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Bill Perkins' Proposin' Day

BY

HELENA A. PFEIL



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THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

BILL PERKINS' PROPOSIN' DAY

A Rustic Comedy in One Act

By
HELENA A. PFEIL

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PS 635
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CAST OF CHARACTERS.

BILL PERKINS, Rustic widower of fifty.
TOM TUCKER, Rustic beau of twenty-five.
MRS. HAWKINS, Rustic widow of forty-five.
BETTY HAWKINS, Rustic belle of twenty.
Costumes, countrified.
Scene, a farmhouse kitchen.

Plays twenty minutes.

TMP96-006892

Went,

BILL PERKINS' PROPOSIN' DAY.

Scene.—When the curtain rises the stage is vacant; the room is an ordinary country living room; there must be a churn on stage. A rap is heard at the door, receiving no answer. Mr. Perkins enters, looks in rather sheepishly at first, then comes in.

BILL PERKINS. Law! Where's all the folks? The house seems clean deserted. Whall I'd heap rather find the coast clear, than ter find folks here that I didn't keer about havin' round, as I meant this yer ter be my proposin' day ter Miss Betty. Miss Betty, yer see, she's the one I've got sot on. I've done bought the weddin' dress. Now look here, I know scott clear that a fellow don't ginerly buy the lady's weddin' dress a tall, or, if he does, he waits till he's clar sure that the gal's goin' ter have him. Ha, ha, ha! [*He puts his hands in his trouser pockets and laughs heartily, his hat on the back of his head.*] But I jest reckoned this yer way, sez I, now if I go over thar and propose ter Miss Betty an' have that ar silk dress ter bring up, it'll be a sorter help like. Now, this yar dress cost me twenty-five dollars if it cost me a red cent. [*He looks about.*] I'd better git out o' here, this ain't no way to be cotched on the day that you've sot for proposin' ter a young lady. [*Listens.*] Thar is somebody stirrin' 'round out yonder. I guess I'll take a sneak an' do the thing proper. [*He walks out rapidly with his hands in pockets, coming down on his heels and toes heavily. Then*

Miss Betty Hawkins enters singing gayly and seats herself at the churn and sings at her work. A rap is heard, she ceases to sing and looks towards door.]

BETTY. Come in. [*Enter Mr. Perkins, hat in his hand.*]

PER. Good day, Miss Betty.

BETTY. How do you do, Mr. Perkins. [*Resumes churning.*]

PER. Miss Betty, [*He hesitates, twirling his hat around shyly.*] I—I—[*Scratches his head.*]

BETTY. Have a seat, Mr. Perkins. [*Curtly.*]

PER. Thank you, Miss. [*Draws chair nearer and sits down.*] Miss Betty, I jest thought as t'was so powerful hot a workin' in the sun, I'd stop over an see you—you all a little bit. [*Lays bundle on the floor.*] It's been powerful hot all day. [*Wipes his face with a bright red handkerchief.*]

BETTY. Well Ma's in the kitchen, if you want to see her I'll call her. [*Churns again rapidly.*]

PER. Miss Betty I'd like yer ter stop that ar churnin' fer a little while, as I want ter talk ter you. [*Betty ceases churning for a moment and looks defiantly at Perkins.*]

BETTY. Well!

PER. It's jest this yer, Miss Betty, I've been over to the village— [*Clears his throat and hesitates.*]

BETTY. Well I've nothing to do with your goin' to the village.

PER. Well I mean ter say that I bought a beautiful silk dress, pure silk every thread of it, and— [*Clearing his throat.*] if you'll accept it, [*Clears his throat.*] I mean if you'll accept me, it's to be your weddin' dress. [*Betty turns to her churn abruptly and churns away without answering a word. Perkins gets on his knees.*] Miss Betty, is it to be yes or no?

BETTY. 'Tain't no use for you to go on like that, Bill Perkins, for I've done told you a dozen times that I ain't wantin' you ter come here at all. I ain't never had no notion of you, and I ain't a goin' to have you nor your silk dress, so there. [*Rises and stamps her foot impatiently. Enter MRS. HAWKINS, sleeves up.*]

MRS. H. Law sakes alive! What's all this about? Law, Mr. Perkins, this hour of the day and down on your knees. Ha, ha, ha! [*Perkins rises as she enters.*]

PER. It's beggin' your pardon, Mam, but I jest stepped over to see Miss Betty a bit, as it was too hot a workin' out doors. I jest sez ter myself, I'll go over thar and tell Miss Betty about the silk dress I bought, but she ain't a wantin' ter hear nothin' about it, pears to me like.

