYCE. There, now! I knew you got it in no good way! Tell me, now.

FARDY. It was playing pitch and toss I won it — —

MISS JOYCE. And who would play for half-crowns with the like of you, Fardy Farrell? Who was it, now?

FARDY. It was — a stranger — —

MISS JOYCE. Do you hear that? A stranger! Did you see e'er a stranger in this town, Mrs. Delane, or Sergeant Carden, or Mr. Quirke?

MR. QUIRKE. Not a one.

SERGEANT. There was no stranger here.

MRS. DELANE. There could not be one here without me knowing it.

FARDY. I tell you there was.

MISS JOYCE. Come on, then, and tell who was he to his reverence.

SERGEANT. [*Taking other arm.*] Or to the bench.

FARDY. I did get it, I tell you, from a stranger.

SERGEANT. Where is he, so?

FARDY. He's in some place — not far away.

SERGEANT. Bring me to him.

FARDY. He'll be coming here.

SERGEANT. Tell me the truth and it will be better for you.

FARDY. [*Weeping.*] Let me go and I will.

SERGEANT. [*Letting go.*] Now — who did you get it from?

FARDY. From that young chap came to-day, Mr. Halvey.

ALL. Mr. Halvey!

MR. QUIRKE. [*Indignantly.*] What are you saying, you young ruffian, you? Hyacinth Halvey to be playing pitch and toss with the like of you!

FARDY. I didn't say that.

MISS JOYCE. You did say it. You said it now.

MR. QUIRKE. Hyacinth Halvey! The best man that ever came into this town!

MISS JOYCE. Well, what lies he has!

MR. QUIRKE. It's my belief the half-crown is a bad one. Maybe it's to pass it off it was given to him. There were tinkers in the town at the time of the fair. Give it here to me. [*Bites it.*] No, indeed, it's sound enough. Here, Sergeant, it's best for you take it. [*Gives it to SERGEANT, who examines it.*]

SERGEANT. Can it be? Can it be what I think it to be?

MR. QUIRKE. What is it? What do you take it to be?

SERGEANT. It is, it is. I know it, I know this half-crown — —

MR. QUIRKE. That is a queer thing, now.

SERGEANT. I know it well. I have been handling it in the church for the last twelvemonth — —

MR. QUIRKE. Is that so?

SERGEANT. It is the nest-egg half-crown we hand round in the collection-plate every Sunday morning. I know it by the dint on the Queen's temples and the crooked scratch under her nose.

MR. QUIRKE. [*Examining it.*] So there is, too.

SERGEANT. This is a bad business. It has been stolen from the church.

ALL. Oh! Oh! Oh!

SERGEANT. [*Seizing FARDY.*] You have robbed the church!

FARDY. [*Terrified.*] I tell you I never did!

SERGEANT. I have the proof of it.

FARDY. Say what you like! I never put a foot in it!

SERGEANT. How did you get this, so?

MISS JOYCE. I suppose from the *stranger*?

MRS. DELANE. I suppose it was Hyacinth Halvey gave it to you, now?

FARDY. It was so.

SERGEANT. I suppose it was he robbed the church?

FARDY. [*Sobs.*] You will not believe me if I say it.

MR. QUIRKE. Oh! the young vagabond! Let me get at him!

MRS. DELANE. Here he is himself now!

[*HYACINTH comes in. FARDY releases himself and creeps behind him.*]

MRS. DELANE. It is time you to come, Mr. Halvey, and shut the mouth of this young schemer.

MISS JOYCE. I would like you to hear what he says of you, Mr. Halvey. Pitch and toss, he says.

MR. QUIRKE. Robbery, he says.

MRS. DELANE. Robbery of a church.

SERGEANT. He has had a bad name long enough. Let him go to a reformatory now.

FARDY. [*Clinging to HYACINTH.*] Save me, save me! I'm a poor boy trying to knock out a way of living; I'll be destroyed if I go to a reformatory. [*Kneels and clings to HYACINTH'S knees.*]

HYACINTH. I'll save you easy enough.

FARDY. Don't let me be jailed!

HYACINTH. I am going to tell them.

FARDY. I'm a poor orphan — —

HYACINTH. Will you let me speak?

FARDY. I'll get no more chance in the world — —

HYACINTH. Sure I'm trying to free you — —

FARDY. It will be tasked to me always.

HYACINTH. Be quiet, can't you?

FARDY. Don't you desert me!

HYACINTH. Will you be silent?

FARDY. Take it on yourself.

HYACINTH. I will if you'll let me.

FARDY. Tell them you did it.

HYACINTH. I am going to do that.

FARDY. Tell them it was you got in at the window.

HYACINTH. I will! I will!

FARDY. Say it was you robbed the box.

HYACINTH. I'll say it! I'll say it!

FARDY. It being open!

HYACINTH. Let me tell, let me tell.

FARDY. Of all that was in it.

HYACINTH. I'll tell them that.

FARDY. And gave it to me.

HYACINTH. [*Putting hand on his mouth and dragging him up.*] Will you stop and let me speak?

SERGEANT. We can't be wasting time. Give him here to me.

HYACINTH. I can't do that. He must be let alone.

SERGEANT. [*Seizing him.*] He'll be let alone in the lock-up.

HYACINTH. He must not be brought there.

SERGEANT. I'll let no man get him off.

HYACINTH. I will get him off.

SERGEANT. You will not!

HYACINTH. I will.

SERGEANT. Do you think to buy him off?

HYACINTH. I will buy him off with my own confession.

SERGEANT. And what will that be?

HYACINTH. It was I robbed the church.

SERGEANT. That is likely indeed!

HYACINTH. Let him go, and take me. I tell you I did it.

SERGEANT. It would take witnesses to prove that.

HYACINTH. [*Pointing to FARDY.*] He will be witness.

FARDY. Oh, Mr. Halvey, I would not wish to do that. Get me off and I will say nothing.

HYACINTH. Sure you must. You will be put on oath in the court.

FARDY. I will not! I will not! All the world knows I don't understand the nature of an oath!

MR. QUIRKE. [*Coming forward.*] Is it blind ye all are?

MRS. DELANE. What are you talking about?

MR. QUIRKE. Is it fools ye all are?

MISS JOYCE. Speak for yourself.

MR. QUIRKE. Is it idiots ye all are?

SERGEANT. Mind who you're talking to.

MR. QUIRKE. [*Seizing HYACINTH'S hands.*] Can't you see? Can't you hear? Where are your wits? Was ever such a thing seen in this town?

MRS. DELANE. Say out what you have to say.

MR. QUIRKE. A walking saint he is!

MRS. DELANE. Maybe so.

MR. QUIRKE. The preserver of the poor! Talk of the holy martyrs! They are nothing at all to what he is! Will you look at him! To save that poor boy he is going! To take the blame on himself he is going! To say he, himself, did the robbery he is going! Before the magistrate he is going! To jail he is going! Taking the blame on his own head!

Putting the sin on his own shoulders! Letting on to have done a robbery! Telling a lie—that it may be forgiven him—to his own injury! Doing all that, I tell you, to save the character of a miserable slack lad, that rose in poverty.

[Murmur of admiration from all.]

MR. QUIRKE. Now, what do you say?

SERGEANT. *[Pressing his hand.]* Mr. Halvey, you have given us all a lesson. To please you, I will make no information against the boy, *[Shakes him and helps him up.]* I will put back the half-crown in the poor-box next Sunday. *[To FARDY.]* What have you to say to your benefactor?

FARDY. I'm obliged to you, Mr. Halvey. You behaved very decent to me, very decent indeed. I'll never let a word be said against you if I live to be a hundred years.

SERGEANT. *[Wiping eyes with a blue handkerchief.]* I will tell it at the meeting. It will be a great encouragement to them to build up their character. I'll tell it to the priest and he taking the chair — —

HYACINTH. Oh, stop, will you — —

MR. QUIRKE. The chair. It's in the chair he, himself, should be. It's in a chair we will put him now. It's to chair him through the streets we will. Sure he'll be an example and a blessing to the whole of the town. *[Seizes HALVEY and seats him in chair.]* Now, Sergeant, give a hand. Here. Fardy.

[They all lift the chair with HALVEY in it, wildly protesting.]

MR. QUIRKE. Come along now to the court-house. Three cheers for Hyacinth Halvey! Hip! hip! hoora!

[Cheers heard in the distance as the curtain drops.]

THE GAZING GLOBE

BY

EUGENE PILLOT

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EUGENE PILLOT

Eugene Pillot, one of the well-known contemporary writers of one-act plays, was born in Houston, Texas. He was educated in the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts, at the University of Texas, at Cornell University, and at Harvard University. While at Harvard, he participated in the activities of The 47 Workshop.

Mr. Pillot's one-act plays are always characterized by excellent and well-sustained technic. Among his best-known one-act plays are *The Gazing Globe*, *Two Crooks and a Lady*, *Telephone Number One* (a prize play), *Hunger*, and *My Lady Dreams*. Mr. Pillot's plays have been produced frequently in schools and Little Theatres of America.

The Gazing Globe originally appeared in *The Stratford Journal*, and was first produced by the Boston Community Players, February 26, 1920, with the following cast: ZAMA, Rosalie Manning; OHANO, Beulah Auerbach; and NIJO, Eugene Pillot. *The Gazing Globe* has unusually sustained tone and dramatic suspense.

CHARACTERS

ZAMA

OHANO

NIJO

THE GAZING GLOBE

SCENE: *A soft cream-colored room, bare walled and unfurnished except for dull-blue grass mats on the floor and brilliant cushions. In the centre of rear wall is a great circular window with a dais before it, so that it may be used as a doorway. A gathered shade of soft blue silk covers the opening of the window.*

PLACE: *An island in a southern sea.*

TIME: *Not so long ago.*

[The curtain rises on an empty stage. ZAMA, an old servant woman dressed in dull purples and grays, hurries in from the right. She stops at centre stage and glances about searchingly, then calls in a weazen voice.

ZAMA. Ohano—Ohano! Where do you be, child?

[Listens, looks about, sees drawn shade at the rear, and sighs as she goes to it and starts to raise it.

[As the shade rolls out of sight we see through the open window a bit of quaint cliff garden that overlooks a sea of green. The rocks are higher on the left, near the window, where a purple-pink vine in full blossom has started to climb. At the right the rocks slope down to the sea. At centre, stone steps lead up to a slender stone pedestal that holds a gazing globe, now a brilliant gold in the late afternoon sunlight. OHANO, with hands clasped round the globe, is gazing at it. She is a woman of the early twenties, beautiful and gowned in a flowing kimono-like robe of green with embroideries of white and blue.

ZAMA. *[In a chiding, motherly way.]* Ohano, my child, you must not be so much at that evil ball! How many times be I not telling you it is an *enchanted* ball?

OHANO. Yes, Zama, I hope it is enchanted. I've tried every other means to gain the way to my heart's desire—and they've all failed me. The story these islanders have woven round this gazing globe may be but a myth—but if it shows me the way to my freedom, I shall not have looked at it in vain.

ZAMA. Be you forgetting, child, 'tis said that evil ball shows only the way to destruction!

OHANO. Yes, these island people will create any myth, go any length, to keep one thinking, living in their narrow way. You are destined for evil if you try to follow the urge of your own heart—oh, yes, I know.

ZAMA. But *your* heart, child, should only be wanting the love of Nijo.

OHANO. Nijo—I am hoping that he will be big enough to help me—but my lover has been away so long— —

ZAMA. But to-day he be coming back—I came to tell you I think I saw his boat— —

OHANO. Nijo's boat? Where?

ZAMA. It be near the edge of the island just where— —

OHANO. Why didn't you tell me before?

ZAMA. I came to—but I be forgetting when I see you at that evil ball again.

OHANO. [*All eagerness.*] Perhaps we can see him land—from here on the rocks—come, Zama, I hear the sound of voices down near the sea—come! [*They climb to the highest rock.*] Look, Zama, the boat is there! Already there in the green water against the shore!

ZAMA. It do seem to be so.

[*Peers toward right.*]

OHANO. And *there*—is Nijo!

ZAMA. Where, where, child?

OHANO. There—see, he's just coming ashore—oh, Nijo! And look, Zama, look what the people crowding round him have done—look!

ZAMA. What? My poor eyes be yet uncertain. What do they be doing to your lover?

OHANO. They have put upon him the Robe of Flame—to greet him with the highest honor of the island.

ZAMA. So they be. The robe they say the gods themselves did wear when time did first begin. Nijo must come back a great warrior now—a great warrior!

OHANO. Oh, how wonderful to return from the wars like that! Zama, I want to—I *must* go out into the world and do great things too, like Nijo.

ZAMA. Nijo be coming back, child. That do be enough. Look, what is it that glitters so in the sun?

OHANO. Why, they are giving something to my red god—something that's long as a serpent moon—see, he holds it out in admiration, before him. Just what can it be?

ZAMA. In faith I do believe they have given your hero—a sword!

OHANO. A marvellous sword—look, its jewels flash with the shifting lights, warm as the colored rifts of sunset!

ZAMA. Such gems do be a tribute to his greatness, Ohano, they do.

OHANO. How gladly would I have the way I seek without such tribute—how willingly!

ZAMA. And now the crowd do be parting—he leaves the boat and he looks this way, Ohano—he looks!

OHANO. Nijo, my red wonder of the world!

ZAMA. See, he mounts his steed—he waves to you!

OHANO. Nijo! Nijo!

ZAMA. And now he rides off to come to you here. It is better we be waiting inside for him—when he brings back his love to his promised bride.

OHANO. [*As they enter room.*] Ah, Zama, he must bring me more than love this time—much more. Yes, your little Ohano must have more in her life to-day than just love—and Nijo must show her the way to that realm where she may stretch her soul and *live*!

ZAMA. The love of so great a man do be enough for any woman, child.

OHANO. Oh, no—oh, no—

ZAMA. But it do be; and evil will fall, I know, if you do be asking more than love!

OHANO. But I tell you, Nijo's love is not enough. I must have a bigger, greater thing!

ZAMA. The gods do know of none that be more than love.

OHANO. But there must be, else why would I feel the rush of its pulse within my veins? Why would my whole being cry out for action and the glory of doing big things in the lands across the sea? Why, tell me why, I would feel those things if they were not so?

ZAMA. It be not for me to say, child; but I do be thinking you moon at that evil ball too much. It do make your sight grow red! It be not wise to know an enchanted thing so well.

OHANO. If that gazing globe in the garden would only show me the way to my heart's desire, how gladly would I be the victim of its enchantment!

ZAMA. Nijo's kiss do be your enchantment, child. One touch of his lips and you do be forgetting all else.

OHANO. If Nijo's kiss can make me forget this fever within me, I want his kiss as I shall never want anything else in all of this life. I want it!!

[Approaching horse's hoofs are heard from off right.]

ZAMA. Listen – the horse! Ohano, your lover do be coming!

OHANO. *[Running to the window.]* Already? He must have taken the short way through the cliffs.

ZAMA. Ah, child, do you not be excited as a bird in a storm-wind's blow?

OHANO. *[Superbly, as she leans against window.]* Yes, I await my hero!

ZAMA. He's stopped, child! He do be here! At last he comes back to my little Ohano!

OHANO. My hope comes! *[With outstretched arms to right.]* My Nijo!! Oh – —!

[She had impulsively started to greet NIJO, but suddenly shrinks back.]

ZAMA. What do be wrong – what?

OHANO. He's so different – so changed – oh, here he is – ssh!

[NIJO appears at the window, where he pauses for a moment. He is a tall, brunette man, scarcely thirty – a handsome, well-knit southern island type, wearing a flowing robe of flame, with a flaring collar of old-gold brocade. A peaked hat completes the costume. A curved sword, with a hilt thickly studded with large jewels and incased in gold, hangs at his belt. He seems worldly weary and sad as he advances into the room.]

OHANO. Nijo!

NIJO. *[Unimpassioned.]* Ohano.

OHANO. *[Eagerly.]* You have come back!

NIJO. Yes – and the season of the heat has been gracious to your health, I hope?

OHANO. Yes – and yours, Nijo?

NIJO. The same.

OHANO. Oh, I am glad—glad as tree-blossoms for the kiss of spring. And Zama here shares my welcome, don't you?

NIJO. [*Recognizing ZAMA.*] Ah, Zama.

ZAMA. [*Bowing before him.*] The gods do be kind to bring back a hero to us.

NIJO. Thank you.

ZAMA. Now I do be going for refreshments for your weariness; great it must be after so long a voyage.

[*Exits right.*]

OHANO. Shall we not sit here?

NIJO. As you will.

[*OHANO and NIJO sit upon mats near the window, partly facing each other.*]

OHANO. They—they gave you a sword at the boat.

NIJO. [*Wearily.*] Oh, yes.

OHANO. Even from up here we could see its jewels flash.

NIJO. [*Without interest.*] Yes, it is cunningly conceived.

OHANO. How wonderful it must be. Perhaps—I may see it?

NIJO. [*Still wearily.*] If you so desire.

[*Unbuckles sword and holds it before himself for her to examine. She leans over it admiringly, touching the jewels as she speaks of them.*]

OHANO. Magnificent! Rubies and emeralds and sapphires! And here are moonstones and diamonds. How you must prize it.

NIJO. [*Wearily.*] Of course, one must.

OHANO. And the very people who tried to stop you from going across the sea to win your glory have given it to you.

NIJO. That is the way of the world.

OHANO. Show me the way to glory, Nijo.

NIJO. And why?

OHANO. I would travel it too.

NIJO. You – a simple island maiden?

OHANO. I'm not simple. I've grown beyond the people here.

NIJO. But there is glory in the work women must do at home.

OHANO. And I have done my share of it. I want bigger work now – out in the world.

NIJO. But the simple tasks must be done.

OHANO. I am sick unto death of doing them!

NIJO. But you can't go into the battles of the world. You are an island woman.

OHANO. This last war has made all women free. If the other island women cling to the everlasting tradition that woman should not go beyond her native hearth, let them cling. I shall reach the summit of things and know the glory of doing big things in the world!

NIJO. But you – sheltered, protected all your life – how can you do it?

OHANO. That's what troubles me. But you were fettered by this island life and you broke through the bars of convention. How did *you* do it?

NIJO. [*Sadly.*] Ohano, I would not spoil your life by telling you.

OHANO. Spoil it? What do you think is happening to it now? Oh, Nijo, can't you understand I'm stagnating—*dying* in this commonplace island life.

NIJO. I thought that about myself, too, when I started my climb to glory; but scarcely a moon had passed before I realized the loneliness of great heights.

OHANO. [*Tigerishly.*] Are you trying to turn me from my wish—to have all the island's glory for yourself?

NIJO. No, but only the valley people enjoy the sublimity of a mountain.

OHANO. [*Scornfully.*] Ha!

NIJO. Those who reach the top have lost their perspective. All they see are the lonely tops of other mountains.

OHANO. [*Sublimely.*] But they've had the joy of the climb!

NIJO. And worth what—no more than the mist of the sea.

OHANO. Do you think that satisfies me? I want to find out for myself! I only want you to tell me the way to use this spirit that boils within my blood, thirsts for action!

NIJO. That I never will.

OHANO. Oh, what shall I do? I've even implored the sun and the moon! [*Looks toward sea.*] Now I *must* listen to my dreams—my dreams that cry and cry: "Look in the gazing globe! Look in the gazing globe! It will show you the way!" And if it ever does, I'll take that path *no matter where it leads*.

NIJO. My journey only made me want to come back to the haven of your love, Ohano. The amber cup of glory left me athirst to be wrapped in the mantle of your boundless love and warmed with the glow of your heart.

OHANO. [*Surprised.*] Your journey has really led you back to me?

NIJO. [*Sadly.*] You're my only hope. I've been as mad for you as the sea for the moonlight.

OHANO. [*Disturbed.*] But you had fire and impulse when you went away; and now – well, you do still yearn for me?

NIJO. [*Quietly, without passion.*] The hope for your love has been the light of my brain, changing from life to dream, from earth to star.

OHANO. My thirst for glory has been that way; but Zama tells me it is as nothing in the kiss of love. If love has that power, I am willing to forget all else. Kiss me, Nijo!

NIJO. At last my lips will press yours, as the sun flames to an immortal moment when it meets the sky.

[*Kneeling opposite each other, their lips meet. OHANO instantly gives a piercing scream and recoils from him. NIJO sinks into a heap.*]

OHANO. [*Rising and turning toward the sea, weeping.*] Oh, oh, oh!

ZAMA. [*Rushing in from right.*] What is it? What is it, Ohano?

OHANO. [*Still weeping.*] Oh – ooh.

ZAMA. What do it be, my little Ohano?

OHANO. [*Turning.*] His kiss – Nijo's kiss!

ZAMA. Yes?

OHANO. Cold as white marble – *cold!*

ZAMA. Cold as white marble?

OHANO. Oh, Nijo, why do you kiss me like a thing of stone?

NIJO. [*As he looks up, pitifully.*] Into that kiss I tried to put all the love I've thought these many years.

OHANO. The love you've *thought?*

NIJO. [*Despondently.*] Yes, I've only thought it — *thought* it!

OHANO. But your heart — — ?

NIJO. [*Rising.*] My heart feels no more! Only my head thinks.

ZAMA. You love no more?

NIJO. Only with my head, it seems. I see things, know things, understand things; but I no longer feel anything. And my thirst for glory has done it all — killed my love of life and turned my very kiss to stone. Oh, glory, why do men give the essence of their lives to you — you who last no longer than the glow of gold above the place of sunset!

OHANO. [*Superbly.*] Because glory gives you the world — everything!

NIJO. It takes everything away — strips you — and leaves you nothing to believe. Oh, I could have become a common soldier here, marching shoulder to shoulder with the island men going out to war — but no — I must be a great warrior, a hero in position. Had I known then what I know now, how gladly would I have gone as one of the thousands who are known as — just soldiers. They are the ones who know the throb of life and love!

OHANO. You bring back such a message to me? You who have climbed and climbed to heights till I have believed you to be as constant in your quest as the light that shines upon the gazing globe?

NIJO. I — a light?

OHANO. Why not? I've always likened your feet unto the disks of two luminaries, lighting the way for all the world to follow. [*Looks at gazing globe, which is now a ball of gold against the black sea and sky.*] And now you tell me I was wrong. Perhaps the light upon the gazing globe itself is the only one to follow.

NIJO. I — a light? Why, Ohano, if I'm anything, I'm a gazing globe!

OHANO. What do you mean — you a gazing globe?

NIJO. That without I'm all fair, all wonderful—but within I'm empty as a gazing globe.

OHANO. [*Scornfully.*] But a gazing globe shows men the way to their heart's desire.

NIJO. It reflects to men what they see into it. So does glory.

OHANO. I can't believe that—now.

NIJO. Behold what it has done to me! Already as a child I gazed at that globe, longing to grasp the glory of which it was a symbol. It filled me with a red madness, surged with an unbearable music, giving me a riotous pain! Oh, it made me drunk for the wine of glory!

OHANO. I know! I know! Now you talk as the man I thought you were.

NIJO. I'm not a man. I'm dead.

OHANO. But you have known the glory of life. Shall I never know the way to it? [*Appealingly, to the globe.*] The way—the way is what I seek!

ZAMA. Look not so upon the evil ball, child. It do be enchanted for one thousand years! [*OHANO moves nearer the globe.*] Go not so near, child! Evil will fall—and you will be enslaved!

OHANO. What care I, if it shows me the way?

[*Hands outstretched to the globe.*]

ZAMA. [*Appealingly to NIJO.*] Sir, I pray you do be stopping her. She do be always gazing at that golden ball; and slowly it do be drawing her within its enchanted grasp. And it do be an enchanted ball!

NIJO. Perhaps there's more to its enchantment than I thought. It claimed me for a victim—and now it's freezing her life's warmth to the falseness of Orient pearl.

OHANO. [*Murmuring to the globe.*] The way—the way! I must have the way!

NIJO. [*Swiftly drawing his sword.*] I will not show you—but I'll save you!

[*Starts toward the gazing globe.*

ZAMA. [*Barring his path.*] Nijo, sir, what do you be doing?

NIJO. [*With a flourish of his sword.*] I kill the thing that freezes another heart!

ZAMA. That do mean ruin! It be an enchanted ball!

NIJO. [*Brushing past ZAMA.*] It will enchant no longer!!

OHANO. No! No, Nijo!

NIJO. [*Running up pedestal steps.*] Yes!!

[*With a mighty blow he strikes the gazing globe with his sword. Frightened, OHANO shrinks to one side, facing right, as a thunder-like crash follows the blow, and pieces of the globe tumble to the ground—all but one piece that remains upon the pedestal. Then from a moon off stage right shines a straight golden path across the sea to the bit of gazing globe on the pedestal.*

OHANO. [*Triumphantly.*] The moon—The way! At last the way! From the gazing globe—the golden path to the moon of glory. Now I am free!

[*Rushes wildly down the moonlight path to the sea.*

ZAMA. Stop her!

NIJO. No, it is better to let her go.

ZAMA. But the path do lead into the sea. It is death! Stop her!!

[*Starts forward.*

NIJO. [*Restraining ZAMA.*] No! In death her soul has found the only way!

CURTAIN

THE BOOR

BY

ANTON TCHEKOV

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ANTON TCHEKOV

Anton Tchekov, considered the foremost of contemporary Russian dramatists, was born in 1860 at Taganrog, Russia. In 1880 he was graduated from the Medical School of the University of Moscow. Ill health soon compelled him to abandon his practice of medicine, and in 1887 he sought the south. In 1904, the year of the successful appearance of his *Cherry Orchard*, he died in a village of the Black Forest in Germany.

As a dramatist, Tchekov has with deliberate intent cast off much of the conventionalities of dramatic technic. In his longer plays especially, like *The Sea Gull*, *Uncle Vanya*, and *Cherry Orchard*, he somewhat avoids obvious struggles, time-worn commonplaces, well-prepared climaxes, and seeks rather to spread out a panoramic canvas for our contemplation. His chief aim is to show us humanity as he sees it. It is his interest in humanity that gives him so high rank as a dramatist.

His one-act plays, a form of drama unusually apt for certain intimate aspects of Russian peasant life, are more regular in their technic than his longer plays. Among the five or six shorter plays that Tchekov wrote, *The Boor* and *A Marriage Proposal* are his best. In these plays he shows the lighter side of Russian country life, infusing some of the spirit of the great Gogol into his broad and somewhat farcical character portrayals. With rare good grace, in these plays he appears to be asking us to throw aside our restraint and laugh with him at the stupidity and naïveté, as well as good-heartedness, of the Russian people he knew so well.

The Boor is a remarkably well-constructed one-act play, and is probably the finest one-act play of the Russian school of drama.

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

HELENA IVANOVNA POPOV, *a young widow, mistress of a country estate*

GRIGORI STEPANOVITCH SMIRNOV, *proprietor of a country estate*

LUKA, *servant of MRS. POPOV*

A gardener. A coachman. Several workmen.

THE BOOR

TIME: *The present.*

SCENE: *A well-furnished reception-room in MRS. POPOV'S home. MRS. POPOV is discovered in deep mourning, sitting upon a sofa, gazing steadfastly at a photograph. LUKA is also present.*

LUKA. It isn't right, ma'am. You're wearing yourself out! The maid and the cook have gone looking for berries; everything that breathes is enjoying life; even the cat knows how to be happy – slips about the courtyard and catches birds – but you hide yourself here in the house as though you were in a cloister. Yes, truly, by actual reckoning you haven't left this house for a whole year.

MRS. POPOV. And I shall never leave it – why should I? My life is over. He lies in his grave, and I have buried myself within these four walls. We are both dead.

LUKA. There you are again! It's too awful to listen to, so it is! Nikolai Michailovitch is dead; it was the will of the Lord, and the Lord has given him eternal peace. You have grieved over it and that ought to be enough. Now it's time to stop. One can't weep and wear mourning forever! My wife died a few years ago. I grieved for her. I wept a whole month – and then it was over. Must one be forever singing lamentations? That would be more than your husband was worth! [*He sighs.*] You have forgotten all your neighbors. You don't go out and you receive no one. We live – you'll pardon me – like the

spiders, and the good light of day we never see. All the livery is eaten by the mice – as though there weren't any more nice people in the world! But the whole neighborhood is full of gentlefolk. The regiment is stationed in Riblov – officers – simply beautiful! One can't see enough of them! Every Friday a ball, and military music every day. Oh, my dear, dear ma'am, young and pretty as you are, if you'd only let your spirits live –! Beauty can't last forever. When ten short years are over, you'll be glad enough to go out a bit and meet the officers – and then it'll be too late.

MRS. POPOV. [*Resolutely.*] Please don't speak of these things again. You know very well that since the death of Nikolai Michailovitch my life is absolutely nothing to me. You think I live, but it only seems so. Do you understand? Oh, that his departed soul may see how I love him! I know, it's no secret to you; he was often unjust toward me, cruel, and – he wasn't faithful, but I shall be faithful to the grave and prove to him how *I* can love. There, in the Beyond, he'll find me the same as I was until his death.

LUKA. What is the use of all these words, when you'd so much rather go walking in the garden or order Toby or Welikan harnessed to the trap, and visit the neighbors?

MRS. POPOV. [*Weeping.*] Oh!

LUKA. Madam, dear madam, what is it? In Heaven's name!

MRS. POPOV. He loved Toby so! He always drove him to the Kortschagins or the Vlassovs. What a wonderful horse-man he was! How fine he looked when he pulled at the reins with all his might! Toby, Toby – give him an extra measure of oats to-day!

LUKA. Yes, ma'am.

[*A bell rings loudly.*]

MRS. POPOV. [*Shudders.*] What's that? I am at home to no one.

LUKA. Yes, ma'am. [*He goes out, centre.*]

MRS. POPOV. [*Gazing at the photograph.*] You shall see, Nikolai, how I can love and forgive! My love will die only with me – when

my poor heart stops beating. [*She smiles through her tears.*] And aren't you ashamed? I have been a good, true wife; I have imprisoned myself and I shall remain true until death, and you – you – you're not ashamed of yourself, my dear monster! You quarrelled with me, left me alone for weeks – –

[LUKA enters in great excitement.

LUKA. Oh, ma'am, some one is asking for you, insists on seeing you – –

MRS. POPOV. You told him that since my husband's death I receive no one?

LUKA. I said so, but he won't listen; he says it is a pressing matter.

MRS. POPOV. I receive no one!

LUKA. I told him that, but he's a wild man; he swore and pushed himself into the room; he's in the dining-room now.

MRS. POPOV. [*Excitedly.*] Good. Show him in. The impudent – –!

[LUKA goes out, centre.

MRS. POPOV. What a bore people are! What can they want with me? Why do they disturb my peace? [*She sighs.*] Yes, it is clear I must enter a convent. [*Meditatively.*] Yes, a convent.

[SMIRNOV enters, followed by LUKA.

SMIRNOV. [To LUKA.] Fool, you make too much noise! You're an ass! [*Discovering MRS. POPOV – politely.*] Madam, I have the honor to introduce myself: Lieutenant in the Artillery, retired, country gentleman, Grigori Stepanovitch Smirnov! I'm compelled to bother you about an exceedingly important matter.

MRS. POPOV. [*Without offering her hand.*] What is it you wish?

SMIRNOV. Your deceased husband, with whom I had the honor to be acquainted, left me two notes amounting to about twelve hundred roubles. Inasmuch as I have to pay the interest to-morrow

on a loan from the Agrarian Bank, I should like to request, madam, that you pay me the money to-day.

MRS. POPOV. Twelve hundred—and for what was my husband indebted to you?

SMIRNOV. He bought oats from me.

MRS. POPOV. [*With a sigh, to LUKA.*] Don't forget to give Toby an extra measure of oats.

[*LUKA goes out.*]

MRS. POPOV. [*To SMIRNOV.*] If Nikolai Michailovitch is indebted to you, I shall, of course, pay you, but I am sorry, I haven't the money to-day. To-morrow my manager will return from the city and I shall notify him to pay you what is due you, but until then I cannot satisfy your request. Furthermore, to-day it is just seven months since the death of my husband, and I am not in a mood to discuss money matters.

SMIRNOV. And I am in the mood to fly up the chimney with my feet in the air if I can't lay hands on that interest to-morrow. They'll seize my estate!

MRS. POPOV. Day after to-morrow you will receive the money.

SMIRNOV. I don't need the money day after to-morrow; I need it to-day.

MRS. POPOV. I'm sorry I can't pay you to-day.

SMIRNOV. And I can't wait until day after to-morrow.

MRS. POPOV. But what can I do if I haven't it?

SMIRNOV. So you can't pay?

MRS. POPOV. I cannot.

SMIRNOV. Hm! Is that your last word?

MRS. POPOV. My last.

SMIRNOV. Absolutely?

MRS. POPOV. Absolutely.

SMIRNOV. Thank you. [*He shrugs his shoulders.*] And they expect me to stand for all that. The toll-gatherer just now met me in the road and asked me why I was always worrying. Why, in Heaven's name, shouldn't I worry? I need money, I feel the knife at my throat. Yesterday morning I left my house in the early dawn and called on all my debtors. If even one of them had paid his debt! I worked the skin off my fingers! The devil knows in what sort of Jew-inn I slept; in a room with a barrel of brandy! And now at last I come here, seventy versts from home, hope for a little money, and all you give me is moods! Why shouldn't I worry?

MRS. POPOV. I thought I made it plain to you that my manager will return from town, and then you will get your money.

SMIRNOV. I did not come to see the manager; I came to see you. What the devil – pardon the language – do I care for your manager?

MRS. POPOV. Really, sir, I am not used to such language or such manners. I shan't listen to you any further.

[*She goes out, left.*]

SMIRNOV. What can one say to that? Moods! Seven months since her husband died! Do I have to pay the interest or not? I repeat the question, have I to pay the interest or not? The husband is dead and all that; the manager is – the devil with him! – travelling somewhere. Now, tell me, what am I to do? Shall I run away from my creditors in a balloon? Or knock my head against a stone wall? If I call on Grusdev he chooses to be "not at home," Iroschevitch has simply hidden himself, I have quarrelled with Kurzin and came near throwing him out of the window, Masutov is ill and this woman has – moods! Not one of them will pay up! And all because I've spoiled them, because I'm an old whiner, dish-rag! I'm too tender-hearted with them. But wait! I allow nobody to play tricks with me, the devil with 'em all! I'll stay here and not budge until she pays! Brrr! How angry I am, how terribly angry I am! Every tendon is

trembling with anger, and I can hardly breathe! I'm even growing ill! [*He calls out.*] Servant!

[LUKA *enters.*

LUKA. What is it you wish?

SMIRNOV. Bring me Kvas or water! [LUKA *goes out.*] Well, what can we do? She hasn't it on hand? What sort of logic is that? A fellow stands with the knife at his throat, he needs money, he is on the point of hanging himself, and she won't pay because she isn't in the mood to discuss money matters. Woman's logic! That's why I never liked to talk to women, and why I dislike doing it now. I would rather sit on a powder barrel than talk with a woman. Brr! — I'm getting cold as ice; this affair has made me so angry. I need only to see such a romantic creature from a distance to get so angry that I have cramps in the calves! It's enough to make one yell for help!

[*Enter* LUKA.

LUKA. [*Hands him water.*] Madam is ill and is not receiving.

SMIRNOV. March! [LUKA *goes out.*] Ill and isn't receiving! All right, it isn't necessary. I won't receive, either! I'll sit here and stay until you bring that money. If you're ill a week, I'll sit here a week. If you're ill a year, I'll sit here a year. As Heaven is my witness, I'll get the money. You don't disturb me with your mourning—or with your dimples. We know these dimples! [*He calls out the window.*] Simon, unharness! We aren't going to leave right away. I am going to stay here. Tell them in the stable to give the horses some oats. The left horse has twisted the bridle again. [*Imitating him.*] Stop! I'll show you how. Stop! [*Leaves window.*] It's awful. Unbearable heat, no money, didn't sleep last night and now —mourning-dresses with moods. My head aches; perhaps I ought to have a drink. Ye-s, I must have a drink. [*Calling.*] Servant!

LUKA. What do you wish?

SMIRNOV. Something to drink! [LUKA *goes out.* SMIRNOV *sits down and looks at his clothes.*] Ugh, a fine figure! No use denying that. Dust, dirty boots, unwashed, uncombed, straw on my vest—the lady

probably took me for a highwayman. [*He yawns.*] It was a little impolite to come into a reception-room with such clothes. Oh, well, no harm done. I'm not here as a guest. I'm a creditor. And there is no special costume for creditors.

LUKA. [*Entering with glass.*] You take great liberty, sir.

SMIRNOV. [*Angrily.*] What?

LUKA. I—I—I just— —

SMIRNOV. Whom are you talking to? Keep quiet.

LUKA. [*Angrily.*] Nice mess! This fellow won't leave!

[*He goes out.*]

SMIRNOV. Lord, how angry I am! Angry enough to throw mud at the whole world! I even feel ill! Servant!

[*MRS. POPOV comes in with downcast eyes.*]

MRS. POPOV. Sir, in my solitude I have become unaccustomed to the human voice and I cannot stand the sound of loud talking. I beg you, please to cease disturbing my rest.

SMIRNOV. Pay me my money and I'll leave.

MRS. POPOV. I told you once, plainly, in your native tongue, that I haven't the money at hand; wait until day after to-morrow.

SMIRNOV. And I also had the honor of informing you in your native tongue that I need the money, not day after to-morrow, but to-day. If you don't pay me to-day I shall have to hang myself to-morrow.

MRS. POPOV. But what can I do if I haven't the money?

SMIRNOV. So you are not going to pay immediately? You're not?

MRS. POPOV. I cannot.

SMIRNOV. Then I'll sit here until I get the money. [*He sits down.*] You will pay day after to-morrow? Excellent! Here I stay until day after to-morrow. [*Jumps up.*] I ask you, do I have to pay that interest to-morrow or not? Or do you think I'm joking?

MRS. POPOV. Sir, I beg of you, don't scream! This is not a stable.

SMIRNOV. I'm not talking about stables, I'm asking you whether I have to pay that interest to-morrow or not?

MRS. POPOV. You have no idea how to treat a lady.

SMIRNOV. Oh, yes, I have.

MRS. POPOV. No, you have not. You are an ill-bred, vulgar person! Respectable people don't speak so to ladies.

SMIRNOV. How remarkable! How do you want one to speak to you? In French, perhaps! Madame, je vous prie! Pardon me for having disturbed you. What beautiful weather we are having to-day! And how this mourning becomes you!

[*He makes a low bow with mock ceremony.*]

MRS. POPOV. Not at all funny! I think it vulgar!

SMIRNOV. [*Imitating her.*] Not at all funny—vulgar! I don't understand how to behave in the company of ladies. Madam, in the course of my life I have seen more women than you have sparrows. Three times have I fought duels for women, twelve I jilted and nine jilted me. There was a time when I played the fool, used honeyed language, bowed and scraped. I loved, suffered, sighed to the moon, melted in love's torments. I loved passionately, I loved to madness, loved in every key, chattered like a magpie on emancipation, sacrificed half my fortune in the tender passion, until now the devil knows I've had enough of it. Your obedient servant will let you lead him around by the nose no more. Enough! Black eyes, passionate eyes, coral lips, dimples in cheeks, moonlight whispers, soft, modest sighs—for all that, madam, I wouldn't pay a kopeck! I am not speaking of present company, but of women in general; from the tiniest to the greatest, they are conceited, hypocritical, chattering, odious, deceitful from top to toe; vain, petty, cruel with a

maddening logic and [*he strikes his forehead*] in this respect, please excuse my frankness, but one sparrow is worth ten of the aforementioned petticoat-philosophers. When one sees one of the romantic creatures before him he imagines he is looking at some holy being, so wonderful that its one breath could dissolve him in a sea of a thousand charms and delights; but if one looks into the soul—it's nothing but a common crocodile. [*He seizes the arm-chair and breaks it in two.*] But the worst of all is that this crocodile imagines it is a masterpiece of creation, and that it has a monopoly on all the tender passions. May the devil hang me upside down if there is anything to love about a woman! When she is in love, all she knows is how to complain and shed tears. If the man suffers and makes sacrifices she swings her train about and tries to lead him by the nose. You have the misfortune to be a woman, and naturally you know woman's nature; tell me on your honor, have you ever in your life seen a woman who was really true and faithful? Never! Only the old and the deformed are true and faithful. It's easier to find a cat with horns or a white woodcock, than a faithful woman.

MRS. POPOV. But allow me to ask, who is true and faithful in love? The man, perhaps?

SMIRNOV. Yes, indeed! The man!

MRS. POPOV. The man! [*She laughs sarcastically.*] The man true and faithful in love! Well, that is something *new*! [*Bitterly.*] How can you make such a statement? Men true and faithful! So long as we have gone thus far, I may as well say that of all the men I have known, my husband was the best; I loved him passionately with all my soul, as only a young, sensible woman may love; I gave him my youth, my happiness, my fortune, my life. I worshipped him like a heathen. And what happened? This best of men betrayed me in every possible way. After his death I found his desk filled with love-letters. While he was alive he left me alone for months—it is horrible even to think about it—he made love to other women in my very presence, he wasted my money and made fun of my feelings—and in spite of everything I trusted him and was true to him. And more than that: he is dead and I am still true to him. I have buried myself within these four walls and I shall wear this mourning to my grave.

SMIRNOV. [*Laughing disrespectfully.*] Mourning! What on earth do you take me for? As if I didn't know why you wore this black domino and why you buried yourself within these four walls. Such a secret! So romantic! Some knight will pass the castle, gaze up at the windows, and think to himself: "Here dwells the mysterious Tamara who, for love of her husband, has buried herself within four walls." Oh, I understand the art!

MRS. POPOV. [*Springing up.*] What? What do you mean by saying such things to me?

SMIRNOV. You have buried yourself alive, but meanwhile you have not forgotten to powder your nose!