MRS. H. [*In surprise.*] Why Betty!

BETTY. I don't want his silk dress, nor I don't want him. [*Rocks to and fro, twisting her apron corner.*]

MRS. H. No, it's that ne'er do well Tom Tucker that you're wantin', and not a dollar in his pocket. That's just it, Mr. Perkins, you needn't waste your time nor your breath a talkin' ter her. She's a head-strong girl, Betty is, and I feel sorry for the man that gits her, indeed I do.

PER. Whall I jest hoped that she'd consent, as I was sot on it, and I'd o' done the right thing by her.

BETTY. Maybe if you'd a done the right thing by Mrs. Perkins she might be a livin' today.

MRS. H. Law sakes alive, hush, did I ever think I'd live to see the day that I'd hear my own flesh and blood talkin' to anyone like that! Betty, Betty.

PER. 'Tain't no fault o' mine that Mrs. Perkins died. The Lord knows and I kin swar on a stack of Bibles knee high, that she had on as purty a silk dress the day her an' I got married as you ever clapped yer two eyes on,

and I bought it with my own money, an' that's the truth.
 [*Betty laughs saucily.*]

BETTY. Well I'll bet she never had another silk dress after that'n wore out. Ha, ha, ha!

MRS. H. Betty daughter, that'll do now. Have you done forgotten that Mr. Perkins is past fifty and deservin' of respect.

BETTY. No, Mam, I ain't forgot it and what's likely I ain't a goin' ter forget so far as ter go an' marry him. I might as well marry my grandfather. Ha, ha, ha!

MRS. H. Well! please respect your elders then and stop talkin' saucy.

PER. It's all right, Mrs. Hawkins, an' I hope she'll never regret the refusin' of me.

MRS. H. I hope she never will, Mr. Perkins, that's what I hope. The gals now o'days ain't like when you an' I was young. Law sakes alive, we jest took the first good chance that came along, and was glad to git it. But they ain't that way now days, that they ain't, they're independent up to their teeth, and Betty's clean spoilt, that's what she is.

PER. You're plum right, Madam. Well, ladies, I wish you both good day, and good luck ter you, Miss Betty.
 [*He takes his bundle under his arm, bows.*]

MRS. H. Good day; come around again an' don't let Betty's talk an' actin' keep you away.

PER. All right, thank you, Mam. [*Exit Perkins.*]

MRS. H. Betty, I'm down right ashamed of you, that I am, and it ain't every girl that gets a chance of a rich man like Mr. Perkins, it's the chance o' a life time.

BETTY. I don't care if I never get another chance. I ain't a goin' to marry Bill Perkins and that's all there is to it. He's old as Mathusalem.

MRS. H. Whist, whist, he ain't a day over fifty and I'm near that myself.

BETTY. Supposin' you take him, mother.

MRS. H. Law sakes alive, what's the child thinkin' about? Your father's bin dead five years, two months and twenty-seven days, exactly, and I ain't never low'ed a thought o' that kind to git inter my head, and it ain't becomin' in you, Betty, to mention that sort of a thing ter me. Mr. Perkins is all right, an' t'was down-right good in him to buy that silk dress a head o' time.

BETTY. Which shows that he's been countin' his chickens before they were hatched. Ha, ha, ha!

MRS. H. Did he low' what sort o' shade o' silk it was?

BETTY. No, Mam, an' I didn't ask him because I wasn't interested about it at all.

MRS. H. Perhaps it's pink or blue, or maybe it's changeable silk like Sarah Williams', but this ain't gettin' any churnin' done. I got a tub full o' things ter hang out. I wish, Betty, yo'd run round the red barn presently an' look after the calf an' see if Speckle ain't layin' in the wood shed again. I seen her go in there this morning.

BETTY. All right, mother, I will presently just as soon as I give this churnin' another start.

MRS. H. Don't make it too long, daughter. [*Exit Mrs. Hawkins. Betty pauses at the churn a moment, then takes a letter from her bosom or pocket and kisses it.*]

BETTY. Dear, dear Tom, I wouldn't give him up for old Bill Perkins, nor all the silk dresses in the world. [*Enter Tom unobserved.*] Bless his dear heart. No, indeed. I ain't goin' ter swap him for a silk dress, nor nothing else. Well, I guess I'd better go an' look after the calf an' Speckle. [*She kisses the letter and appears to put it in her bosom, but drops it without perceiving it. Then goes out. Tom, a young farmer, handsome, but rustic*

in his manner and dress, appears not to notice the letter on the floor at first.]