MRS. POPOV. How dare you speak so?

SMIRNOV. Don't scream at me, please; I'm not the manager. Allow me to call things by their right names. I am not a woman, and I am accustomed to speak out what I think. So please don't scream.

MRS. POPOV. I'm not screaming. It is you who are screaming. Please leave me, I beg of you.

SMIRNOV. Pay me my money and I'll leave.

MRS. POPOV. I won't give you the money.

SMIRNOV. You won't? You won't give me my money?

MRS. POPOV. I don't care what you do. You won't get a kopeck! Leave me!

SMIRNOV. As I haven't the pleasure of being either your husband or your fiancé, please don't make a scene. [*He sits down.*] I can't stand it.

MRS. POPOV. [*Breathing hard.*] You are going to sit down?

SMIRNOV. I already have.

MRS. POPOV. Kindly leave the house!

SMIRNOV. Give me the money.

MRS. POPOV. I don't care to speak with impudent men. Leave!
[*Pause.*] You aren't going?

SMIRNOV. No.

MRS. POPOV. No?

SMIRNOV. No.

MRS. POPOV. Very well.

[*She rings the bell.*

[*Enter* LUKA.

MRS. POPOV. Luka, show the gentleman out.

LUKA. [*Going to* SMIRNOV.] Sir, why don't you leave when you are ordered? What do you want?

SMIRNOV. [*Jumping up.*] Whom do you think you are talking to? I'll grind you to powder.

LUKA. [*Puts his hand to his heart.*] Good Lord! [*He drops into a chair.*] Oh, I'm ill; I can't breathe!

MRS. POPOV. Where is Dascha? [*Calling.*] Dascha! Pelageja! Dascha!

[*She rings.*

LUKA. They're all gone! I'm ill! Water!

MRS. POPOV. [*To* SMIRNOV.] Leave! Get out!

SMIRNOV. Kindly be a little more polite!

MRS. POPOV. [*Striking her fists and stamping her feet.*] You are vulgar! You're a boor! A monster!

SMIRNOV. What did you say?

MRS. POPOV. I said you were a boor, a monster!

SMIRNOV. [*Steps toward her quickly.*] Permit me to ask what right you have to insult me?

MRS. POPOV. What of it? Do you think I am afraid of you?

SMIRNOV. And you think that because you are a romantic creature you can insult me without being punished? I challenge you!

LUKA. Merciful Heaven! Water!

SMIRNOV. We'll have a duel.

MRS. POPOV. Do you think because you have big fists and a steer's neck I am afraid of you?

SMIRNOV. I allow no one to insult me, and I make no exception because you are a woman, one of the "weaker sex"!

MRS. POPOV. [*Trying to cry him down.*] Boor, boor, boor!

SMIRNOV. It is high time to do away with the old superstition that it is only the man who is forced to give satisfaction. If there is equity at all let there be equity in all things. There's a limit!

MRS. POPOV. You wish to fight a duel? Very well.

SMIRNOV. Immediately.

MRS. POPOV. Immediately. My husband had pistols. I'll bring them. [*She hurries away, then turns.*] Oh, what a pleasure it will be to put a bullet in your impudent head. The devil take you!

[*She goes out.*]

SMIRNOV. I'll shoot her down! I'm no fledgling, no sentimental young puppy. For me there is no weaker sex!

LUKA. Oh, sir. [*Falls to his knees.*] Have mercy on me, an old man, and go away. You have frightened me to death already, and now you want to fight a duel.

SMIRNOV. [*Paying no attention.*] A duel. That's equity, emancipation. That way the sexes are made equal. I'll shoot her down as a matter of principle. What can a person say to such a woman? [*Imitating her.*] "The devil take you. I'll put a bullet in your impudent head." What can one say to that? She was angry, her eyes blazed, she accepted the challenge. On my honor, it's the first time in my life that I ever saw such a woman.

LUKA. Oh, sir. Go away. Go away!

SMIRNOV. That *is* a woman. I can understand her. A real woman. No shilly-shallying, but fire, powder, and noise! It would be a pity to shoot a woman like that.

LUKA. [*Weeping.*] Oh, sir, go away.

[*Enter MRS. POPOV.*]

MRS. POPOV. Here are the pistols. But before we have our duel, please show me how to shoot. I have never had a pistol in my hand before!

LUKA. God be merciful and have pity upon us! I'll go and get the gardener and the coachman. Why has this horror come to us?

[*He goes out.*]

SMIRNOV. [*Looking at the pistols.*] You see, there are different kinds. There are special duelling pistols, with cap and ball. But these are revolvers, Smith & Wesson, with ejectors; fine pistols! A pair like that cost at least ninety roubles. This is the way to hold a revolver. [*Aside.*] Those eyes, those eyes! A real woman!

MRS. POPOV. Like this?

SMIRNOV. Yes, that way. Then you pull the hammer back — so — then you aim — put your head back a little. Just stretch your arm out, please. So — then press your finger on the thing like that, and that is all. The chief thing is this: don't get excited, don't hurry your aim, and take care that your hand doesn't tremble.

MRS. POPOV. It isn't well to shoot inside; let's go into the garden.

SMIRNOV. Yes. I'll tell you now, I am going to shoot into the air.

MRS. POPOV. That is too much! Why?

SMIRNOV. Because—because. That's my business.

MRS. POPOV. You are afraid. Yes. A-h-h-h, No, no, my dear sir, no flinching! Please follow me. I won't rest until I've made a hole in that head I hate so much. Are you afraid?

SMIRNOV. Yes, I'm afraid.

MRS. POPOV. You are lying. Why won't you fight?

SMIRNOV. Because—because—I—like you.

MRS. POPOV. [*With an angry laugh.*] You like me! He dares to say he likes me! [*She points to the door.*] Go.

SMIRNOV. [*Laying the revolver silently on the table, takes his hat and starts. At the door he stops a moment, gazing at her silently, then he approaches her, hesitating.*] Listen! Are you still angry? I was mad as the devil, but please understand me—how can I express myself? The thing is like this—such things are—[*He raises his voice.*] Now, is it my fault that you owe me money? [*Grasps the back of the chair, which breaks.*] The devil knows what breakable furniture you have! I like you! Do you understand? I—I'm almost in love!

MRS. POPOV. Leave! I hate you.

SMIRNOV. Lord! What a woman! I never in my life met one like her. I'm lost, ruined! I've been caught like a mouse in a trap.

MRS. POPOV. Go, or I'll shoot.

SMIRNOV. Shoot! You have no idea what happiness it would be to die in sight of those beautiful eyes, to die from the revolver in this little velvet hand! I'm mad! Consider it and decide immediately, for if I go now, we shall never see each other again. Decide—speak— I am a noble, a respectable man, have an income of ten thousand, can shoot a coin thrown into the air. I own some fine horses. Will you be my wife?

MRS. POPOV. [*Swings the revolver angrily.*] I'll shoot!

SMIRNOV. My mind is not clear—I can't understand. Servant—water! I have fallen in love like any young man. [*He takes her hand and she cries with pain.*] I love you! [*He kneels.*] I love you as I have never loved before. Twelve women I jilted, nine jilted me, but not one of them all have I loved as I love you. I am conquered, lost; I lie at your feet like a fool and beg for your hand. Shame and disgrace! For five years I haven't been in love; I thanked the Lord for it, and now I am caught, like a carriage tongue in another carriage. I beg for your hand! Yes or no? Will you?—Good!

[*He gets up and goes quickly to the door.*]

MRS. POPOV. Wait a moment!

SMIRNOV. [*Stopping.*] Well?

MRS. POPOV. Nothing. You may go. But—wait a moment. No, go on, go on. I hate you. Or—no; don't go. Oh, if you knew how angry I was, how angry! [*She throws the revolver on to the chair.*] My finger is swollen from this thing. [*She angrily tears her handkerchief.*] What are you standing there for? Get out!

SMIRNOV. Farewell!

MRS. POPOV. Yes, go. [*Cries out.*] Why are you going? Wait—no, go!! Oh, how angry I am! Don't come too near, don't come too near—er—come—no nearer.

SMIRNOV. [*Approaching her.*] How angry I am with myself! Fall in love like a schoolboy, throw myself on my knees. I've got a chill! [*Strongly.*] I love you. This is fine—all I needed was to fall in love. To-morrow I have to pay my interest, the hay harvest has begun, and then you appear! [*He takes her in his arms.*] I can never forgive myself.

MRS. POPOV. Go away! Take your hands off me! I hate you—you—this is—

[*A long kiss.*]

[Enter LUKA with an axe, the gardener with a rake, the coachman with a pitchfork, and workmen with poles.]

LUKA. *[Staring at the pair.]* Merciful heavens!

[A long pause.]

MRS. POPOV. *[Dropping her eyes.]* Tell them in the stable that
Tobby isn't to have any oats.

CURTAIN

THE LAST STRAW

BY

BOSWORTH CROCKER

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BOSWORTH CROCKER

Bosworth Crocker was born March 2, 1882, in Surrey, England. While still a child he was brought to the United States. He lives in New York City and may be reached in care of the Society of American Dramatists and Composers, 148 West 45th Street.

In addition to *Pawns of War* and *Stone Walls*, he has written a number of one-act plays, *The Dog*, *The First Time*, *The Cost of a Hat*, *The Hour Before*, *The Baby Carriage*, and *The Last Straw*.

The Last Straw, produced by the Washington Square Players in New York City, is an excellent one-act tragedy, based upon the psychological law of suggestion.

CAST

FRIEDRICH BAUER, *janitor of the Bryn Mawr*

MIENE, *his wife*

KARL, *elder son, aged ten*

FRITZI, *younger son, aged seven*

JIM LANE, *a grocer boy*

THE LAST STRAW

TIME: *The present day.*

SCENE: *The basement of a large apartment-house in New York City.*

SCENE: *The kitchen of the Bauer flat in the basement of the Bryn Mawr. A window at the side gives on an area and shows the walk above and the houses across the street. Opposite the windows is a door to an inner room. Through the outer door, in the centre of the back wall, a dumb-waiter and whistles to tenants can be seen. A broken milk-bottle lies in a puddle of milk on the cement floor in front of the dumb-waiter. To the right of the outer door, a telephone; gas-range on which there are flat-irons heating and vegetables cooking. To the left of the outer door is an old sideboard; over it hangs a picture of Schiller. Near the centre of the room, a little to the right, stands a kitchen table with four chairs around it. Ironing-board is placed between the kitchen table and the sink, a basket of dampened clothes under it. A large calendar on the wall. An alarm-clock on the window-sill. Time: a little before noon. The telephone rings; MRS. BAUER leaves her ironing and goes to answer it.*

MRS. BAUER. No, Mr. Bauer's out yet. *[She listens through the transmitter.]* Thank you, Mrs. Mohler. *[Another pause.]* I'll tell him just so soon he comes in — yes, ma'am.

[MRS. BAUER goes back to her ironing. Grocer boy rushes into basement, whistling; he puts down his basket, goes up to MRS. BAUER'S door and looks in.]

LANE. Say — where's the boss?

MRS. BAUER. He'll be home soon, I — hope — Jim. What you want?

[He stands looking at her with growing sympathy.]

LANE. Nothin'. Got a rag 'round here? Dumb-waiter's all wet.... Lot of groceries for Sawyers.

MRS. BAUER. *[Without lifting her eyes, mechanically hands him a mop which hangs beside the door.]* Here.

LANE. What's the matter?

MRS. BAUER. *[Dully.]* Huh?

LANE. *[Significantly.]* Oh, I know.

MRS. BAUER. What you know?

LANE. About the boss. [MRS. BAUER *looks distressed.*] Heard your friends across the street talkin'.

MRS. BAUER. [*Bitterly.*] Friends!

LANE. Rotten trick to play on the boss, all right, puttin' that old maid up to get him pinched.

MRS. BAUER. [*Absently.*] Was she an old maid?

LANE. The cruelty-to-animals woman over there [*waves his hand*]—regular old crank. Nies put her up to it all right.

MRS. BAUER. I guess it was his old woman. Nies ain't so bad. She's the one. Because my two boys dress up a little on Sunday, she don't like it.

LANE. Yes, she's sore because the boys told her the boss kicks their dog.

MRS. BAUER. He don't do nothin' of the sort—jus' drives it 'way from the garbage-pails—that's all. We coulda had that dog took up long ago—they ain't got no license. But Fritz—he's so easy—he jus' takes it out chasin' the dog and hollerin'.

LANE. That ain't no way. He ought to make the dog holler—good and hard—once; then it'd keep out of here.

MRS. BAUER. Don't you go to talkin' like that 'round my man. Look at all this trouble we're in on account of a stray cat.

LANE. I better get busy. They'll be callin' up the store in a minute. That woman's the limit.... Send up the groceries in that slop, she'd send them down again. High-toned people like her ought to keep maids.

[*He mops out the lower shelf of the dumb-waiter, then looks at the broken bottle and the puddle of milk inquiringly.*]

MRS. BAUER. [*Taking the mop away from him.*] I'll clean that up. I forgot—in all this trouble.

LANE. Whose milk?

MRS. BAUER. The Mohlers'. That's how it all happened. Somebody upset their milk on the dumb-waiter and the cat was on the shelf lickin' it up; my man, not noticin', starts the waiter up and the cat tries to jump out; the bottle rolls off and breaks. The cat was hurt awful—caught in the shaft. I don't see how it coulda run after that, but it did—right into the street, right into that woman—Fritz after it. Then it fell over. "You did that?" she says to Fritz. "Yes," he says, "I did that." He didn't say no more, jus' went off, and then after a while they came for him and — — [*She begins to cry softly.*]

LANE. Brace up; they ain't goin' to do anything to him.... [*Comes into kitchen. Hesitatingly.*] Say!... He didn't kick the cat—did he?

MRS. BAUER. Who said so?

LANE. Mrs. Nies—says she saw him from her window.

MRS. BAUER. [*As though to herself.*] I dunno. [*Excitedly.*] Of course he didn't kick that cat. [*Again, as though to herself.*] Fritz is so quick-tempered he mighta kicked it 'fore he knew what he was about. No one'd ever know how good Fritz is unless they lived with him. He never hurt no one and nothing except himself.

LANE. Oh, I'm on to the boss. I never mind his hollerin'.

MRS. BAUER. If you get a chance, bring me some butter for dinner—a pound.

LANE. All right. I'll run over with it in ten or fifteen minutes, soon as I get rid of these orders out here in the wagon.

MRS. BAUER. That'll do.

[*She moves about apathetically, lays the cloth on the kitchen table and begins to set it. LANE goes to the dumb-waiter, whistles up the tube, puts the basket of groceries on the shelf of the dumb-waiter, pulls rope and sends waiter up. MRS. BAUER continues to set the table. Boys from the street suddenly swoop into the basement and yell.*]

CHORUS OF BOY'S VOICES. Who killed the cat! Who killed the cat!

LANE. [*Letting the rope go and making a dive for the boys.*] I'll show you, you — —

[*They rush out, MRS. BAUER stands despairingly in the doorway shaking her clasped hands.*

MRS. BAUER. Those are Nies's boys.

LANE. Regular toughs! Call the cop and have 'em pinched if they don't stop it.

MRS. BAUER. If my man hears them—you know—there'll be more trouble.

LANE. The boss ought to make it hot for them.

MRS. BAUER. Such trouble!

LANE. [*Starts to go.*] Well—luck to the boss.

MRS. BAUER. There ain't no such thing as luck for us.

LANE. Aw, come on....

MRS. BAUER. Everything's against us. First Fritz's mother dies. We named the baby after her—Trude.... Then we lost Trude. That finished Fritz. After that he began this hollerin' business. And now this here trouble—just when things was goin' half-ways decent for the first time. [*She pushes past him and goes to her ironing.*

LANE. [*Shakes his head sympathetically and takes up his basket.*] A pound, you said?

MRS. BAUER. Yes.

LANE. All right. [*He starts off and then rushes back.*] Here's the boss comin', Mrs. Bauer.

[*Rushes off again.*

LANE'S VOICE. [*Cheerfully.*] Hello, there!

BAUER'S VOICE. [*Dull and strained.*] Hello!

[BAUER comes in. His-naturally bright blue eyes are tired and lustreless; his strung frame seems to have lost all vigor and alertness; there is a look of utter despondency on his face.]

MRS. BAUER. [*Closing the door after him.*] They let you off?

BAUER. [*With a hard little laugh.*] Yes, they let me off – they let me off with a fine all right.

MRS. BAUER. [*Aghast.*] They think you did it then.

BAUER. [*Harshly.*] The judge fined me, I tell you.

MRS. BAUER. [*Unable to express her poignant sympathy.*] Fined you!... Oh, Fritz!

[*She lays her hand on his shoulder.*]

BAUER. [*Roughly, to keep himself from, going to pieces.*] That slop out there ain't cleaned up yet.

MRS. BAUER. I've been so worried.

BAUER. [*With sudden desperation.*] I can't stand it, I tell you.

MRS. BAUER. Well, it's all over now, Fritz.

BAUER. Yes, it's all over.... it's all up with me.

MRS. BAUER. Fritz!

BAUER. That's one sure thing.

MRS. BAUER. You oughtn't to give up like this.

BAUER. [*Pounding on the table.*] I tell you I can't hold up my head again.

MRS. BAUER. Why, Fritz?

BAUER. They've made me out guilty. The judge fined me. Fined me, Miene! How is that? Can a man stand for that? The woman said I told her myself — right out — that I did it.

MRS. BAUER. The woman that had you — [*he winces as she hesitates*] took?

BAUER. Damned — —

MRS. BAUER. [*Putting her hand over his mouth.*] Hush, Fritz.

BAUER. Why will I hush, Miene? She said I was proud of the job. [*Passionately raising his voice.*] The damned interferin' — —

MRS. BAUER. Don't holler, Fritz. It's your hollerin' that's made all this trouble.

BAUER. [*Penetrated by her words more and more.*] My hollerin'!....

[The telephone rings; she answers it.

MRS. BAUER. Yes, Mrs. Mohler, he's come in now. — Yes. — Won't after dinner do? — All right. — Thank you, Mrs. Mohler. [*She hangs up the receiver.*] Mrs. Mohler wants you to fix her sink right after dinner.

BAUER. I'm not goin' to do any more fixin' around here.

MRS. BAUER. You hold on to yourself, Fritz; that's no way to talk; Mrs. Mohler's a nice woman.

BAUER. I don't want to see no more nice women. [*After a pause.*] Hollerin'! — that's what's the matter with me — hollerin', eh? Well, I've took it all out in hollerin'.

MRS. BAUER. They hear you and they think you've got no feelings.

BAUER. [*In utter amazement at the irony of the situation.*] And I was goin' after the damned cat to take care of it.

MRS. BAUER. Why didn't you tell the judge all about it?

BAUER. They got me rattled among them. The lady was so soft and pleasant—"He must be made to understand, your honor," she said to the judge, "that dumb animals has feelin's, too, just as well as human beings"—*Me, Miene*—made to understand that! I couldn't say nothin'. My voice just stuck in my throat.

MRS. BAUER. What's the matter with you! You oughta spoke up and told the judge just how it all happened.

BAUER. I said to myself; I'll go home and put a bullet through my head—that's the best thing for me now.

MRS. BAUER. [*With impatient unbelief.*] Ach, Fritz, Fritz!

[*Clatter of feet.*

CHORUS OF VOICES. [*At the outer door.*] Who killed the cat! Who killed the cat!

[*BAUER jumps up, pale and shaken with strange rage; she pushes him gently back into his chair, opens the door, steps out for a moment, then comes in and leaves the door open behind her.*

BAUER. You see?... Even the kids ... I'm disgraced all over the place.

MRS. BAUER. So long as you didn't hurt the cat— —

BAUER. What's the difference? Everybody believes it.

MRS. BAUER. No, they don't, Fritz.

BAUER. You can't fool me, Miene. I see it in their eyes. They looked away from me when I was comin' 'round the corner. Some of them kinder smiled like—[*passes his hand over his head*]. Even the cop says to me on the way over, yesterday: "Don't you put your foot in it any more'n you have to." You see? He thought I did it all right. Everybody believes it.

MRS. BAUER. [*Putting towels away.*] Well, then *let* them believe it.... The agent don't believe it.

BAUER. I dunno. He'da paid my fine anyhow.

MRS. BAUER. He gave you a good name.

BAUER. [*With indignant derision.*] He gave me a good name!... Haven't I always kept this place all right since we been here? Afterward he said to me: "I'm surprised at this business, Bauer, very much surprised." That shows what he thinks. I told him it ain't true, I didn't mean to hurt it. I saw by his eyes he didn't believe me.

MRS. BAUER. Well, don't you worry any more now.

BAUER. [*To himself.*] Hollerin'!

MRS. BAUER. [*Shuts the door.*] Well, now, holler a little if it does you good.

BAUER. Nothin's goin' to do me good.

MRS. BAUER. You just put it out of your mind. [*The telephone rings. She answers it.*] Yes, but he can't come now, Mrs. McAllister. He'll be up this afternoon.

[*She hangs up the receiver.*]

BAUER. And I ain't goin' this afternoon — nowhere.

MRS. BAUER. It's Mrs. McAllister. Somethin's wrong with her refrigerator — the water won't run off, she says.

BAUER. They can clean out their own drain-pipes.

MRS. BAUER. You go to work and get your mind off this here business.

BAUER. [*Staring straight ahead of him.*] I ain't goin' 'round among the people in this house ... to have them lookin' at me ... disgraced like this.

MRS. BAUER. You want to hold up your head and act as if nothin's happened.

BAUER. Nobody spoke to me at the dumb-waiter when I took off the garbage and paper this morning. Mrs. Mohler always says something pleasant.

MRS. BAUER. You just think that because you're all upset. [*The telephone rings; she goes to it and listens.*] Yes, ma'am, I'll see. Fritz, have you any fine wire? Mrs. McAllister thinks she might try and fix the drain with it—till you come up.

BAUER. I got no wire.

MRS. BAUER. Mr. Bauer'll fix it—right after dinner, Mrs. McAllister. [*Impatiently.*] He can't find the wire this minute—soon's he eats his dinner.

BAUER. [*Doggedly.*] You'll see....

MRS. BAUER. [*Soothingly.*] Come now, Fritz, give me your hat.

[*She takes his hat from him.*]

VOICES IN THE STREET. [*Receding from the front area.*] Who killed the cat! Who killed the cat!

[*BAUER rushes toward the window in a fury of excitement.*]

BAUER. [*Shouting at the top of his voice.*] Verdammt loafers! Schweine!

MRS. BAUER. [*Goes up to him.*] Fritz! Fritz!

BAUER. [*Collapses and drops into chair.*] You hear 'em.

MRS. BAUER. Don't pay no attention, then they'll get tired.

BAUER. Miene, we must go away. I can't stand it here no longer.

MRS. BAUER. But there's not such another good place, Fritz—and the movin'....

BAUER. I say I can't stand it.

MRS. BAUER. [*Desperately.*] It ... it would be just the same any other place.

BAUER. Just the same?

MRS. BAUER. Yes, something'd go wrong anyhow.

BAUER. You think I'm a regular Jonah.

[*He shakes his head repeatedly in the affirmative, as though wholly embracing her point of view.*]

MRS. BAUER. Folks don't get to know you. They hear you hollerin' 'round and they think you beat the children and kick the dogs and cats.

BAUER. Do I ever lick the children when they don't need it?

MRS. BAUER. Not Fritz.

BAUER. You want to spoil Karl. I just touch him with the strap once, a little—like this [*illustrates with a gesture*] to scare him, and he howls like hell.

MRS. BAUER. Yes, and then he don't mind you no more because he knows you don't mean it.

BAUER. [*To himself.*] That's the way it goes ... a man's own wife and children ...

MRS. BAUER. [*Attending to the dinner. Irritably.*] Fritz, if you would clean that up out there—and Mrs. Carroll wants her waste-basket. You musta forgot to send it up again.

BAUER. All right.

[*He goes out and leaves the door open. She stands her flat-iron on the ledge of the range to cool and puts her ironing-board away, watching him at the dumb-waiter while he picks up the glass and cleans up the milk on the cement floor. He disappears for a moment, then he comes in again, goes to a drawer and takes out rags and a bottle of polish.*]

MRS. BAUER. [*Pushing the clothes-basket out of the way.*] This ain't cleanin' day, Fritz.

BAUER. [*Dully, putting the polish back into the drawer.*] That's so.

MRS. BAUER. [*Comforting him.*] You've got to eat a good dinner and then go up-stairs and fix that sink for Mrs. Mohler and the drain for Mrs. McAllister.

BAUER. [*In a tense voice.*] I tell you I can't stand it.... I tell you, Miene....

MRS. BAUER. What now, Fritz?

BAUER. People laugh in my face. [*Nods in the direction of the street.*] Frazer's boy standin' on the stoop calls his dog away when it runs up to me like it always does.

MRS. BAUER. Dogs know better'n men who's good to them.

BAUER. He acted like he thought I'd kick it.

MRS. BAUER. You've got all kinds of foolishness in your head now.... You sent up Carroll's basket?

BAUER. No.

MRS. BAUER. Well — —

[*She checks herself.*

BAUER. All right.

[*He gets up.*

MRS. BAUER. It's settin' right beside the other dumb-waiter, [*He goes out.*] Oh, Gott! — Oh, Gott! — Oh, Gott!

[*Enter KARL, and FRITZI. FRITZI is crying.*

MRS. BAUER. [*Running to them.*] What's the matter?

[*She hushes them and carefully closes the door.*

KARL. The boys make fun of us; they mock us.

FRITZI. They mock us — "Miau! Miau!" they cry, and then they go like this — —

[FRITZI *imitates kicking and breaks out crying afresh.*

MRS. BAUER. Hush, Fritz, you mustn't let your father hear.

FRITZI. He'd make them shut up.

KARL. I don't want to go to school this afternoon.

[*He doubles his fists.*

MRS. BAUER. [*Turning on him fiercely.*] Why not? [*In an undertone.*] You talk that way before your little brother. — Have you no sense?

FRITZI. [*Beginning to whimper.*] I d-d-d-on't want to go to school this afternoon.

MRS. BAUER. You just go 'long to school and mind your own business.

KARL *and* FRITZI. [*Together.*] But the boys....

MRS. BAUER. They ain't a-goin' to keep it up forever. Don't you answer them. Just go 'long together and pay no attention.

KARL. Then they get fresher and fresher.

FRITZI. [*Echoing KARL.*] Yes, then they get fresher and fresher.

[*MRS. BAUER begins to take up the dinner. The sound of footfalls just outside the door is heard.*

MRS. BAUER. Go on now, hang up your caps and get ready for your dinners.

FRITZI. I'm going to tell my papa.

[*Goes to inner door.*

MRS. BAUER. For God's sake, Fritz, shut up. You mustn't tell no one. Papa'd be disgraced all over.

KARL. [*Coming up to her.*] Disgraced?

MRS. BAUER. Hush!

KARL. Why disgraced?

MRS. BAUER. Because there's liars, low-down, snoopin' liars in the world.

KARL. Who's lied, mama?

MRS. BAUER. The janitress across the street.

KARL. Mrs. Nies?

FRITZ. [*Calling out.*] Henny Nies is a tough.

MRS. BAUER. [*Looking toward the outer door anxiously and shaking her head threateningly at FRITZ.*] I give you somethin' if you don't stop hollerin' out like that.

KARL. Who'd she lie to?

MRS. BAUER. Never mind. Go 'long now. It's time you begin to eat.

KARL. What'd she lie about?

MRS. BAUER. [*Warningly.*] S-s-sh! Papa'll be comin' in now in a minute.

KARL. It was Henny Nies set the gang on to us. I coulda licked them all if I hadn't had to take care of Fritz.

MRS. BAUER. You'll get a lickin' all right if you don't keep away from Henny Nies.

KARL. Well—if they call me names—and say *my* father's been to the station-house for killing a cat ...?

FRITZI. Miau! Miau! Miau!

MRS. BAUER. Hold your mouth.

FRITZI. [*Swaggering.*] My father never was in jail – was he, mama?

KARL. Course not.

MRS. BAUER. [*To FRITZI.*] Go, wash your hands, Fritz.

[*She steers him to the door of the inner room. He exits.*]

MRS. BAUER. [*Distressed.*] Karl ...

KARL. [*Turning to his mother.*] Was he, mama?

MRS. BAUER. Papa don't act like he used to. Sometimes I wonder what's come over him. Of course it's enough to ruin any man's temper, all the trouble we've had.

CHORUS OF VOICES. [*From the area by the window.*] Who killed the cat! Who killed the cat!

[*Sound of feet clattering up the area steps. FRITZI rushes in, flourishing a revolver.*]

FRITZI. I shoot them, mama.

MRS. BAUER. [*Grabbing the revolver.*] Mein Gott! Fritz! Papa's pistol! [*She examines it carefully.*] You ever touch that again and I'll ...

[*She menaces him.*]

FRITZI. [*Sulkily.*] I'll save up my money and buy me one.

MRS. BAUER. [*Smiling a little to herself.*] I see you buyin' one.

[*Carries revolver into inner room.*]

FRITZI. [*In a loud, voice and as though shooting at KARL.*] Bang! Bang! Bang!

[*KARL strikes at FRITZI; FRITZI dodges.*]

KARL. [*To his mother as she re-enters.*] Trouble with Fritzi is he don't mind me any more.

MRS. BAUER. You wash your dirty hands and face this minute — d'you hear me, Fritzi!

FRITZI. [*Looking at his hands.*] That's ink-stains. I got the highest mark in spelling to-day. Capital H-e-n-n-y, capital N-i-e-s — Henny Nies, a bum.

[MRS. BAUER *makes a rush at him, and he runs back into the inner room.*

KARL. [*Sitting down beside the table.*] Do we have to go to school this afternoon?

MRS. BAUER. You have to do what you always do.

KARL. Can't we stay home?...

MRS. BAUER. [*Fiercely.*] Why? Why?

KARL. [*Sheepishly.*] I ain't feelin' well.

MRS. BAUER. Karlchen!... *schäm dich!*

KARL. Till the boys forget....

MRS. BAUER. Papa'd know somethin' was wrong right away. That'd be the end. You mustn't act as if anything was different from always.

KARL. [*Indignantly.*] Sayin' *my* father's been to jail!

MRS. BAUER. Karl....

KARL. Papa'd make them stop.

MRS. BAUER. [*Panic-stricken.*] Karl, don't you tell papa nothing.

KARL. Not tell papa?

MRS. BAUER. No.

KARL. Why not tell papa?

MRS. BAUER. Because — —

KARL. Yes, mama?

MRS. BAUER. Because he was arrested yesterday.

KARL. [SHOCKED.] What for, mama? Why was he — —

MRS. BAUER. For nothing.... It was all a lie.

KARL. Well — what was it, mama?

MRS. BAUER. The cat got hurt in the dumb-waiter — papa didn't mean to — then they saw papa chasin' it — then it died.

KARL. Why did papa chase it?

MRS. BAUER. To see how it hurt itself.

KARL. Whose cat?

MRS. BAUER. The stray cat.

KARL. The little black cat? Is Blacky dead?

MRS. BAUER. Yes, he died on the sidewalk.

KARL. Where was we?

MRS. BAUER. You was at school.

KARL. Papa didn't want us to keep Blacky.

MRS. BAUER. So many cats and dogs around....

FRITZI. [*Wailing at the door.*] Blacky was my cat.

MRS. BAUER. S-s-h! What do you know about Blacky?

FRITZI. I was listening. Why did papa kill Blacky?

MRS. BAUER. Hush!

FRITZI. Why was papa took to jail?

MRS. BAUER. Fritz! If papa was to hear....

[MRS. BAUER *goes out*.

FRITZI. [*Sidling up to KARL.*] Miau! Miau!

KARL. You shut up that. Didn't mama tell you?

FRITZI. When I'm a man I'm going to get arrested. I'll shoot Henny Nies.

KARL. [*Contemptuously.*] Yes, you'll do a lot of shooting.

[FRITZI *punches KARL in back*.

KARL. [*Striking at FRITZI.*] You're as big a tough as Henny Nies.

FRITZI. [*Proud of this alleged likeness.*] I'm going to be a man just like my father; I'll holler and make them stand around.

KARL. [*With conviction.*] What you need is a good licking.

[*Telephone rings; KARL goes to it.*

KARL. No, ma'am, we're just going to eat now.

FRITZI. [*Sits down beside the table.*] Blacky was a nice cat; she purred just like a steam-engine.

KARL. Mama told you not to bring her in.

FRITZI. Papa said I could.

[*There is the sound of footfalls. BAUER and his wife come in and close the door behind them.*

MRS. BAUER. [*Putting the dinner on the table.*] Come, children.
[*To BAUER.*] Sit down, Fritz.

[*She serves the dinner. KARL pulls FRITZI out of his father's chair and pushes him into his own; then he takes his place next to his mother.*

MRS. BAUER. [*To BAUER, who sits looking at his food.*] Eat somethin', Friedrich.

[*She sits down.*

BAUER. I can't eat nothin'. I'm full up to here.

[*He touches his throat.*

MRS. BAUER. If you haven't done nothin' wrong, why do you let it worry you so?

[*Children are absorbed in eating.*

FRITZI. [*Suddenly.*] Gee, didn't Blacky like liver!

[*MRS. BAUER and KARL look at him warningly.*

MRS. BAUER. [*Fiercely.*] You eat your dinner.

BAUER. [*Affectionately, laying his hand on FRITZI'S arm.*] Fritz.

FRITZI. [*Points toward the inner room.*] I'm going to have a gun, too, when I'm a man.

[*BAUER follows FRITZI'S gesture and falls to musing. There is a look of brooding misery on his face. KARL nudges FRITZI warningly and watches his father furtively. BAUER sits motionless, staring straight ahead of him.*

MRS. BAUER. [*To BAUER.*] Now drink your coffee.

BAUER. Don't you see, Miene, don't you see?... Nothing makes it right now; no one believes me – no one believes – no one.

MRS. BAUER. What do you care, if you didn't do it?

BAUER. I care like hell.

MRS. BAUER. [*With a searching look at her husband.*] Fritz, when you go on like this, people won't believe you didn't do it. You ought to act like you don't care.... [*She fixes him with a beseeching glance.*] If you *didn't* do it.

[BAUER looks at his wife as though a hidden meaning to her words had suddenly bitten into his mind.]

BAUER. [*As though to himself.*] A man can't stand that. I've gone hungry ... I've been in the hospital ... I've worked when I couldn't stand up hardly....

MRS. BAUER. [*Coaxingly.*] Drink your coffee, drink it now, Fritz, while it's hot.

[*He tries to swallow a little coffee and then puts down the cup.*]

BAUER. I've never asked favors of no man.

MRS. BAUER. Well, an' if you did ...

BAUER. I've always kept my good name ...

MRS. BAUER. If a man hasn't done nothin' wrong it don't matter. Just go ahead like always — if — —

BAUER. [*Muttering.*] If — if — —

MRS. BAUER. [*To the boys.*] Get your caps now, it's time to go to school.

[*KARL gets up, passes behind his father and beckons to FRITZI to follow him.*]

FRITZI. [*Keeping his seat.*] Do we have to go to school?

BAUER. [*Suddenly alert.*] Why, what's the matter?

FRITZI. The boys — —

MRS. BAUER. [*Breaking in.*] Fritz!

[*The boys go into the inner room. BAUER collapses again.*]

MRS. BAUER. [*Looking at him strangely.*] Fritz — if you didn't — —

BAUER. I can't prove nothing — and no one believes me. [*A pause. She is silent under his gaze.*] No one! [*He waits for her to speak. She sits*

with averted face. He sinks into a dull misery. The expression in his eyes changes from beseeching to despair as her silence continues, and he cries out hoarsely.] No one! Even if you kill a cat—what's a cat against a man's life!

MRS. BAUER. [*Tensely, her eyes fastened on his.*] But you *didn't* kill it?

[*A pause.*

MRS. BAUER. [*In a low, appealing voice.*] Did you? Fritz? Did you?

[*BAUER gets up slowly. He stands very still and stares at his wife.*

KARL'S VOICE. Mama, Fritz's fooling with papa's gun.

[*Both children rush into the room.*

KARL. You oughta lock it up.

MRS. BAUER. [*To FRITZI.*] Bad boy! [*To KARL.*] Fritz wants to kill himself—that's what. Go on to school.

[*Boys run past area.*

VOICES. Who killed the cat! Who killed the cat!

[*At the sound of the voices the boys start back. Instinctively MRS. BAUER lays a protecting hand on each. She looks around at her husband with a sudden anxiety which she tries to conceal from the children, who whisper together. BAUER rises heavily to his feet and walks staggeringly toward the inner room.*

MRS. BAUER. [*In a worried tone, as she pushes the children out.*] Go on to school.

[*At the threshold of the inner room BAUER stops, half turns back with distorted features, and then hurries in. The door slams behind him. MRS. BAUER closes the outer door, turns, takes a step as though to follow BAUER, hesitates, then crosses to the kitchen table and starts to clear up the dishes. The report of a revolver sounds from the inner room. Terror-stricken, MRS. BAUER rushes in.*

MRS. BAUER'S VOICE. Fritz! Fritz! Speak to me! Look at me, Fritz! You didn't do it, Fritz! I know you didn't do it!

[Sound of low sobbing.... After a few seconds the telephone bell.... It rings continuously while the Curtain slowly falls.]

MANIKIN AND MINIKIN

(A BISQUE-PLAY)

BY
ALFRED KREYMBORG

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ALFRED KREYMBORG

Alfred Kreymborg, one of the foremost advocates of free-verse rhythmical drama, was born in New York City, 1883. He founded and edited *The Globe* while it was in existence; and under its auspices issued the first anthology of imagist verse (Ezra Pound's Collection, 1914). In July, 1915, he founded *Others, a Magazine of the New Verse*, and *The Other Players* in March, 1918, an organization devoted exclusively to American plays in poetic form. At present Mr. Kreymborg is in Italy, launching a new international magazine, *The Broom*.

Mr. Kreymborg has been active in both poetry and drama. He has edited several anthologies of free verse, and has published his own free verse as *Mushrooms* and *The Blood of Things*. His volume of plays, all in free rhythmical verse, is *Plays for Poem – Mimes*. The most popular plays in this volume are *Lima Beans*, and *Manikin and Minikin*.

Manikin and Minikin aptly exemplifies Mr. Kreymborg's idea of rhythmical, pantomimic drama. It is a semi-puppet play in which there are dancing automatons to an accompaniment of rhythmic lines in place of music. Mr. Kreymborg is a skilled musician and he composes his lines with musical rhythm in mind. His lines should be read accordingly.

MANIKIN AND MINIKIN

(A BISQUE-PLAY)

Seen through an oval frame, one of the walls of a parlor. The wall-paper is a conventionalized pattern. Only the shelf of the mantelpiece shows. At each end, seated on pedestals turned slightly away from one another, two aristocratic bisque figures, a boy in delicate cerise and a girl in cornflower blue. Their shadows join in a grotesque silhouette. In the centre, an ancient clock whose tick acts as the metronome for the sound of their high voices. Presently the mouths of the figures open and shut, after the mode of ordinary conversation.

SHE. Manikin!

HE. Minikin?

SHE. That fool of a servant has done it again.

HE. I should say, she's more than a fool.

SHE. A meddlesome busybody — —

HE. A brittle-fingered noddy!

SHE. Which way are you looking? What do you see?

HE. The everlasting armchair,
the everlasting tiger-skin,
the everlasting yellow, green, and purple books,
the everlasting portrait of milord — —

SHE. Oh, these Yankees! — And I see
the everlasting rattan rocker,
the everlasting samovar,
the everlasting noisy piano,
the everlasting portrait of milady — —

HE. Simpering spectacle!

SHE. What does she want, always dusting?

HE. I should say — that is, I'd consider the thought — —

SHE. You'd consider a lie — oh, Manikin — you're trying to defend her!

HE. I'm not defending her — —

SHE. You're trying to — —

HE. I'm not trying to — —

SHE. Then, what are you trying to — —

HE. Well, I'd venture to say, if she'd only stay away some morning — —

SHE. That's what I say in my dreams!

HE. She and her broom — —

SHE. Her everlasting broom — —

HE. She wouldn't be sweeping — —

SHE. Every corner, every cranny, every crevice — —

HE. And the dust wouldn't move — —

SHE. Wouldn't crawl, wouldn't rise, wouldn't fly — —

HE. And cover us all over — —

SHE. Like a spider-web — ugh!

HE. Everlasting dust has been most of our life — —

SHE. Everlasting years and years of dust!

HE. You on your lovely blue gown — —

SHE. And you on your manly pink cloak.

HE. If she didn't sweep, we wouldn't need dusting — —

SHE. Nor need taking down, I should say — —

HE. With her stupid, clumsy hands — —

SHE. Her crooked, monkey paws — —

HE. And we wouldn't need putting back — —

SHE. I with my back to you — —

HE. I with my back to you.

SHE. It's been hours, days, weeks — —

by the sound of that everlasting clock — —

and the coming of day and the going of day — —

since I saw you last!

HE. What's the use of the sun

with its butterfly wings of light —

what's the use of a sun made to see by —

if I can't see you!

SHE. Manikin!

HE. Minikin?

SHE. Say that again!

HE. Why should I say it again — don't you know?

SHE. I know, but sometimes I doubt — —

HE. Why do you, what do you doubt?

SHE. Please say it again!

HE. What's the use of a sun — —

SHE. What's the use of a sun?

HE. That was made to see by — —

SHE. That was made to see by?

HE. If I can't see you!

SHE. Oh, Manikin!

HE. Minikin?

SHE. If you hadn't said that again, my doubt would have filled a balloon.

HE. Your doubt – which doubt, what doubt?

SHE. And although I can't move, although I can't move unless somebody shoves me, one of these days when the sun isn't here, I would have slipped over the edge of this everlasting shelf – –

HE. Minikin!

SHE. And fallen to that everlasting floor into so many fragments, they'd never paste Minikin together again!

HE. Minikin, Minikin!

SHE. They'd have to set another here – some Minikin, I'm assured!

HE. Why do you chatter so, prattle so?

SHE. Because of my doubt – because I'm as positive as I am that I sit here with my knees in a knot – that that human creature – loves you.

HE. Loves me?

SHE. And you her!

HE. Minikin!

SHE. When she takes us down she holds you much longer.

HE. Minikin!

SHE. I'm sufficiently feminine – and certainly old enough – I and my hundred and seventy years – I can see, I can feel by her manner of

touching me and her flicking me with her mop — the creature hates me — she'd like to drop me, that's what she would!

HE. Minikin!

SHE. Don't you venture defending her! Booby — you don't know live women! When I'm in the right position I can note how she fondles you, pets you like a parrot with her finger-tip, blows a pinch of dust from your eye with her softest breath, holds you off at arm's length and fixes you with her spider look, actually holds you against her cheek — her rose-tinted cheek — before she releases you! If she didn't turn us apart so often, I wouldn't charge her with insinuation; but now I know she loves you — she's as jealous as I am — and poor dead me in her live power! Manikin?

HE. Minikin?

SHE. If you could see me — the way you see her — —

HE. But I see you — see you always — see only you!

SHE. If you could see me the way you see her, you'd still love me, you'd love me the way you do her! Who made me what I am? Who dreamed me in motionless clay?

HE. Minikin?

SHE. Manikin?

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. No!

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. No.

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. Yes.

HE. I love you — —

SHE. No!

HE. I've always loved you — —

SHE. No.

HE. You doubt that?

SHE. Yes!

HE. You doubt that?

SHE. Yes.

HE. You doubt that?

SHE. No. You've always loved me — yes — but you don't love me now — no — not since that rose-face encountered your glance — no.

HE. Minikin!

SHE. If I could move about the way she can —
if I had feet —
dainty white feet which could twinkle and twirl —
I'd dance you so prettily
you'd think me a sun butterfly —
if I could let down my hair
and prove you it's longer than larch hair —
if I could raise my black brows
or shrug my narrow shoulders,
like a queen or a countess —
if I could turn my head, tilt my head,
this way and that, like a swan —
ogle my eyes, like a peacock,
till you'd marvel,
they're green, nay, violet, nay, yellow, nay, gold —
if I could move, only move
just the moment of an inch —
you would see what I could be!
It's a change, it's a change,
you men ask of women!

HE. A change?

SHE. You're eye-sick, heart-sick
of seeing the same foolish porcelain thing,
a hundred years old,
a hundred and fifty,
and sixty, and seventy —
I don't know how old I am!

HE. Not an exhalation older than I—not an inhalation younger!
Minikin?

SHE. Manikin?

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. No!

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. No!

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. Yes.

HE. I don't love that creature — —

SHE. You do.

HE. I can't love that creature — —

SHE. You can.

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. Yes —
if you'll tell me —
if you'll prove me —
so my last particle of dust —
the tiniest speck of a molecule —
the merest electron — —

HE. Are you listening?

SHE. Yes!

HE. To begin with —
I dislike, suspect, deplore —
I had best say, feel compassion
for what is called humanity —
or the animate, as opposed to the inanimate — —

SHE. You say that so wisely —
you're such a philosopher —
say it again!

HE. That which is able to move
can never be steadfast, you understand?
Let us consider the creature at hand
to whom you have referred
with an undue excess of admiration
adulterated with an undue excess of envy — —

SHE. Say that again!

HE. To begin with —
I can only see part of her at once.
She moves into my vision;
she moves out of my vision;
she is doomed to be wayward.

SHE. Yes, but that which you see of her — —

HE. Is ugly, commonplace, unsightly.
Her face a rose-face?
It's veined with blood and the skin of it wrinkles —
her eyes are ever so near to a hen's —
her movements,
if one would pay such a gait with regard —
her gait is unspeakably ungainly —
her hair — —

SHE. Her hair?

HE. Luckily I've never seen it down—
I dare say it comes down in the dark,
when it looks, most assuredly, like tangled weeds.

SHE. Again, Manikin, that dulcet phrase!

HE. Even were she beautiful,
she were never so beautiful as thou!

SHE. Now you're a poet, Manikin!

HE. Even were she so beautiful as thou—lending her your eyes, and
the exquisite head which holds them—like a cup two last beads of
wine, like a stone two last drops of rain, green, nay, violet, nay,
yellow, nay, gold— —

SHE. Faster, Manikin!

HE. I can't, Minikin!
Words were never given to man
to phrase such a one as you are—
inanimate symbols
can never embrace, embody, hold
the animate dream that you are—
I must cease.

SHE. Manikin!

HE. And even were she so beautiful as thou,
she couldn't stay beautiful.

SHE. Stay beautiful?

HE. Humans change with each going moment.
That is a gray-haired platitude.
Just as I can see that creature
only when she touches my vision,
so I could only see her once, were she beautiful—

at best, twice or thrice —
you're more precious than when you came!

SHE. And you!

HE. Human pathos penetrates still deeper
when one determines their inner life,
as we've pondered their outer.
Their inner changes far more desperately.

SHE. How so, wise Manikin?

HE. They have what philosophy terms moods,
and moods are more pervious to modulation
than pools to idle breezes.

These people may say, to begin with —
I love you.

This may be true, I'm assured —
as true as when *we* say, I love you.

But they can only say,

I love you,

so long as the mood breathes,

so long as the breezes blow,

so long as water remains wet.

They are honest —

they mean what they say —

passionately, tenaciously, tragically —

but when the mood languishes,

they have to say,

if it be they are honest —

I do not love you.

Or they have to say,

I love you,

to somebody else.

SHE. To somebody else?

HE. Now, you and I —
we've said that to each other —
we've had to say it

for a hundred and seventy years —
and we'll have to say it always.

SHE. Say always again!

HE. The life of an animate —

SHE. Say always again!

HE. Always!
The life of an animate
is a procession of deaths
with but a secret sorrowing candle,
guttering lower and lower,
on the path to the grave —
the life of an inanimate
is as serenely enduring —
as all still things are.

SHE. Still things?

HE. Recall our childhood in the English museum —
ere we were moved,
from place to place,
to this dreadful Yankee salon —
do you remember
that little old Greek tanagra
of the girl with a head like a bud —
that little old Roman medallion
of the girl with a head like a — —

SHE. Manikin, Manikin —
were they so beautiful as I —
did you love them, too —
why do you bring them back?

HE. They were not so beautiful as thou —
I spoke of them —
recalled, designated them —
well, because they were ages old —
and — and — —

SHE. And – and?

HE. And we might live as long as they –
as they did and do!
I hinted their existence
because they're not so beautiful as thou,
so that by contrast and deduction – –

SHE. And deduction?

HE. You know what I'd say – –

SHE. But say it again!

HE. I love you.

SHE. Manikin?

HE. Minikin?

SHE. Then even though that creature has turned us
can you see me?

HE. I can see you.

SHE. Even though you haven't seen me
for hours, days, weeks –
with your dear blue eyes –
you can see me –
with your hidden ones?

HE. I can see you.

SHE. Even though you are still,
and calm, and smooth,
and lovely outside –
you aren't still and calm
and smooth and lovely inside?

HE. Lovely, yes – but not still and calm and smooth!

SHE. Which way are you looking? What do you see?

HE. I look at you. I see you.

SHE. And if that fool of a servant—oh, Manikin—suppose she should break the future—our great, happy centuries ahead—by dropping me, throwing me down?

HE. I should take an immediate step off this everlasting shelf —

SHE. But you cannot move!

HE. The good wind would give me a blow!

SHE. Now you're a punster! And what would your fragments do?

HE. They would do what Manikin did.

SHE. Say that again!

HE. They'd do what Manikin did....

SHE. Manikin?

HE. Minikin?

SHE. Shall I tell you something?

HE. Tell me something.

SHE. Are you listening?

HE. With my inner ears.

SHE. I wasn't jealous of that woman — —

HE. You weren't jealous?

SHE. I wanted to hear you talk — —

HE. You wanted to hear me talk?

SHE. You talk so wonderfully!

HE. Do I, indeed? What a booby I am!

SHE. And I wanted to hear you say — —

HE. You cheat, you idler, you — —

SHE. Woman — —

HE. Dissembler!

SHE. Manikin?

HE. Minikin?

SHE. Everlastingly?

HE. Everlastingly.

SHE. Say it again!

HE. I refuse — —

SHE. You refuse?

HE. Well — —

SHE. Well?

HE. You have ears outside your head—I'll say that for you—but they'll never hear—what your other ears hear!

SHE. Say it—down one of the ears—outside my head?

HE. I refuse.

SHE. You refuse?

HE. Leave me alone.

SHE. Manikin?

HE. I can't say it!

SHE. Manikin!

[The clock goes on ticking for a moment. Its mellow chimes strike the hour.]

CURTAIN

WHITE DRESSES
(A TRAGEDY OF NEGRO LIFE)

BY
PAUL GREENE

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PAUL GREENE

Paul Greene, one of the most promising of the University of North Carolina Playmakers, was born in 1894 on a farm near Lillington, North Carolina. He has received his education at Buies Creek Academy and at the University of North Carolina, from which he received his bachelor's degree in 1921. He saw service with the A. E. F. in France, with the 105th United States Engineers.

In addition to *White Dresses*, Mr. Greene has written a number of one-act plays: *The Last of the Lowries* (to be included in a forthcoming volume of Carolina Folk-Plays, published by Henry Holt & Company), *The Miser*, *The Old Man of Edenton*, *The Lord's Will*, *Wreck P'int*, *Granny Boling* (in *The Drama* for August-September, 1921). The first three plays named above were produced originally by the Carolina Playmakers at Chapel Hill.

White Dresses is an excellent example of folk-play of North Carolina. This play was written in English 31, the course in dramatic composition at the University of North Carolina conducted by Professor Frederick H. Koch. "The Aim of the Carolina Playmakers," says Professor Koch, "is to build up a genuinely native drama, a fresh expression of the folk-life in North Carolina, drawn from the rich background of local tradition and from the vigorous new life of the present day. In these simple plays we hope to contribute something of lasting value in the making of a new folk-theatre and a new folk-literature."

Out of the many conflicts of American life, past and present, Mr. Greene sees possibilities for a great native drama. *White Dresses* presents a fundamental aspect of the race problem in America.

CHARACTERS

CANDACE MCLEAN, *an old negro woman, MARY'S aunt*

MARY MCLEAN, *a quadroon girl, niece of CANDACE*

JIM MATTHEWS, *Mary's lover*

HENRY MORGAN, *the landlord, a white man*

WHITE DRESSES

TIME: *The evening before Christmas, 1900.*

SCENE: *The scene is laid in a negro cabin, the home of CANDACE and MARY MCLEAN, in eastern North Carolina.*

In the right corner of the room is a rough bed covered with a ragged counterpane. In the centre at the rear is an old bureau with a cracked mirror, to the left of it a door opening to the outside. In the left wall is a window with red curtains. A large chest stands near the front on this side, and above it hang the family clothes, several ragged dresses, an old bonnet, and a cape. At the right, toward the front, is a fireplace, in which a small fire is burning. Above and at the sides of the fireplace hang several pots and pans, neatly arranged. Above these is a mantel, covered with a lambrequin of dingy red crape paper. On the mantel are bottles and a clock. A picture of "Daniel in the Lion's Den" hangs above the mantel. The walls are covered with newspapers, to which are pinned several illustrations clipped from popular magazines. A rough table is in the centre of the room. A lamp without a chimney is on it. Several chairs are about the room. A rocking-chair with a rag pillow in it stands near the fire. There is an air of cleanliness and poverty about the whole room.

The rising of the curtain discloses the empty room. The fire is burning dimly. AUNT CANDACE enters at the rear, carrying several sticks of firewood under one arm. She walks with a stick, and is bent with rheumatism. She is dressed in a flat bonnet, which hides her face in its shadow, brogan shoes, a man's ragged coat, a checkered apron, a dark-

colored dress. She mumbles to herself and shakes her head as she comes in. With great difficulty she puts the wood on the fire, and then takes the poker and examines some potatoes that are cooking in the ashes. She takes out her snuff-box and puts snuff in her lip. As she does this her bonnet is pushed back, and in the firelight her features are discernible – sunken eyes, high cheek-bones, and big, flat nose. Upon her forehead she wears a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles.

She sits down in a rocking-chair, now and then putting her hand to her head, and groaning as if in pain. She turns and looks expectantly toward the door. After a moment she hobbles to the chest on the right and takes out an old red crocheted fascinator. Shivering she wraps it around her neck and stands looking down in the chest. She lifts out a little black box and starts to unfasten it, when the door suddenly opens and MARY MCLEAN comes in. AUNT CANDACE puts the box hastily back into the chest, and hurries to the fire.

MARY MCLEAN has a "turn" of collards in one arm and a paper bundle in the other. She lays the collards on the floor near the window and puts her shawl on the bed. She is a quadroon girl about eighteen years old, with an oval face and a mass of fine dark hair, neatly done up. There is something in her bearing that suggests a sort of refinement. Her dress is pitifully shabby, her shoes ragged. But even this cannot hide the lines of an almost perfect figure. For a negro she is pretty. As she comes up to the fire her pinched lips and the tired expression on her face are plainly visible. Only her eyes betray any signs of excitement.

AUNT CANDACE. Honey, I's been a-waitin' foh you de las' two hours. My haid's been bad off. Chile, whah you been? Miss Mawgin must a had a pow'ful washin' up at de big house.

[MARY opens her hand and shows her a five-dollar bill.]

AUNT CANDACE. De Lawd help my life, chile!

MARY. An' look here what Mr. Henry sent you, too. [She undoes the bundle, revealing several cooked sweet potatoes, sausages, spareribs, and some boiled ham.] He said as 'twas Christmas time he sent you this with the collards there.

[She points toward the collards at the window. AUNT CANDACE pays little attention to the food as MARY places it in her lap, but continues to look straight into MARY'S face. The girl starts to give her the money, but she pushes her away.]

AUNT CANDACE. *[Excitedly.]* Whah'd you git dat, honey? Whah'd you git it? Mr. Henry ain't never been dat kind befo'. Dey ain't no past Christmas times he was so free wid 'is money. He ain't de kind o' man foh dat. An' he a-havin' 'is washin' done on Christmas Eve. *[Her look is direct and troubled.]* Chile, Mr. Hugh didn't give you dat money, did he?

MARY. *[Still looking in the fire.]* Aunt, I ain't said Mr. Henry sent you this money. Yes'm, Mr. Hugh sent it to you. I done some washin' for him. I washed his socks and some shirts—pure silk they was. *[She smiles at the remembrance.]* An' he give me the money an' tole me to give it to you—said he wished he could give you somethin' more.

[She hands the money to AUNT CANDACE, who takes it quickly.]

AUNT CANDACE. Help my soul an' body! De boy said dat! Bless 'is soul! He ain't fo'got 'is ol' aunty, even if he ain't been to see 'er since he come back from school way out yander. De Lawd bless 'im! Allus was a good boy, an' he ain't changed since he growed up nuther. When I useter nuss 'im he'd never whimper, no suh. Bring me de tin box, honey. An' don't notice what I's been sayin'. I specs I's too perticler 'bout you. I dunno.

[MARY goes to the bureau and gets a tin box. She puts the money in it, returns it, and lights the lamp. AUNT CANDACE takes off her bonnet and hangs it behind her on the rocking-chair. Then she begins to eat greedily, now and then licking the grease off her fingers. Suddenly she utters a low scream, putting her hands to her head and rocking to and fro. She grasps her stick and begins beating about her as if striking at something, crying out in a loud voice.]

AUNT CANDACE. Ah-hah, I'll git you! I'll git you!

[MARY goes to her and pats her on the cheek.]

MARY. It's your poor head, ain't it, aunty? You rest easy, I'll take care of you. [*She continues to rub her cheek and forehead until the spell passes.*] Set still till I git in a turn of light-wood. It's goin' to be a terrible cold night an' looks like snow.

[*After a moment AUNT CANDACE quiets down and begins eating again. MARY goes out and brings in an armful of wood which she throws into the box. She takes a bottle and spoon from the mantel, and starts to pour out some medicine.*

AUNT CANDACE. I's better now, honey. Put it back up. I ain't gwine take none now. D'ain't no use ... d'ain't no use in dat. I ain't long foh dis world, ain't long. I's done my las' washin' an' choppin' an' weighed up my las' cotton. Medicine ain't no mo' good.

MARY. You're allus talkin' like that, aunty. You're goin' to live to be a hundred. An' this medicine — —

AUNT CANDACE. I ain't gwine take it, I say. No, suh, ain't gwine be long. I's done deaf. I's ol' an' hipshot now. No, suh, I don't want no medicine. [*Childishly.*] I's got a taste o' dese heah spareribs an' sausages, an' I ain't gwine take no medicine. [*MARY puts the bottle and spoon back on the mantel and sits down. AUNT CANDACE stops eating and looks at MARY'S dreaming face.*] Honey, what makes you look like dat? [*Excitedly.*] Mr. Henry ain't said ... he ain't said no mo' 'bout us havin' to leave, has he?

MARY. [*Looking up confusedly.*] No'm, he ... no'm, he said ... he said to-day that he'd 'bout decided to let us stay right on as long as we please.

AUNT CANDACE. Huh, what's dat?

MARY. He said it might be so we could stay right on as long as we please.

AUNT CANDACE. [*Joyously.*] Thank de Lawd! Thank de Lawd! I knowed he's gwine do it. I knowed. But I's been pow'ful feared, chile, he's gwine run us off. An' he ain't never liked Mr. Hugh's takin' up foh us. But now I c'n rest in peace. Thank de Lawd, I's

gwine rest my bones rat whah I loves to stay till dey calls foh me up yander. [*Stopping.*] Has you et?

MARY. Yes'm, I et up at Mr. Henry's. Mr. Hugh ... [*hesitating*] he said 'twas a shame for me to come off without eatin' nothin' an' so I et.

[*AUNT CANDACE becomes absorbed in her eating. MARY goes to the chest, opens it, and takes out a faded cloak and puts it on. Then she goes to the bureau, takes out a piece of white ribbon, and ties it on her hair. For a moment she looks at her reflection in the mirror. She goes to the chest and stands looking down in it. She makes a movement to close it. The lid falls with a bang. AUNT CANDACE turns quickly around.*]

AUNT CANDACE. What you want, gal? You ain't botherin' de li'l box, is you?

MARY. [*Coming back to the fire.*] Botherin' that box! Lord, no, I don't worry about it no more ... I'm just dressin' up a little.

AUNT CANDACE. Ah-hah, but you better not be messin' 'round de chist too much. You quit puttin' you' clothes in dere. I done tol' you. What you dressin' up foh? Is Jim comin' round to-night?

[*She wraps up the remainder of her supper and puts it in the chimney corner.*]

MARY. [*Not noticing the question.*] Aunty, don't I look a little bit like a white person?

AUNT CANDACE. [*Taking out her snuff-box.*] Huh, what's dat?

MARY. I don't look like a common nigger, do I?

AUNT CANDACE. Lawd bless you, chile, you's purty, you is. You's jes' as purty as any white folks. You's lak yo' mammy what's dead an' gone. Yessuh, you's her very spit an' image, 'ceptin' you's whiter. [*Lowering her voice.*] Yes, suh, 'ceptin' you's whiter. [*They both look in the fire.*] 'Bout time foh Jim to be comin', ain't it?

MARY. Yes'm, he'll be comin', I reckon. They ain't no gittin' away from him an' his guitar.

AUNT CANDACE. *What* you got agin Jim? Dey ain't no better nigger'n Jim. He's gwine treat you white, an' it's time you's gittin' married. I's done nussin' my fust chile at yo' age, my li'l Tom 'twas. Useter sing to 'im. [*Pausing.*] Useter sing to 'im de sweetest kin' o' chunes, jes' lak you, honey, jes' lak you. He's done daid an' gone do'. All my babies is. De Marster he call an' tuck 'em. An' 'druther'n let 'em labor an' sweat below, he gi'n 'em a harp an' crown up dere. Tuck my ol' man from 'is toil an' trouble, too, an' I's left heah alone now. Ain't gwine be long do', ain't gwine be long. [*Her voice trails off into silence. All is quiet save for the ticking of the clock.* AUNT CANDACE *brushes her hand across her face, as if breaking the spell of her reverie.*] Yessuh, I wants you to git married, honey. I told you, an' told you. We's lived long enough by ourselves. I's lak to nuss yo' li'l uns an' sing to 'em fo' I go. Mind me o' de ol' times.

MARY. [*Lost in abstraction, apparently has not been listening.*] Aunty, you ought to see him now. He's better to me than he ever was. He's as kind as he can be. An' he wears the finest clothes! [*She stares in the fire.*]

AUNT CANDACE. Dat he do. Dey ain't no 'sputin' of it. I allus said he's de best-lookin' nigger in de country. An' dey ain't nobody kinder'n Jim. No, suh.

MARY. An' to-day he said 'twas a pity I had to work an' wash like a slave for a livin'. He don' treat me like I was a nigger. He acts like I'm white folks. Aunty, you reckon ...

AUNT CANDACE. [*Gazing at her with a troubled look of astonishment.*] I knows it, honey, I knows it. Course dey ain't no better nigger'n Jim an' I wants you to marry Jim. He's awaitin' an' ...

MARY. [*Vehemently.*] I ain't talkin' 'bout Jim. What's Jim? He ain't nothin'.

AUNT CANDACE. [*Guessing at the truth, half rises from her seat.*] What you mean? Huh! What you talkin' 'bout?

MARY. [*Wearily sitting down.*] Nothin', aunty, jes' talkin'.

AUNT CANDACE. Jes' talkin'? Chile ... chile ...

MARY. Aunty, did you ever wish you was white?

AUNT CANDACE. [*Troubled.*] Laws a mercy! Huh! White! Wish I's white? Lawdy, no! What I want to be white foh? I's born a nigger, an' I's gwine die a nigger. I ain't one to tear up de work o' de Lawd. He made me an' I ain't gwine try to change it. What's in yo' haid, chile? [*Sadly.*] Po' thing, don't do dat. Yo' po' mammy useter talk lak dat ... one reason she ain't livin' to-day. An' I ain't done prayin' foh 'er nuther. Chile, you git such notions ra't out'n yo' haid. [*She shakes her head, groaning.*] Oh, Lawdy! Lawdy! [*Then, screaming, she puts her hands to her head. She grasps her stick and begins striking about her, shrieking.*] Dey's after me! Dey's after me! [*She continues beating around her.*] Open de do! Open de do!

[*MARY puts her arms around her and tries to soothe her, but she breaks away from her, fighting with her stick. Then MARY runs and opens the door, and AUNT CANDACE drives the imaginary devils out.*]

MARY. They're gone now, they're gone.

[*She closes the door and leads her back to her seat. AUNT CANDACE sits down, mumbling and groaning. The spell passes and the wild look dies from her face.*]

AUNT CANDACE. [*Looking up.*] I's had another spell, ain't I, honey?

MARY. Yes'm, but you're all right now.

[*She pours out some medicine and gives it to her.*]

AUNT CANDACE. Some dese days I's gwine be carried off by 'em, chile; I's ol' an' po'ly, ol' an' po'ly now. Dem debbils gwine git me yit.

[*She mumbles.*]

MARY. No, they ain't, aunty. I ain't goin' to let 'em.

[*There is a knock at the door, and stamping of feet.*]

AUNT CANDACE. What's dat?

MARY. Nothin'. Somebody at the door. [*The low strumming of guitar is heard.*] That's Jim. Come in!

[JIM MATTHEWS *enters. He is a young negro about twenty-two years old, and as black as his African ancestors. He carries a guitar slung over his shoulders, wears an old derby hat, tan shirt with a dark tie, well-worn blue suit, the coat of which comes to his knees, and tan shoes, slashed along the sides to make room for his feet. As he comes in he pulls off his hat and smiles genially, showing his white teeth. With better clothes he might call himself a spo' t.*

JIM. Good even', ladies.

[*He lays his derby an the bed.*

AUNT CANDACE. [*Turning around in her chair.*] What does he say?

MARY. He says good evenin'.

AUNT CANDACE. Ah-hah! Good even', Jim. Take a seat. I's sho glad you come. Mary's been talkin' 'bout you. [*He smiles complacently.*] We's sho glad you come.

[*He takes a seat between AUNT CANDACE and MARY.*

JIM. Yes'm. An' I's sho glad to be wid you all. I's allus glad to be wid de ladies.

AUNT CANDACE. What's he say?

JIM. [*Louder.*] I's glad to be wid you all.

AUNT CANDACE. Ah-hah! [JIM *pulls out a large checkered handkerchief from his breast-pocket, wipes his forehead, and then flips the dust from his shoes. He folds it carefully and puts it back in his pocket.*] Any news, Jim?

JIM. No'm, none 'tall. Any wid you?

AUNT CANDACE. Hah? No, nothin' 'tall, 'ceptin' Mr. Henry done said ... said ...

[Here she groans sharply and puts her hand to her head.]

JIM. What's that she's sayin'? *[As AUNT CANDACE continues groaning.]* Still havin' them spells, is she, Miss Mary?

MARY. Yes, she has 'em about every night.

[Making a movement as if to go to AUNT CANDACE. She stops and stares in the fire.]

AUNT CANDACE. Ne' min' me. I's all right now. An' you chillun go on wid yo' cou'tin'. I's gwine peel my 'taters.

[Raking the potatoes from the ashes, she begins peeling them. Then she takes a piece of sausage from the package in the corner. JIM smiles sheepishly and strums his guitar once or twice. He moves his chair nearer to MARY. She moves mechanically from him, still gazing in the fire.]

JIM. Er ... Miss Mary, you's lookin' 'ceedin' snatchin' wid dat white ribbon an' new cloak. I's glad to see you thought I's comin' 'round. Yes'm, I tells all de gals you got 'em beat a mile. *[He stops. MARY pays no attention to him.]* From here slam to France an' back, I ain't seed no gals lak you. Yes'm, dat's what I tells 'em all, an' I oughta know, kaze I's an ol' road nigger. I's seen de world, I has. But I's tired of 'tall, an' I wants to settle down ... an' ... you knows me... *[He stops and fidgets in his chair, strums his guitar, feels of his necktie, takes out his handkerchief and wipes his forehead.]* Miss Mary, I's ...

MARY. Jim, I done tol' you, you needn't come messin' 'round here. I ain't lovin' you. I ain't goin' to marry – nobody, never!

JIM. *[Taken aback.]* Now, Miss Mary ... er ... honey. I knows jas' how you feels. It's kaze I been a rounder, but you'll hadder forgive me. An' I's gwine 'form, I is. I's quit all dem tother gals, near 'bout broke dey hearts, but I hadder do it. Dey's only one foh me, you know. To-day I's talkin' to dat young feller, Hugh Mawgin, an' ...

MARY. Hugh what! What you sayin', Jim Matthews! Mr. Hugh, you mean.

JIM. *[Hurriedly.]* Yes'm, I said "Mr. Hugh." Didn't you hear me, Miss Mary?

MARY. What'd you say to him?

JIM. I told 'im I's callin' 'round here 'casionally, an' he said ... he ...

MARY. [*Looking straight at JIM.*] He said what?

JIM. He axed me if I's a-courtin', an' I told 'im I mought ... er ... be ...

MARY. Go on; tell me. Did he say I ought to marry you?

JIM. [*Eagerly.*] Yes'm.... [*MARY gasps.*] No'm, not ezzactly.... He said as how it was a pity you had nobody to take care o' you, an' had to work so hard lak a slave every day. An' he said you's most too purty an' good to do it. An' I tuck from 'is talk dat he meant he thought you's good enough foh me, an' wanted me to take care o' you, so's you wouldn't hadder work.

MARY. *Oh!*... Yes, I reckon so.

[*She is silent.*]

JIM. He's a eddicated boy, an' he knows. Dey teaches 'im how to know everything out yander at dat college place. He sees my worf', he does. Co'se I ain't braggin', but de gals all do say ... oh, you know what dey says.

MARY. [*Jumping up from her chair.*] Jim Matthews, you think I'd marry a ... oh, I'd ...

AUNT CANDACE. [*Turning around.*] What's you sayin', gal?

MARY. [*Sittin' down.*] Oh, aunty! I ... I ... was just askin' Jim to play a piece. [*To JIM in a lower voice.*] For the Lord's sake play somethin'....

[*She hides her face in her apron.*]

AUNT CANDACE. Ah-hah.... Play us a piece on yo' box, Jim.

[*JIM, at a loss as to the meaning of MARY'S tears, but feeling that they are somehow a further proof of his power with the ladies, smiles knowingly, tunes his guitar, and begins strumming a chord. After playing a few bars, he starts singing in a clear voice, with "Ohs" and "Ahs" thrown in.*]

JIM. Oh, whah you gwine, my lover?
Gwine on down de road.
Oh, whah you gwine, my lover?
Gwine on down de road.
(*Bass*) Gwine ... on ... gwine on down de road.

She th'owed her arms aroun' me
An' cast me silver an' gold.
Said, "Whah you gwine, my lover?"
Gwine on down de road.
(*Bass*) Oh, Lawd! ... Oh, Lawd!
Gwine ... on ... down ... de ... road.

[MARY *still leans forward, with her face in her hands. JIM stops playing and speaks softly.*

JIM. Miss Mary, I's sho' sorry I made you cry. Honey, I don't want you to cry 'bout me lak dat ...

[*She remains silent. He smiles in self-gratulation, but utters a mournful sigh for her benefit. Pulling his guitar further up on his lap, he takes out his pocket-knife, fits it between his fingers in imitation of the Hawaiians, clears his throat and strikes another chord.*

AUNT CANDACE. [*Noticing the silence, looks at MARY.*] What's de trouble wid you, gal? What's de trouble, chile? Oh, Lawdy me!
[*Passing her hand across her forehead.*

MARY. [*Raising her head.*] Nothin', nothin'. I'm tickled at Jim.
[*To JIM.*] Go on, play her piece about the hearse. Play it!

JIM. [*Strums his guitar, tunes it, and begins.*]
Hearse done carried somebody to de graveyard.
Lawd, I know my time ain't long.
Hearse done carried somebody to de graveyard.
Lawd, I know my time ain't long.
[*He sings louder, syncopating with his feet.*]
Preacher keeps a-preachin' an' people keep a-dyin'.
Lawd, I know my time ain't long.

[AUNT CANDACE begins swaying rhythmically with the music, clapping her hands, and now and then exclaiming.

AUNT CANDACE. Jesus! Lawdy, my Lawd!

[She and JIM begin to sing alternately, she the first verse and JIM the refrain. While this is going on MARY, unobserved, goes to the window, pulls open the curtain and looks out, stretching her clenched hands above her head. She turns to the mirror, smooths back her heavy hair, shakes her head, snatches off the ribbon and throws it on the floor. Then she pulls off her cloak and lays it on the bed. She picks up the ribbon and puts it in the bureau. Meanwhile the music has continued.

Hammer keep ringin' on somebody's coffin.

JIM. Lawd, I know my time ain't long.

[They repeat these lines.

AUNT CANDACE. Gwine roll 'em up lak leaves in de judgment.

JIM. Lawd, I know my time ain't long.

[After these lines have been repeated, JIM, noticing MARY'S absence from his side, stops and looks around. AUNT CANDACE keeps on singing a verse or two. She stops and looks around, sees MARY standing in an attitude of despair. JIM speaks.

JIM. Miss Mary!

AUNT CANDACE. What is it, honey?

[There is a stamping of feet outside. MARY raises her head with an expectant look on her face. She runs to the door and opens it. Her expression changes to one of disappointment and fear as HENRY MORGAN enters. He is a man of powerful build, about fifty years old, rough and overbearing. A week's growth of grizzled beard darkens his face. He wears a felt hat, long black overcoat, ripped at the pockets and buttoned up to his chin, big laced boots, and yarn mittens. In his hand he carries a package, which he throws contemptuously on the bed. He keeps his hat on. MARY closes the door and stands with her back to it, clasping the latch-

string. AUNT CANDACE and JIM offer their seats. JIM'S look is one of servile respect, that of Aunt Candace one of troubled expectancy.

MORGAN. [*In a booming voice.*] Dad burn you, Jim. Still a-courtin', eh? Set down, Candace. I ain't goin't to stay long.

AUNT CANDACE. [*Querulously.*] What's he say?

MARY. [*Coming to the centre of the room.*] He says for you to set down. He ain't goin' to stay long.

AUNT CANDACE. [*Sitting down.*] Ah-hah ... Oh, Lawdy! Lawdy!

MORGAN. [*Coming closer to AUNT CANDACE.*] How you gettin' 'long now, Candace?

AUNT CANDACE. Po'ly, po'ly, Mr. Mawgin. Ain't got much longer down here, ain't much longer.

MORGAN. [*Laughing.*] Aw come on, Candace, cut out your foolin'. You ain't half as bad off as you make out. [*JIM moves his chair to the corner and sits down.*] I understand you. If you'd git up from there an' go to work you'd be well in a week.

AUNT CANDACE. Oh, Lawd, Mr. Mawgin, I sho' is po'ly! I hopes you'll never have to suffer lak me.

[*Mumbling, she shakes her head, rocks to and fro without taking her feet from the floor, punctuating her movements by tapping with her stick. MORGAN sees MARY looking at the package.*]

MORGAN. That's for Mary. I was comin' down this way an' caught up with John. He said he was comin' here to bring it. An' so I took an' brought it, though he acted sort of queer about it, like he didn't want me even to save him a long walk. Wonder what that nigger can be givin' you. [*MARY starts toward the bed.*] No, you ain't goin' to see it now, gal. We got a little business to 'tend to first. Did you tell Candace what I said?

MARY. Mr. Morgan, how could I?... I couldn't do it, not to-night.

MORGAN. Uh-huh ... I knowed it. Knowed I'd better come down here an' make sure of it. Durn me, you been cryin', ain't you? [*His voice softens.*] What's the trouble, gal?

MARY. Nothin', nothin'. I ... I been tickled at Jim.

JIM. Tickled at Jim?

AUNT CANDACE. What does he say?

MORGAN. [*Turning to her.*] Keep quiet, can't you, Candace; I got a little business with Mary. [*AUNT CANDACE becomes silent and begins watching the package. She half starts from her chair, then settles back, staring hard at the bundle. MORGAN speaks to MARY.*] You ain't been cryin' about what I told you this evenin', have you?

MARY. No, sir. I was tickled at Jim. It wan't nothin', honest it wan't.

MORGAN. Well, go on lyin' if you want to.

MARY. Mr. Morgan, I was jes' ...

MORGAN. No matter. [*Brusquely.*] Well, what you goin' to do about what I said? [*He looks at her squarely. JIM watches them both with open mouth. AUNT CANDACE keeps staring at the bundle on the bed, and now and then glancing around to see if any one is watching her. She is oblivious of the conversation. MARY stands with bowed head.*] Well, what about it? I've done told you you got to get out at the first o' the year if you ain't a mind to marry Jim. [*JIM straightens up.*] At least you've got to marry somebody that can come here and work. I told you to tell Candace to look out for it. Why didn't you tell her like I said?

MARY. I couldn't do it. It'd kill her to leave here. You know it. She's been good to me all my life. Oh, I can't do it.

[*AUNT CANDACE stealthily slips across the room and picks up the package from the bed, unseen by any one but JIM.*]

MORGAN. Can't do it? Well, what you want me to do? Lose money on you till the end of time! You ain't earned enough to keep you in clothes for the last three years since Candace got down, an' ...

[A terrible cry rings out. AUNT CANDACE stands by the bed, holding a white dress up before her. MORGAN looks perplexed. Suddenly he starts back in astonishment.]

MARY. *[Starting forward.]* It's for me! *[Joyously.]* It's mine!

MORGAN. *[Catching MARY by the arm.]* What – what is it?... Heigh! Don't you move, gal! Wait a minute!

[He pulls her back. AUNT CANDACE looks at MORGAN. Gradually he lowers his head.]

AUNT CANDACE. I's a-feared on it. I knowed it ... I knowed it. *[She throws the dress back on the bed and hobbles to the fire, groaning.]* Oh, Lawdy! Oh, Lawdy! My po' li'l gal! My po' li'l gal!

[She rocks to and fro. MORGAN'S hand falls from MARY'S shoulder, and she runs to the bed.]

MARY. He sent it to me! He sent it to me! I knowed he wouldn't forget.

[She hugs the dress to her.]

MORGAN. *[Turning to her.]* Well, and what nigger's sending you presents now? *[With suspicion fully aroused.]* Who give you that, Mary!

MARY. He did!

MORGAN. *[Sternly.]* Who?

MARY. *[Impetuously.]* It was him! An' I don't care if you do know it!

MORGAN. Who? You don't mean ...

MARY. I do too – an' ...

MORGAN. God a'mighty, my ... it can't be so.

[MARY goes to the window and holds the dress in front of her.]

MARY. It is, too. Mr. Hugh sent it to me. [MORGAN *groans*.] He told me to-day he's sorry for me. I knowed he'd remember me; I knowed it. An', after all, I ain't been workin' the whole year for nothin'. He's got a heart if nobody else ain't.

MORGAN. What in the devil! I wonder ... Lord!

[AUNT CANDACE *still looks in the fire*. For a moment MORGAN *stands lost in abstraction*, then he *speaks fiercely*.

MORGAN. Mary, put them damned things up. Put 'em up, I say. [He *goes toward her*. She *shrinks back*; holding the dress to her. He *snatches it from her and throws it on the bed*, then he *pushes her out in the middle of the floor*. She *wipes the tears from her eyes with her apron*.] You listen here, gal. We're goin' to settle it right here and now, once and for all. You're goin' to marry Jim?

MARY. Mr. Morgan ... oh ... I can't marry him. I can't! I won't! Let me stay. Don't drive her out; she'll die. I'll work, I'll hoe an' wash, day an' night. I'll do anything, I'll ...

MORGAN. [*Fiercely*.] You've tole me that a thousand times, an' you've got to say one or the other right now. Right now! Do you hear! Marry Jim, I tell you, and it'll be all right. He's smart and he'll take care of you ...

MARY. I can't do it, I tell you. I can't! I'd rather die. Look at me. Ain't I almost white? Look at him. He's black and I hate him. I can't marry no nigger. Oh, don't make me do it.

MORGAN. White! What's that got to do with your marryin'? Ain't you a ...? You don't think you can marry a white man, do you? I tell you you've got to decide to-night. I've been after you now for two years and, gal, you've got to do it!

MARY. Don't make me do it! I hate him. I ain't black. Oh, Lord!...

MORGAN. [*Desperately*.] Candace!

MARY. [*Clutching at his arm*.] Don't tell her. I ain't goin' to see her drove out in the cold from her home. Don't tell her.

[AUNT CANDACE *still looks in the fire*. JIM *sits lost in amazement, idly strumming his guitar*.

MORGAN. Well?

MARY. [*Looking wildly around, as if seeking help.*] Oh!...

MORGAN. [*Wiping his face.*] Gal, I don't want to be too hard on you. But use common sense. I've been good to you. They ain't another man in the county that would have kept you for the last three years, an' losin' money on you every year. I'm done of it, gal, I'm done. Marry Jim.

MARY. He wouldn't let you do it if he was here. He wouldn't.

MORGAN. Who? Who you talkin' about?

MARY. Mr. Hugh, your boy. He's got feelin's, he has. If he was here ...

MORGAN. [*Hoarsely.*] I know it. I know it. Don't you see? He's all I got. I can't run the risk of his ... Oh, Mary, I can't tell you. For God's sake, marry Jim. Can't you see? You've got to marry him! Hugh's gone off for a week, an' I'm goin' to settle it before he ever gets back. And when he gets back, you and Candace will be clean out of this country, if you don't marry Jim. They ain't nobody else 'round here will take you in, and keep you like I have.

MARY. Where ... where's he gone?

MORGAN. He's gone to see his gal. The one he's going to marry. And by God, you've got to marry Jim.

MARY. [*Half sobbing.*] They ain't no use tryin' to change it. I've tried and tried, but they ain't no use. I jus' as well do it. Yes, yes, I'll marry him. I'll marry him. They ain't no way to be white. I got to be a nigger. I'll marry him, yes. I'll marry him, an' work an' hoe an' wash an' raise more children to go through it all like me, maybe other children that'll want to be white an' can't. They ain't nobody can help me. But look at him. [*Pointing to JIM.*] He's a nigger an' ... yes ... I'm a nigger too.

[She throws her arms out, letting them fall at her side.]

MORGAN. *[Almost gently.]* All right, Mary ... I'll send for the preacher and the license in the morning and have him marry you and Jim right here. You needn't think about leavin' any more. And you and Jim can live here as long as you please. Is that all right, Jim?

JIM. *[Uncertainly.]* Yes-suh, yes-suh, Mr. Mawgin! An' I thanks you 'specially.

MORGAN. *[Going up to AUNT CANDACE.]* Mary and Jim are going to be married to-morrow, Candace. It'll be a lucky day for you. *[She makes no answer, but continues her trancelike stare in the fire. MORGAN comes to MARY and offers his hand. She fails to see it.]* Child, what I've had to do to-night has hurt me a whole lot worse'n you.... Good-night, Mary.

[He stands a moment looking at the floor, then goes out quietly.]

JIM. *[Coming up to MARY.]* Miss Mary, don't look lak dat. I's gwine do better, I's.... *[MARY keeps her head muffled in her apron.]* Honey, I's sho' gwine make you a good man.

[MARY pays no attention to him. In his embarrassment he strums his guitar, clears his throat, props his foot up on a chair rung, and begins singing in a low voice.]