TOM. Well now, if this yer ain't enough ter turn a fellow upside down, and inside out and give him the yaller janters to boot, ter come clear clean two miles ter see a young lady, and that same young lady yer sweetheart, and find her a kissin' somebody else's letter, and talkin' about a silk dress that somebody or nother is a wantin' ter give her. It's like my grandmother used to say. It's jest more'n flesh and blood kin bear. It jest makes a fellow feel like somebody was pourin' cold water down his back. I heard tell o' people being disappointed in love, but lands a musey, who'd a ever thought it o' Betty. [*Walks about looking perplexed.*] "There's many a slip twixt the cup and the lip," that's what my grandmother used ter say, and you are never sure of a thing till you've got it, an' then you had better not be too sure of it, because it might slip away after you thought you had done cotched a hold of it. Jeminy crickets, what's this? [*He picks up the letter.*] Now here it is, the same letter that she was a readin' and a kissin' so confectionately when I came in. I'll see what this other fellow has got ter say. [*He reads it.*] "Darling Betty." [*He whistles and scratches his head.*] I'll have some squarin' up to do with that chap. [*He reads on.*] "I've been a dreamin' o' you every hour and every minute since we parted down under the old peach tree." Wahl he'll be a dreamin' o' me for a month or two, if ever I clap my hands on him. [*He walks about distractedly.*] That's the way it is, you put your confidence in a gal and it's just like pourin' water in a sifter, it'll all leak out again, that's exactly what my grandmother used ter say. [*He folds the letter up and puts it in his pocket.*] Wahl, I'll see about you later. [*Enter Betty.*]

BETTY. Why how do you do, Tom. [*Tom looks sulky.*] Why, Tom, what's up? You look seven ways from Sunday, or like a mud fence on a rainy day. What's up, I say?

TOM. Tain't nothin' up, it's all down an' I feel as if my heart's goin' clean down inter my boots.

BETTY. You're out o' sorts, Tom, is any of your kin folks dead?

TOM. Wahl, I'll jest tell you, Betty, I found this yer letter on the floor here, and I came in jest when you was a readin' an' a kissin' it, an I heard every word you said about some other fellow, and it gave me the blues, as my grandmother used ter say when she got talkin' an' a thinkin' o' grandpap.

BETTY. Why it's my letter. How did I happen at all ter drop it, but I don't see why you should get upset about it, Tom.

TOM. It's them courtin' words that's in it, an' the way you were goin' on about it, that's makes me feel poky, as my grandmother used ter say.

BETTY. Oh, hang your grandmother, Tom, you're a real goose. [*She snatches the letter from him.*] It has the fellow's name right here at the bottom of the page. Look here—[*She spells slowly*] T-O-M, Tom Tucker. Don't you know your own letters when you see them?

TOM. Well bless my soul, Betty! Well I'll be hanged! Ha, ha, ha, that's the letter I wrote you when I went down to Buckskin ter get them new kind o' pumpkin seed. Well now, as my grandmother used ter say, you've got me Betty, and I'll own I'm dead beat.

BETTY. And something else will surely get you one of these days, if you don't open your eyes and look at things, before you fly all to pieces. Here, sit down on this chair, and promise me that you'll do better for the future. [*Sits down.*]

TOM. I'll promise you most anything now, Betty, but laws a mercy, I was a thinkin' about committin' susenside. [*Betty is churning.*] Look here, Betty, can't you let that thing alone fur a little while. Tain't every day that I get an opportunity ter talk with you.

BETTY. Well I'm listening, Tom dear, head and ears. [*Enter Bill Perkins with the same parcel.*]

PER. Sorry ter disturb you folks, but I—I want ter see Mrs. Hawkins on perticular business.

BETTY. I'll go and tell mother that you want ter see her. [*Aside.*] I believe he's goin to propose to mother. [*Exit Betty. Enter with Mrs. Hawkins.*]

MRS. H. Sure as I'm alive if there ain't two gentlemen here, well this is company, and when it rains it pours.

TOM. That's exactly what my grandmother used to say. How are you, Mrs. Hawkins? [*Betty aside.*] Tom, I wish you'd let up on your grandmother. [*Threateningly.*] If you don't—

TOM. [*Aside.*] I will, I will. [*Mrs. Hawkins proceeds to dust a chair with her apron.*]

MRS. H. Sit down, Mr. Perkins, and rest yourself.