JIM. Lyin' in the jail house,
A-peepin' th'ough de bars....

AUNT CANDACE. *[Waking from her reverie.]* Bring me de li'l black box, gal. Bring me de box! *[MARY drops her apron and stares dully at the floor.]* Bring me de box! *[Half-screaming.]* Bring me de box, I say! *[Trembling and groaning, she stands up. MARY goes to the chest and brings her the black box. AUNT CANDACE drops her stick and clutches it.]* I's gwine tell you de secret o' dis li'l box. Yo' mammy told me to tell you if de time ever come, an' it's come. She seed trouble an' our mammy befo' us. *[She takes a key, tied by a string around her neck, and unlocks the box, pulling out a wrinkled white dress, yellowed with age, of the style of the last generation. JIM sits down, overcome with astonishment, staring at the old woman with open mouth.]* Look heah, chile. I's gwine

tell you now. Nineteen yeahs ago come dis Christmas dey's a white man gi'n your mammy dis heah, an' dat white man is kin to you, an' he don't live fur off nuther. Gimme dat dress dere on de bed. [MARY gets it and holds it tightly to her breast. AUNT CANDACE snatches at it, but MARY clings to it.] Gimme dat dress!

MARY. It's mine!

AUNT CANDACE. Gimme! [She jerks the dress from MARY. Hobbling to the fireplace, she lays both of them carefully on the flames. JIM makes a movement as if to save them, but she waves him back with her stick.] Git back, nigger! Git back! Dis night I's gwine wipe out some o' de traces o' sin. [MARY sits in her chair, sobbing. As the dresses burn AUNT CANDACE comes to her and lays her hand upon her head.] I knows yo' feelin's, chile. But yo's got to smother 'em in. Yo's got to smother 'em in.

CURTAIN

MOONSHINE

BY
ARTHUR HOPKINS

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ARTHUR HOPKINS

Arthur Hopkins, one of the well-known men of the practical theatre of to-day, was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1878. He completed his academic training at Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. At present he is the manager of Plymouth Theatre, New York City.

Mr. Hopkins's entire life has been given to the theatre, which is his hobby. In the midst of his various activities as a manager he has found time to do some dramatic writing. Among his one-act plays are *Thunder God*, *Broadway Love*, and *Moonshine*, which appeared in the *Theatre Acts Magazine* for January, 1919.

Moonshine is an excellent play of situation that has grown out of the reaction of character on character.

CHARACTERS

LUKE HAZY, *Moonshiner*
A REVENUE OFFICER

MOONSHINE

SCENE: *Hut of a moonshiner in the mountain wilds of North Carolina. Door back left. Window back right centre. Old deal table right centre. Kitchen chair at either side of table, not close to it. Old cupboard in left corner. Rude stone fireplace left side. On back wall near door is a rough pencil sketch of a man hanging from a tree.*

At rise of curtain a commotion is heard outside of hut.

LUKE. [*Off stage.*] It's all right, boys.... Jist leave him to me.... Git in there, Mister Revenue.

[REVENUE, a Northerner in city attire, without hat, clothes dusty, is pushed through doorway. LUKE, a lanky, ill-dressed Southerner, following, closes door. REVENUE'S hands are tied behind him.]

LUKE. You must excuse the boys for makin' a demonstration over you, Mister Revenue, but you see they don't come across you fellers very frequent, and they allus gits excited.

REVENUE. I appreciate that I'm welcome.

LUKE. 'Deed you is, and I'm just agoin' to untie your hands long nuff fer you to take a sociable drink. [*Goes to stranger, feels in all-pockets for weapons.*] Reckon yer travellin' peaceable. [*Unties hands.*] Won't yer sit down?

REVENUE. [*Drawing over chair and sitting.*] Thank you. [*Rubs wrists to get back circulation.*]

LUKE. [*Going over to cupboard and taking out jug.*] Yessa, Mister, the boys ain't seen one o' you fellers fer near two years. Began to think you wus goin' to neglect us. I wus hopin' you might be Jim Dunn. Have a drink?

REVENUE. [*Starts slightly at mention of JIM DUNN.*] No, thank you, your make is too strong for me.

LUKE. It hain't no luck to drink alone when you git company. Better have some.

REVENUE. Very well, my friend, I suffer willingly.

[*Drinks a little and chokes.*]

LUKE. [*Draining cup.*] I reckon ye all don't like the flavor of liquor that hain't been stamped.

REVENUE. It's not so bad.

LUKE. The last Revenue that sit in that chair got drunk on my make.

REVENUE. That wouldn't be difficult.

LUKE. No, but it wuz awkward.

REVENUE. Why?

LUKE. I had to wait till he sobered up before I give him his ticker. I didn't feel like sendin' him to heaven drunk. He'd a found it awkward climbin' that golden ladder.

REVENUE. Thoughtful executioner.

LUKE. So you see mebbe you kin delay things a little by dallyin' with the lick.

REVENUE. [*Picking up cup, getting it as far as his lips, slowly puts it down.*] The price is too great.

LUKE. I'm mighty sorry you ain't Jim Dunn. But I reckon you ain't. You don't answer his likeness.

REVENUE. Who's Jim Dunn?

LUKE. You ought to know who Jim Dunn is. He's just about the worst one of your revenue critters that ever hit these parts. He's got four of the boys in jail. We got a little reception all ready for him. See that?

[*Pointing to sketch on back wall.*]

REVENUE. [*Looking at sketch.*] Yes.

LUKE. That's Jim Dunn.

REVENUE. [*Rising, examining picture.*] Doesn't look much like any one.

LUKE. Well, that's what Jim Dunn'll look like when we git 'im. I'm mighty sorry you hain't Jim Dunn.

REVENUE. I'm sorry to disappoint you.

LUKE. [*Turning to cupboard and filling pipe.*] Oh, it's all right. I reckon one Revenue's about as good as another, after all.

REVENUE. Are you sure I'm a revenue officer?

LUKE. [*Rising.*] Well, since we ketched ye climin' trees an' snoopin' round the stills, I reckon we won't take no chances that you hain't.

REVENUE. Oh.

LUKE. Say, mebbe you'd like a seggar. Here's one I been savin' fer quite a spell back, thinkin' mebbe I'd have company some day. [*Brings out dried-up cigar, hands it to him.*]

REVENUE. No, thank you.

LUKE. It hain't no luck to smoke alone when ye got company. [*Striking match and holding it to REVENUE.*] Ye better smoke. [*REVENUE bites off end and mouth is filled with dust, spits out dust. LUKE holds match to cigar. With difficulty REVENUE lights it.*] That's as good a five-cent cigar as ye can git in Henderson.

REVENUE. [*After two puffs, makes wry face, throws cigar on table.*] You make death very easy, Mister.

LUKE. Luke's my name. Yer kin call me Luke. Make you feel as though you had a friend near you at the end — Luke Hazy.

REVENUE. [*Starting as though interested, rising.*] Not the Luke Hazy that cleaned out the Crosby family?

LUKE. [*Startled.*] How'd you hear about it?

REVENUE. Hear about it? Why, your name's been in every newspaper in the United States. Every time you killed another Crosby the whole feud was told all over again. Why, I've seen your picture in the papers twenty times.

LUKE. Hain't never had one took.

REVENUE. That don't stop them from printing it. Don't you ever read the newspapers?

LUKE. Me read? I hain't read nothin' fer thirty years. Reckon I couldn't read two lines in a hour.

REVENUE. You've missed a lot of information about yourself.

LUKE. How many Crosbys did they say I killed?

REVENUE. I think the last report said you had just removed the twelfth.

LUKE. It's a lie! I only killed six ... that's all they wuz — grewed up. I'm a-waitin' fer one now that's only thirteen.

REVENUE. When'll he be ripe?

LUKE. Jes as soon as he comes a-lookin' fer me.

REVENUE. Will he come?

LUKE. He'll come if he's a Crosby.

REVENUE. A brave family?

LUKE. They don't make 'em any braver — they'd be first-rate folks if they wuzn't Crosbys.

REVENUE. If you feel that way why did you start fighting them?

LUKE. I never started no fight. My granddad had some misunderstandin' with their granddad. I don't know jes what it wuz about, but I reckon my granddad wuz right, and I'll see it through.

REVENUE. You must think a lot of your grandfather.

LUKE. Never seen 'im, but it ain't no luck goin' agin yer own kin. Won't ye have a drink?

REVENUE. No — no — thank you.

LUKE. Well, Mr. Revenue, I reckon we might as well have this over.

REVENUE. What?

LUKE. Well, you won't get drunk, and I can't be put to the trouble o' havin' somebody guard you.

REVENUE. That'll not be necessary.

LUKE. Oh, I know yer like this yer place now, but this evenin' you might take it into yer head to walk out.

REVENUE. I'll not walk out unless you make me.

LUKE. Tain't like I'll let yer, but I wouldn't blame yer none if yu tried.

REVENUE. But I'll not.

LUKE. [*Rising.*] Say, Mistah Revenue, I wonder if you know what you're up against?

REVENUE. What do you mean?

LUKE. I mean I gotta kill you.

REVENUE. [*Rising, pauses.*] Well, that lets me out.

LUKE. What do yu mean?

REVENUE. I mean that I've been trying to commit suicide for the last two months, but I haven't had the nerve.

LUKE. [*Startled.*] Suicide?

REVENUE. Yes. Now that you're willing to kill me, the problem is solved.

LUKE. Why, what d'ye want to commit suicide fer?

REVENUE. I just want to stop living, that's all.

LUKE. Well, yu must have a reason.

REVENUE. No special reason—I find life dull and I'd like to get out of it.

LUKE. Dull?

REVENUE. Yes—I hate to go to bed—I hate to get up—I don't care for food—I can't drink liquor—I find people either malicious or dull—I see by the fate of my acquaintances, both men and women, that love is a farce. I have seen fame and preference come to those who least deserved them, while the whole world kicked and cuffed the worthy ones. The craftier schemer gets the most money and glory, while the fair-minded dealer is humiliated in the bankruptcy court. In the name of the law every crime is committed; in the name of religion every vice is indulged; in the name of education greatest ignorance is rampant.

LUKE. I don't git all of that, but I reckon you're some put out.

REVENUE. I am. The world's a failure ... what's more, it's a farce. I don't like it but I can't change it, so I'm just aching for a chance to get out of it.... [*Approaching LUKE.*] And you, my dear friend, are going to present me the opportunity.

LUKE. Yes, I reckon you'll get your wish now.

REVENUE. Good ... if you only knew how I've tried to get killed.

LUKE. Well, why didn't you kill yerself?

REVENUE. I was afraid.

LUKE. Afreed o' what—hurtin' yourself?

REVENUE. No, afraid of the consequences.

LUKE. Whad d'ye mean?

REVENUE. Do you believe in another life after this one?

LUKE. I kan't say ez I ever give it much thought.

REVENUE. Well, don't—because if you do you'll never kill another Crosby ... not even a revenue officer.

LUKE. 'Tain't that bad, is it?

REVENUE. Worse. Twenty times I've had a revolver to my head—crazy to die—and then as my finger pressed the trigger I'd get a terrible dread—a dread that I was plunging into worse terrors than this world ever knew. If killing were the end it would be easy, but what if it's only the beginning of something worse?

LUKE. Well, you gotta take some chances.

REVENUE. I'll not take that one. You know, Mr. Luke, life was given to us by some one who probably never intended that we should take it, and that some one has something ready for people who destroy his property. That's what frightens me.

LUKE. You do too much worryin' to be a regular suicide.

REVENUE. Yes, I do. That's why I changed my plan.

LUKE. What plan?

REVENUE. My plan for dying.

LUKE. Oh, then you didn't give up the idea?

REVENUE. No, indeed—I'm still determined to die, but I'm going to make some one else responsible.

LUKE. Oh—so you hain't willing to pay fer yer own funeral music?

REVENUE. No, sir. I'll furnish the passenger, but some one else must buy the ticket. You see, when I finally decided I'd be killed, I immediately exposed myself to every danger I knew.

LUKE. How?

REVENUE. In a thousand ways.... [*Pause.*] Did you ever see an automobile?

LUKE. No.

REVENUE. They go faster than steam engines, and they don't *stay* on tracks. Did you ever hear of Fifth Avenue, New York?

LUKE. No.

REVENUE. Fifth Avenue is jammed with automobiles, eight deep all day long. People being killed every day. I crossed Fifth Avenue a thousand times a day, every day for weeks, never once trying to get out of the way, and always praying I'd be hit.

LUKE. And couldn't yu git hit?

REVENUE. [*In disgust.*] No. Automobiles only hit people who try to get out of the way. [*Pause.*] When that failed, I frequented the lowest dives on the Bowery, flashing a roll of money and wearing diamonds, hoping they'd kill me for them. They stole the money and diamonds, but never touched me.

LUKE. Couldn't you pick a fight?

REVENUE. I'm coming to that. You know up North they believe that a man can be killed in the South for calling another man a liar.

LUKE. That's right.

REVENUE. It is, is it? Well, I've called men liars from Washington to Atlanta, and I'm here to tell you about it.

LUKE. They must a took pity on ye.

REVENUE. Do you know Two Gun Jake that keeps the dive down in Henderson?

LUKE. I should think I do.... Jake's killed enough of 'em.

REVENUE. He's a bad man, ain't he?

LUKE. He's no trifler.

REVENUE. I wound up in Jake's place two nights ago, pretending to be drunk. Jake was cursing niggers.

LUKE. He's allus doin' that.

REVENUE. So I elbowed my way up to the bar and announced that I was an expert in the discovery of nigger blood ... could tell a nigger who was 63-64ths white.

LUKE. Ye kin?

REVENUE. No, I can't, but I made them believe it. I then offered to look them over and tell them if they had any nigger blood in them. A few of them sneaked away, but the rest stood for it. I passed them all until I got to Two Gun Jake. I examined his eyeballs, looked at his finger-nails, and said, "You're a nigger."

LUKE. An' what did Jake do?

REVENUE. He turned pale, took me into the back room. He said: "Honest to God, mister, can ye see nigger blood in me?" I said: "Yes." "There's no mistake about it?" "Not a bit," I answered. "Good God," he said, "I always suspected it." Then he pulled out his gun —

LUKE. Eh ... eh?

REVENUE. And shot *himself*.

LUKE. Jake shot hisself!... Is he dead?

REVENUE. I don't know — I was too disgusted to wait. I wandered around until I thought of you moonshiners ... scrambled around in the mountains until I found your still. I *sat* on it and waited until you boys showed up, and here I am, and you're going to kill me.

LUKE. [*Pause.*] Ah, so ye want us to do yer killin' fer ye, do ye?

REVENUE. You're my last hope. If I fail this time I may as well give it up.

LUKE. [*Takes out revolver, turns sidewise and secretly removes cartridges from chamber. Rises.*] What wuz that noise?

[*Lays revolver on table and steps outside of door. REVENUE looks at revolver, apparently without interest.*]

[LUKE *cautiously enters doorway and expresses surprise at seeing REVENUE making no attempt to secure revolver. Feigning excitement, goes to table, picks up gun.*

LUKE. I reckon I'm gettin' careless, leavin' a gun layin' around here that-a-way. Didn't you see it?

REVENUE. Yes.

LUKE. Well, why didn't ye grab it?

REVENUE. What for?

LUKE. To git the drop on me.

REVENUE. Can't you understand what I've been telling you, mister? I don't *want* the drop on you.

LUKE. Well, doggone if I don't believe yer tellin' me the truth. Thought I'd just see what ye'd do. Ye see, I emptied it first.

[*Opens up gun.*

REVENUE. That wasn't necessary.

LUKE. Well, I reckon ye better git along out o' here, mister.

REVENUE. You don't mean you're weakening?

LUKE. I ain't got no call to do your killin' fer you. If ye hain't sport enough to do it yerself, I reckon ye kin go on sufferin'.

REVENUE. But I told you why I don't want to do it. One murder more or less means nothing to you. You don't care anything about the hereafter.

LUKE. Mebbe I don't, but there ain't no use my takin' any more chances than I have to. And what's more, mister, from what you been tellin' me I reckon there's a charm on you, and I ain't goin' to take no chances goin' agin charms.

REVENUE. So *you're* going to go back on me?

LUKE. Yes, siree.

REVENUE. Well, maybe some of the other boys will be willing. I'll wait till they come.

LUKE. The other boys ain't goin' to see you. You're a leavin' this yer place right now – now! It won't do no good. You may as well go peaceable; ye ain't got no right to expect us to bear yer burdens.

REVENUE. Damn it all! I've spoiled it again.

LUKE. I reckon you better make up yer mind to go on livin'.

REVENUE. That looks like the only way out.

LUKE. Come on, I'll let you ride my horse to town. It's the only one we got, so yu can leave it at Two Gun Jake's, and one o' the boys'll go git it, or I reckon I'll go over myself and see if Jake made a job of it.

REVENUE. I suppose it's no use arguing with you.

LUKE. Not a bit. Come on, you.

REVENUE. Well, I'd like to leave my address so if you ever come to New York you can look me up.

LUKE. 'Tain't likely I'll ever come to New York.

REVENUE. Well, I'll leave it, anyhow. Have you a piece of paper?

LUKE. Paper what you write on? Never had none, mister.

REVENUE. [*Looking about room, sees JIM DUNN's picture on wall, goes to it, takes it down.*] If you don't mind, I'll put it on the back of Jim Dunn's picture. [*Placing picture on table, begins to print.*] I'll print it for you, so it'll be easy to read. My address is here, so if you change your mind you can send for me.

LUKE. 'Tain't likely – come on. [*Both go to doorway – LUKE extends hand, REVENUE takes it.*] Good-by, mister – cheer up ... there's the horse.

REVENUE. Good-by. [*Shaking LUKE's hand.*]

LUKE. Don't be so glum, mister. Lemme hear you laff jist onct before yu go. [REVENUE *begins to laugh weakly.*] Aw, come on, laff out with it hearty. [REVENUE *laughs louder.*] Heartier yit.

[REVENUE *is now shouting his laughter, and is heard laughing until hoof-beats of his horse die down in the distance.*]

[LUKE *watches for a moment, then returns to table – takes a drink – picks up picture – turns it around several times before getting it right – then begins to study. In attempting to make out the name he slowly traces in the air with his index finger a capital "J" – then mutters "J-J-J," then describes a letter "I" – mutters "I-I-I," then a letter "M" – muttering "M-M-M, J-I-M – J-I-M – JIM." In the same way describes and mutters D-U-N-N.*]

LUKE. Jim Dunn! By God! [*He rushes to corner, grabs shot-gun, runs to doorway, raises gun in direction stranger has gone – looks intently – then slowly lets gun fall to his side, and scans the distance with his hand shadowing his eyes – steps inside – slowly puts gun in corner – seats himself at table.*] Jim Dunn! – and he begged me to kill 'im!!

MODESTY

BY
PAUL HERVIEU

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PAUL HERVIEU

Paul Hervieu, one of the foremost of contemporary French dramatists, was born in 1857 at Neuilly, near Paris. Although he prepared for the bar, having passed the examination at twenty, and practised his profession for a few years, he soon set to writing short stories and novels which appeared in the early eighties. *The Nippers*, in 1890, established his reputation as a dramatist. The remainder of his life was given to writing for the stage. In 1900 he was elected to the French Academy. He died October 15, 1915.

In addition to *The Nippers*, Hervieu's best-known long plays are *The Passing of the Torch*, *The Labyrinth*, and *Know Thyself*.

Modesty is his well-known one-act play. In subtlety of technic and in delicacy of touch it is one of the finest examples of French one-act plays. Its humor and light, graceful satire are noteworthy.

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

HENRIETTE
JACQUES
ALBERT

MODESTY

TIME: *The present.*

SCENE: A drawing-room. Entrance, C; sofa, chairs, writing-desk. JACQUES and HENRIETTE enter C, from dinner. HENRIETTE in ball costume, JACQUES in evening dress. They come down C.

HENRIETTE. What is it? Is it so terribly embarrassing?

JACQUES. You can easily guess.

HENRIETTE. You're so long-winded. You make me weary — come to the point.

JACQUES. I'll risk all at a stroke — My dear Henriette, we are cousins. I am unmarried, you — a widow. Will you — will you be my wife?

HENRIETTE. Oh, my dear Jacques, what *are* you thinking of? We were such good friends! And now you're going to be angry.

JACQUES. Why?

HENRIETTE. Because I'm not going to give you the sort of answer you'd like.

JACQUES. You don't — you don't think I'd make a good husband?

HENRIETTE. Frankly, no.

JACQUES. I don't please you?

HENRIETTE. As a cousin you are charming; as a husband you would be quite impossible.

JACQUES. What have you against me?

HENRIETTE. Nothing that you're to blame for. It is merely the fault of my character; *that* forces me to refuse you.

JACQUES. But I can't see why you — —?

HENRIETTE. [*With an air of great importance.*] A great change is taking place in the hearts of us women. We have resolved

henceforward not to be treated as dolls, but as creatures of reason. As for me, I am most unfortunate, for nobody ever did anything but flatter me. I have always been too self-satisfied, too — —

JACQUES. You have always been the most charming of women, the most — —

HENRIETTE. Stop! It's exactly that sort of exaggeration that's begun to make me so unsure of myself. I want you to understand once for all, Jacques, I have a conscience, and, furthermore, it is beginning to develop. I have taken some important resolutions.

JACQUES. What *do* you mean?

HENRIETTE. I have resolved to better myself, to raise my moral and intellectual standards, and to do that I must be guided, criticised — —

JACQUES. But you already possess every imaginable quality! You are charitable, cultured, refined — —

HENRIETTE. [*Annoyed.*] Please!

[*Turns away and sits on settee.* JACQUES addresses her from behind chair.

JACQUES. You are discreet, witty — —

HENRIETTE. The same old compliments! Everybody tells me that. I want to be preached to, contradicted, scolded — —

JACQUES. You could never stand *that*.

HENRIETTE. Yes, I could. I should be happy to profit by the criticism. It would inspire me.

JACQUES. I'd like to see the man who has the audacity to criticise you to your face — —

HENRIETTE. That is enough! I trust you are aware that you are not the person fit to exercise this influence over me?

JACQUES. How could I? Everything about you pleases me. It can never be otherwise.

HENRIETTE. How interesting! That's the very reason I rejected your proposal. I sha'n't marry until I am certain that I shall not be continually pestered with compliments and flattery and submission. The man who marries me shall make it his business to remind me of my shortcomings, to correct all my mistakes. He must give me the assurance that I am continually bettering myself.

JACQUES. And this — husband — have you found him already?

HENRIETTE. What — ? Oh, who knows?

JACQUES. Perhaps it's — Albert?

HENRIETTE. Perhaps it is — what of it?

JACQUES. Really!

HENRIETTE. You want me to speak frankly?

JACQUES. Of course.

HENRIETTE. Then — you wouldn't be annoyed if I said something nice about Albert?

[JACQUES brings down C. chair which is by desk, facing HENRIETTE.]

JACQUES. Why, he's your friend!

HENRIETTE. Oh! So you, too, have a good opinion of him?

JACQUES. Certainly.

HENRIETTE. Well, what would you say of him?

JACQUES. [*Trying to be fair.*] I'd trust him with money — I've never heard he was a thief.

HENRIETTE. But in other ways?

JACQUES. [*Still conscientious.*] I believe him to be somewhat— somewhat— —

HENRIETTE. Wilful? Headstrong?

JACQUES. Um— uncultured, let us say.

HENRIETTE. As you like—but for my part, I find that that air of his inspires absolute confidence. He knows how to be severe at times— —

JACQUES. You're mistaken about that; that's only simple brute force. Go to the Zoo: the ostrich, the boa constrictor, the rhinoceros, all produce the same effect on you as your Albert— —

HENRIETTE. My Albert? My Albert? Oh, I don't appropriate him so quickly as all that. His qualifications as censor are not yet entirely demonstrated.

[JACQUES rises and approaches HENRIETTE, who maintains an air of cold dignity.]

JACQUES. For heaven's sake, Henriette, stop this nonsense!

HENRIETTE. What nonsense?

JACQUES. Tell me you are only playing with me. That you only wanted to put my love to the test! To make me jealous! To torture me! You have succeeded. Stop it, for heaven's sake— —

HENRIETTE. My dear friend, I'm very sorry for you. I wish I could help you, but I cannot. I have given you a perfect description of the husband I want, and I am heart-broken that you bear so remote a resemblance to him.

JACQUES. Only promise you will think over your decision.

HENRIETTE. It is better to stop right now.

JACQUES. Don't send me away like this. Don't— —

HENRIETTE. I might give you false hopes. I have only to tell you that I shall never consent to be the wife of a man who cannot be the severest of censors.

JACQUES. [*Kneeling.*] I beg you!

HENRIETTE. No, no, no, Jacques! Spare me that. [*A telephone rings in the next room.*] There's the 'phone — —

JACQUES. Don't go!

[HENRIETTE rises hastily and goes to door. JACQUES tries for a moment to stop her.]

HENRIETTE. I must go. Go away, I tell you. I'll be furious if I find you here when I come back.

JACQUES. Henriette!

HENRIETTE. [*Coming down L. to table.*] Not now! Please, Jacques. [*Exit.*]

JACQUES. I can't leave it that way. I am the husband who will make her happy. But how? That is the question. [*Pause.*] Ah, Albert!

[*Enter ALBERT. He shakes hands with JACQUES.*]

ALBERT. How are you, rival?

JACQUES. [*Gravely.*] My friend, we are no longer rivals.

ALBERT. How's that?

JACQUES. I have just had a talk with Henriette; she refuses to marry either one of us.

ALBERT. Did she mention me?

JACQUES. Casually.

[*Both sit down, ALBERT on sofa, JACQUES on chair near it.*]

ALBERT. What did she say?

JACQUES. Oh, I wouldn't repeat it; it wouldn't be friendly.

ALBERT. I *must* know.

JACQUES. Very well, then—she said that you had not succeeded—nor had I—to find the way to her heart. Between you and me, we've got a high-minded woman to deal with, a philosopher who detests flattery. It seems you have been in the habit of paying her compliments — —

ALBERT. I never pay compliments.

JACQUES. Whatever you did, she didn't like it. Moreover—since you want the whole truth—you seem to her a bit—ridiculous.

ALBERT. Pardon?

JACQUES. The very word: ridiculous. She wants a husband who will act as a sort of conscience pilot. Evidently, you haven't appealed to her in that capacity.

ALBERT. Sometimes I used to be rather sharp with her — —

JACQUES. You did it too daintily, perhaps; you lacked severity. I'll wager you smiled, instead of scowled—that would have been fatal!

ALBERT. I don't understand.

JACQUES. Henriette is a singular woman; to get her, you have to tell her that you don't like her—her pride demands it. Tell her all her bad qualities, straight from the shoulder.

ALBERT. [*Feeling himself equal to the task.*] Don't worry about that! [*Rises and walks about.*] I know women love to be told things straight out.

JACQUES. I'm not the man for that; nor are you, I suppose?

ALBERT. No? Jacques, I'm awfully obliged to you; you've done me a good turn — —

JACQUES, Don't mention it— —

ALBERT. You want to do me one more favor?

JACQUES. [*Devotedly.*] Anything you like!

ALBERT. Promise me you'll never let Henrietta know that you told me this?

JACQUES. I promise; but why?

ALBERT. You know she has to understand that my behavior toward her is in character. Natural, you see.

JACQUES. Oh, you're going at it strenuously.

ALBERT. I am.

JACQUES. Your decision honors you.

ALBERT. Let's not have Henriette find us together. Would you mind disappearing?

JACQUES. With pleasure. I'll look in later and get the news.

[JACQUES *rises*.

ALBERT. Thanks, Jacques.

JACQUES. Good-by, Albert.

[*Exits after shaking hands cordially with ALBERT.*

HENRIETTE. [*Re-entering as ALBERT assumes a rather severe attitude.*] How are you? [*Pause.*] Have you seen Jacques?

ALBERT. [*With a determined air.*] No, Henriette. Thank God!

HENRIETTE. Why?

ALBERT. Because it pains me to see men in your presence whom you care nothing for.

HENRIETTE. [*Delighted.*] You don't like that?

[*Sitting down on sofa.*]

ALBERT. No, I don't. And I'd like to tell you — —

HENRIETTE. About my relations with Jacques?

ALBERT. Oh, he's not the only one.

HENRIETTE. Heaps of others, I suppose?

ALBERT. [*Sits on chair near sofa.*] You suppose correctly; heaps.

HENRIETTE. Really?

ALBERT. You are a coquette.

HENRIETTE. You think so?

ALBERT. I am positive.

HENRIETTE. I suppose I displease you in other ways, too?

ALBERT. In a great many other ways.

HENRIETTE. [*Really delighted.*] How confidently you say that!

ALBERT. So much the worse if you don't like it!

HENRIETTE. Quite the contrary, my dear Albert; you can't imagine how you please me when you talk like that. It's perfectly adorable.

ALBERT. It makes very little difference to me whether I please you or not. I speak according to my temperament. Perhaps it is a bit authoritative, but I can't help *that*.

HENRIETTE. You are superb.

ALBERT. Oh, no. I'm just myself.

HENRIETTE. Oh, if you were only the — —

ALBERT. I haven't the slightest idea what you were about to say, but I'll guarantee that there's not a more inflexible temper than mine in Paris.

HENRIETTE. I can easily believe it. [*Pause.*] Now tell me in what way you think I'm coquettish.

[*Sitting on edge of sofa in an interested attitude. ALBERT takes out cigarette, lights and smokes it.*]

ALBERT. That's easy; for instance, when you go to the theatre, to a reception, to the races. As soon as you arrive the men flock about in dozens; those who don't know you come to be introduced. You're the talking-stock of society. Now I should be greatly obliged if you would tell me to what you attribute this notoriety?

HENRIETTE. [*Modestly.*] Well, I should attribute it to the fact that I am — agreeable, and pleasant — —

ALBERT. There are many women no less so.

HENRIETTE. [*Summoning up all her modesty to reply.*] You force me to recognize the fact — —

ALBERT. And I know many women fully as pleasant as you who don't flaunt their favors in the face of everybody; *they* preserve some semblance of dignity, a certain air of aloof distinction that it would do you no harm to acquire.

HENRIETTE. [*With a gratitude that is conscious of its bounds.*] Thanks, thanks so much. [*Drawing back to a corner of the sofa.*] I am deeply obliged to you — —

ALBERT. Not at all.

HENRIETTE. In the future I shall try to behave more decorously.

ALBERT. Another thing — —

HENRIETTE. [*The first signs of impatience begin to appear.*] What? Another thing to criticise?

ALBERT. A thousand! [*Settling himself comfortably.*]

HENRIETTE. Well, hurry up.

ALBERT. You must rid yourself of your excessive and ridiculous school-girl sentimentality.

HENRIETTE. I wonder just on what you base your statement. Would you oblige me so far as to explain that?

ALBERT. With pleasure. I remember one day in the country you were in tears because a *poor* little mouse had fallen into the claws of a *wretched* cat; two minutes later you were sobbing because the *poor* cat choked in swallowing the *wretched* little mouse.

HENRIETTE. That was only my kindness to dumb animals. Is it wrong to be kind to dumb animals?

[*She is about to rise when ALBERT stops her with a gesture.*]

ALBERT. That would be of no consequence, if it weren't that you were of so contradictory a nature that you engage in the emptiest, most frivolous conversations, the most — —

HENRIETTE. [*Slightly disdainful.*] Ah, you are going too far! You make me doubt your power of analysis. I am interested only in noble and high things — —

ALBERT. And yet as soon as the conversation takes a serious turn, it's appalling to see you; you yawn and look bored to extinction.

HENRIETTE. There you are right — partly.

ALBERT. You see!

HENRIETTE. [*Sharp and even antagonistic.*] Yes, I have that unfortunate gift of understanding things before people have finished explaining them. While the others are waiting for the explanation, I can't wait, and I fly on miles ahead — —

ALBERT. Hm — that sounds probable; I sha'n't say anything more about that just now. But while I'm on the subject, I have more than

once noticed that you are guilty of the worst vice woman ever possessed — —

HENRIETTE. And what, if you please?

ALBERT. Vanity.

HENRIETTE. I vain? Oh, you're going too far!

ALBERT. [*Unruffled.*] Not a word! Every time I tell you a fault, you twist it round to your own advantage. Whereas you are really worse — —

HENRIETTE. [*Rising and gathering her skirts about her with virtuous indignation.*] You are rude! I suppose you would find fault with me if I considered myself more polite than the person whom I have the honor to address?

ALBERT. I hope you don't intend that remark as personal.

HENRIETTE. I certainly do.

[*She crosses to the other side of the stage and sits down. ALBERT rises and goes up to her.*

ALBERT. Henriette! No! [*Laughing.*] I see your trick.

HENRIETTE. What do you mean?

ALBERT. You can't deceive me by pretending to be angry. You wanted to see whether I could withstand your temper. Let us now proceed to the next chapter: your manner of dressing.

HENRIETTE. [*Now really outraged.*] My manner of dressing? You dare!

[*HENRIETTE crosses L. Front, ALBERT following her.*

ALBERT. Yes, that will be enough for to-day — —

HENRIETTE. And then you'll begin again to-morrow!

ALBERT. Yes.

HENRIETTE. And do you think for one minute that I'll listen to you while you insult me to my face? *You* are the vain one, to think you can come to that! *You* are the frivolous one, *you* are the — —

ALBERT. [*Slightly perturbed.*] Be careful what you say!

HENRIETTE. I'll take care of that. Let me tell you that you are a detestable cynic. You are disgustingly personal; always dwelling on details, on the least — —

ALBERT. Which is as much as calling me a fool?

HENRIETTE. Just about. You would be if you didn't read your morning paper regularly; so regularly that I know in advance exactly what you are going to say to me during the day.

ALBERT. Why not call me a parrot?

HENRIETTE. That would flatter you, for you don't speak as well as a parrot; a parrot's memory never gets clouded, a parrot has at least the common politeness to — —

ALBERT. [*Between his teeth.*] I won't stand for this. I wonder how you could have endured me so long if you thought me such a fool.

HENRIETTE. I believed you harmless.

ALBERT. Are you aware that you have wounded me cruelly?

HENRIETTE. *You* have wounded *me*. Thank heaven, though, we had this discussion! Now I'll know how to conduct myself toward you in the future.

ALBERT. Thank heaven for the same thing! It was high time! I grieve to think that only last night I had fully made up my mind to ask you to be my wife!

HENRIETTE. My dear friend, if you ever do so, I shall show you the door immediately.

[*Enter JACQUES hurriedly. HENRIETTE runs to him as for protection.*]

JACQUES. What's all this noise? What's the matter?

HENRIETTE. Oh, Jacques — I'm so glad you've come.

ALBERT. Just in time! You put an end to our pleasant little tête-à-tête.

JACQUES. But what's happened?

HENRIETTE. Well, monsieur here — —

ALBERT. No, it was mademoiselle who — —

[HENRIETTE and ALBERT each take an arm of JACQUES and bring him down-stage C. His attention is constantly shifting from one to the other, as they address him in turn.]

HENRIETTE. Just think, Jacques — —

ALBERT. Jacques, she had the audacity to — —

HENRIETTE. Stop! I'm going to tell him first — —

JACQUES. You're both too excited to explain anything. Albert, you take a little stroll and cool off.

ALBERT. [*Retreating toward the door.*] Charmed.

HENRIETTE. Then I can draw a free breath.

JACQUES. [*To ALBERT.*] I'll fix up things while you're away.

ALBERT. [*To both.*] I won't give in.

HENRIETTE. Neither will I.

JACQUES. Tut, tut!

ALBERT. Good-day, mademoiselle.

HENRIETTE. Good-day.

JACQUES. Good-day, Albert.

[Exit ALBERT.]

HENRIETTE. Thank goodness, we're rid of him!

JACQUES. [*Sympathetically.*] Tell me all about it.

HENRIETTE. [*Sits down on sofa, inviting JACQUES by a gesture to do the same. He sits beside her.*] That man invented the most abominable things about me; criticised me to my face!

JACQUES. He did!

HENRIETTE. It was so ridiculous — makes me sick to think about it.

JACQUES. My dear Henriette, don't think about it. Albert must have behaved like a brute to make you so angry.

HENRIETTE. Yes, don't you think so? *You* think I'm right?

JACQUES. [*Loyally.*] Of course I do.

HENRIETTE. [*At her ease once more.*] You encourage me, Jacques.

JACQUES. When I saw you were angry I said to myself at once: "Henriette is right."

HENRIETTE. Really?

JACQUES. I said it because I knew you were by nature peace-loving and considerate — —

HENRIETTE. [*With profound conviction.*] Well, I think that's the least that could be said of me.

JACQUES. In any event, you are always tactful, you always — —

HENRIETTE. *You* know me, Jacques!

JACQUES. I flatter myself. I felt instinctively you couldn't be wrong. You have always been so admirably poised, so unfailingly considerate.

HENRIETTE. [*With perfect simplicity.*] Frankly now, do I ever lose my temper with you?

JACQUES. [*In good faith.*] Never. With me you are always patient, gracious, modest — —

HENRIETTE. But I remember, a little while ago, I made you suffer — —

JACQUES. Yes, I was unhappy. But "if after every storm comes such a calm" — —

HENRIETTE. It was all my fault. You understand me; you are truly a friend.

JACQUES. Nothing more?

[*Rising, but standing near her. HENRIETTE blushing looks down at her shoe.*

HENRIETTE. Oh — —

JACQUES. Prove that you mean that sincerely.

HENRIETTE. What have I to do? [*Same business.*

JACQUES. Place your future in my hands; marry me.

HENRIETTE. [*With downcast eyes.*] I was just thinking about it. [*Same business, but with repressed joy.*

JACQUES. [*About to embrace her.*] Ah!

HENRIETTE. Wait!

[*Complete metamorphosis. Her joy is still present, but it has taken on a playful, serio-comic aspect. Rising and putting her hand in his.*

JACQUES. Why do you hesitate?

HENRIETTE. Jacques, do you remember what I told you not long ago?

JACQUES. Yes.

HENRIETTE. In spite of that, are you quite sure that I am not vain or coquettish?

JACQUES. I am certain.

HENRIETTE. You are also firmly resolved to be my moral guide, critic, helper?

JACQUES. [*Stolid as ever.*] I am.

HENRIETTE. I make one condition.

JACQUES. Name it.

HENRIETTE. On your word of honor?

JACQUES. On my word of honor. Tell me.

HENRIETTE. Will you swear to tell me, without pity, every time you find me at fault? Swear.

JACQUES. I swear.

HENRIETTE. Then you have my promise.

JACQUES. [*As they embrace.*] Dearest!

CURTAIN

THE DEACON'S HAT

BY
JEANNETTE MARKS

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JEANNETTE MARKS

Jeannette Marks, well-known essayist, poet, and playwright, was born in 1875 at Chattanooga, Tennessee, but spent her early life in Philadelphia, where her father, the late William Dennis Marks, was professor of dynamics in the University of Pennsylvania and president of the Edison Electric Light Company. She attended school in Dresden, and in 1900 was graduated from Wellesley College. She obtained her master's degree from Wellesley in 1903. Her graduate studies were continued at the Bodleian Library and at the British Museum. Since 1901 she has been on the staff of the English Department at Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts. Her chief courses are Nineteenth Century Poetry and Play-writing.

Miss Marks's interest in Welsh life is the result of her hiking several summers among the Welsh hills and valleys. She became intimately acquainted with Welsh peasant life. It is said that Edward Knobloch, well-known dramatist, on one of her homeward voyages from one of her summer outings in Wales, pointed out to Miss Marks the dramatic possibilities of the material she had thus acquired. *Three Welsh Plays* was the result. Two of these plays, without the author's knowledge, were entered in 1911 for the Welsh National Theatre prize contest. To her credit, the plays won the prize. The complete volume appeared in 1917.

The Deacon's Hat is a fine study of the life of the common folk of Wales.

CHARACTERS

DEACON ROBERTS, *a stout, oldish Welshman*

HUGH WILLIAMS, *an earnest, visionary young man who owns Y Gegin*

NELI WILLIAMS, *his capable wife*

MRS. JONES, *the Wash, a stout, kindly woman who wishes to buy soap*

MRS. JENKINS, *the Midwife, after pins for her latest baby*

TOM MORRIS, *the Sheep, who comes to buy tobacco and remains to pray*

THE DEACON'S HAT

SCENE: *A little shop called Y Gegin (The Kitchen), in Bala, North Wales.*

TIME: *Monday morning at half-past eleven.*

To the right is the counter of Y Gegin, set out with a bountiful supply of groceries; behind the counter are grocery-stocked shelves. Upon the counter is a good-sized enamel-ware bowl filled with herring pickled in brine and leek, also a basket of fresh eggs, a jar of pickles, some packages of codfish, a half dozen loaves of bread, a big round cheese, several pounds of butter wrapped in print paper, etc., etc.

To the left are a cheerful glowing fire and ingle.

At the back center is a door; between the door and the fire stands a grandfather's clock with a shining brass face. Between the clock and the door, back centre, is a small tridarn [Welsh dresser] and a chair. From the rafters hang flitches of bacon, hams, bunches of onions, herbs, etc. On either side of the fireplace are latticed windows, showing a glimpse of the street. Before the fire is a small, round, three-legged table; beside it a tall, straight-backed chair.

Between the table and left is a door which is the entrance to Y Gegin and from which, on a metal elbow, dangles a large bell.

At rise of curtain Hugh Williams enters at back centre, absorbed in reading a volume of Welsh theological essays. He is dressed in a brightly striped vest, a short, heavy cloth coat, cut away in front and with lapels trimmed with brass buttons, swallowtails behind, also trimmed with brass buttons, stock wound around his neck, and tight trousers down to his boot-tops.

Neli Williams, his wife, a comely, capable young woman, busy with her knitting every instant she talks, is clad in her market costume, a scarlet cloak, and a tall black Welsh beaver. Over her arm is an immense basket.

NELI. [*Commandingly.*] Hughie, put down that book!

HUGH. [*Still going on reading.*] Haven't I just said a man is his own master, whatever!

NELI. Hughie, ye're to mind the shop while I'm gone!

HUGH. [*Patiently.*] Yiss, yiss.

NELI. I don't think ye hear a word I am sayin' whatever.

HUGH. Yiss, I hear every word ye're sayin'.

NELI. What is it, then?

HUGH. [*Weakly.*] 'Tis all about—about—the—the weather whatever!

NELI. Ye've not heard a word, an' ye're plannin' to read that book from cover to cover, I can see.

HUGH. [*A little too quickly.*] Nay, I have no plans....

[*He tucks book away in back coat pocket over-hastily.*]

NELI. Hugh!

HUGH. [*Weakly.*] Nay, I *have* no plans whatever!

NELI. [*Reproachfully.*] Hugh—*ie!* 'Twould be the end of sellin' anythin' to anybody if I leave ye with a book whatever! Give me that book!

HUGH. [*Obstinately.*] Nay, I'll no read the book.

NELI. Give me that book!

HUGH. [*Rising a little.*] Nay. I say a man is his own master whatever!

NELI. [*Finding the book hidden in his coat-tail pocket.*] Is he? Well, I'll no leave ye with any masterful temptations to be readin'.

HUGH. Ye've no cause to take this book away from me.

NELI. [*Opens book and starts with delight.*] 'Tis Deacon Roberts's new book on "The Flamin' Wickedness of Babylon." Where did ye get it?

HUGH. [*Reassured by her interest.*] He lent it to me this morning.

NELI. [*Resolutely.*] Well, I will take it away from ye this noon till I am home again whatever!

HUGH. [*Sulkily.*] Sellin' groceries is not salvation. They sold groceries in Babylon; Deacon Roberts says so.

NELI. [*Looking at book with ill-disguised eagerness.*] I dunno as anybody ever found salvation by givin' away all he had for nothin'! 'Tis certain Deacon Roberts has not followed that way.

HUGH. [*Still sulkily.*] A man is his own master, I say.

NELI. [*Absent-mindedly, her nose in the book.*] Is he? Well, indeed!

HUGH. [*Crossly.*] Aye, he is. [*Pointedly.*] An' I was not plannin' to give away the book whatever.

NELI. [*Closing volume with a little sigh, as for stolen delights, and speaking hastily.*] An' I am not talkin' about acceptin' books, but about butter an' eggs an' cheese an' all the other groceries!

HUGH. Aye, ye'll get no blessin' from such worldliness.

NELI. [*Absent-mindedly.*] Maybe not, but ye will get a dinner from that unblessed worldliness an' find no fault, I'm thinkin'. [*Her hand lingering on the book, which she opens.*] But such wonderful theology! An' such eloquence! Such an understandin' of sin! Such glowin' pictures of Babylon!

HUGH. Aye, hot! I tell ye, Neli, there's no man in the parish has such a gift of eloquence as Deacon Roberts or such theology. In all Wales ye'll not find stronger theology than his.

NELI. Ye have no need to tell me that! [*Looking for a place in which to hide the book until she returns.*] Have I not a deep an' proper admiration for theology? Have I not had one minister an' five deacons an' a revivalist in my family, to say nothin' at all of one composer of hymns?

HUGH. Yiss, yiss. Aye, 'tis a celebrated family. I am no sayin' anythin' against your family.

NELI. Then what?

HUGH. [*Pleadingly.*] Deacon Roberts has great fire with which to save souls. We're needin' that book on Babylon's wickedness. Give it back to me, Neli!

NELI. Oh, aye! [*Looks at husband.*] I'm not sayin' but that ye are wicked, Hugh, an' needin' these essays, for ye have no ministers and deacons and hymn composers among your kin.

HUGH. [*Triumphantly.*] Aye, aye, that's it! That's it! An' the more need have I to read till my nostrils are full of the smoke of—of Babylon.

NELI. [*Absent-mindedly tucking book away on shelf as she talks.*] Aye, but there has been some smoke about Deacon Roberts's reputation which has come from some fire less far away than Babylon.

HUGH. What smoke?

NELI. [*Evasively.*] Well, I am thinkin' about my eggs which vanished one week ago to-day. There was no one in that mornin' but Deacon Roberts. Mrs. Jones the Wash had come for her soap an' gone before I filled that basket with eggs.

HUGH. [*Watching her covertly, standing on tiptoe and craning his neck as she stows away book.*] Yiss, yiss!

NELI. [*Slyly.*] Ask Deacon Roberts if cats steal eggs whatever?

HUGH. [*Repeating.*] If cats steal eggs, if cats steal eggs.

NELI. Aye, not if eggs steal cats.

HUGH. [*Craning neck.*] Yiss, yiss, if eggs steal cats!

NELI. Hugh—*ie!* Now ye'll never get it correct again! 'Tis if cats steal eggs.

HUGH. [*Sulkily.*] Well, I'm no carin' about cats with heaven starin' me in the face.

[NELI turns about swiftly with the quick, sudden motions characteristic of her, and HUGH shrinks into himself. She shakes her finger at him and goes over to kiss him.]

NELI. Hughie, lad, ye're not to touch the book while I am gone to market.

HUGH. Nay, nay, certainly not!

NELI. And ye're to be on the lookout for Mrs. Jones the Wash, for Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife—Jane Elin has a new baby, an' it'll be needin' somethin'. [*Pointing to counter.*] Here is everythin' plainly marked. Ye're no to undersell or give away anythin.' D'ye hear?

HUGH. Aye, I hear!

NELI. An' remember where the tobacco is, for this is the day Tom Morris the Sheep comes in.

HUGH. Aye, in the glass jar.

NELI. Good-by. I will return soon.

HUGH. [*Indifferently.*] Good-by.

[NELI leaves by door at back centre. Immediately HUGH steals toward the shelves where she hid the book.]

NELI. [*Thrusting head back in.*] Mind, Hughie lad, no readin'—nay, not even any theology!

HUGH. *[Stepping quickly away from shelves and repeating parrotlike.]* Nay, nay, no readin', no sermons, not even any theology!

NELI. An' no salvation till I come back!

[She smiles, withdraws head, and is gone. HUGH starts forward, collides clumsily with the counter in his eagerness, knocks the basket of eggs with his elbow, upsetting it. Several eggs break. He shakes his head ruefully at the mess and as ruefully at the counter. He finds book and hugs it greedily to him.]

HUGH. *[Mournfully.]* Look at this! What did I say but that there was no salvation sellin' groceries! If Neli could but see those eggs! *[He goes behind counter and gets out a box of eggs, from which he refills the basket. The broken eggs he leaves untouched upon the floor. He opens his volume of sermons and seats himself by a little three-legged table near the fire. He sighs in happy anticipation. Hearing a slight noise, he looks suspiciously at door, gets up, tiptoes across floor to street door, and locks it quietly. An expression of triumph overspreads his face.]* Da, if customers come, they will think no one is at home whatever, an' I can read on! *[He seats himself at little three-legged table, opens volume, smooths over its pages lovingly, and begins to read slowly and halting over syllables.]* The smoke of Ba-by-lon was hot — scorchin' hot. An' 'twas filled with Ba-ba-ba-baal stones, slimy an' scorchin' hot also — —

[There is the sound of feet coming up the shop steps, followed by a hand trying the door-knob. HUGH looks up from his sermons, an expression of innocent triumph on his face. The door-knob is tried again, the door rattled.]

[Then some one rings the shop door-bell.]

MRS. JONES THE WASH. *[Calling.]* Mrs. Williams, mum, have ye any soap? *[No answer. Calling.]* Mrs. Williams! Mrs. Williams!

[HUGH nods approvingly and lifts his volume to read.]

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Where are they all whatever? I will just look in at the window, *[A large, kindly face is anxiously flattened against the window. At that HUGH drops in consternation under the three-legged table.]* Uch, what's that shadow skippin' under the table? No doubt a rat after the groceries. Mrs. Williams, mum, Mrs. Williams! Well, indeed, they're out.

[She pounds once more on the door with a heavy fist, rings, and then goes. Suddenly the door back centre opens, and NELI WILLIAMS appears.]

NELI. *[She does not see HUGH and peers around for him.]* What is all that bell-ringing about?

[HUGH crawls out from under the table.]

HUGH. Hush, she's gone!

NELI. *[Amazed, and whispering to herself.]* Under the table!

HUGH. *[Rising and putting up his hand as a sign for her to keep silent.]* Nay, 'twas Mrs. Jones the Wash come to buy her soap whatever!

NELI. Aye, well, why didn't she come in whatever?

HUGH. *[Whispering.]* I locked the door, Neli, so I could finish readin' those essays whatever! An' then she looked in at the window, an' I had to get under the table.

NELI. *[Indignantly.]* Locked the door against a customer, an' after all I said! An' crawled under a table! Hugh Williams, your wits are goin' quite on the downfall!

HUGH. *[In a whisper.]* Aye, but Neli, those essays – an' I thought ye had gone to market.

NELI. I had started, but I came back for my purse. Put down that book!

HUGH. Aye, but, Neli – –

NELI. *[Angrily.]* Much less of heaven an' much more of earth is what I need in a husband! Ye have sent away a customer; very like Mrs. Jones the Wash after soap will go elsewhere.

HUGH. Aye, but Neli....

[Steps are heard approaching.]

NELI. Get up! Some one is coming.

[HUGH gets up very unwillingly.]

HUGH. [*Whispering still.*] Aye, but Neli....

NELI. [*Angrily.*] Put down that book, I say! [*She crunches over some eggshells.*] Eggs? Broken?

HUGH. [*Putting down book.*] Aye, Neli, my elbow an' the eggs in Babylon....

NELI. [*Sarcastically.*] Aye, I see beasts in Babylon here together — doleful creatures smearin' one an' sixpence worth of eggs all over the floor. An' a half-dozen eggs gone last week. [*Wiping up eggs.*] An' I'm to suppose Babylon had something to do with that half-dozen eggs, too? They were put in the basket after Mrs. Jones the Wash had left whatever, an' before Deacon Roberts came.

HUGH. Neli, I did not say — —

NELI. [*Still angrily.*] Well, indeed, unlock that door!

HUGH. [*Going to unlock door.*] But, Neli....

NELI. [*Disappearing through door back centre.*] Not a word! Your mind has gone quite on the downfall — lockin' doors against your own bread and butter an' soap.

HUGH. [*Unlocking door sullenly.*] But, Neli, salvation an' soap....

NELI. [*Snappily.*] Salvation an' soap are as thick as thieves.

HUGH. But, Neli, a man is his own master.

NELI. Yiss, I see he is!

[NELI goes out, slamming door noisily.]

HUGH. Dear anwyl, she seems angry!

[HUGH opens street door left just as NELI goes out through kitchen, by door back centre. DEACON ROBERTS enters the door HUGH has unlocked. He looks at HUGH, smiles, and goes over to counter in a businesslike way. He is a stout man, dressed in a black broadcloth cutaway coat, tight

trousers, a drab vest, high collar and stock, woollen gloves, a muffler wound about his neck and face, and a tall Welsh beaver hat. Under his arm he carries a book.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Speaking affectionately, pulling off his gloves, putting down book on counter, and beginning eagerly to touch the various groceries.*] Essays on Babylon to-day, Hughie lad?

HUGH. [*Looking about for NELI and speaking fretfully.*] Nay.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Unwinding his muffler.*] Ye look as if ye had been in spiritual struggle.

HUGH. [*Drearily.*] I have.

DEACON ROBERTS. Well, indeed, Hughie, 'tis neither the angel nor the archfiend here now, nor for me any struggle except the struggle to both live an' eat well—ho! ho! *an'* eat well, I say—in Bala. [*Laughs jovially.*] Ho! ho! not bad, Hughie lad—live *an'* eat in Bala!

HUGH. [*Patiently.*] With that muffler around your head, deacon, ye are enough to frighten the devil out of Babylon.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Unwinding last lap of muffler.*] Yiss, yiss, Hughie lad. But I dunno but ye will understand better if I call myself, let us say the angel with the sickle—ho! ho!—not the angel of fire, Hughie, but the angel with the sharp sickle gatherin' the clusters of the vines of the earth. [*Sudden change of subject.*] Where is Neli?

HUGH. [*Vacantly.*] I dunno—yiss, yiss, at market.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Chuckling.*] Dear, dear, at market—a fine day for marketing! An' my essays on the Flamin' Wickedness of Babylon, Hughie lad, how are they? Have ye finished them?

HUGH. Nay, not yet.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Looking over counter, touching one article after another as he mentions it.*] Pickled herrin'—grand but wet! Pickles—dear me, yiss, Neli's—an' good! Butter from Hafod-y-Porth—sweet as honey! [*He picks up a pat of butter and sniffs it, drawing in his breath*

loudly. He smiles with delight and lays down the butter. He takes off his hat and dusts it out inside. He puts his hat back on his head, smiles, chuckles, picks up butter, taps it thoughtfully with two fingers, smells it and puts down the pat lingeringly. He lifts up a loaf of NELI WILLIAMS'S bread, glancing from it to the butter.] Bread! Dear me! [His eyes glance on to codfish.] American codfish [picks up package and smacks his lips loudly], dear an'wyl, with potatoes—[reads] "Gloucester." [Reaches out and touches eggs affectionately.] Eggs—are they fresh, Hugh?

HUGH. [*Dreamily.*] I dunno. But I broke some of them. They might be!

[*Looks at floor.*

DEACON ROBERTS. Were they fresh?

HUGH. I dunno.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Sharply.*] Dunno? About eggs?

[*Picks up egg.*

HUGH. [*Troubled.*] Neli's hens laid them.

DEACON ROBERTS. I see, Neli's hens laid 'em, an' you broke 'em! Admirable arrangement! [*Putting down the egg and turning toward the cheese, speaks on impatiently.*] Well, indeed then, were the hens fresh?

HUGH. [*More cheerful.*] Yiss, I think. Last week the basket was grand an' full of fresh eggs, but they disappeared, aye, they did indeed.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Starts.*] Where did they go to?

HUGH. [*Injured.*] How can I say? I was here, an' I would have told her if I had seen, but I did not whatever. Neli reproves me for too great attention to visions an' too little to the groceries.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Chuckling.*] Aye, Hughie lad, such is married life! Let a man marry his thoughts or a wife, for he cannot have both. I have chosen my thoughts.

HUGH. But the cat — —

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Briskly.*] Aye, a man can keep a cat without risk.

HUGH. Nay, nay, I mean the cat took 'em. I dunno. That's it — [*HUGH clutches his head, trying to recall something.*] Uch, that's it! Neli told me to remember to ask ye if ye thought eggs could steal a cat whatever.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Puzzled.*] Eggs steal a cat?

HUGH. [*Troubled.*] Nay, nay, cats steal an egg?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Startled and looking suspiciously at HUGH.*] Cats? What cats?

HUGH. [*With solemnity.*] Aye, but I told Neli I'm no carin' about cats with heaven starin' me in the face. Deacon Roberts, those essays are grand an' wonderful.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Relieved.*] Yiss, yiss! Hughie lad, theology is a means to salvation an' sometimes to other ends, too. But there's no money in theology. [*Sighs.*] And a man must live! [*Points to corroded dish of pickled herring, sniffing greedily.*] Dear people, what beautiful herrin'! [*Wipes moisture away from corners of his mouth and picks up a fish from dish, holding it, dripping, by tail.*] Pickled?

HUGH. [*Looking at corroded dish.*] Tuppence.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Shortly.*] Dear to-day.

HUGH. [*Eyeing dish dreamily.*] I dunno. Neli — —

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Eyes glittering, cutting straight through sentence and pointing to cheese.*] Cheese?

HUGH. A shillin', I'm thinkin'.

DEACON ROBERTS. A shillin', Hugh? [*DEACON ROBERTS lifts knife and drops it lightly on edge of cheese. The leaf it pares off he picks up and*

thrusts into his mouth, greedily pushing in the crumbs. Then he pauses and looks slyly at HUGH.] Was it sixpence ye said, Hugh?

HUGH. *[Gazing toward the fire and the volume of essays.] Yiss, sixpence, I think.*

DEACON ROBERTS. *[Sarcastically.] Still too dear, Hugh!*

HUGH. *[Sighing.] I dunno, it might be dear. [With more animation.] Deacon, when Babylon fell — —*

DEACON ROBERTS. *[Wipes his mouth and, interrupting HUGH, speaks decisively.] No cheese. [He removes his tall Welsh beaver hat, mops off his bald white head, and, pointing up to the shelves, begins to dust out inside of hatband again, but with a deliberate air of preparation.] What is that up there, Hughie lad?*

HUGH. *[Trying to follow the direction of the big red wavering forefinger.] Ye mean that? A B C In-fants' Food, I think.*

DEACON ROBERTS. *[Giving his hat a final wipe.] Nay, nay, not for me, Hughie lad! Come, come, brush the smoke of burnin' Babylon from your eyes! In a minute I must be goin' back to my study, whatever. An' I have need of food!*

[HUGH takes a chair and mounts it. The DEACON looks at HUGH'S back, puts his hand down on the counter, and picks up an egg from the basket. He holds it to the light and squints through it to see whether it is fresh. Then he turns it lovingly over in his fat palm, makes a dexterous backward motion and slides it into his coat-tail pocket. This he follows with two more eggs for same coat-tail and three for other — in all half a dozen.]

HUGH. *[Dreamily pointing to tin.] Is it Yankee corn?*

DEACON ROBERTS. *[To Hugh's back, and slipping in second egg.] Nay, nay, not that, Hughie lad, that tin above!*

HUGH. *[Absent-mindedly touching tin.] Is it ox tongue?*

DEACON ROBERTS. *[Slipping in third egg and not even looking up.] Ox tongue, lad? Nay, nuthin' so large as that.*

HUGH. [*Dreamily reaching up higher.*] American condensed m-m-milk? Yiss, that's what it is.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Slipping in fourth egg.*] Condensed milk, Hughie? Back to infants' food again.

HUGH. [*Stretching up almost to his full length and holding down tin with tips of long white finger.*] Kippert herrin'? Is it that?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Slipping in fifth egg.*] Nay, nay, a little further up, if you please.

HUGH. [*Gasping, but still reaching up and reading.*] Uto – U-to-pi-an Tinned Sausage. Is it that?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Slipping in sixth egg with an air of finality and triumph, and lifting his hat from the counter.*] Nay, nay, not that, Hughie lad. Why do ye not begin by askin' me what I want? Ye've no gift for sellin' groceries whatever.

HUGH. [*Surprised.*] Did I not ask ye?

DEACON ROBERTS. Nay.

HUGH. What would Neli say whatever? She would never forgive me.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Amiably.*] Well, I forgive ye, Hughie lad. 'Tis a relish I'm needin'!

HUGH. [*Relieved.*] Well, indeed, a relish! We have relishes on that shelf above, I think. [*Reaches up but pauses helplessly.*] I must tell Neli that these shelves are not straight.

[*Dizzy and clinging to the shelves, his back to the DEACON.*]

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Picking up a pound of butter wrapped in print paper.*] Is it up there?

HUGH. No, I think, an' the shelves are not fast whatever. I must tell Neli. They go up like wings. [*Trying to reach to a bottle just above him.*] Was it English or American?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Putting the pound of butter in his hat and his hat on his head.*] American, Hughie lad.

[*At that instant there is a noise from the inner kitchen, and NELI WILLIAMS opens the door. The DEACON turns, and their glances meet and cross. Each understands perfectly what the other has seen. NELI WILLIAMS has thrown off her red cloak and taken off her Welsh beaver hat. She is dressed in a short full skirt, white stockings, clogs on her feet, a striped apron, tight bodice, fichu, short sleeves, and white cap on dark hair.*

NELI. [*Slowly.*] Uch! The deacon has what he came for whatever!

HUGH. [*Turning to contradict his wife.*] Nay, Neli— [*Losing his balance on chair, tumbles off, and, with arm flung out to save himself, strikes dish of pickled herring. The herring and brine fly in every direction, spraying the DEACON and HUGHIE; the bowl spins madly, dipping and revolving on the floor. For a few seconds nothing is audible except the bowl revolving on the flagstones and HUGHIE picking himself up and sneezing behind the counter.*] Achoo! Achoo! Dear me, Neli — Achoo!

NELI. [*Going quickly to husband and beginning to wipe brine from husband's forehead and cheeks; at the same time has her back to the DEACON and forming soundless letters with her lips, she jerks her head toward the DEACON.*] B-U-T-T-E-R!

HUGH. [*Drearily.*] Better? Aye, I'm better. It did not hurt me whatever.

NELI. [*Jerking head backwards toward DEACON ROBERTS and again forming letters with lips.*] B-U-T-T-E-R!

HUGH. What, water? Nay, I don't want any water.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Coughing, ill at ease and glancing suspiciously at bowl that has come to rest near his leg.*] Ahem! 'Tis cold here, Mrs. Williams, mum, an' I must be movin' on.

NELI. [*Savagely to DEACON.*] Stay where ye are whatever!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Unaccustomed to being spoken to this way by a woman.*] Well, indeed, mum, I could stay, but I'm thinkin' 'tis cold an' — I'd better go.

NELI. [*Again savagely.*] Nay, stay! Stay for — for what ye came for whatever!

[NELI looks challengingly at the DEACON. Then she goes on wiping brine carefully from husband's hair and from behind his ears. The DEACON coughs and pushes bowl away with the toe of his boot.]

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Smiling.*] 'Tis unnecessary to remain then, mum.

NELI. [*To HUGH.*] What did he get?

HUGH. [*Sneezing.*] N — n — Achoo! — nothin'!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*With sudden interest, looking at the floor.*] Well, indeed!

NELI. [*Suspiciously.*] What is it?

[*He reaches down with difficulty to a small thick puddle on the floor just beneath his left coat-tail. He aims a red forefinger at it, lifts himself, and sucks fingertip.*]

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Smiling.*] Ahem, Mrs. Williams, mum, 'tis excellent herrin' brine! [*From the basket on the counter he picks up an egg, which he tosses lightly and replaces in basket.*] A beautiful fresh egg, Mrs. Williams, mum. I must be steppin' homewards.

HUGH. [*Struggling to speak just as NELI reaches his nose, wringing it vigorously at she wipes it.*] Aye, but Neli, I was just tellin' ye when I fell that I could not find the deacon's relish — uch, achoo! achoo!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*With finality, tossing the egg in air, catching it and putting it back in basket.*] Well, indeed, mum, I must be steppin' homewards now.

[NELI'S glance rests on fire burning on other side of room. She puts down wet cloth. She turns squarely on the DEACON.]

NELI. What is your haste, Mr. Roberts? Please to go to the fire an' wait! I can find the relish.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Hastily.*] Nay, nay, mum. I have no need any more — [*Coughs.*] Excellent herrin' brine.

[*Goes toward door.*]

NELI. [*To HUGH.*] Take him to the fire, Hugh. 'Tis a cold day whatever! [*Insinuatingly to DEACON.*] Have ye a reason for wantin' to go, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Going.*] Nay, nay, mum, none at all! But, I must not trouble ye. 'Tis too much to ask, an' I have no time to spare an' — —

NELI. [*Interrupting and not without acerbity.*] Indeed, Mr. Roberts, sellin' what we can is our profit. [*To HUGH, who obediently takes DEACON by arm and pulls him toward fire.*] Take him to the fire, lad. [*To DEACON.*] What kind of a relish was it, did ye say, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Having a tug of war with HUGH.*] 'Tis an Indian relish, mum, but I cannot wait.

HUGH. [*Pulling harder.*] American, ye said.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Hastily.*] Yiss, yiss, American Indian relish, that is.

NELI. Tut, 'tis our specialty, these American Indian relishes! We have several. Sit down by the fire while I look them up. [*Wickedly.*] As ye said. Mr. Roberts, 'tis cold here this morning.

DEACON ROBERTS. There, Hughie lad, I must not trouble ye. [*Looks at clock.*] 'Tis ten minutes before twelve, an' my dinner will be ready at twelve.

[*Pulls harder.*]

NELI. [*To HUGH.*] Keep him by the fire, lad.

DEACON ROBERTS. There, Hughie lad, let me go!

[*But HUGH holds on, and the DEACON'S coat begins to come off.*]

NELI. [*Sarcastically.*] The relish—American Indian, ye said, I think—will make your dinner taste fine and grand!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Finding that without leaving his coat behind he is unable to go, he glowers at HUGH and speaks sweetly to NELI.*] 'Tis a beautiful clock, Mrs. Williams, mum. But I haven't five minutes to spare.

NELI. [*Keeping a sharp lookout on the rim of the DEACON'S hat.*] Well, indeed, I can find the relish in just one minute. An' ye'll have abundance of time left.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Trapped, and gazing at clock with fine air of indifference.*] 'Tis a clever, shinin' lookin' clock whatever, Mrs. Williams, mum.

NELI. Have ye any recollection of the name of the maker of the relish, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Putting his hands behind him anxiously and parting his freighted coat-tails with care; then, revolving, presenting his back and one large, well-set, bright-colored patch to the fire.*] Nay, I have forgotten it, Mrs. Williams, mum.

NELI. Too bad, but I'm sure to find it. [*She mounts upon chair. At this moment the shop door-bell rings violently, and there enters MRS. JONES THE WASH, very fat and very jolly. She is dressed in short skirt, very full, clogs on her feet, a bodice made of striped Welsh flannel, a shabby kerchief, a cap on her head, and over this a shawl. NELI turns her head a little.*] Aye, Mrs. Jones the Wash, in a minute, if you please. Sit down until I find Deacon Roberts's relish whatever.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Sits down on chair by door back centre and folds her hands over her stomach.*] Yiss, yiss, mum, thank you. I've come for soap. I came once before, but no one was in.

NELI. Too bad!

MRS. JONES THE WASH. An' I looked in at the window an' saw nothin' but a skippin' shadow looked like a rat. Have ye any rats, Mrs. Williams, mum, do ye think?

NELI. Have I any rats? Well, indeed, 'tis that I'm wantin' to know, Mrs. Jones the Wash!

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Well, I came back, for the water is eatin' the soap to-day as if 'twere sweets—aye, 'tis a very meltin' day for soap! [*Laughs.*]

DEACON ROBERTS. 'Tis sweet to be clean, Mrs. Jones the Wash.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Laughing.*] Yiss, yiss, Deacon Roberts, there has many a chapel been built out of a washtub, an' many a prayer risen up from the suds!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Solemnly.*] Aye, Mrs. Jones the Wash, 'tis holy work, washin' is very holy work.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Touched.*] Yiss, yiss, I thank ye, Deacon Roberts.

DEACON ROBERTS. Well, I must be steppin' homeward now.

NELI. [*Firmly.*] Nay, Mr. Roberts. I am searchin' on the shelf where I think that American Indian relish is. Ye act as if ye had some cause to hurry, Mr. Roberts. Wait a moment, if you please.

DEACON ROBERTS. Well, indeed, but I am keepin' Mrs. Jones the Wash waitin'!

NELI. [*To MRS. JONES.*] Ye are in no haste?

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Thoroughly comfortable and happy.*] Nay, mum, no haste at all. I am havin' a rest, an' 'tis grand an' warm here whatever.

NELI. [*Maliciously to DEACON.*] Does it feel hot by the fire?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Experiencing novel sensations on the crown of his bald head.*] Mrs. Williams, mum, 'tis hot in Y Gegin, but as with Llanycil Churchyard, Y Gegin is only the portal to a hotter an' a bigger place where scorchin' flames burn forever an' forever. Proverbs saith, "Hell an' destruction are never full." What, then,

shall be the fate of women who have no wisdom, Mrs. Williams, mum?

NELI. [*Searching for relish.*] Aye, what? Well, indeed, the men must know.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Nodding her head appreciatively at HUGH.*] Such eloquence, Mr. Williams! Aye, who in chapel has such grand theology as Deacon Roberts!

[*She sighs. The bell rings violently again, and TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP enters. He is dressed in gaiters, a shepherd's cloak, etc., etc. He carries a crook in his hand. He is a grizzle-haired, rosy-faced old man, raw-boned, strong, and awkward, with a half-earnest, half-foolish look.*

NELI. [*Looking around.*] Aye, Tom Morris the Sheep, come in an' sit down. I am lookin' out an American Indian relish for the deacon.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Yiss, mum. I am wantin' to buy a little tobacco, mum. 'Tis lonely upon the hillsides with the sheep, whatever.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Hastily.*] I must go now, Mrs. Williams, mum, an' ye can wait on Tom Morris.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Nay, nay, Mr. Roberts, sir, there is no haste.

NELI. [*To TOM MORRIS.*] Sit down there by the door, if you please.

[*TOM MORRIS seats himself on other side of door by back centre.*

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Yiss, mum. [*Touches his forelock to MRS. JONES THE WASH.*] A grand day for the clothes, Mrs. Jones, mum.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Yiss, yiss, an' as I was just sayin' 'tis a meltin' day for the soap!

NELI. [*Significantly.*] An' perhaps 'tis a meltin' day for somethin' besides soap!

[*She looks at DEACON.*]

HUGH. [*Earnestly.*] Yiss, yiss, for souls, meltin' for souls, I am hopin'. [*Picking up the book from the little three-legged table, and speaking to the DEACON.*] They are enlargin' the burial ground in Llanycil Churchyard – achoo! achoo!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Slyly moving a step away from fire.*] They're only enlargin' hell, Hughie lad, an' in that place they always make room for all. [*He casts a stabbing look at NELI.*]

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Nodding head.*] True, true, room for all! [*Chuckling.*] But 'twould be a grand place to dry the clothes in!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Severely.*] Mrs. Jones, mum, hell is paved with words of lightness.

HUGH. [*Looking up from book, his face expressing delight.*] Deacon Roberts, I have searched for the place of hell, but one book sayeth one thing, an' another another. Where is hell?

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Aye, where is hell?

[*The bell rings violently. All start except NELI. MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE enters. She is an old woman, white-haired, and with a commanding, somewhat disagreeable expression on her face. She wears a cloak and black Welsh beaver and walks with a stick.*]

NELI. Yiss, yiss, Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife, I am just lookin' out a relish for the Deacon. Sit down by the fire, please.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. [*Seating herself on other side of fire.*] Aye, mum, I've come for pins; I'm in no haste.

NELI. is it Jane Elin's baby?

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. Aye, Jane Elin's, an' 'tis my sixth hundredth birth.

HUGH. We're discussing the place of hell, Mrs. Jenkins, mum.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. Well, indeed, I have seen the place of hell six hundred times then. [*Coughs and nods her head up and down over stick.*] Heaven an' hell I'm thinkin' we have with us here.

HUGH. Nay, nay, how could that be? Tell us where is the place of hell, Deacon Roberts.

[*All listen with the most intense interest.*]

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Nodding.*] Aye, the place of hell—[*stopping suddenly, a terrified look on his face, as the butter slides against the forward rim of his hat, almost knocking it off, then going on with neck rigid and head straight up*] to me is known where is that place—their way is dark an' slippery; they go down into the depths, an' their soul is melted because of trouble.

NELI. [*Pausing sceptically.*] Aye, 'tis my idea of hell whatever with souls meltin', Mr. Roberts!

HUGH. [*Tense with expectation.*] Tell us where is that place!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Neck rigid, head unmoved, and voice querulous.*] Yiss, yiss. [*Putting his hand up and letting it down quickly.*] Ahem! Ye believe that it rains in Bala?

HUGH. [*Eyes on DEACON, in childlike faith.*] I do.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. Yiss, yiss, before an' after every birth whatever!

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Yiss, yiss, who would know better than I that it rains in Bala?

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Aye, amen, it rains in Bala upon the hills an' in the valleys.

DEACON ROBERTS. Ye believe that it can rain in Bala both when the moon is full an' when 'tis new?

HUGH. [*Earnestly.*] I do.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Wearily.*] Yiss, any time.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Aye, all the time.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE.. Yiss, yiss, it rains ever an' forever!

NELI. [*Forgetting the relish search.*] Well, indeed, 'tis true it can rain in Bala at any time an' at all times.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Paying no attention to Neli.*] Ye believe that Tomen-y-Bala is Ararat?

HUGH. [*Clutching his book more tightly and speaking in a whisper.*] Yiss.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Aye, 'tis true.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE.. Yiss, the Hill of Bala is Ararat.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Yiss, I have driven the sheep over it whatever more than a hundred times.

NELI. [*Both hands on counter, leaning forward, listening to DEACON'S words.*] Aye, Charles-y-Bala said so.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Still ignoring NELI and lowering his coat-tails carefully.*] Ye believe, good people, that the Druids called Noah "Tegid," an' that those who were saved were cast up on Tomen-y-Bala?

HUGH. Amen, I do!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. [*Nodding her old head.*] Aye, 'tis true.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Yiss, yiss.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Amen, 'tis so.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Moving a few steps away from the fire, standing sidewise, and lifting hand to head, checking it in midair.*] An' ye know that Bala has been a lake, an' Bala will become a lake?

HUGH. Amen, I do!

NELI. [*Assenting for the first time.*] Yiss, 'tis true — that is.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Dear anwyl, yiss!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*With warning gesture toward window.*] Hell is out there—movin' beneath Bala Lake to meet all at their comin'. [*Raises his voice suddenly.*] Red-hot Baal stones will fall upon your heads—Baal stones. Howl ye! [*Shouting loudly.*] Meltin' stones smellin' of the bullocks. Howl, ye sinners! [*Clasping his hands together desperately.*] Scorchin' hot—Oo—o—o—Howl ye!—howl ye! [*The DEACON'S hat sways, and he jams it down more tightly on his head. Unclasping his hands and as if stirring up the contents of a pudding-dish.*] 'Round an' round like this! Howl, ye sinners, howl!

[*All moan and sway to and fro except NELI.*

NELI. [*Sceptically.*] What is there to fear?

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. [*Groaning.*] Nay, but what is there not to fear?

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Aye, outermost darkness. Och! Och!

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Have mercy!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Shouting again.*] Get ready! Lift up your eyes! [*Welsh beaver almost falls off and is set straight in a twinkling.*] Beg for mercy before the stones of darkness burn thee, an' there is no water to cool thy tongue, an' a great gulf is fixed between thee an' those who might help thee!

NELI. [*Spellbound by the DEACON'S eloquence and now oblivious to hat, etc.*] Yiss, yiss, 'tis true, 'tis very true!

[*She steps down from chair and places hands on counter.*

DEACON ROBERTS. [*His face convulsed, shouting directly at her.*] Sister, hast thou two eyes to be cast into hell fire?

NELI. [*Terrified and swept along by his eloquence.*] Two eyes to be burned?

[All lower their heads, groaning and rocking to and fro.]

DEACON ROBERTS. *[The butter trickling down his face, yelling with sudden violence.]* Hell is here an' now. Here in Bala, here in Y Gegin, here with us! Howl ye! Howl, ye sinners!

[All moan together.]

HUGH. *[Whispering.]* Uch, here!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. Yiss, here!

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Yiss.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. *[Terrified.]* Aye. Amen! Yiss!

NELI. *[Whispering.]* Here in Y Gegin!

DEACON ROBERTS. *[Clapping his hands to his face.]* Stones of Baal, stones of darkness, slimy with ooze, red-hot ooze, thick vapors! Howl ye, howl, ye sinners! *[All moan and groan. Takes a glance at clock, passes hand over face and runs on madly, neck rigid, eyes staring, fat red cheeks turning to purple.]* Midday, not midnight, is the hour of hell; its sun never sets! But who knows when comes that hour of hell?

NELI. *[Taking hands from counter and crossing them as she whispers.]* Who knows?

ALL. *[Groaning.]* Who knows?

HUGH. *[Voice quavering and lifting his Welsh essays.]* Who knows?

DEACON ROBERTS. *[Big yellow drops pouring down his face, his voice full of anguish.]* I will tell ye when is the hour of hell. *[He points to the clock.]* Is one the hour of hell? Nay. Two? Nay. Three? No, not three. Four? Four might be the hour of hell, but 'tis not. Five? Nor five, indeed. Six? Nay. Seven? Is seven the hour, the awful hour? Nay, not yet. Eight? Is eight the hour – an hour bright as this bright hour? Nay, eight is not. *[The DEACONshouts in a mighty voice and points with a red finger at the clock.]* 'Tis comin'! 'Tis comin', I say! Howl ye, howl! Only one minute more! Sinners, sinners, lift up your eyes! Cry for mercy! *[All groan.]* Cry for mercy! When the clock

strikes twelve, 'twill be the hour of hell! Fix your eyes upon the clock! Watch! Count! Listen! 'Tis strikin'. The stroke! The hour is here!

[All dropped on their knees and turned toward the clock, their backs to the street door, are awaiting the awful stroke. The book has fallen from HUGH'S hands. NELI'S hands are clenched. MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE is nodding her old head. MRS. JONES THE WASH on her knees, her face upturned to the clock, is rubbing up and down her thighs, as if at the business of washing. TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP is prostrate and making a strange buzzing sound between his lips. The wheels of the clever old timepiece whir and turn. Then in the silent noonday the harsh striking begins: One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, Twelve.

DEACON ROBERTS. *[Yelling suddenly in a loud and terrible voice.]* Hell let loose! Howl ye! Howl, ye sinners! *[All cover their eyes. All groan or moan. The clock ticks, the flame in the grate flutters, NELI'S bosom rises and falls heavily.]* Lest worse happen to ye, sin no more!

[The DEACON looks at them all quietly. Then he lifts his hands in sign of blessing, smiles and vanishes silently through street door. All remain stationary in their terror. Nothing happens. But at last NELI fearfully, still spellbound by the DEACON'S eloquence, lifts her eyes to the clock. Then cautiously she turns a little toward the fire and the place of DEACON ROBERTS.

NELI. Uch! *[She stands on her feet and cries out.]* The Deacon is gone!

HUGH. *[Raising his eyes.]* Uch, what is it? Babylon — —

NELI. Babylon nothing! *[She wrings her hands.*

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. *[Groaning.]* Is he dead? Is he dead?

NELI. *[With sudden plunge toward the door.]* Uch, ye old hypocrite, ye villain! Uch, my butter an' my eggs, my butter an' my eggs!

[NELI throws open the door and slams it to after her as she pursues the DEACON out into the bright midday sunshine.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. Well, indeed, what is it? Has she been taken?

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Getting up heavily.*] Such movin' eloquence! A saintly man is Deacon Roberts!

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Aye, a saintly man is Deacon Roberts!

HUGH. [*Picking up his book and speaking slowly.*] Aye, eloquence that knoweth the place of hell even better than it knoweth Bala whatever!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. [*Very businesslike.*] Aye, 'twas a treat—a rare treat! But where's my pins now?

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Very businesslike.*] Yiss, yiss, 'twas a grand an' fine treat. But I'm wantin' my soap now.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Have ye any tobacco, Hughie lad?

CURTAIN

WHERE BUT IN AMERICA

BY
OSCAR M. WOLFF

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OSCAR M. WOLFF

Oscar M. Wolff was born July 13, 1876. After graduation from Cornell University he completed his law course in the University of Chicago. In addition to his interest in law, which he has practised and taught, he has done considerable writing and editing. He has published a legal text-book, and his articles on legal subjects have appeared both in law journals and in magazines of general interest. During the war he was connected with the United States Food Administration at Washington. At present he lives in Chicago, Illinois.

In addition to some stories, he has written several one-act plays: *Where But in America*, *The Claim for Exemption*, and *The Money-Lenders*.

Where But in America is an excellent play of situation, as well as a delicate satire on a certain aspect of American social life.

CAST

MRS. ESPENHAYNE
MR. ESPENHAYNE
HILDA

WHERE BUT IN AMERICA

SCENE: *The Espenhayne dining-room.*

The curtain rises on the Espenhayne dining-room. It is furnished with modest taste and refinement. There is a door, centre, leading to the living-room, and a swinging door, left, leading to the kitchen.

The table is set, and ROBERT and MOLLIE ESPENHAYNE are discovered at their evening meal. They are educated, well-bred young Americans. ROBERT is a pleasing, energetic business man of thirty; MOLLIE an attractive woman of twenty-five. The bouillon cups are before them as the curtain rises.

BOB. Mollie, I heard from the man who owns that house in Kenilworth. He wants to sell the house. He won't rent.

MOLLIE. I really don't care, Bob. That house was too far from the station, and it had only one sleeping-porch, and you know I want white-enamelled woodwork in the bedrooms. But, Bob, I've been terribly stupid!

BOB. How so, Mollie?

MOLLIE. You remember the Russells moved to Highland Park last spring?

BOB. Yes; Ed Russell rented a house that had just been built.

MOLLIE. A perfectly darling little house! And Fanny Russell once told me that the man who built it will put up a house for any one who will take a five-year lease. And she says that the man is very competent and they are simply delighted with their place.

BOB. Why don't we get in touch with the man?

MOLLIE. Wasn't it stupid of me not to think about it? It just flashed into my mind this morning, and I sat down at once and sent a special-delivery letter to Fanny Russell. I asked her to tell me his name at once, and where we can find him.

BOB. Good! You ought to have an answer by to-morrow or Thursday and we'll go up north and have a talk with him on Saturday.

MOLLIE. [*With enthusiasm.*] Wouldn't it be wonderful if he'd build just what we want! Fanny Russell says every detail of their house is perfect. Even the garage; they use it — —

BOB. [*Interrupting.*] Mollie, that's the one thing I'm afraid of about the North Shore plan. I've said repeatedly that I don't want to buy a car for another year or two. But here you are, talking about a garage already.

MOLLIE. But you didn't let me finish what I was saying. The Russells have fitted up their garage as a playroom for the children. If we had a garage we could do the same thing.

BOB. Well, let's keep temptation behind us and not even talk to the man about a garage. If we move up north it must be on an economy basis for a few years; just a half-way step between the apartment and the house we used to plan. You mustn't get your heart set on a car.

MOLLIE. I haven't even thought of one, dear. [*BOB and MOLLIE have now both finished the bouillon course and lay down their spoons. Reaching out her hand to touch the table button, and at the same time leaning across the table and speaking very impressively.*] Bob, I'm about to ring for Hilda!

BOB. What of it?

MOLLIE. [*Decidedly and with a touch of impatience.*] You know very well, what of it. I don't want Hilda to hear us say one word about moving away from the South Side!

BOB. [*Protesting.*] But Mollie — —

MOLLIE. [*Interrupting hurriedly and holding her finger to her lips in warning.*] Psst!

[*The next instant HILDA enters, left. She is a tall, blonde Swedish girl, about twenty-five years old. She is very pretty and carries herself well and looks particularly charming in a maid's dress, with white collars and cuffs and a dainty waitress's apron. Every detail of her dress is immaculate.*

MOLLIE. [*Speaking the instant that HILDA appears and talking very rapidly all the time that HILDA remains in the room. While she speaks MOLLIE watches HILDA rather than ROBERT, whom she pretends to be addressing.*] In the last game Gert Jones was my partner. It was frame apiece and I dealt and I bid one no trump. I had a very weak no trump. I'll admit that, but I didn't want them to win the rubber. Mrs. Stone bid two spades and Gert Jones doubled her. Mrs. Green passed and I simply couldn't go to three of anything. Mrs. Stone played two spades, doubled, and she made them. Of course, that put them out and gave them the rubber. I think that was a very foolish double of Gert Jones, and then she said it was my fault, because I bid one no trump.

[*As MOLLIE begins her flow of words BOB first looks at her in open-mouthed astonishment. Then as he gradually comprehends that MOLLIE is merely talking against time he too turns his eyes to HILDA and watches her closely in her movements around the table. Meanwhile HILDA moves quietly and quickly and pays no attention to anything except the work she has in hand. She carries a small serving-tray, and, as MOLLIE speaks, HILDA first takes the bouillon cups from the table, then brings the carving-knife and fork from the sideboard and places them before ROBERT, and then, with the empty bouillon cups, exits left. BOB and MOLLIE are both watching HILDA as she goes out. The instant the door swings shut behind her, MOLLIE relaxes with a sigh, and ROBERT leans across the table to speak.*]

BOB. Mollie, why not be sensible about this thing! Have a talk with Hilda and find out if she will move north with us.

MOLLIE. That's just like a man! Then we might not find a house to please us and Hilda would be dissatisfied and suspicious. She might even leave. [*Thoughtfully.*] Of course, I must speak to her before we sign a lease, because I really don't know what I'd do if Hilda refused to leave the South side. [*More cheerfully.*] But there, we won't think about the disagreeable things until everything is settled.

BOB. That's good American doctrine.

MOLLIE. [*Warningly and again touching her finger to her lips.*] Psst!

[HILDA *enters, left, carrying the meat plates, with a heavy napkin under them.*

MOLLIE. [*Immediately resuming her monologue.*] I think my last year's hat will do very nicely. You know it rained all last summer and I really only wore the hat a half a dozen times. Perhaps not that often. I can make a few changes on it; put on some new ribbons, you know, and it will do very nicely for another year. You remember that hat, don't you dear?

[BOB *starts to answer, but MOLLIE rushes right on.*

Of course you do, you remember you said it was so becoming. That's another reason why I want to wear it this summer.

[HILDA, *meanwhile, puts the plates on the table in front of BOB, and goes out, left. MOLLIE at once stops speaking.*

BOB. [*Holding his hands over the plates as over a fire and rubbing them together in genial warmth.*] Ah, the good hot plates! She never forgets them. She is a gem, Mollie.

MOLLIE. [*In great self-satisfaction.*] If you are finally convinced of that, after three years, I wish you would be a little bit more careful what you say the next time Hilda comes in the room.

BOB. [*In open-mouthed astonishment.*] What!

MOLLIE. Well, I don't want Hilda to think we are making plans behind her back.

BOB. [*Reflectively.*] "A man's home is his castle." [*Pauses.*] It's very evident that the Englishman who first said that didn't keep any servants.

[*Telephone bell rings off stage.*

MOLLIE. Answer that, Bob.

BOB. Won't Hilda answer it?

MOLLIE. [*Standing up quickly and speaking impatiently.*] Very well, I shall answer it myself. I can't ask Hilda to run to the telephone while she is serving the meal.

BOB. [*Sullenly, as he gets up.*] All right! All right!

[*BOB exits, centre. As he does so HILDA appears at the door, left, hurrying to answer the telephone.*

MOLLIE. Mr. Espenhayne will answer it, Hilda.

[*HILDA makes the slightest possible bow of acquiescence, withdraws left, and in a moment reappears with vegetable dishes and small side dishes, which she puts before MRS. ESPENHAYNE. She is arranging these when BOB re-enters, centre.*

BOB. Somebody for you, Hilda.

HILDA. [*Surprised.*] For me? Oh! But I cannot answer eet now. Please ask the party to call later.

[*HILDA speaks excellent English, but with some Swedish accent. The noticeable feature of her speech is the precision and great care with which she enunciates every syllable.*

MOLLIE. Just take the number yourself, Hilda, and tell the party you will call back after dinner.

HILDA. Thank you, Messes Aispenhayne.

[*HILDA exits, centre. BOB stands watching HILDA, as she leaves the room, and then turns and looks at MOLLIE with a bewildered expression.*

BOB. [*Standing at his chair.*] But I thought Hilda couldn't be running to the telephone while she serves the dinner?

MOLLIE. But this call is for Hilda, herself. That's quite different, you see.

BOB. [*Slowly and thoughtfully.*] Oh, yes! Of course; I see! [*Sits down in his chair.*] That is—I don't quite see!

MOLLIE. [*Immediately leaning across the table and speaking in a cautious whisper.*] Do you know who it is?

[BOB closes his lips very tightly and nods yes in a very important manner.

MOLLIE. [*In the same whisper and very impatiently.*] Who?

BOB. [*Looking around the room as if to see if any one is in hiding, and then putting his hand to his mouth and exaggerating the whisper.*] The Terrible Swede.

MOLLIE. [*In her ordinary tone and very much exasperated.*] Robert, I've told you a hundred times that you shouldn't refer to—to—the man in that way.

BOB. And I've told you a hundred times to ask Hilda his name. If I knew his name I'd announce him with as much ceremony as if he were the Swedish Ambassador.

MOLLIE. [*Disgusted.*] Oh, don't try to be funny! Suppose some day Hilda hears you speak of him in that manner?

BOB. You know that's mild compared to what you think of him. Suppose some day Hilda learns what you think of him?

MOLLIE. I think very well of him and you know it. Of course, I dread the time when she marries him, but I wouldn't for the world have her think that we speak disrespectfully of her or her friends.

BOB. "A man's home is his castle."

[MOLLIE'S only answer is a gesture of impatience. MOLLIE and BOB sit back in their chairs to await HILDA'S return. Both sit with fingers interlaced, hands resting on the edge of the table in the attitude of school children at attention. A long pause. MOLLIE unclasps her hands and shifts uneasily. ROBERT does the same. MOLLIE, seeing this, hastily resumes her former attitude of quiet waiting. ROBERT, however, grows increasingly restless. His restlessness makes MOLLIE nervous and she watches ROBERT, and when he is not observing her she darts quick, anxious glances at the door, centre. BOB drains and refills his glass.

MOLLIE. [*She has been watching ROBERT and every time he shifts or moves she unconsciously does the same, and finally she breaks out nervously.*] I don't understand this at all! Isn't to-day Tuesday?

BOB. What of it?

MOLLIE. He usually calls up on Wednesdays and comes to see her on Saturdays.

BOB. And takes her to the theatre on Thursdays and to dances on Sundays. He's merely extending his line of attack.

[*Another long pause – then Bob begins to experiment to learn whether the plates are still hot. He gingerly touches the edges of the upper plate in two or three places. It seems safe to handle. He takes hold of upper and lower plates boldly, muttering, as he does so, "Cold as – " Drops the plates with a clatter and a smothered oath. Shakes his fingers and blows on them. Meanwhile MOLLIE is sitting very rigid, regarding BOB with a fixed stare and beating a vigorous tattoo on the tablecloth with her fingers. Bob catches her eye and cringes under her gaze. He drains and refills his glass. He studies the walls and the ceiling of the room, meanwhile still nursing his fingers. BOB steals a sidelong glance at MOLLIE. She is still staring at him. He turns to his water goblet. Picks it up and holds it to the light. He rolls the stem between his fingers, squinting at the light through the water. Reciting slowly as he continues to gaze at the light.*

BOB. Starlight! Starbright! Will Hilda talk to him all night!

MOLLIE. [*In utter disgust.*] Oh, stop that singing.

[*BOB puts down his glass, then drinks the water and refills the glass. He then turns his attention to the silverware and cutlery before him. He examines it critically, then lays a teaspoon carefully on the cloth before him, and attempts the trick of picking it up with the first finger in the bowl and the thumb at the point of the handle. After one or two attempts the spoon shoots on the floor, far behind him. MOLLIE jumps at the noise. BOB turns slowly and looks at the spoon with an injured air, then turns back to MOLLIE with a silly, vacuous smile. He now lays all the remaining cutlery in a straight row before him.*

BOB. [*Slowly counting the cutlery and silver, back and forth.*] Eeny, meeny, miney, mo. Catch a – [*Stops suddenly as an idea comes to him.*

Gazes thoughtfully at MOLLIE for a moment, then begins to count over again.] Eeny, meeny, miney, mo; Hilda's talking to her beau. If we holler, she may go. Eeny, mee — —

MOLLIE. [*Interrupting and exasperated to the verge of tears.*] Bob, if you don't stop all that nonsense, I shall scream! [*In a very tense tone.*] I believe I'm going to have one of my sick headaches! [*Puts her hand to her forehead.*] I know it; I can feel it coming on!

BOB. [*In a soothing tone.*] Hunger, my dear, hunger! When you have a good warm meal you'll feel better.

MOLLIE. [*In despair.*] What do you suppose I ought to do?

BOB. Go out in the kitchen and fry a couple of eggs.

MOLLIE. Oh! be serious! I'm at my wits' end! Hilda never did anything like this before.

BOB. [*Suddenly quite serious.*] What does that fellow do for a living, anyhow?

MOLLIE. How should I know?

BOB. Didn't you ever ask Hilda?

MOLLIE. Certainly not. Hilda doesn't ask me about your business; why should I pry into her affairs?

BOB. [*Taking out his cigarette case and lighting a cigarette.*] Mollie, I see you're strong for the Constitution of the United States.

MOLLIE. [*Suspiciously.*] What do you mean by that?

BOB. The Constitution says: "Whereas it is a self-evident truth that all men are born equal" — [*With a wave of the hand.*] Hilda and you, and the Terrible Swede and I and — —

MOLLIE. [*Interrupting.*] Bob, you're such a heathen! *That's not in the Constitution.* That's in the Bible!

BOB. Well, wherever it is, until this evening I never realized what a personage Hilda is.

MOLLIE. You can make fun of me all you please, but I know what's right! Your remarks don't influence me in the least—not in the least!

BOB. [*Murmurs thoughtfully and feelingly.*] How true! [*Abruptly.*] Why don't they get married? Do you know that?

MOLLIE. All I know is that they are waiting until his business is entirely successful, so that Hilda won't have to work.

BOB. Well, the Swedes are pretty careful of their money. The chances are Hilda has a neat little nest-egg laid by.

MOLLIE. [*Hesitating and doubtfully.*] That's one thing that worries me a little. I think Hilda puts money—into—into—into the young man's business.

BOB. [*Indignantly.*] Do you mean to tell me that this girl gives her money to that fellow and you don't try to find out a thing about him? Who he is or what he does? I suppose she supports the loafer.

MOLLIE. [*With dignity.*] He's not a loafer. I've seen him and I've talked with him, and I know he's a gentleman.

BOB. Mollie, I'm getting tired of all that kind of drivel. I believe nowadays women give a good deal more thought to pleasing their maids than they do to pleasing their husbands.

MOLLIE. [*Demurely.*] Well, you know, Bob, your maid can leave you much easier than your husband can—[*pauses thoughtfully*] and I'm sure she's much harder to replace.

BOB. [*Very angry, looking at his watch, throwing his napkin on the table and standing up.*] Mollie, our dinner has been interrupted for fifteen minutes while Hilda entertains her [*with sarcasm*] gentleman friend. If you won't stop it, I will.

[*Steps toward the door, centre.*]

MOLLIE. [*Sternly, pointing to BOB'S chair.*] Robert, sit down!

[*BOB pauses, momentarily, and at the instant HILDA enters, centre, meeting BOB, face to face. Both are startled. BOB, in a surly manner, walks back to his place at the table. HILDA follows, excited and eager. BOB sits down and HILDA stands for a moment at the table, smiling from one to the other and evidently anxious to say something. BOB and MOLLIE are severe and unfriendly. They gaze at HILDA coldly. Slowly HILDA'S enthusiasm cools, and she becomes again the impassive servant.*

HILDA. Aixcuse me, Meeses Aispenhayne, I am very sorry. I bring the dinner right in.

[*Hilda exits left.*

BOB. It's all nonsense. [*Touches the plates again, but this time even more cautiously than before. This time he finds they are entirely safe to handle.*] These plates are stone cold now.

[*HILDA enters, left, with meat platter. Places it before BOB. He serves the meat and MOLLIE starts to serve the vegetables. HILDA hands MOLLIE her meat plate.*

MOLLIE. Vegetables? [*BOB is chewing on his meat and does not answer. MOLLIE looks at him inquiringly. But his eyes are on his plate. Repeating.*] Vegetables? [*Still no answer from BOB. Very softly, under her breath.*] H'mm.

[*MOLLIE helps herself to vegetables and then dishes out a portion which she hands to HILDA, who in turn places the dish beside BOB. When both are served HILDA stands for a moment back of the table. She clasps and unclasps her hands in a nervous manner, seems about to speak, but as BOB and MOLLIE pay no attention to her she slowly and reluctantly turns, and exits left. MOLLIE takes one or two bites of the meat and then gives a quick glance at BOB. He is busy chewing at his meat, and MOLLIE quietly lays down her knife and fork and turns to the vegetables.*

BOB. [*Chewing desperately on his meat.*] Tenderloin, I believe?

MOLLIE. [*Sweetly.*] Yes, dear.

BOB. [*Imitating MOLLIE a moment back.*] H'mm! [*He takes one or two more hard bites.*] Mollie, I have an idea.

MOLLIE. I'm relieved.

BOB. [*Savagely.*] Yes, you will be when you hear it. When we get that builder's name from Fanny Russell, we'll tell him that instead of a garage, which we don't need, he can build a special telephone booth off the kitchen. Then while Hilda serves the dinner — —

[*BOB stops short, as HILDA bursts in abruptly, left, and comes to the table.*

HILDA. Aixcuse me, Meeses Aispenhayne, I am so excited.

MOLLIE. [*Anxiously.*] Is anything wrong, Hilda?

HILDA. [*Explosively.*] Meeses Aispenhayne, Meester Leendquist he say you want to move to Highland Park.

[*BOB and MOLLIE simultaneously drop their knives and forks and look at HILDA in astonishment and wonder.*

MOLLIE. What?

BOB. Who?

HILDA. [*Repeats very rapidly.*] Meester Leendquist, he say you look for house on North Shore!

MOLLIE. [*Utterly overcome at HILDA'S knowledge and at a loss for words of denial.*] We move to the North Shore? How ridiculous! Hilda, where did you get such an idea? [*Turns to ROBERT.*] Robert, did you ever hear anything so laughable? [*She forces a strained laugh.*] Ha! Ha! Ha! [*ROBERT has been looking at HILDA in dumb wonder. At MOLLIE'S question he turns to her in startled surprise. He starts to answer, gulps, swallows hard, and then coughs violently. Very sharply, after waiting a moment for BOB to answer.*] Robert Espenhayne, will you stop that coughing and answer me!

BOB. [*Between coughs, and drinking a glass of water.*] Egh! Egh! Excuse me! Something, eh! egh! stuck in my throat.

MOLLIE. [*Turning to HILDA.*] Some day we might want to move north, Hilda, but not now! Oh, no, not now!

BOB. Who told you that, Hilda?

HILDA. Meester Leendquist.

MOLLIE. [*Puzzled.*] Who is Mr. Lindquist?

HILDA. [*Surprised.*] Meester Leendquist—[*Pauses, a trifle embarrassed.*] Meester Leendquist ees young man who just speak to me on telephone. He come to see me every Saturday.

BOB. Oh, Mr. Lindquist, the—the—Ter—

MOLLIE. [*Interrupting frantically, and waving her hands at BOB.*] Yes, yes, of course. You know—Mr. Lindquist! [BOB catches himself just in time and MOLLIE settles back with a sigh of relief, then turns to HILDA with a puzzled air.] But where did Mr. Lindquist get such an idea?

HILDA. Mrs. Russell tell heem so.

MOLLIE. [*Now entirely bewildered.*] What Mrs. Russell?

HILDA. Meeses Russell—your friend.

MOLLIE. [*More and more at sea.*] Mrs. Edwin Russell, who comes to see me—every now and then?

HILDA. Yes.

MOLLIE. But how does Mrs. Russell know Mr. Lindquist and why should she tell Mr. Lindquist that we expected to move to the North Shore?

HILDA. Meester Leendquist, he build Meeses Russell's house. That ees hees business. He build houses on North Shore and he sell them and rent them.

[BOB and MOLLIE look at each other and at HILDA, in wonder and astonishment as the situation slowly filters into their brains. A long pause.]

BOB. [*In awe and astonishment.*] You mean that Mr. Lindquist, the young man who comes to see you every—every—every now and then—is the same man who put up the Russell house?

HILDA. Yes, Meester Aispenhayne.

BOB. [*Slowly.*] And when Mrs. Espenhayne [*points to MOLLIE*] wrote to Mrs. Russell [*jerks his thumb to indicate the north*], Mrs. Russell told Mr. Lindquist [*jerks his thumb in opposite direction*] and Mr. Lindquist telephoned to you?

[*Points to HILDA.*

HILDA. Yes, Meester Aispenhayne.

[*Nodding.*

BOB. [*Very thoughtfully and slowly.*] H'mm! [*Then slowly resuming his meal and speaking in mock seriousness, in subtle jest at MOLLIE, and imitating her tone of a moment or two back.*] But of course, you understand, Hilda, we don't want to move to the North Shore now! Oh, no, not now!

HILDA. [*Somewhat crestfallen.*] Yes, Meester Aispenhayne.

BOB. [*Reflectively.*] But, of course, if Mr. Lindquist builds houses, we might look. Yes, we might look.

HILDA. [*In growing confidence and enthusiasm.*] Yes, Meester Aispenhayne, and he build such beautiful houses and so cheap. He do so much heemself. Hees father was carpenter and he work hees way through Uneeversity of Mennesota and study architecture and then he go to Uneeversity of Eelenois and study landscape gardening and now he been in business for heemself sex years. And oh, Meeses Aispenhayne, you must see hees own home! You will love eet, eet ees so beautiful. A little house, far back from the road. You can hardly see eet for the trees and the shrubs, and een the summer the roses grow all around eet. Eet is just like the picture book!

MOLLIE. [*In the most perfunctory tone, utterly without interest or enthusiasm.*] How charming! [*Pauses thoughtfully, then turns*

to HILDA, *anxiously*.] Then I suppose, Hilda, if we should decide to move up to the North Shore you would go with us?

HILDA. [*Hesitatingly*.] Yes, Meeses Aispenhayne. [*Pauses*.] But I theenk I must tell you thees spring Meester Leendquist and I aixpect to get married. Meester Leendquist's business ees very good. [*With a quick smile and a glance from one to the other*.] You know, I am partner with heem. I put all my money een Meester Leendquist's business too.

[MOLLIE and BOB gaze at each other in complete resignation and surrender.]

BOB. [*Quite seriously after a long pause*.] Hilda, I don't know whether we will move north or not, but the next time Mr. Lindquist comes here I want you to introduce me to him. I'd like to know him. You ought to be very proud of a man like that.

HILDA. [*Radiant with pleasure*.] Thank you, Meester Aispenhayne.

MOLLIE. Yes, indeed, Hilda, Mr. Espenhayne has often said what a fine young man Mr. Lindquist seems to be. We want to meet him, and Mr. Espenhayne and I will talk about the house, and then we will speak to Mr. Lindquist. [*Then weakly*.] Of course, we didn't expect to move north for a long time, but, of course, if you expect to get married, and Mr. Lindquist builds houses — —

[*Her voice dies out. Long pause*.]

HILDA. Thank you, Meeses Aispenhayne, I tell Mr. Leendquist.

[HILDA stands at the table a moment longer, then slowly turns and moves toward door, left. BOB and MOLLIE watch her and as she moves away from the table BOB turns to MOLLIE. At this moment HILDA stops, turns suddenly and returns to the table.]

HILDA. Oh, Meeses Aispenhayne, I forget one theeng!

MOLLIE. What now, Hilda?

HILDA. Meester Leendquist say eef you and Meester Aispenhayne want to look at property on North Shore, I shall let heem know and he meet you at station weeth hees automobile.

CURTAIN

A DOLLAR
BY
DAVID PINSKI

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DAVID PINSKI

David Pinski, perhaps the most notable dramatist of the Yiddish Theatre, was born of Jewish parentage April 5, 1872, in Mohilev, on the Dnieper, White Russia. Because his parents had rabbinical aspirations for him he was well educated in Hebrew studies (Bible and Talmud) by his fourteenth year, when he moved to Moscow, where he was further trained in classical and secular studies. In 1891 he planned to study medicine in Vienna, but soon returned to Warsaw, where he began his literary work as a short-story writer. In 1896 he took up the study of philosophy and literature, and in 1899 wrote his first plays. In 1899 he came to New York City, where he is now editor of the Jewish daily, *Die Zeit*. In 1911 he revisited Germany to see a production of his well-known comedy, *The Treasure*, by Max Reinhart.

Mr. Pinski is zealous in his interests in literature, drama, socialism, and Zionism. Drama is to him an interpretation of life, and a guide and leader, as were the words of the old poets and prophets. "The dramatic technique," says he, "changes with each plot, as each plot brings with it its own technique. One thing, however, must be common to all the different forms of the dramatic technique—avoidance of tediousness."

Mr. Pinski has written a goodly number of plays, most of which are on Yiddish themes. *Forgotten Souls*, *The Stranger*, *Sufferings*, *The Treasure*, *The Phonograph*, and *A Dollar* may be mentioned. Most of his plays have been produced many times; *The Stranger* played the third season in Moscow.

"I wrote *A Dollar*," says he, "in the summer of 1913, when I was hard pressed financially. I relieved myself of my feelings by a hearty

laugh at the almighty dollar and the race for it. Just as I did many summers before, in 1906, when I entertained myself by ridiculing the mad money joy in the bigger comedy, *The Treasure*."

PERSONS

The Characters are given in the order of their appearance.

THE COMEDIAN

THE VILLAIN

THE TRAGEDIAN

ACTOR *who plays* "OLD MAN" *rôle*

THE HEROINE

THE INGENUE

ACTRESS *who plays* "OLD WOMAN" *rôle*

THE STRANGER

A DOLLAR

A cross-roads at the edge of a forest. One road extends from left to right; the other crosses the first diagonally, disappearing into the forest. The roadside is bordered with grass. On the right, at the crossing, stands a sign-post, to which are nailed two boards, giving directions and distances.

The afternoon of a summer day. A troupe of stranded strolling players enters from the left. They are ragged and weary. The COMEDIAN walks first, holding a valise in each hand, followed by the VILLAIN carrying over his arms two huge bundles wrapped in bed-sheets. Immediately behind these the TRAGEDIAN and the "OLD MAN" carrying together a large, heavy trunk.

COMEDIAN. [*Stepping toward the sign-post, reading the directions on the boards, and explaining to the approaching fellow-actors.*] That way [*pointing to right and swinging the valise to indicate the direction*] is thirty miles. This way [*pointing to left*] is forty-five—and that way it is thirty-six. Now choose for yourself the town that you'll never reach to-day. The nearest way for us is back to where we came from,

whence we were escorted with the most splendid catcalls that ever crowned our histrionic successes.

VILLAIN. [*Exhausted.*] Who will lend me a hand to wipe off my perspiration? It has a nasty way of streaming into my mouth.

COMEDIAN. Stand on your head, then, and let your perspiration water a more fruitful soil.

VILLAIN. Oh!

[*He drops his arms, the bundles fall down. He then sinks down onto one of them and wipes off the perspiration, moving his hand wearily over his face. The TRAGEDIAN and the "OLD MAN" approach the post and read the signs.*

TRAGEDIAN. [*In a deep, dramatic voice.*] It's hopeless! It's hopeless!

[*He lets go his end of the trunk.*

"OLD MAN." [*Lets go his end of the trunk.*] Mm. Another stop.

[*TRAGEDIAN sits himself down on the trunk in a tragico-heroic pose, knees wide apart, right elbow on right knee, left hand on left leg, head slightly bent toward the right. COMEDIAN puts down the valises and rolls a cigarette. The "OLD MAN" also sits down upon the trunk, head sunk upon his breast.*

VILLAIN. Thirty miles to the nearest town! Thirty miles!

COMEDIAN. It's an outrage how far people move their towns away from us.

VILLAIN. We won't strike a town until the day after to-morrow.

COMEDIAN. Hurrah! That's luck for you! There's yet a day-after-to-morrow for us.

VILLAIN. And the old women are still far behind us. Crawling!

"OLD MAN." They want the vote and they can't even walk.

COMEDIAN. We won't give them votes, that's settled. Down with votes for women!

VILLAIN. It seems the devil himself can't take you! Neither your tongue nor your feet ever get tired. You get on my nerves. Sit down and shut up for a moment.

COMEDIAN. *Me?* Ha—ha! I'm going back there to the lady of my heart. I'll meet her and fetch her hither in my arms.

[He spits on his hands, turns up his sleeves, and strides rapidly off toward the left.]

VILLAIN. Clown!

"OLD MAN." How can he laugh and play his pranks even now? We haven't a cent to our souls, our supply of food is running low and our shoes are dilapidated.

TRAGEDIAN. *[With an outburst.]* Stop it! No reckoning! The number of our sins is great and the tale of our misfortunes is even greater. Holy Father! Our flasks are empty; I'd give what is left of our soles *[displaying his ragged shoes]* for just a smell of whiskey.

[From the left is heard the laughter of a woman. Enter the COMEDIAN carrying in his arms the HEROINE, who has her hands around his neck and holds a satchel in both hands behind his back.]

COMEDIAN. *[Letting his burden down upon the grass.]* Sit down, my love, and rest up. We go no further to-day. Your feet, your tender little feet must ache you. How unhappy that makes me! At the first opportunity I shall buy you an automobile.

HEROINE. And in the meantime you may carry me oftener.

COMEDIAN. The beast of burden hears and obeys.

[Enter the INGENUE and the "OLD WOMAN," each carrying a small satchel.]

INGENUE. *[Weary and pouting.]* Ah! No one carried *me*.

[She sits on the grass to the right of the HEROINE.

VILLAIN. We have only one ass with us.

[COMEDIAN stretches himself out at the feet of the HEROINE and emits the bray of a donkey. "OLD WOMAN" sits down on the grass to the left of the HEROINE.

"OLD WOMAN." And are we to pass the night here?

"OLD MAN." No, we shall stop at "Hotel Neverwas."

COMEDIAN. Don't you like our night's lodgings? *[Turning over toward the "OLD WOMAN."]* See, the bed is broad and wide, and certainly without vermin. Just feel the high grass. Such a soft bed you never slept in. And you shall have a cover embroidered with the moon and stars, a cover such as no royal bride ever possessed.

"OLD WOMAN." You're laughing, and I feel like crying.

COMEDIAN. Crying? You should be ashamed of the sun which favors you with its setting splendor. Look, and be inspired!

VILLAIN. Yes, look and expire.

COMEDIAN. Look, and shout with ecstasy!

"OLD MAN." Look, and burst!

[INGENUE starts sobbing. TRAGEDIAN laughs heavily.

COMEDIAN. *[Turning over to the INGENUE.]* What! You are crying? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

INGENUE. I'm sad.

"OLD WOMAN." *[Sniffing.]* I can't stand it any longer.

HEROINE. Stop it! Or I'll start bawling, too.

[COMEDIAN springs to his knees and looks quickly from one woman to the other.

VILLAIN. Ha – ha! Cheer them up, clown!

COMEDIAN. [*Jumps up abruptly without the aid of his hands.*] Ladies and gentlemen, I have it! [*In a measured and singing voice.*] Ladies and gentlemen, I have it!

HEROINE. What have you?

COMEDIAN. Cheerfulness.

VILLAIN. Go bury yourself, clown.

TRAGEDIAN. [*As before.*] Ho-ho-ho!

"OLD MAN." P-o-o-h!

[*The women weep all the louder.*]

COMEDIAN. I have – a bottle of whiskey!

[*General commotion. The women stop crying and look up to the COMEDIAN in amazement; the TRAGEDIAN straightens himself out and casts a surprised look at the COMEDIAN; the "OLD MAN," rubbing his hands, jumps to his feet; the VILLAIN looks suspiciously at the COMEDIAN.*]

TRAGEDIAN. A bottle of whiskey?

"OLD MAN." He-he-he – A bottle of whiskey.

VILLAIN. Hum – whiskey.

COMEDIAN. You bet! A bottle of whiskey, hidden and preserved for such moments as this, a moment of masculine depression and feminine tears.

[*Taking the flask from his hip pocket. The expression on the faces of all changes from hope to disappointment.*]

VILLAIN. You call that a bottle. I call it a flask.

TRAGEDIAN. [*Explosively.*] A thimble!

"OLD MAN." A dropper!

"OLD WOMAN." For seven of us! Oh!

COMEDIAN. [*Letting the flash sparkle in the sun.*] But it's whiskey, my children. [*Opening the flask and smelling it.*] U—u—u—m! That's whiskey for you. The saloonkeeper from whom I hooked it will become a teetotaler from sheer despair.

[*TRAGEDIAN rising heavily and slowly proceeding toward the flask. VILLAIN still skeptical and rising as if unwilling. The "OLD MAN" chuckling and rubbing his hands. The "OLD WOMAN" getting up indifferently and moving apathetically toward the flask. The HEROINE and INGENUE hold each other by the hand and take ballet steps in waltz time. All approach the COMEDIAN with necks eagerly stretched out and smell the flask, which the COMEDIAN holds firmly in both hands.*]

TRAGEDIAN. Ho—ho—ho—Fine!

"OLD MAN." He—he—Small quantity, but excellent quality!

VILLAIN. Seems to be good whiskey.

HEROINE. [*Dancing and singing.*] My comedian, my comedian. His head is in the right place. But why didn't you nab a larger bottle?

COMEDIAN. My beloved one, I had to take in consideration both the quality of the whiskey and the size of my pocket.

"OLD WOMAN." If only there's enough of it to go round.

INGENUE. Oh, I'm feeling sad again.

COMEDIAN. Cheer up, there will be enough for us all. Cheer up. Here, smell it again.

[*They smell again and cheerfulness reappears. They join hands and dance and sing, forming a circle, the COMEDIAN applauding.*]

COMEDIAN. Good! If you are so cheered after a mere smell of it, what won't you feel like after a drink. Wait, I'll join you. [*He hides the whiskey flask in his pocket.*] I'll show you a new roundel which we will

perform in our next presentation of Hamlet, to the great edification of our esteemed audience. [*Kicking the VILLAIN'S bundles out of the way.*] The place is clear, now for dance and play. Join hands and form a circle, but you, Villain, stay on the outside of it. You are to try to get in and we dance and are not to let you in, without getting out of step. Understand? Now then!

[*The circle is formed in the following order —*
COMEDIAN, HEROINE, TRAGEDIAN, "OLD WOMAN," "OLD
MAN," INGENUE.

COMEDIAN. [*Singing.*]

To be or not to be, that is the question.
That is the question, that is the question.
He who would enter in,
Climb he must over us,
If over he cannot,
He must get under us.

REFRAIN

Tra-la-la, tra-la-la,
Over us, under us.
Tra-la-la, tra-la-la,
Under us, over us.
Now we are jolly, jolly are we.

[*The COMEDIAN sings the refrain alone at first and the others repeat it together with him.*

COMEDIAN.

To be or not to be, that is the question,
That is the question, that is the question.
In life to win success,
Elbow your way through,
Jostle the next one,
Else *you* will be jostled.

REFRAIN

[Same as before.]

[On the last word of the refrain they flop as if dumbfounded, and stand transfixed, with eyes directed on one spot inside of the ring. The VILLAIN leans over the arms of the COMEDIAN and the HEROINE; gradually the circle draws closer till their heads almost touch. They attempt to free their hands but each holds on to the other and all seven whisper in great astonishment.

ALL. A dollar!

[The circle opens up again, they look each at the other and shout in wonder.

ALL. A dollar!

[Once more they close in and the struggle to free their hands grows wilder; the VILLAIN tries to climb over and then under the hands into the circle and stretches out his hand toward the dollar, but instinctively he is stopped by the couple he tries to pass between, even when he is not seen but only felt. Again all lean their heads over the dollar, quite lost in the contemplation of it, and whispering, enraptured.

ALL. A dollar!

[Separating once again they look at each other with exultation and at the same time try to free their hands, once more exclaiming in ecstasy.

ALL. A dollar!

[Then the struggle to get free grows wilder and wilder. The hand that is perchance freed is quickly grasped again by the one who held it.

INGENUE. *[In pain.]* Oh, my hands, my hands! You'll break them. Let go of my hands!

"OLD WOMAN." If you don't let go of my hands I'll bite.

[Attempting to bite the hands of the TRAGEDIAN and the "OLD MAN," while they try to prevent it.

"OLD MAN." [*Trying to free his hands from the hold of the HEROINE and the "OLD WOMAN."*] Let go of me. [*Pulling at both his hands.*] These women's hands that — seem so frail, just look at them now.

HEROINE. [*To COMEDIAN.*] But you let go my hands.

COMEDIAN. I think it's you who are holding fast to mine.

HEROINE. Why should I be holding you? If you pick up the dollar, what is yours is mine, you know.

COMEDIAN. Then let go of my hand and I'll pick it up.

HEROINE. No, I'd rather pick it up myself.

COMEDIAN. I expected something like that from you.

HEROINE. [*Angrily.*] Let go of my hands, that's all.

COMEDIAN. Ha-ha-ha — It's a huge joke. [*In a tone of command.*] Be quiet. [*They become still.*] We must contemplate the dollar with religious reverence. [*Commotion.*] Keep quiet, I say! A dollar is spread out before us. A real dollar in the midst of our circle, and everything within us draws us toward it, draws us on irresistibly. Be quiet! Remember you are before the Ruler, before the Almighty. On your knees before him and pray. On your knees.

[*Sinks down on his knees and drags with him the HEROINE and INGENUE. "OLD MAN" dropping on his knees and dragging the "OLD WOMAN" with him.*]

"OLD MAN." He-he-he!

TRAGEDIAN. Ho-ho-ho, clown!

COMEDIAN. [*To TRAGEDIAN.*] You are not worthy of the serious mask you wear. You don't appreciate true Divine Majesty. On your knees, or you'll get no whiskey. [*TRAGEDIAN sinks heavily on his knees.*] O holy dollar, O almighty ruler of the universe, before thee we kneel in the dust and send toward thee our most tearful and heartfelt prayers. Our hands are bound, but our hearts strive toward thee and our souls yearn for thee. O great king of kings, thou who

bringest together those who are separated, and separatest those who are near, thou who — —

[The VILLAIN, who is standing aside, takes a full jump, clears the INGENUE and grasps the dollar. All let go of one another and fall upon him, shouting, screaming, pushing, and fighting. Finally the VILLAIN manages to free himself, holding the dollar in his right fist. The others follow him with clenched fists, glaring eyes, and foaming mouths, wildly shouting.]

ALL. The dollar! The dollar! The dollar! Return the dollar!

VILLAIN. *[Retreating.]* You can't take it away from me; it's mine. It was lying under my bundle.

ALL. Give up the dollar! Give up the dollar!

VILLAIN. *[In great rage.]* No, no. *[A moment during which the opposing sides look at each other in hatred. Quietly but with malice.]* Moreover, whom should I give it to? To you — you — you — you?

COMEDIAN. Ha-ha-ha-ha! He is right, the dollar is his. He has it, therefore it is his. Ha-ha-ha-ha, and I wanted to crawl on my knees toward the dollar and pick it up with my teeth. Ha-ha-ha-ha, but he got ahead of me. Ha-ha-ha-ha.

HEROINE. *[Whispering in rage.]* That's because you would not let go of me.

COMEDIAN. Ha-ha-ha-ha!

TRAGEDIAN. *[Shaking his fist in the face of the VILLAIN.]* Heaven and hell, I feel like crushing you!

[He steps aside toward the trunk and sits down in his former pose. INGENUE, lying down on the grass, starts to cry.]

COMEDIAN. Ha-ha-ha! Now we will drink, and the first drink is the Villain's.

[His proposition is accepted in gloom; the INGENUE, however, stops crying; the "OLD MAN" and the "OLD WOMAN" have been standing by]

the VILLAIN looking at the dollar in his hand as if waiting for the proper moment to snatch it from, him. Finally the "OLD WOMAN" makes a contemptuous gesture and both turn aside from the VILLAIN. The latter, left in peace, smooths out the dollar, with a serious expression on his face. The COMEDIAN hands him a small glass of whiskey.

COMEDIAN. Drink, lucky one.

[The VILLAIN, shutting the dollar in his fist, takes the whiskey glass gravely and quickly drinks the contents, returning the glass. He then starts to smooth and caress the dollar again. The COMEDIAN, still laughing, passes the whiskey glass from one to the other of the company, who drink sullenly. The whiskey fails to cheer them. After drinking, the INGENUE begins to sob again. The HEROINE, who is served last, throws the empty whiskey glass toward the COMEDIAN.

COMEDIAN. Good shot. Now I'll drink up all that's left in the bottle.

[He puts the flask to his lips and drinks. The HEROINE tries to knock it away from him, but he skilfully evades her. The VILLAIN continues to smooth and caress the dollar.

VILLAIN. Ha-ha-ha!...

[Singing and dancing.

He who would enter in,
Jump he must over us.

Ho-ho-ho! O Holy Dollar! O Almighty Ruler of the World!... O King of Kings! Ha-ha-ha!... Don't you all think if I have the dollar and you have it not that I partake a bit of its majesty? That means that I am now a part of its majesty. That means that I am the Almighty Dollar's plenipotentiary, and therefore I am the Almighty Ruler himself. On your knees before me!... He-he-he!...

COMEDIAN. *[After throwing away the empty flask, lies down on the grass.]* Well roared, lion, but you forgot to hide your jack-ass's ears.

VILLAIN. It is one's consciousness of power. He-he-he. I know and you know that if I have the money I have the say. Remember, none of you has a cent to his name. The whiskey is gone.

[Picking up the flask and examining it.]

COMEDIAN. I did my job well. Drank it to the last drop.

VILLAIN. Yes, to the last drop. This evening you shall have bread and sausage. Very small portions, too, for to-morrow is another day. *[INGENUE sobbing more frequently.]* Not till the day after to-morrow shall we reach town, and that doesn't mean that you get anything to eat there, either, but I—I—I—he-he-he. O Holy Dollar, Almighty Dollar! *[Gravely.]* He who does my bidding shall not be without food.

COMEDIAN. *[With wide-open eyes.]* What? Ha-ha-ha!

[INGENUE gets up and throws herself on the VILLAIN'S bosom.]

INGENUE. Oh, my dear beloved one.

VILLAIN. Ha-ha, my power already makes itself felt.

HEROINE. *[Pushing the INGENUE away.]* Let go of him, you. He sought my love for a long time and now he shall have it.

COMEDIAN. What? You!

HEROINE. *[To COMEDIAN.]* I hate you, traitor. *[To the VILLAIN.]* I have always loved—genius. You are now the wisest of the wise. I adore you.

VILLAIN. *[Holding INGENUE in one arm.]* Come into my other arm.

[HEROINE, throwing herself into his arms, kissing and embracing him.]

COMEDIAN. *[Half rising on his knees.]* Stop, I protest. *[Throwing himself on the grass.]* "O frailty, thy name is woman."

"OLD WOMAN." [*Approaching the VILLAIN from behind and embracing him.*] Find a little spot on your bosom for me. I play the "Old Woman," but you know I'm not really old.

VILLAIN. Now I have all of power and all of love.

COMEDIAN. Don't call it love. Call it servility.

VILLAIN. [*Freeing himself from the women.*] But now I have something more important to carry out. My vassals—I mean you all—I have decided we will not stay here over night. We will proceed further.

WOMEN. How so?

VILLAIN. We go forward to-night.

COMEDIAN. You have so decided?

VILLAIN. I have so decided, and that in itself should be enough for you; but due to an old habit I shall explain to you why I have so decided.

COMEDIAN. Keep your explanation to yourself and better not disturb my contemplation of the sunset.

VILLAIN. I'll put you down on the blacklist. It will go ill with you for your speeches against me. Now, then, *without* an explanation, we will go—and at once. [*Nobody stirs.*] Very well, then, I go alone.

WOMEN. No, no.

VILLAIN. What do you mean?

INGENUE. I go with you.

HEROINE. And I.

"OLD WOMAN." And I.

VILLAIN. Your loyalty gratifies me very much.

"OLD MAN." [*Who is sitting apathetically upon the trunk.*] What the deuce is urging you to go?

VILLAIN. I wanted to explain to you, but now no more. I owe you no explanations. I have decided—I wish to go, and that is sufficient.

COMEDIAN. He plays his comedy wonderfully. Would you ever have suspected that there was so much wit in his cabbage head?

WOMEN. [*Making love to the VILLAIN.*] Oh, you darling.

TRAGEDIAN. [*Majestically.*] I wouldn't give him even a single glance.

VILLAIN. Still another on the blacklist. I'll tell you this much—I have decided — —

COMEDIAN. Ha-ha-ha! How long will you keep this up?

VILLAIN. We start at once, but if I am to pay for your food I will not carry any baggage. You shall divide my bundles among you and of course those who are on the blacklist will get the heaviest share. You heard me. Now move on. I'm going now. We will proceed to the nearest town, which is thirty miles away. Now, then, I am off.

COMEDIAN. Bon voyage.

VILLAIN. And with me fares His Majesty the Dollar and your meals for to-morrow.

WOMEN. We are coming, we are coming.

"OLD MAN." I'll go along.

TRAGEDIAN. [*To the VILLAIN.*] You're a scoundrel and a mean fellow.

VILLAIN. I am no fellow of yours. I am master and bread-giver.

TRAGEDIAN. I'll crush you in a moment.

VILLAIN. What? You threaten me! Let's go.

[Turns to right. The women take their satchels and follow him.]

"OLD MAN." *[To the TRAGEDIAN.]* Get up and take the trunk. We will settle the score with him some other time. It is he who has the dollar now.

TRAGEDIAN. *[Rising and shaking his fist.]* I'll get him yet.

[He takes his side of the trunk.]

VILLAIN. *[To TRAGEDIAN.]* First put one of my bundles on your back.

TRAGEDIAN. *[In rage.]* One of your bundles on my back?

VILLAIN. Oh, for all I care you can put it on your head, or between your teeth.

"OLD MAN." We will put the bundle on the trunk.

COMEDIAN. *[Sitting up.]* Look here, are you joking or are you in earnest?

VILLAIN. *[Contemptuously.]* I never joke.

COMEDIAN. Then you are in earnest?

VILLAIN. I'll make no explanations.

COMEDIAN. Do you really think that because you have the dollar — —

VILLAIN. The holy dollar, the almighty dollar, the king of kings.

COMEDIAN. *[Continuing.]* That therefore you are the master — —

VILLAIN. Bread-giver and provider.

COMEDIAN. And that we must — —

VILLAIN. Do what I bid you to.

COMEDIAN. So you are in earnest?

VILLAIN. You must get up, take the baggage and follow me.

COMEDIAN. [*Rising.*] Then I declare a revolution.

VILLAIN. What? A revolution!

COMEDIAN. A bloody one, if need be.

TRAGEDIAN. [*Dropping his end of the trunk and advancing with a bellicose attitude toward the VILLAIN.*] And I shall be the first to let your blood, you scoundrel.

VILLAIN. If that's the case I have nothing to say to you. Those who wish, come along.

COMEDIAN. [*Getting in his way.*] No, you shall not go until you give up the dollar.

VILLAIN. Ha-ha. It is to laugh!

COMEDIAN. The dollar, please, or — —

VILLAIN. He-he-he!

COMEDIAN. Then let there be blood. [*Turns up his sleeves.*

TRAGEDIAN. [*Taking off his coat.*] Ah! Blood, blood!

"OLD MAN." [*Dropping his end of the trunk.*] I'm not going to keep out of a fight.

WOMEN. [*Dropping his satchels.*] Nor we. Nor we.

VILLAIN. [*Shouting.*] To whom shall I give up the dollar? You — you — you — you?

COMEDIAN. This argument will not work any more. You are to give the dollar up to all of us. At the first opportunity we'll get change and divide it into equal parts.

WOMEN. Hurrah, hurrah! Divide it, divide it!

COMEDIAN. [*To VILLAIN.*] And I will even be so good as to give you a share.

TRAGEDIAN. I'd rather give him a sound thrashing.

COMEDIAN. It shall be as I say. Give up the dollar.

HEROINE. [*Throwing herself on the COMEDIAN'S breast.*] My comedian! My comedian!

INGENUE. [*To the VILLAIN.*] I'm sick of you. Give up the dollar.

COMEDIAN. [*Pushing the HEROINE aside.*] You better step aside or else you may get the punch I aim at the master and bread-giver. [*To the VILLAIN.*] Come up with the dollar!

TRAGEDIAN. Give up the dollar to him, do you hear?

ALL. The dollar, the dollar!

VILLAIN. I'll tear it to pieces.

COMEDIAN. Then we shall tear out what little hair you have left on your head. The dollar, quick!

[*They surround the VILLAIN; the women pull his hair; the TRAGEDIAN grabs him by the collar and shakes him; the "OLD MAN" strikes him on his bald pate; the COMEDIAN struggles with him and finally grasps the dollar.*]

COMEDIAN. [*Holding up the dollar.*] I have it!

[*The women dance and sing.*]

VILLAIN. Bandits! Thieves!

TRAGEDIAN. Silence, or I'll shut your mouth.

[*Goes back to the trunk and assumes his heroic pose.*]

COMEDIAN. [*Putting the dollar into his pocket.*] That's what I call a successful and a bloodless revolution, except for a little fright and heart palpitation on the part of the late master and bread-giver.

Listen, some one is coming. Perhaps he'll be able to change the dollar and then we can divide it at once.

"OLD MAN." I am puzzled how we can change it into equal parts.

[Starts to calculate with the INGENUE and the "OLD WOMAN."

HEROINE. *[Tenderly attentive to the COMEDIAN.]* You are angry with me, but I was only playing with him so as to wheedle the dollar out of him.

COMEDIAN. And now you want to trick me out of my share of it.

"OLD MAN." It is impossible to divide it into equal parts. It is absolutely impossible. If it were ninety-eight cents or one hundred and five cents or — —

[The STRANGER enters from the right, perceives the company, greets it, and continues his way to left. COMEDIAN stops him.]

COMEDIAN. I beg your pardon, sir; perhaps you have change of a dollar in dimes, nickels, and pennies.

[Showing the dollar. The "OLD MAN" and women step forward.]

STRANGER. *[Getting slightly nervous, starts somewhat, makes a quick movement for his pistol-pocket, looks at the COMEDIAN and the others and says slowly.]* Change of a dollar? *[Moving from the circle to left.]* I believe I have.

WOMEN. Hurrah!

STRANGER. *[Turns so that no one is behind him and pulls his revolver.]* Hands up!

COMEDIAN. *[In a gentle tone of voice.]* My dear sir, we are altogether peaceful folk.

STRANGER. *[Takes the dollar from the COMEDIAN'S hand and walks backwards to left with the pistol pointed at the group.]* Good-night, everybody.

[He disappears, the actors remain dumb with fear, with their hands up, mouths wide open, and staring into space.]

COMEDIAN. *[Finally breaks out into thunderous laughter.]* Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

CURTAIN

THE DIABOLICAL CIRCLE

BY
BEULAH BORNSTEAD

The Diabolical Circle is reprinted by special permission of Professor Franz Rickaby, in whose course in dramatic composition (English 36) in the University of North Dakota this play was written. For permission to perform, address Professor Franz Rickaby, University of North Dakota, University, North Dakota.

BEULAH BORNSTEAD

Beulah Bornstead, one of the promising young playwrights of the Northwest, was born in Grand Forks, North Dakota, May 5, 1896. She has had her academic training at the University of North Dakota, from which she received her B.A. in 1921. At present Miss Bornstead is principal of the Cavalier High School, North Dakota. Before attempting drama she tried her hand at journalism and at short-story writing.

Miss Bornstead was introduced into playwriting by Professor Franz Rickaby, in whose course in dramatic composition at the University of North Dakota *The Diabolical Circle* was written. In speaking of this play Miss Bornstead writes: "*The Diabolical Circle* is the first play I have ever written. I never enjoyed doing anything so much in my life. The characters were so real to me that if I had bumped into one going round the corner I should not have been surprised in the least. BETTY and CHARLES and ADONIJAH and even COTTON MATHER himself worked that play out. All the humble author did was to set it down on paper." *The Diabolical Circle* was produced May 5, 1921, by the Dakota Playmakers in their Little Theatre at the University of North Dakota.

The Diabolical Circle is one of the best contemporary plays dealing with American historical material. Its characterization is one of its noteworthy elements.

CHARACTERS

COTTON MATHER

BETTY, *his daughter*

ADONIJAH WIGGLESWORTH, *a suitor, and COTTON'S choice*

CHARLES MANNING, *likewise a suitor, but BETTY'S choice*

THE CLOCK

THE DIABOLICAL CIRCLE

SCENE: *The living-room in the Mather home in Boston.*

TIME: *About 1700, an evening in early autumn.*

The stage represents the living-room of the Mather home. A large colonial fireplace is seen down-stage left, within which stand huge brass andirons. To one side hangs the bellows, with the tongs near by, while above, underneath the mantelpiece, is suspended an old flint-lock rifle. On both ends of the mantel are brass candlesticks, and hanging directly above is an old-fashioned portrait of Betty's mother. There are two doors, one leading into the hall at centre left, the other, communicating with the rest of the house, up-stage right. A straight high-backed settee is down-stage right, while in the centre back towers an old grandfather's clock. To the left of the clock is the window, cross-barred and draped with flowered chintz. An old-fashioned table occupies the corner between the window and the hall door. Here and there are various straight-backed chairs of Dutch origin. Rag rugs cover the floor.

As the curtain rises COTTON MATHER is seated in a large armchair by the fire, with BETTY on a stool at his feet, with her knitting.

COTTON, his hair already touched with the whitening frost of many a severe New England winter, is grave and sedate. Very much exercised with the perils of this life, and serenely contemplative of the life to come, he takes himself and the world about him very seriously.

Not so with MISTRESS BETTY. Outwardly demure, yet inwardly rebellious against the straitened conventions of the times, she dimples over with roguish merriment upon the slightest provocation.

As we first see them COTTON is giving BETTY some timely advice.

COTTON. But you must understand that marriage, my daughter, is a most reverend and serious matter which should be approached in a manner fittingly considerate of its grave responsibility.

BETTY. [*Thoughtfully.*] Truly reverend and most serious, father [*looking up roguishly*], but I like not so much of the grave about it.

COTTON. [*Continuing.*] I fear thou lookest upon the matter too lightly. It is not seemly to treat such a momentous occasion thus flippantly.

BETTY. [*Protesting.*] Nay, father, why consider it at all? Marriage is yet a great way off. Mayhap I shall never leave thee.

COTTON. Thou little thinkest that I may be suddenly called on to leave *thee*. The Good Word cautions us to boast not ourselves of the morrow, for we know not what a day may bring forth.

BETTY. [*Dropping her knitting.*] Father, thou art not feeling well. Perhaps — —

COTTON. Nay, child, be not alarmed. 'Tis but a most necessary lesson to be learned and laid up in the heart. I will not always be with thee and I would like to be comfortably assured of thy future welfare before I go.

BETTY. [*Picking her knitting up.*] Be comfortably assured, then, I prithee; I have no fears.

COTTON. [*Bringing his arm down forcibly on the arm of the chair.*] Aye! There it is. Thou hast no fears. Would that thou had'st some! [*Looks up at the portrait.*] Had thy prudent and virtuous mother only lived to point the way, I might be spared this anxiety; but, beset by diverse difficulties in establishing the kingdom of God in this country, and sorely harassed by many hardships and by evil men, I fear me I have not propounded to thee much that I ought.

BETTY. In what then is mine education lacking? Have I not all that is fitting and proper for a maiden to know?

COTTON. [*Perplexed.*] I know not. I have done my best, but thou hast not the proper attitude of mind befitting a maiden about to enter the married estate.

BETTY. [*Protesting.*] Nay, but I am not about to enter the married estate.

COTTON. It is time.

BETTY. [*Mockingly pleading.*] Entreat me not to leave thee, father, nor forsake thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and whither — —

COTTON. [*Interrupting sternly.*] Betty! It ill befitteth a daughter of mine to quote the Scriptures with such seeming irreverence.—I would not be parted from thee, yet I would that thou wert promised to some godly and upright soul that would guide thee yet more surely in the paths of righteousness. There be many such.

BETTY. Yea, too many.

COTTON. What meanest thou?

BETTY. One were one too many when I would have none.

COTTON. [*Shaking his head.*] Ah. Betty, Betty! When wilt thou be serious? There is a goodly youth among the friends surrounding thee whom I have often marked, both on account of his godly demeanor and simple wisdom.

BETTY. [*Nodding.*] Yea, simple.

COTTON. I speak of Adonijah Wigglesworth, a most estimable young gentleman, an acquaintance whom thou would'st do well to cultivate.

BETTY. Yea, cultivate.

COTTON. What thinkest thou?

BETTY. A sod too dense for any ploughshare. My wit would break in the turning.

COTTON. His is a strong nature, born to drive and not be driven. There is not such another, nay, not in the whole of Boston.

BETTY. Nay. I have lately heard there be many such!

COTTON. [*Testily.*] Mayhap thou wouldst name a few.

BETTY. [*Musingly, holds up her left hand with fingers outspread.*] Aye, that I can. [*Checks off one on the little finger.*] There be Marcus Ainslee — —

COTTON. A goodly youth that hath an eye for books.

BETTY. One eye, sayest thou? Nay, four; and since I am neither morocco bound nor edged with gilt, let us consign him to the shelf wherein he findeth fullest compensation.

COTTON. How now? A man of action, then, should appeal to thy brash tastes. What sayest thou to Jeremiah Wadsworth?

BETTY. Too brash and rash for me [*checking off that candidate on the next finger*], and I'll have none of him. There's Percy Wayne.

COTTON. Of the bluest blood in Boston.

BETTY. Yet that be not everything [*checks off another finger*] — and Jonas Appleby — —

COTTON. He hath an eye to worldly goods — —

BETTY. [*Quickly.*] Especially the larder. To marry him would be an everlasting round between the tankard and the kettle. [*Checks him off.*] Nay, let me look yet farther — James Endicott. [*Checking.*]

COTTON. Aye, there might be a lad for thee; birth, breeding, a well-favored countenance, and most agreeable.

BETTY. Yea, most agreeable—unto himself. 'Twere a pity to disturb such unanimity. Therefore, let us pass on. Take Charles Manning, an you please — —

COTTON. It pleaseth me not! I know the ilk; his father before him a devoted servant of the devil and King Charles. With others of his kind he hath brought dissension among the young men of Harvard, many of whom are dedicated to the service of the Lord, with his wicked apparel and ungodly fashion of wearing long hair after the manner of Russians and barbarous Indians. Many there be with him brought up in such pride as doth in no ways become the service of the Lord. The devil himself hath laid hold on our young men, so that they do evaporate senseless, useless, noisy impertinency wherever they may be; and now it has e'en got out in the pulpits of the land, to the great grief and fear of many godly hearts.

[He starts to his feet and paces the floor.]

BETTY. *[Standing upright.]* But Charles — —

COTTON. *[Interrupting.]* Mention not that scapegrace in my hearing.

BETTY. *[Still persisting.]* But, father, truly thou knowest not — —

COTTON. *[Almost savagely, while BETTY retreats to a safe distance.]* Name him not. I will not have it. Compared with Adonijah he is a reed shaken in the winds, whereas Adonijah resembleth a tree planted by the river of waters.

BETTY. *[Who has been looking out of the window.]* Converse of the devil and thou wilt behold his horns. Even now he approacheth the knocker.

[The knocker sounds.]

COTTON. *[Sternly.]* Betake thyself to thine own chamber with thine unseemly tongue, which so ill befitteth a maid.

[BETTY is very demure, with head slightly bent and downcast eyes; but the moment COTTON turns she glances roguishly after his retreating form; then while her glance revolves about the room, she starts slightly as her

gaze falls upon the clock. A smile of mischievous delight flits over her countenance as she tiptoes in COTTON'S wake until the clock is reached. COTTON, unsuspecting, meanwhile, proceeds to do his duty as host, with never a backward glance. While he is out in the hall BETTY, with a lingering smile of triumph, climbs into the clock and cautiously peeks forth as her father opens the door and ushers in ADONIJAH, whereupon the door softly closes.

ADONIJAH. Good-morrow, reverend sir.

COTTON. Enter, and doubly welcome.

ADONIJAH. I would inquire whether thy daughter Betty is within.

COTTON. We were but speaking of thee as thy knock sounded. Betty will be here presently; she hath but retired for the moment. Remove thy wraps and make thyself in comfort.

[ADONIJAH is a lean, lank, lantern-jawed individual, clad in the conventional sober gray of the Puritan, with high-crowned hat, and a fur tippet wound about his neck up to his ears. He removes the hat and tippet and hands them to COTTON, who carefully places them upon the table; meanwhile ADONIJAH looks appraisingly about him and judiciously selects the armchair by the fire. He pauses a moment to rub his hands before the blaze, and then gingerly relaxes into the depths of the armchair, as though fearful his comfort would give way ere fully attained. COTTON places a chair on the other side of ADONIJAH and is seated.

COTTON. And how is it with thee since I have seen thee last?

ADONIJAH. My business prospereth [*mournfully*], but not so finely as it might well do.

[The clock strikes four, but is unnoticed by the two men.]

COTTON. Thou hast suffered some great loss?

ADONIJAH. But yes — and no — this matter of lending money hath many and grievous complications, not the least of which is the duplicity of the borrower. I but insist on the thirty pounds to the hundred as my due recompense, and when I demand it they

respond not, but let my kindness lie under the clods of ingratitude. [*Straightening up, and speaking with conviction.*] They shall come before the council. I will have what is mine own.

COTTON. [*Righteously.*] And it is not unbecoming of thee to demand it. I wist not what the present generation is coming to.

ADONIJAH. They have no sense of the value of money. They know not how to demean themselves properly in due proportion to their worldly goods, as the Lord hath prospered them. There be many that have nothing and do hold their heads above us that be worthy of our possessions.

COTTON. The wicked stand in slippery places. It will not always be thus. Judgment shall come upon them.

ADONIJAH. Aye, let them fall. I for one have upheld them too far. They squander their means in riotous living, and walk not in the ways of their fathers.

COTTON. There be many such—many such—but thou, my lad, thou art not one of the multitude. As I have often observed to my Betty, thou standest out as a most upright and God-fearing young man.

ADONIJAH. [*Brimming over with self-satisfaction.*] That have I ever sought to be.

COTTON. An example that others would do well to imitate.

ADONIJAH. [*All puffed up.*] Nay, others value it not. They be envious of my good fortune.

COTTON. A most prudent young man! Nay, be not so over-blushingly timid. Thou'rt too modest.

ADONIJAH. [*His face falling.*] But Betty—doth she regard me thus?

COTTON. The ways of a maid are past finding out; but despair not. I think she hath thee much to heart, but, as the perverse heart of woman dictateth, behaveth much to the contrary.

ADONIJAH. [*Brightening up as one with new hopes.*] Thou thinkest — —

COTTON. [*Interrupting.*] Nay, lad, I am sure of it. Betty was ever a dutiful daughter.

[*All unseen, BETTY peeks out mischievously.*

ADONIJAH. But I mistrust me her heart is elsewhere.

COTTON. Thou referr'st to young Manning without doubt. It can never be. 'Tis but a passing fancy.

ADONIJAH. Nay, but I fear Charles thinketh not so. I have been told in secret [*leaning forward confidentially*] by one that hath every opportunity to know, that he hath enjoined Goodman Shrewsbury to send for — [*impressively*] a ring!

COTTON. [*Angered.*] A ring, sayest thou?

ADONIJAH. [*Nodding.*] Aye, even so.

COTTON. But he hath not signified such intention here to me.

ADONIJAH. Then there are no grounds for his rash presumption?

COTTON. Humph! Grounds! For a ring! Aye, there'll be no diabolical circle here for the devil to daunce in. I will question Betty thereon. [*Rises.*] Do thou remain here and I will send her to thee. Oh, that he should offer daughter of mine a ring!

[*COTTON leaves the room. ADONIJAH leans back in his chair in supreme contentment at the turn affairs have taken. The clamorous knocker arouses him from his reverie. He gazes stupidly around. The continued imperious tattoo on the knocker finally brings him to his feet. He goes into the hall and opens the door. His voice is heard.*

ADONIJAH. [*Frostily.*] Good-afternoon, Sir Charles, mine host is absent.

CHARLES. [*Stepping in.*] My mission has rather to do with Mistress Betty. Is she in?

ADONIJAH. [*Closing the hall door, and turning to CHARLES, replies in grandiose hauteur.*] Mistress Betty is otherwise engaged, I would have thee know.

CHARLES. Engaged? [*Bowing.*] Your humble servant, I trust, hath the supreme pleasure of that engagement.

[*He glances inquiringly about the room, and places the hat on the table beside that of ADONIJAH. The two hats are as different as the two men: ADONIJAH'S prim, Puritanic, severe; CHARLES'S three-cornered, with a flowing plume.*

[*CHARLES is a handsome chap of goodly proportions, with a straightforward air and a pleasant smile. He is dressed more after the fashion of the cavaliers of Virginia, and wears a long wig with flowing curls. The two men size each other up.*

ADONIJAH. [*Meaningly.*] Her father will shortly arrive.

CHARLES. [*Impatiently striding forth.*] Devil take her father. 'Tis Mistress Betty I would see. Where is she?

[*CHARLES continues pacing the floor. ADONIJAH, shocked beyond measure, turns his back on the offending CHARLES, and with folded arms and bowed head stands aside in profound meditation. The clock door slowly opens and BETTY cautiously peeks out. CHARLES stops short and is about to begin a decided demonstration, when BETTY, with a warning glance toward ADONIJAH, checks him with upraised hand. The clock door closes and CHARLES subsides into the armchair with a comprehending grin of delight. ADONIJAH slowly turns and faces CHARLES with a melancholy air.*

CHARLES. Prithee, why so sad?

[*The grin becomes a chuckle.*

ADONIJAH. I do discern no cause for such unrighteous merriment.

CHARLES. 'Tis none the less for all of that. I take life as I find it, and for that matter so do they all, even thou. The difference be in the finding.

[*Whistles.*

ADONIJAH. [*Uneasily.*] It is time her father did arrive.

CHARLES. Where then hath he been?

ADONIJAH. He but went in search of Betty.

CHARLES. Ah, then we'll wait.

[*He whistles, while ADONIJAH moves uneasily about the room, glancing every now and then at this disturbing element of his peace, as if he would send him to kingdom come, if he only could.*

ADONIJAH. [*After considerable toleration.*] Waiting may avail thee naught.

CHARLES. And thee? Nevertheless we'll wait.

[*Whistles.*

ADONIJAH. [*Takes another turn or two and fetches up a counterfeit sigh.*] Methinks, her father's quest be fruitless.

CHARLES. [*Starting up.*] Ah, then, let us go.

[*ADONIJAH., visibly relieved, sits down in the chair opposite.*

CHARLES. [*Amused.*] Nay? [*Sits down and relaxes.*] Ah, then, we'll wait. [*Whistles.*

ADONIJAH. [*Troubled.*] 'Tis certain Mistress Betty be not here.

CHARLES. Nay, if she be not here, then I am neither here nor there. I would wager ten pounds to a farthing she be revealed in time if she but will it. Wilt take me up?

ADONIJAH. It be not seemly so to stake thy fortune on a woman's whim.

CHARLES. [*Laughs.*] Thou'rt right on it. If she will, say I, for if she will she won't, and if she won't she will.

ADONIJAH. False jargon! A woman has no will but e'en her father's as a maid, her husband's later still.

[Enter COTTON, who stops short on seeing CHARLES, rallies quickly, and proceeds.]

COTTON. *[Stiffly.]* Good-day to you, sir.

CHARLES. *[Bowing; he has risen.]* And to you, sire.

COTTON. *[To ADONIJAH.]* I am deeply grieved to report that Mistress Betty is not to be found.

[ADONIJAH. steals a sly look of triumph at CHARLES.]

CHARLES. *[In mock solemnity.]* I prithee present my deep regrets to Mistress Betty. I will call again.

COTTON. God speed thee! *[And as CHARLES takes his leave COTTON places his hand affectionately upon ADONIJAH'S shoulder, saying reassuringly.]* Come again, my son; Betty may not be afar off. I fain would have her soon persuaded of thy worth. Improve thy time.

ADONIJAH. *[Beaming.]* Good morrow, sir; I will.

[As the door closes behind them COTTON slowly walks toward the fire, where he stands in complete reverie. Still absorbed in thought he walks slowly out the door at the right. BETTY peeks cautiously out, but hearing footsteps quickly withdraws. COTTON re-enters with hat on. He is talking to himself, reflectively.]

COTTON. Where can she be? Mayhap at Neighbor Ainslee's.

[He goes hurriedly out through the hall door. The banging of the outside door is heard. The clock door once more slowly opens and BETTY peers forth, listening. The sound of a door opening causes her to draw back. As the noise is further emphasized by approaching footsteps, she pulls the clock door quickly to. CHARLES enters. He looks inquiringly about, tosses his hat on the table, and goes for the clock. He opens it with a gay laugh. BETTY steps forth out of the clock, very much assisted by CHARLES.]

CHARLES. Blessed relief! Thou art in very truth, then, flesh and blood?

BETTY. And what else should I be, forsooth?

CHARLES. [*Laughing.*] I marked thee for a mummy there entombed.

BETTY. [*Disengaging her hand.*] What? Darest thou?

CHARLES. A lively mummy now thou art come to, whilst I [*sighs*]—I waited through the ages!

BETTY. [*Laughingly.*] A veritable monument of patient grief.

CHARLES. And Adonijah— —

BETTY. Yea, verily, old Father Time but come to life. [*Mimics.*] Thy waiting may avail thee naught.

CHARLES. In truth, it may avail me naught; thy father may be back at any time, while I have much to say, sweet Betty— —

BETTY. [*Interrupting.*] Nay, sweet Betty call me not.

CHARLES. Dear Betty, then, the dearest— —

BETTY. [*Quickly.*] Yea, call me dearest mummy, Hottentot, or what you will, just so it be not *sweet*, like Adonijah. It sickens me beyond expressing.

CHARLES. Then, *sweet* Betty thou art *not*, say rather sour Betty, cross Betty, mean Betty, bad Betty, mad Betty, sad Betty.

BETTY. [*Suddenly dimpling.*] Nay, glad Betty!

CHARLES. Art then so glad? Wilt tell me why? In sooth, I know not whither to be glad, or sad, or mad. Sometimes I am but one, sometimes I am all three.

BETTY. Wilt tell me why?

CHARLES. [*Stepping closer and imprisoning her left hand.*] Thou wilt not now escape it, for I will tell thee why, and mayhap this will aid me. [*Slips ring, which he has had concealed in his pocket, on her finger.*] Hath this no meaning for thee?

BETTY. [*Her eyes sparkling with mischief.*] Aye, 'tis a diabolical circle for the devil to daunce in!

CHARLES. [*In astonishment.*] A what?

BETTY. [*Slowly.*] A diabolical circle for the devil to daunce in—so father saith. Likewise Adonijah.

CHARLES. [*Weakly endeavoring to comprehend.*] A diabolical circle—but what!—say it again, Betty.

BETTY. [*Repeats slowly, emphasizing it with pointed finger.*] A diabolical circle for the devil to daunce in.

CHARLES. [*Throws back his head and laughs.*] May I be the devil!

BETTY. [*Shaking her finger at him.*] Then daunce!

[*They take position, as though for a minuet. The knocker sounds. BETTY runs to the window.*]

BETTY. Aye, there's ADONIJAH at the knocker. Into the clock—hie thee—quick, quick!

CHARLES. [*Reproachfully.*] And would'st thou incarcerate me through the ages? [*Turns to the clock.*] O timely sarcophagus!

[*CHARLES is smuggled into the clock, and BETTY has barely enough time to make a dash for the hat and conceal it behind her before the door opens and in stalks ADONIJAH. He looks about suspiciously. BETTY faces him with the hat held behind her. He removes his hat and tippet and lays them on the table.*]

ADONIJAH. Methought I heard a sound of many feet.

BETTY. [*Looking down.*] Two feet have I; no more, no less.

ADONIJAH. [*Dryly.*] Aye, two be quite sufficient.

BETTY. An thou sayest the word, they yet can beat as loud a retreat as an whole regiment.

ADONIJAH. Thou dost my meaning misconstrue.

BETTY. Construe it then, I prithee.

ADONIJAH. I came not here to vex — —

BETTY. Then get thee hence. [*He steps forward. BETTY steps back.*] But not behind me, Satan.

ADONIJAH. [*Coming closer.*] And yet thou driv'st me to it.

BETTY. [*Backing off.*] Indeed, thou hast a nature born to *drive* and not be driven.

ADONIJAH. [*Highly complimented.*] So be it, yet I scarce had hoped that thou would'st notice. [*Advancing.*] Born to drive, thou sayest, not be driven.

BETTY. [*Retreating.*] Thou hast said it, born to *drive*. But what to drive I have not said. That knowledge hath my father yet concealed.

ADONIJAH. [*Eagerly.*] Thy father, then, hath told thee — —

BETTY. [*Who is retreating steadily across the room.*] Thou wert born to *drive*!

[*Strikes settee and goes down on the hat. ADONIJAH seats himself beside BETTY. BETTY is of necessity forced to remain — on the hat. ADONIJAH slides arm along the back of the settee. The clock door strikes erratically. He jerks his arm back and gazes in the direction of the clock. The clock hands wigwag. ADONIJAH stares abstractedly and passes his hand over his forehead in a dazed manner.*]

BETTY. [*Solicitously.*] What aileth thee?

ADONIJAH. [*Still staring.*] The time!

BETTY. [*Stifles a yawn.*] It doth grow late.

ADONIJAH. But not consistently; it changeth.

BETTY. 'Twas ever so with time.

ADONIJAH. [*Reminiscently.*] Of a certainty they moved.

BETTY. Yea, verily, 'tis not uncommon.

ADONIJAH. But backwards!

BETTY. [*Joyfully.*] Why, then, my prayers are answered. How often I have prayed them thus to move! Yet hath it never come to pass.

ADONIJAH. Nay, had'st thou seen — —

BETTY. Prithee calm thyself. Thou'rt ill.

ADONIJAH. [*Steals his arm along the back of the settee and moves over closer.*] Sweet Betty! [*BETTY looks away with a wry face.*] Thy indifference in no wise blinds me to thy conception of my true value. [*BETTY sits up, round-eyed.*] There was a time when I despaired — [*The clock again strikes wildly. The hands drop and rise as before. ADONIJAH excitedly points at the clock.*] Again! Did'st mark it? Something doth ail the clock!

BETTY. Yea, truly thou art ill. The clock behaveth much more to the point than thou.

ADONIJAH. [*Tearing his gaze from the clock.*] As I was on the point of saying — [*glances at the clock*] thy father hath given — [*another glance*] me to understand — [*with eye on the clock he hitches up closer*] that thou art not averse to mine affections — —

[*As he attempts to put his arm around BETTY the clock strikes a tattoo and startles him excitedly to his feet, as the hands travel all the way round.*]

ADONIJAH. [*Pointing.*] Now look! Mark the time!

[*COTTON enters.*]

COTTON. Tarry yet awhile, my son, the time doth not prevent thee.

ADONIJAH. Tarry? Time doth not prevent? Little knowest thou! [*Gazes abstractedly about. Sights the ring on BETTY'S finger, who in excitement has forgotten to keep her hands behind her back.*] Aye, there it is, the diabolical circle. It is a charm. It harms her not, while all about me is askew. Whence came she here? [*Points at BETTY.*] She neither came nor went, and yet she was not there and now she is. A manly form did enter. Yet hath vanished into thin air. Yea, verily, it was none other than the devil himself in one of his divers forms, of which he hath aplenty. The very clock indulgeth in unseemly pranks. A strange influence hangs over me. I cannot now abide. I must depart from hence. My conscience bids me go.

COTTON. [*Striving to detain him.*] Hold! Thou'rt mad!

BETTY. Nay, father, he is ill.

ADONIJAH. [*Wildly.*] Aye, if I be mad, thy daughter be to blame. The spell did come upon me. I have seen strange things.

COTTON. What meanest thou?

ADONIJAH. [*Pointing at BETTY, who regards him wonderingly.*] Thy daughter is a witch!

BETTY. [*Runs to COTTON.*] Oh, father!

COTTON. [*Consoles BETTY; thunders at ADONIJAH.*] What? Darest thou to bring forth such an accusation?

ADONIJAH. Aye, while I yet have strength to order mine own will. We shall see what we shall see when the fires leap round the stake. All the diabolical circles the devil may invent or his helpmeets acquire will be of small avail when the leaping tongues of flame curl round you, false servant of the devil. I can delay no longer. I will repair to the council at once, and report what I have seen.

[*BETTY faints away. COTTON is at once all paternal solicitude. ADONIJAH gazes in stupefaction. All unobserved CHARLES slips out of the clock. Finally ADONIJAH, as BETTY shows signs of reviving, turns himself away, only to find himself face to face with CHARLES. ADONIJAH stops dead in his tracks, absolutely nonplussed.*]

CHARLES. Thou goest to the council? Thou lackest evidence. Behold the devil an' thou wilt.

[ADONIJAH'S *jaw drops. He stares unbelievably.* COTTON *looks up in surprise as CHARLES continues.*

CHARLES. An' thou goest to the council with such a message, the devil will dog thy very footsteps. And match word of thine with word of truth in such a light that thine own words shall imprison thee in the stocks over Sunday.

[ADONIJAH *recovers from his temporary abstraction, and seizing his hat and tippet, tears out the door as if a whole legion of imps were in full pursuit.* CHARLES *contemptuously turns on his heel and goes over to BETTY, who is now clinging to her father's arm.*

BETTY. [*Faintly.*] They will not burn me for a witch?

CHARLES. [*Savagely.*] Aye, let them try it an they will.

COTTON. [*Hotly.*] Aye—let them! [*Then starting suddenly with a new thought.*] But how cam'st thou here? Yea, verily, it seemeth to me thou did'st materialize out of thin air.

[*Surveys CHARLES with piercing scrutiny.*

CHARLES. Nay, see through me an thou can'st. Thou wilt find me a most material shadow, the like of which no eye hath ever pierced. 'Twas not out of the air, but out of yonder clock that I materialized.

BETTY. Yea, father, I put him there.

COTTON. [*Going to the clock and opening it.*] Of a truth, the evidence, all told, is here. Thou wert of a certainty in the clock. [*Takes out the detached pendulum. Steps back and surveys the timepiece, whose hands clearly indicate a time long passed or not yet come.*] And as far as pendulums are concerned [*looking ruefully at the one in his hand*], thou certainly wert no improve — —

CHARLES. Aye, that I'll warrant. And may I never more be called to fulfil such position; the requirements be far too exacting for one of my build and constitution.

COTTON. But what extremity hath induced thee to take up thine abode in such a place?

[Lays the pendulum aside and gives CHARLES his entire attention.]

CHARLES. Why, that came all in the course of events as I take it. When I returned a short time ago, hard upon mine heels came Adonijah; and, being loath either to leave the field or share it, I hid within the clock. Once there, the temptation to help time in covering its course grew strong upon me in the hope that Adonijah, misled by the lateness of the hour, would soon depart. Only I looked not for such a departure. Judge me not too harshly, sire, for I love thy daughter, and if thou wilt give thy consent to our marriage I will do all that becometh a man to deserve such treasure.

COTTON. I like not thy frivolous manner of wearing hair that is not thine own; it becomes thee not. And I strongly mistrust thine attitude toward the more serious things of life.

CHARLES. If my wig standeth between me and my heart's desire, why, I'll have no wig at all. *[He pulls the wig off and tosses it aside. BETTY, with a little cry, picks it up and smooths its disarranged curls.]* And as for mine outlook on life, I promise thee that hath but matched the outer trappings, and can be doffed as quickly. I am as serious beneath all outward levity as any sober-minded judge, and can act accordingly.

COTTON. See to it that thou suit the action to those words. My heart is strangely moved toward thee, yet I would ponder the matter more deeply. *[Turns to BETTY, who has been absent-mindedly twirling the curls on the wig.]* And where is thy voice, my daughter? Thou art strangely silent—*[as an afterthought]* for the once. But it is of small wonder, since thou hast had enough excitement for one evening. Methinks that scoundrel, Adonijah, needeth following up. Do thou remain with Betty, Charles, and I will hasten after him.

CHARLES. Nay, thou need'st not trouble thyself regarding Adonijah. He hath much too wholesome a regard for the ducking-stool to cause further mischief.

COTTON. Nevertheless, I will away to the council and make sure.
[He plants his hat on his head and departs.]

CHARLES. *[Turning to BETTY, who has dropped the wig on the settee, and who is now gazing demurely at the floor.]* And now to finish up where we left off. The devil hath led us a merrier dance than we suspected. Thou hast not truly given answer to the question I have asked of thee.

BETTY. What more of an answer would'st thou yet require?

CHARLES. Why, I have yet had none at all.

BETTY. Must tell thee further?

CHARLES. *[Gravely.]* Thou must.

BETTY. *[Mischievously.]* Then — put the question once again.

CHARLES. Thou knowest the question, an thou wilt.

BETTY. An' thou knowest the answer.

[CHARLES takes her in his arms.]

BETTY. *[Holding up her hand so that the ring sparkles.]* Look, Charles — the diabolical circle!

CURTAIN

THE FAR-AWAY PRINCESS

BY
HERMANN SUDERMANN

The Far-Away Princess is reprinted by special arrangement with Charles Scribner's Sons, the publishers of *Roses*, from which this play is taken. For permission to perform address the publishers.

HERMANN SUDERMANN

Hermann Sudermann, one of the foremost of the Continental European dramatists, was born at Matziken, in East Prussia, Germany, September 30, 1857. He attended school at Elbing and Tilsit, and then at fourteen became a druggist's apprentice. He received his university training at Königsberg and Berlin. Soon he devoted his energies to literary work.

His greatest literary work is in the field of the drama, in which he became successful almost instantly. His strength is not in poetic beauty and in deep insight into human character, as in the instance of a number of other German dramatists. He is essentially a man of the theatre, a dramatist, and a technician by instinct. He is a dramatic craftsman of the first order.

His chief one-act plays are in two volumes: *Morituri*, which contains *Teja*, *Fritchen*, and *The Eternal Masculine*; and *Roses*, which contains *Streaks of Light*, *Margot*, *The Last Visit*, and *The Far-Away Princess*.

The Far-Away Princess is one of the most subtle and most delicate of Sudermann's plays. Its technic is exemplary.

CHARACTERS

THE PRINCESS VON GELDERN

BARONESS VON BROOK, *her maid of honor*

FRAU VON HALLDORF

LIDDY } *her daughters*

MILLY }
FRITZ STRÜBEL, *a student*
FRAU LINDEMANN
ROSA, *a waitress*
A LACKEY

THE FAR-AWAY PRINCESS

THE PRESENT DAY: *The scene is laid at an inn situated above a watering-place in central Germany.*

The veranda of an inn. The right side of the stage and half of the background represent a framework of glass enclosing the veranda. The left side and the other half of the background represent the stone walls of the house. To the left, in the foreground, a door; another door in the background, at the left. On the left, back, a buffet and serving-table. Neat little tables and small iron chairs for visitors are placed about the veranda. On the right, in the centre, a large telescope, standing on a tripod, is directed through an open window. ROSA, dressed in the costume of the country, is arranging flowers on the small tables. FRAU LINDEMANN, a handsome, stoutish woman in the thirties, hurries in excitedly from the left.

FRAU LINDEMANN. There! Now she can come—curtains, bedding—everything fresh and clean as new! No, this honor, this unexpected honor—! Barons and counts have been here often enough. Even the Russian princes sometimes come up from the Springs. I don't bother my head about them—they're just like—that!—But a princess—a real princess!

ROSA. Perhaps it isn't a real princess after all.

FRAU LINDEMANN. [*Indignantly.*] What? What do you mean by that!

ROSA. I was only thinking that a real princess wouldn't be coming to an inn like this. Real princesses won't lie on anything but silks and velvets. You just wait and see; it's a trick!

FRAU LINDEMANN. Are you going to pretend that the letter isn't genuine; that the letter is a forgery?

ROSA. Maybe one of the regular customers is playing a joke. That student, Herr Strübel, he's always joking. [*Giggles.*]

FRAU LINDEMANN. When Herr Strübel makes a joke he makes a decent joke, a real, genuine joke. Oh, of course one has to pretend to be angry sometimes—but as for writing a forged letter—My land!—a letter with a gold crown on it—there! [*She takes a letter from her waist and reads.*] "This afternoon Her Highness, the Princess von Geldern, will stop at the Fairview Inn, to rest an hour or so before making the descent to the Springs. You are requested to have ready a quiet and comfortable room, to guard Her Highness from any annoying advances, and, above all, to maintain the strictest secrecy regarding this event, as otherwise the royal visit will not be repeated. Baroness von Brook, maid of honor to Her Highness." Now, what have you got to say?

ROSA. Herr Strübel lent me a book once. A maid of honor came into that, too. I'm sure it's a trick!

FRAU LINDEMANN. [*Looking out toward the back.*] Dear, dear, isn't that Herr Strübel now, coming up the hill? To-day of all days! What on earth does he always want up here?

ROSA. [*Pointedly.*] He's in such favor at the Inn. He won't be leaving here all day.

FRAU LINDEMANN. That won't do at all. He's got to be sent off. If I only knew how I could—Oh, ho! I'll be disagreeable to him—that's the only way to manage it!

[*STRÜBEL enters. He is a handsome young fellow without much polish, but cheerful, unaffected, entirely at his ease, and invariably good-natured.*]

STRÜBEL. Good day, everybody.

FRAU LINDEMANN. [*Sarcastically.*] Charming day.

STRÜBEL. [*Surprised at her coolness.*] I say! What's up? Who's been rubbing you the wrong way? May I have a glass of beer, anyway? Glass of beer, if you please! Several glasses of beer, if you please. [*Sits down.*] Pestiferously hot this afternoon.

FRAU LINDEMANN. [*After a pause.*] H'm, H'm.

STRÜBEL. Landlady Linda, dear, why so quiet to-day?

FRAU LINDEMANN. In the first place, Herr Strübel, I would have you know that my name is Frau Lindemann.

STRÜBEL. Just so.

FRAU LINDEMANN. And, secondly, if you don't stop your familiarity — —

STRÜBEL. [*Singing, as ROSA brings him a glass of beer.*] "Beer — beer!" — Heavens and earth, how hot it is! [*Drinks.*

FRAU LINDEMANN. If you find it so hot, why don't you stay quietly down there at the Springs?

STRÜBEL. Ah, my soul thirsts for the heights — my soul thirsts for the heights every afternoon. Just as soon as ever my sallow-faced pupil has thrown himself down on the couch to give his red corpuscles a chance to grow, "I gayly grasp my Alpine staff and mount to my beloved."

FRAU LINDEMANN. [*Scornfully.*] Bah!

STRÜBEL. Oh, you're thinking that *you* are my beloved? No, dearest; my beloved stays down there. But to get nearer to her, I have to come up here — up to your telescope. With the aid of your telescope I can look right into her window — see?

ROSA. [*Laughing.*] Oh, so that's why — —

FRAU LINDEMANN. Perhaps you think I'm interested in all that? Besides, I've no more time for you. Moreover, I'm going to have this place cleaned right away. Good-by, Herr Strübel. [*Goes out.*

STRÜBEL. [*Laughing.*] I certainly caught it that time! See here, Rosa, what's got into her head?

ROSA. [*Mysteriously.*] Ahem, there are crowned heads and other heads – and – ahem – there are letters *with* crowns and letters *without* crowns.

STRÜBEL. Letters – ? Are you – – ?

ROSA. There are maids of honor – and other maids! [*Giggles.*

STRÜBEL. Permit me. [*Tapping her forehead lightly with his finger.*] Ow! Ow!

ROSA. What's the matter?

STRÜBEL. Why, your head's on fire. Blow! Blow! And while you are getting some salve for my burns, I'll just – –

[*Goes to the telescope.*

[*Enter FRAU VON HALLDORF, LIDDY, and MILLY. FRAU VON HALLDORF is an aristocratic woman, somewhat supercilious and affected.*

LIDDY. Here's the telescope, mother. Now you can see for yourself.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. What a pity that it's in use just now.

STRÜBEL. [*Stepping back.*] Oh, I beg of you, ladies – I have plenty of time. I can wait.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. [*Condescendingly.*] Ah, thanks so much. [*She goes up to the telescope, while STRÜBEL returns to his former place.*] Waitress! Bring us three glasses of milk.

LIDDY. [*As MILLY languidly drops into a chair.*] Beyond to the right is the road, mother.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. Oh, I have found the road, but I see no carriage – neither a royal carriage nor any other sort.

LIDDY. Let me look.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. Please do.

LIDDY. It has disappeared now.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. Are you quite sure that it was a royal carriage?

LIDDY. Oh, one has an instinct for that sort of thing, mother. It comes to one in the cradle.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. [*As MILLY yawns and sighs aloud.*] Are you sleepy, dear?

MILLY. No, only tired. I'm always tired.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. Well, that's just why we are at the Springs. Do as the princess does: take the waters religiously.

MILLY. The princess oughtn't to be climbing up such a steep hill either on a hot day like this.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. [*More softly.*] Well, you know why we are taking all this trouble. If, by good luck, we should happen to meet the princess — —

LIDDY. [*Who has been looking through the telescope.*] Oh, there it is again!

FRAU V. HALLDORF. [*Eagerly.*] Where? Where?

[*Takes LIDDY'S place.*]

LIDDY. It's just coming around the turn at the top.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. Oh, now I see it! Why, there's no one inside!

LIDDY. Well, then she's coming up on foot.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. [*To MILLY.*] See, the princess is coming up on foot, too. And she is just as anæmic as you are.

MILLY. If I were going to marry a grand-duke, and if I could have my own carriage driven along beside me, I wouldn't complain of having to walk either.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. I can't see a thing now.

LIDDY. You have to turn the screw, mother.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. I have been turning it right along, but the telescope won't move.

LIDDY. Let me try.

STRÜBEL. [*Who has been throwing little wads of paper at ROSA during the preceding conversation.*] What are they up to?

LIDDY. It seems to me that you've turned the screw too far, mother.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. Well, what shall we do about it?

STRÜBEL. [*Rising.*] Permit me to come to your aid, ladies. I've had some experience with these old screws.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. Very kind—indeed.

[STRÜBEL *busies himself with the instrument.*

LIDDY. Listen, mother. If the carriage has almost reached the top the princess can't be far off. Wouldn't it be best, then, to watch for them on the road?

FRAU V. HALLDORF. Certainly, if you think that would be best, dear Liddy.

STRÜBEL. This is not only an old screw, but it's a regular perverted old screw.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. Ah, really? [*Aside to her daughters.*] And if she should actually speak to us at this accidental meeting—and if we could present ourselves as the subjects of her noble fiancé, and tell her that we live at her future home—just imagine what an advantage that would give us over the other women of the court!

STRÜBEL. There, ladies! We have now rescued the useful instrument to which the far-sightedness of mankind is indebted.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. Thanks, so much. Pardon me, sir, but have you heard anything about the report that the princess is going to make the journey up here to-day?

STRÜBEL. The princess? The princess of the Springs? The princess of the lonely villa? The princess who is expected at the iron spring every morning, but who has never been seen by a living soul? Why, I am enormously interested. You wouldn't believe how much interested I am!

LIDDY. [*Who has looked out, back.*] There — there — there — it is!

FRAU V. HALLDORF. The carriage?

LIDDY. It's reached the top already. It is stopping over there at the edge of the woods.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. She will surely enter it there, then. Come quickly, my dear children, so that it will look quite accidental. Here is your money. [*She throws a coin to ROSA and unwraps a small package done up in tissue-paper, which she has brought with her.*] Here is a bouquet for you — and here's one for you. You are to present these to the princess.

MILLY. So that it will look quite accidental — oh, yes!

[*All three go out.*]

STRÜBEL. Good heavens! Could I — ? I don't believe it! Surely she sits — well, I'll make sure right away — [*Goes up to the telescope and stops.*] Oh, I'll go along with them, anyhow.

[*Exit after them.*]

FRAU LINDEMANN. [*Entering.*] Have they all gone — all of them?

ROSA. All of them.

FRAU LINDEMANN. [*Looking toward the right.*] There — there — two ladies and a lackey are coming up the footpath. Mercy me! How my heart is beating! — If I had only had the sofa recovered last spring! — What am I going to say to them? — Rosa, don't you know a

poem by heart which you could speak to the princess? [ROSA *shrugs her shoulders.*] They're coming through the court now! — Stop putting your arms under your apron that way, you stupid thing! — oh dear, oh dear — —

[*The door opens. A LACKEY in plain black livery enters, and remains standing at the door. He precedes THE PRINCESS and FRAU V. BROOK. THE PRINCESS is a pale, sickly, unassuming young girl, wearing a very simple walking costume and a medium-sized leghorn hat trimmed with roses. FRAU V. BROOK is a handsome, stately, stern-looking woman, in the thirties. She is well-dressed, but in accordance with the simple tastes of the North German nobility.*

FRAU V. BROOK. Who is the proprietor of this place?

FRAU LINDEMANN. At your command, your Highness.

FRAU V. BROOK. [*Reprovingly.*] I am the maid of honor. Where is the room that has been ordered?

FRAU LINDEMANN. [*Opens the door, left.*] Here — at the head of the stairs — my lady.

FRAU V. BROOK. Would your Highness care to remain here for a few moments?

THE PRINCESS. Very much, dear Frau von Brook.

FRAU V. BROOK. Edward, order what is needed for Her Highness, and see that a room next to Her Highness is prepared for me. I may assume that these are Your Highness's wishes?

THE PRINCESS. Why certainly, dear Frau von Brook.

[*THE LACKEY, who is carrying shawls and pillows, goes out with ROSA, left.*

THE PRINCESS. Mais puisque je te dis, Eugénie, que je n'ai pas sommeil. M'envoyer coucher comme une enfant, c'est abominable.

FRAU V. BROOK. Mais je t'implore, chérie, sois sage! Tu sais, que c'est le médecin, qui — —

THE PRINCESS. Ah, ton médecin! Toujours cette corvée. Et si je te dis — —

FRAU V. BROOK. Chut! My dear woman, wouldn't it be best for you to superintend the preparations?

FRAU LINDEMANN. I am entirely at your service.

[About to go out, left.]

FRAU V. BROOK. One thing more. This veranda, leading from the house to the grounds — would it be possible to close it to the public?

FRAU LINDEMANN. Oh, certainly. The guests as often as not sit out under the trees.

FRAU V. BROOK. Very well, then do so, please. [FRAU LINDEMANN *locks the door.*] We may be assured that no one will enter this place?

FRAU LINDEMANN. If it is desired, none of us belonging to the house will come in here either.

FRAU V. BROOK. We should like that.

FRAU LINDEMANN. Very well. *[Exit.]*

FRAU V. BROOK. Really, you must be more careful, darling. If that woman had understood French — You must be careful!

THE PRINCESS. What would have been so dreadful about it?

FRAU V. BROOK. Oh, my dear child! This mood of yours, which is due to nothing but your illness — that reminds me, you haven't taken your peptonized milk yet — this is a secret which we must keep from every one, above all from your fiancé. If the Grand Duke should discover — —

THE PRINCESS. *[Shrugging her shoulders.]* Well, what of it?

FRAU V. BROOK. A bride's duty is to be a happy bride. Otherwise — —

THE PRINCESS. Otherwise?

FRAU V. BROOK. She will be a lonely and an unloved woman.

THE PRINCESS. [*With a little smile of resignation.*] Ah!

FRAU V. BROOK. What is it, dear? [THE PRINCESS *shakes her head.*] And then think of the strain of those formal presentations awaiting you in the autumn! You must grow strong. Remember that you must be equal to the most exacting demands of life.

THE PRINCESS. Of life? Whose life?

FRAU V. BROOK. What do you mean by that?

THE PRINCESS. Ah, what good does it do to talk about it?

FRAU V. BROOK. Yes, you are right. In my soul, too, there are unhappy and unholy thoughts that I would rather not utter. From my own experience I know that it is best to keep strictly within the narrow path of duty.

THE PRINCESS. And to go to sleep.

FRAU V. BROOK. Ah, it isn't only that.

THE PRINCESS. Look out there! See the woods! Ah, to lie down on the moss, to cover oneself with leaves, to watch the clouds pass by high above — —

FRAU V. BROOK. [*Softening.*] We can do that, too, some-time.

THE PRINCESS. [*Laughing aloud.*] Sometime!

[THE LACKEY *appears at the door.*

FRAU V. BROOK. Is everything ready?

[THE LACKEY *bows.*

THE PRINCESS. [*Aside to FRAU V. BROOK.*] But I simply cannot sleep.

FRAU V. BROOK. Try to, for my sake. [*Aloud.*] Does Your Highness command — —

THE PRINCESS. [*Smiling and sighing.*] Yes, I command.

[*They go out, left.*]

[*The stage remains empty for several moments. Then STRÜBEL is heard trying the latch of the back door.*]

STRÜBEL'S VOICE. Hullo! What's up! Why is this locked all of a sudden? Rosa! Open up! I've got to look through the telescope! Rosa! Won't you? Oh, well, I know how to help myself. [*He is seen walking outside of the glass-covered veranda. Then he puts his head through the open window at the right.*] Not a soul inside? [*Climbs over.*] Well, here we are. What on earth has happened to these people? [*Unlocks the back door and looks out.*] Everything deserted. Well, it's all the same to me. [*Locks the door again.*] But let's find out right away what the carriage has to do with the case.

[*Prepares to look through the telescope. THE PRINCESS enters cautiously through the door at the left, her hat in her hand. Without noticing STRÜBEL, who is standing motionless before the telescope, she goes hurriedly to the door at the back and unlocks it.*]

STRÜBEL. [*Startled at the sound of the key, turns around.*] Why, how do you do? [THE PRINCESS, *not venturing to move, glances back at the door through which she has entered.*] Wouldn't you like to look through the telescope a while? Please do. [THE PRINCESS, *undecided as to whether or not she should answer him, takes a few steps back toward the door at the left.*] Why are you going away? I won't do anything to you.

THE PRINCESS. [*Reassured.*] Oh, I'm not going away.

STRÜBEL. That's right. But—where have you come from? The door was locked. Surely you didn't climb through the window as I did?

THE PRINCESS. [*Frightened.*] What? You came—through the window? — —

STRÜBEL. Of course I did.

THE PRINCESS. [*Frightened anew.*] Then I had rather — —

[*About to go back.*

STRÜBEL. Oh, my dear young lady, you just stay right here. Why, before I'd drive you away I'd pitch myself headlong over a precipice!

THE PRINCESS. [*Smiling, reassured.*] I only wanted to go out into the woods for half an hour.

STRÜBEL. Oh, then you're a regular guest here at the Inn?

THE PRINCESS. [*Quickly.*] Yes — yes, of course.

STRÜBEL. And of course you drink the waters down below?

THE PRINCESS. [*In a friendly way.*] Oh, yes, I drink the waters. And I'm taking the baths, too.

STRÜBEL. Two hundred metres up and down every time! Isn't that very hard on you? Heavens! And you look so pale! See here, my dear young lady, don't you do it. It would be better for you to go down there — that is — Oh, forgive me! I've been talking without thinking. Of course, you have your own reasons — It's decidedly cheaper up here. I know how to value a thing of that sort. I've never had any money in all my life!

THE PRINCESS. [*Trying to seem practical.*] But when one comes to a watering-place, one must have money.

STRÜBEL. [*Slapping himself on the chest.*] Do I look to you as if I drank iron? Thank Heaven, I can't afford such luxuries! No; I'm only a poor fellow who earns his miserable pittance during vacation by acting as a private tutor — that's to say, "miserable" is only a figure of speech, for in the morning I lie abed until nine, at noon I eat five and at night seven courses; and as for work, I really haven't a thing to do! My pupil is so anæmic — why, compared to him, *you're* fit for a circus rider!

THE PRINCESS. [*Laughing unrestrainedly.*] Oh, well, I'm rather glad I'm not one.

STRÜBEL. Dear me, it's a business like any other.

THE PRINCESS. Like any other? Really, I didn't think that.

STRÜBEL. And pray, what did you think then?

THE PRINCESS. Oh, I thought that they were—an entirely different sort of people.

STRÜBEL. My dear young lady, all people are "an entirely different sort." Of course *we* two aren't. We get along real well together, don't we? As poor as church mice, both of us!

THE PRINCESS. [*Smiling reflectively.*] Who knows? Perhaps that's true.

STRÜBEL. [*Kindly.*] Do you know what? If you want to stay down there—I'll tell you how one can live cheaply. I have a friend, a student like myself. He's here to mend up as you are. I feed him up at the house where I'm staying. [*Frightened at a peculiar look of THE PRINCESS'S.*] Oh, but you mustn't be—No, I shouldn't have said it. It wasn't decent of me. Only, let me tell you, I'm so glad to be able to help the poor fellow out of my unexpected earnings, that I'd like to be shouting it from the housetops all the time! Of course, you understand that, don't you?

THE PRINCESS. You like to help people, then?

STRÜBEL. Surely—don't you?

THE PRINCESS. [*Reflecting.*] No. There's always so much talk about it, and the whole thing immediately appears in the newspapers.

STRÜBEL. What? If you help some one, that appears— —?

THE PRINCESS. [*Quietly correcting herself.*] I only mean if one takes part in entertainments for charity— —

STRÜBEL. Oh, yes, naturally. In those things they always get some woman of rank to act as patroness, if they can, and she sees to it, you may be sure, that the newspapers make a fuss over it.

THE PRINCESS. [*Demurely.*] Oh, not every — —

STRÜBEL. Just try to teach me something I don't know about these titled women! Besides, my dear young lady, where is your home — in one of the large cities, or — — ?

THE PRINCESS. Oh, no. In quite a small town — really more like the country.

STRÜBEL. Then I'm going to show you something that you probably never saw before in all your life.

THE PRINCESS. Oh do! What is it?

STRÜBEL. A princess! H'm — not a make-believe, but a real, true-blue princess!

THE PRINCESS. Oh, really?

STRÜBEL. Yes. Our Princess of the Springs.

THE PRINCESS. And who may that be?

STRÜBEL. Why, Princess Marie Louise.

THE PRINCESS. Of Geldern?

STRÜBEL. Of course.

THE PRINCESS. Do you know her?

STRÜBEL. Why, certainly.

THE PRINCESS. Really? I thought that she lived in great retirement.

STRÜBEL. Well, that doesn't do her any good. Not a bit of it. And because you are such a jolly good fellow I'm going to tell you my secret. I'm in love with this princess!

THE PRINCESS. Oh!

STRÜBEL. You can't imagine what a comfort it is. The fact is, every young poet has got to have a princess to love.

THE PRINCESS. Are you a poet?

STRÜBEL. Can't you tell that by looking at me?

THE PRINCESS. I never saw a poet before.

STRÜBEL. Never saw a poet—never saw a princess! Why, you're learning a heap of things to-day!

THE PRINCESS. [*Assenting.*] H'm—and have you written poems to her?

STRÜBEL. Why, that goes without saying! Quantities of 'em!

THE PRINCESS. Oh, please recite some little thing—won't you?

STRÜBEL. No, not yet. Everything at the proper time.

THE PRINCESS. Ah, yes, first I should like to see the princess.

STRÜBEL. No, first I am going to tell you the whole story.

THE PRINCESS. Oh, yes, yes. Please do. [*Sits down.*]

STRÜBEL. Well, then—I had hardly heard that she was here before I was dead in love with her. It was just as quick as a shot, I tell you. Just as if I had waited all my life long to fall in love with her. Besides, I also heard about her beauty—and her sorrow. You see, she had an early love affair.

THE PRINCESS. [*Disconcerted.*] What? Are they saying that?

STRÜBEL. Yes. It was a young officer who went to Africa because of her—and died there.

THE PRINCESS. And they know that, too?

STRÜBEL. What don't they know? But that's a mere detail—it doesn't concern me. Even the fact that in six months she will become the bride of a grand-duke—even that can make no difference to me. For the present she is *my* princess. But you're not listening to me!

THE PRINCESS. Oh, yes, I am!

STRÜBEL. Do you know what that means—*my* princess! I'll not give up *my* princess—not for anything in all the world!

THE PRINCESS. But—if you don't even know her— —?

STRÜBEL. I don't know her? Why, I know her as well as I know myself!

THE PRINCESS. Have you ever met her, then?

STRÜBEL. I don't know of any one who has ever met her. And there's not a soul that can tell what she looks like. It is said that there were pictures of her in the shop-windows when she first came, but they were removed immediately. In the morning a great many people are always lurking around the Springs trying to catch a glimpse of her. I, myself, have gotten up at six o'clock a couple of times—on the same errand—and if you knew me better, you'd realize what that meant. But not a sign of her! Either she has the stuff brought to her house or she has the power of making herself invisible. [THE PRINCESS *turns aside to conceal a smile.*] After that, I used to hang around her garden—every day, for hours at a time. Until one day the policeman, whom the managers of the Springs have stationed at the gates, came up to me and asked me what on earth I was doing there. Well, that was the end of those methods of approach! Suddenly, however, a happy thought struck me. Now I can see her and have her near to me as often as I wish.

THE PRINCESS. Why, that's very interesting. How?

STRÜBEL. Yes, that's just the point. H'm, should I risk it? Should I take you into my confidence?

THE PRINCESS. You promised me some time ago that you would show her to me.

STRÜBEL. Wait a second. [*Looks through the telescope.*] There she is. Please look for yourself.

THE PRINCESS. But I am—[*She, too, looks through the telescope.*] Actually, there is the garden as plain as if one were in it.

STRÜBEL. And at the corner window on the left—with the embroidery-frame—that's she.

THE PRINCESS. Are you absolutely certain that that is the princess?

STRÜBEL. Why, who else could it be?

THE PRINCESS. Oh, 'round about a princess like that—there are such a lot of people. For instance, there is her waiting-woman, there's the seamstress and her assistants, there's — —

STRÜBEL. But, my dear young lady, if you only understood anything about these matters, you would have been certain at the very first glance that it was she—and no one else. Observe the nobility in every motion—the queenly grace with which she bends over the embroidery-frame — —

THE PRINCESS. How do you know that it's an embroidery-frame?

STRÜBEL. Why, what should a princess be bending over if not an embroidery-frame? Do you expect her to be darning stockings?

THE PRINCESS. It wouldn't hurt her at all!

STRÜBEL. Now, that's just one of those petty, bourgeois notions which we ought to suppress. It's not enough that *we* have to stick in this misery, but we'd like to drag her down, too—that being far above all earthly care — —

THE PRINCESS. Oh, dear me!

STRÜBEL. What are you sighing about so terribly?

THE PRINCESS. Tell me, wouldn't you like to have a closer acquaintance with your princess, some time?

STRÜBEL. Closer? Why should I? Isn't she close enough to me, my far-away princess?—for that's what I call her when I talk to myself about her. And to have her *still* closer?

THE PRINCESS. Why, so that you could talk to her and know what she really was like?

STRÜBEL. [*Terrified.*] Talk to her! Heaven forbid! Goodness gracious, no! Just see here—how am I to face a princess? I'm an ordinary fellow, the son of poor folks. I haven't polished manners—I haven't even a decent tailor. A lady like that—why, she'd measure me from top to toe in one glance. I've had my lessons in the fine houses where I've applied as tutor. A glance from boots to cravat—and you're dismissed!

THE PRINCESS. And you think that I—[*correcting herself*] that this girl is as superficial as that?

STRÜBEL. "This girl"! Dear me, how that sounds! But, how should I ever succeed in showing her my real self? And even if I should, what would she care? Oh, yes, if she were like you—so nice and simple—and with such a kindhearted, roguish little twinkle in her eye— —!

THE PRINCESS. Roguish—I? Why so?

STRÜBEL. Because you are laughing at me in your sleeve. And really I deserve nothing better.

THE PRINCESS. But your princess deserves something better than your opinion of her.

STRÜBEL. How do you know that?

THE PRINCESS. You really ought to try to become acquainted with her some time.

STRÜBEL. No, no, no—and again no! As long as she remains my far-away princess she is everything that I want her to be—modest,

gracious, loving. She smiles upon me dreamily. Yes, she even listens when I recite my poems to her—and that can't be said of many people! And as soon as I have finished she sighs, takes a rose from her breast, and casts it down to the poet. I wrote a few verses yesterday about that rose, that flower which represents the pinnacle of my desires, as it were.

THE PRINCESS. [*Eagerly.*] Oh, yes. Oh, please, please!

STRÜBEL. Well, then, here goes. H'm — —

"Twenty roses nestling close — —"

THE PRINCESS. What? Are there twenty now?

STRÜBEL. [*Severely.*] My princess would not have interrupted me.

THE PRINCESS. Oh, please — forgive me.

STRÜBEL. I shall begin again.

"Twenty roses nestling close
Gleam upon thy breast,
Twenty years of rose-red love
Upon thy fair cheeks rest.

"Twenty years would I gladly give
Out of life's brief reign,
Could I but ask a rose of thee
And ask it not in vain.

"Twenty roses thou dost not need —
Why, pearls and rubies are thine!
With nineteen thou'dst be just as fair,
And *one* would then be *mine*!

"And twenty years of rose-wreathed joy
Would spring to life for me —
Yet twenty years could ne'er suffice
To worship it — and thee!"

THE PRINCESS. How nice that is! I've never had any verses written to me b — —

STRÜBEL. Ah, my dear young lady, ordinary folks like us have to do their own verse-making!

THE PRINCESS. And all for one rose! Dear me, how soon it fades! And then what is left you?

STRÜBEL. No, my dear friend, a rose like that never fades — even as my love for the gracious giver can never die.

THE PRINCESS. But you haven't even got it yet!

STRÜBEL. That makes no difference in the end. I'm entirely independent of such externals. When some day I shall be explaining Ovid to the beginners, or perhaps even reading Horace with the more advanced classes — no, it's better for the present not to think of reaching any such dizzy heights of greatness — well, then I shall always be saying to myself with a smile of satisfaction: "You, too, were one of those confounded artist fellows — why, you once went so far as to love a princess!"

THE PRINCESS. And that will make you happy?

STRÜBEL. Enormously! For what makes us happy, after all? A bit of happiness? Great heavens, no! Happiness wears out like an old glove.

THE PRINCESS. Well, then, what does?

STRÜBEL. Ah, how should I know! Any kind of a dream — a fancy — a wish unfulfilled — a sorrow that we coddle — some nothing which suddenly becomes everything to us. I shall always say to my pupils: "Young men, if you want to be happy as long as you live, create gods for yourselves in your own image; these gods will take care of your happiness."

The Princess. And what would the god be like that you would create?

STRÜBEL. *Would be? Is, my dear young lady, is!* A man of the world, a gentleman, well-bred, smiling, enjoying life—who looks out upon mankind from under bushy eyebrows, who knows Nietzsche and Stendhal by heart, and—[*pointing to his shoes*] who isn't down at the heels—a god, in short, worthy of my princess. I know perfectly well that all my life long I shall never do anything but crawl around on the ground like an industrious ant, but I know, too, that the god of my fancy will always take me by the collar when the proper moment comes and pull me up again into the clouds. Yes, up there I'm safe. And your god, or rather your goddess—what would she look like?

THE PRINCESS. [*Thoughtfully.*] That's not easy to say. My goddess would be—a quiet, peaceful woman who would treasure a secret little joy like the apple of her eye, who would know nothing of the world except what she wanted to know, and who would have the strength to make her own choice when it pleased her.

STRÜBEL. But that doesn't seem to me a particularly lofty aspiration, my dear young lady.

THE PRINCESS. Lofty as the heavens, my friend.

STRÜBEL. My princess would be of a different opinion.

THE PRINCESS. Do you think so?

STRÜBEL. For that's merely the ideal of every little country girl.

THE PRINCESS. Not her ideal—her daily life which she counts as naught. It is my ideal because I can never attain it.

STRÜBEL. Oh, I say, my dear young girl! It can't be as bad as that! A young girl like you—so charming and—I don't want to be forward, but if I could only help you a bit!

THE PRINCESS. Have you got to be helping all the time? Before, it was only a cheap lunch, now it's actually — —

STRÜBEL. Yes, yes, I'm an awful donkey, I know, but — —

THE PRINCESS. [*Smiling.*] Don't say any more about it, dear friend! I like you that way.

STRÜBEL. [*Feeling oppressed by her superiority.*] Really, you are an awfully strange person! There's something about you that – that –

THE PRINCESS. Well?

STRÜBEL. I can't exactly define it. Tell me, weren't you wanting to go into the woods before? It's so – so oppressive in here.

THE PRINCESS. Oppressive? I don't find it so at all – quite the contrary.

STRÜBEL. No, no – I'm restless. I don't know what – at all events, may I not escort you – ? One can chat more freely, one can express himself more openly – if one –

[*Takes a deep breath.*]

THE PRINCESS. [*Smiling.*] And you are leaving your far-away princess with such a light heart?

STRÜBEL. [*Carelessly.*] Oh, she! She won't run away. She'll be sitting there to-morrow again – and the day after, too!

THE PRINCESS. And so that is your great, undying love?

STRÜBEL. Yes, but when a girl like you comes across one's path –
—

FRAU V. HALLDORF. [*Hurrying in and then drawing back in feigned astonishment.*] Oh!

LIDDY AND MILLY. [*Similarly.*] Oh!

STRÜBEL. Well, ladies, didn't I tell you that you wouldn't find her? Princesses don't grow along the roadside like weeds!

FRAU V. HALLDORF. [*Disregarding him – ceremoniously.*] The infinite happiness with which this glorious event fills our hearts must excuse in some measure the extraordinary breach of good

manners which we are committing in daring to address Your Highness. But, as the fortunate subjects of Your Highness's most noble fiancé, we could not refrain from — —

STRÜBEL. Well, well! What's all this?

FRAU V. HALLDORF.—from offering to our eagerly awaited sovereign a slight token of our future loyalty. Liddy! Milly! [*LIDDY and MILLY come forward, and, with low court bows, offer their bouquets.*] My daughters respectfully present these few flowers to the illustrious princess — —

STRÜBEL. I beg your pardon, but who is doing the joking here, you or — —?

[*FRAU V. BROOK enters. THE PRINCESS, taken unawares, has retreated more and more helplessly toward the door at the left, undecided whether to take flight or remain. She greets the arrival of FRAU V. BROOK with a happy sigh of relief.*

FRAU V. BROOK. [*Severely.*] Pardon me, ladies. Apparently you have not taken the proper steps toward being presented to Her Highness. In matters of this sort one must first apply to me. I may be addressed every morning from eleven to twelve, and I shall be happy to consider your desires.

FRAU V. HALLDORF. [*With dignity.*] I and my children, madame, were aware of the fact that we were acting contrary to the usual procedure; but the impulse of loyal hearts is guided by no rule. I shall be glad to avail myself of your — very kind invitation.

[*All three go out with low curtsies to THE PRINCESS.*

FRAU V. BROOK. What forwardness! But how could you come down without me? And what is that young man over there doing? Does he belong to those people?

[*THE PRINCESS shakes her head. STRÜBEL, without a word, goes to get his hat, which has been lying on a chair, bows abruptly, and is about to leave.*

THE PRINCESS. Oh, no! That wouldn't be nice. Not that way — —

FRAU V. BROOK. [*Amazed.*] What? What! Why, Your Highness — —!

THE PRINCESS. Let me be, Eugenie. This young man and I have become far too good friends to part in such an unfriendly, yes, almost hostile fashion.

FRAU V. BROOK. Your Highness, I am *very* much — —

THE PRINCESS. [*To STRÜBEL.*] You and I will certainly remember this hour with great pleasure, and I thank you for it with all my heart. If I only had a rose with me, so as to give you your dear wish! Eugenie, haven't we any roses with us?

FRAU V. BROOK. Your Highness, I am *very* much — —

THE PRINCESS. [*Examining herself and searching among the vases.*] Well, how are we going to manage it?

STRÜBEL. I most humbly thank—your Highness—for the kind intention.

THE PRINCESS. No, no—wait! [*Her glance falls upon the hat which she is holding in her hand—with a sudden thought.*] I have it! But don't think that I'm joking. And we'll have to do without scissors! [*She tears one of the roses from the hat.*] I don't know whether there are just twenty—[*Holding out one of the roses to him.*] Well? This rose has the merit of being just as real as the sentiment of which we were speaking before—and just as unfading.

STRÜBEL. Is this—to be—my punishment? [THE PRINCESS *smilingly shakes her head.*] Or does your Highness mean by it that only the Unreal never fades?

THE PRINCESS. That's exactly what I mean—because the Unreal must always dwell in the imagination.

STRÜBEL. So that's it! Just as it is only the *far-away* princesses who are always near to us.

FRAU V. BROOK. Permit me to remark, Your Highness—that it is *high* time — —

THE PRINCESS. As you see, those who are near must hurry away.
[Offering him the rose again.] Well?

STRÜBEL. [*Is about to take it, but lets his hand fall.*] With the far-away princess there—[*pointing down*] it would have been in harmony, but with the—[*Shakes his head, then softly and with emotion.*] No, thanks—I'd rather not.

[*He bows and goes out.*]

THE PRINCESS. [*Smiling pensively, throws away the artificial flower.*] I'm going to ask my fiancé to let me send him a rose.

FRAU V. BROOK. Your Highness, I am *very* much—surprised!

THE PRINCESS. Well, I told you that I wasn't sleepy.

CURTAIN

THE STRONGER
BY
AUGUST STRINDBERG

AUGUST STRINDBERG

August Strindberg, Sweden's foremost dramatist, was born at Stockholm in 1849. He attended the University of Upsala but did not graduate. In 1872 he wrote *Master Olaf*, which was for six years steadily refused by managers. When it did appear it inaugurated the Swedish dramatic renaissance. By turns Strindberg was schoolmaster, journalist, dramatist, writer of scientific and political treatises, and writer of short stories. In 1883 he left Sweden and travelled extensively in Denmark, Germany, France, and Italy. He died in 1912.

As a dramatist Strindberg's chief strength lies not so much in dramatic technique as it does in his trenchant and searching power of analysis of the human mind. His chief plays are very exact and narrow views of the feminine soul. Some of his own domestic bitterness finds expression in the feminine studies in his plays. He is very fond of showing the power of one character over another.

His important one-act plays are *The Outlaw*, *Countess Julie*, *Creditors*, *Pariah*, *Facing Death*, and *The Stronger*. *The Stronger* has a dramatic intensity that few plays possess. Though but one character speaks, the souls of three are skilfully laid bare.

PERSONS

MRS. X., *an actress, married*

MISS Y., *an actress, unmarried*

THE STRONGER

SCENE: *A corner of a ladies' restaurant; two small tables of cast-iron, a sofa covered with red plush, and a few chairs.*

MRS. X. *enters, dressed in hat and winter coat, and carrying a pretty Japanese basket on her arm.*

MISS Y. *has in front of her a partly emptied bottle of beer; she is reading an illustrated weekly, and every now and then, she exchanges it for a new one.*

MRS. X. Well, how do, Millie! Here you are sitting on Christmas Eve, as lonely as a poor bachelor.

[MISS Y. *looks up from the paper for a moment, nods, and resumes her reading.*]

MRS. X. Really, I feel sorry to find you like this — alone — alone in a restaurant, and on Christmas Eve of all times. It makes me as sad as when I saw a wedding party at Paris once in a restaurant — the bride was reading a comic paper and the groom was playing billiards with the witnesses. Ugh, when it begins that way, I thought, how will it end? Think of it, playing billiards on his wedding day! Yes, and you're going to say that she was reading a comic paper — that's a different case, my dear.

[A waitress brings a cup of chocolate, places it before MRS. X., and disappears again.]

MRS. X. [Sips a few spoonfuls; opens the basket and displays a number of Christmas presents.] See what I've bought for my tots. [Picks up a doll.] What do you think of this? Lisa is to have it. She can roll her eyes and twist her head, do you see? Fine, is it not? And here's a cork pistol for Carl.

[Loads the pistol and pops it at MISS Y. MISS Y. starts as if frightened.]

MRS. X. Did I scare you? Why, you didn't fear I was going to shoot you, did you? Really, I didn't think you could believe that of me. If you were to shoot *me* — well, that wouldn't surprise me the least. I've got in your way once, and I know you'll never forget it — but I couldn't help it. You still think I intrigued you away from the Royal Theatre, and I didn't do anything of the kind — although you think so. But it doesn't matter what I say, of course — you believe it was I just the same. [Pulls out a pair of embroidered slippers.] Well,

these are for my hubby—tulips—I've embroidered them myself. H'm!—I hate tulips—and he must have them on everything.

[MISS Y. looks up from the paper with an expression of mingled sarcasm and curiosity.

MRS. X. [*Puts a hand in each slipper.*] Just see what small feet Bob has. See? And you should see him walk—elegant! Of course, you've never seen him in slippers.

[MISS Y. laughs aloud.

MRS. X. Look here—here he comes.

[*Makes the slippers walk across the table.* MISS Y. laughs again.

MRS. X. Then he gets angry, and he stamps his foot just like this: "Blame that cook who can't learn how to make coffee." Or: "The idiot—now that girl has forgotten to fix my study lamp again." Then there is a draught through the floor and his feet get cold. "Gee, but it's freezing, and those blanked idiots don't even know enough to keep the house warm."

[*She rubs the sole of one slipper against the instep of the other.* MISS Y. breaks into prolonged laughter.

MRS. X. And then he comes home and has to hunt for his slippers—Mary has pushed them under the bureau. Well, perhaps it is not right to be making fun of one's own husband. He's pretty good for all that—a real dear little hubby, that's what he is. You should have such a husband—what are you laughing at? Can't you tell? Then, you see, I know he is faithful. Yes, I know, for he has told me himself—what in the world makes you giggle like that? That nasty Betty tried to get him away from me while I was on the road. Can you think of anything more infamous? [*Pause.*] But I'd have scratched the eyes out of her face, that's what I'd have done, if I had been at home when she tried it. [*Pause.*] I'm glad Bob told me all about it, so I didn't have to hear it first from somebody else. [*Pause.*] And, just think of it, Betty was not the only one! I don't know why it is, but all women seem to be crazy after my husband. It must be because they imagine his government position gives him something

to say about the engagements. Perhaps you've tried it yourself—you may have set your traps for him, too? Yes, I don't trust you very far—but I know he never cared for you—and then I have been thinking you rather had a grudge against him.

[Pause. They look at each other in an embarrassed manner.]

MRS. X. Amelia, spend the evening with us, won't you? Just to show that you are not angry—not with me, at least. I cannot tell exactly why, but it seems so awfully unpleasant to have you—you—for an enemy. Perhaps because I got in your way that time *[rallentando]* or—I don't know—really, I don't know at all—

[Pause. MISS Y. gazes searchingly at MRS. X.]

MRS. X. *[Thoughtfully.]* It was so peculiar, the way our acquaintance—why, I was afraid of you when I first met you; so afraid that I did not dare to let you out of sight. It didn't matter where I tried to go—I always found myself near you. I didn't have the courage to be your enemy—and so I became your friend. But there was always something discordant in the air when you called at our home, for I saw that my husband didn't like you—and it annoyed me—just as it does when a dress won't fit. I've tried my very best to make him appear friendly to you at least, but I couldn't move him—not until you were engaged. Then you two became such fast friends that it almost looked as if you had not dared to show your real feelings before, when it was not safe—and later—let me see, now! I didn't get jealous—strange, was it not? And I remember the baptism—you were acting as godmother, and I made him kiss you—and he did, but both of you looked terribly embarrassed—that is, I didn't think of it then—or afterwards, even—I never thought of it—till—*now!* *[Rises impulsively.]* Why don't you say something? You have not uttered a single word all this time. You've just let me go on talking. You've been sitting there staring at me only, and your eyes have drawn out of me all these thoughts which were lying in me like silk in a cocoon—thoughts—bad thoughts maybe—let me think. Why did you break your engagement? Why have you never called on us afterward? Why don't you want to be with us to-night?

[MISS Y. makes a motion as if intending to speak.]

MRS. X. No, you don't need to say anything at all. All is clear to me now. So, that's the reason of it all. Yes, yes! Everything fits together now. Shame on you! I don't want to sit at the same table with you. [*Moves her things to another table.*] That's why I must put those hateful tulips on his slippers—because you love them. [*Throws the slippers on the floor.*] That's why we have to spend the summer in the mountains—because you can't bear the salt smell of the ocean; that's why my boy had to be called Eskil—because that was your father's name; that's why I had to wear your color, and read your books, and eat your favorite dishes, and drink your drinks—this chocolate, for instance; that's why—great heavens!—it's terrible to think of it—it's terrible! Everything was forced on me by you—even your passions. Your soul bored itself into mine as a worm into an apple, and it ate and ate and burrowed and burrowed, till nothing was left but the outside shell and a little black dust. I wanted to run away from you, but I couldn't. You were always on hand like a snake, with your black eyes, to charm me—I felt how my wings beat the air only to drag me down—I was in the water with my feet tied together, and the harder I worked with my arms, the further down I went—down, down, till I sank to the bottom, where you lay in wait like a monster crab to catch me with your claws—and now I'm there! Shame on you! How I hate you, hate you, hate you! But you, you just sit there, silent and calm and indifferent, whether the moon is new or full; whether it's Christmas or mid-summer; whether other people are happy or unhappy. You are incapable of hatred and you don't know how to love. As a cat in front of a mouse-hole, you are sitting there. You can't drag your prey out, and you can't pursue it, but you can outwait it. Here you sit in this corner—do you know they've nicknamed it "the mousetrap" on your account? Here you read the papers to see if anybody is in trouble, or if anybody is about to be discharged from the theatre. Here you watch your victims and calculate your chances and take your tributes. Poor Amelia! Do you know, I pity you all the same, for I know you are unhappy—unhappy as one who has been wounded, and malicious because you are wounded. I ought to be angry with you, but really I can't—you are so small, after all—and as to Bob, why, that does not bother me in the least. What does it matter to me, anyhow? If you or somebody else taught me to drink chocolate—what of that? [*Takes a spoonful of chocolate; then, sententiously.*] They say chocolate is very wholesome. And if I have learned from you how to dress—*tant*

mieux!—it has only given me a stronger hold on my husband—and you have lost where I have gained. Yes, judging by several signs, I think you have lost him already. Of course, you meant me to break with him—as you did, and as you are now regretting—but, you see, *I* never would do that. It wouldn't do to be narrow-minded, you know. And why should I take only what nobody else wants? Perhaps, after all, I am the stronger now. You never got anything from me; you merely gave—and thus happened to me what happened to the thief—I had what you missed when you woke up. How explain in any other way that, in your hand, everything proved worthless and useless? You were never able to keep a man's love, in spite of your tulips and your passions—and I could; you could never learn the art of living from the books—as I learned it; you bore no little Esquil, although that was your father's name. And why do you keep silent always and everywhere—silent, ever silent? I used to think it was because you were so strong; and maybe the simple truth was you never had anything to say—because you were unable to think! [*Rises and picks up the slippers.*] I'm going home now—I'll take the tulips with me—your tulips. You couldn't learn anything from others; you couldn't bend—and so you broke like a dry stem—and I didn't. Thank you, Amelia, for all your instructions. I thank you that you have taught me how to love my husband. Now I'm going home—to him!

[*Exit.*

CURTAIN

***Free*editorial** 