PER. [*Clearing his throat and hesitating.*] I wanted ter see you, Mam, on some real perticular business.

MRS. H. Betty, daughter, run and shew the chickens out of the garden, that's a dear.

BETTY. All right, mother. [*Beckons to Tom aside.*] We're in the way I guess.

TOM. [*Follows her.*] There is something up. [*Exit both.*]

PER. Mrs. Hawkins, I'll come to the point at once. Yer see I had my heart sot on this yer bein' my proposin' day ter Miss Betty, an' after she rejected me I went over to home feelin' sort o' down in the mouth, so I jest got ter studyin' over the matter, and said to myself, now,

there's Miss Betty's mother, as fine a lady as could be found miles around. [*Mrs. Hawkins bows very low.*]

MRS. H. Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

PER. And I said ter myself, sez I, I'll just go over thar and carry this yer silk dress [*Clears his throat.*] and maybe she will accept it, and me with it, for ter tell you the truth, Mrs. Hawkins, I get rather lonesome over thar to my place sometimes. It's a purty little home and it's yours for the taking of it. [*Mrs. Hawkins feigns surprise and wipes her eyes with the corner of her apron.*] Now, how is that, Mam?

MRS. H. You are a dear good man, never mindin' the home and silk dress.

PER. But they go in with the bargain.

MRS. H. Law sakes o' live, now did I ever!

PER. Is it to be yes or no, Mam?

MRS. H. Lands sakes o' lives, it's yes, Mr. Perkins. [*Opens parcel.*]

PER. Wahl, this is a lucky day, and I ain't ter be disappointed after all.

MRS. H. What'll Betty say? Law sakes alive. [*Calls.*] Betty! [*Enter Betty and Tom holding hands.*] Betty, daughter, look here: ain't this a stunnin' handsome dress, it's all silk, every thread of it, and it beats Sarah Williams' all ter smash.

BETTY. There's nothing wrong about it, mother.

TOM. It's exactly like the bed quilts that my grandmother used ter make. [*Betty shakes her head reprovingly, saying, Tom! Tom!*]

MRS. H. Now look here, Tom Tucker, don't you be making light of my weddin' dress.

TOM. Well now that's a horse of another color.

BETTY. I thought there was something up.

TOM. Well you are not the only blossom on the tree.

Betty and I'se ter get married, too.

PER. Well all's well that ends well.

TOM. That's what my grandmother used to say.

PER. This here's been a proposin' day sure enough. Supposin' we have a double weddin'?

TOM AND BETTY. Good—good.

PER. Then there will have to be two silk dresses, and I'm the man that's goin' ter foot the bill. How's that?

BETTY. Bill Perkins you are a trump. [*Shakes his hand.*]

PER. That's worth a dozen silk dresses, and look here, little gal, I'm gointer be your stepfather now and you've got to walk the chalk line.

TOM. That's what my grandmother used ter say.

CURTAIN.

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Lettner	Clerk of police court
Second Court Clerk.....	Clerk of police court
Two policemen	
Little Hugo.....	Agatha's child
Agatha Steme	Ross' bookkeeper
Ida Rheinhold.....	A retired singer
Mrs. Wilmuth.....	A washerwoman
Katie	Factory girl
Frances	Factory girl

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act 1. Ross' private office. "What has given me the honor of this visit?" "I will never sing again. My life has been a sad failure." "Good God! My mother!" "I have done wrong, I confess, but when a mother asks, a child must forgive. Oh, Mr. Ross, help me." "You, my rich and famous mother, to you I was nothing, and you—you are nothing—nothing to me." "Agatha! Agatha! My child! My child!"

Act 2. Agatha's attic. "My poor father. So young and strong. How I could have loved him." "Yes, Katie is right, I have nothing but bread for my sweet child." "Madam, I would lie if I say she was anything but a lady." "On the other side, towards the garden, there are a few rooms I have never used. If you will take them—" "You do not look like a man who could commit murder. How was it?" "I was a weak man and many misfortunes made me desperate." "My picture! I must be mad." "You are good, child, but you shall not call me father." "Father! Father!"

Act 3. Ross' Garden. "He is so good to me, but I cannot forget my poor unhappy father." "The picture was taken when I was young. He shall have it." "Stay here and be my wife." "That suspicious old man is in the garden." "For her I sacrificed everything." "Do you want to go to prison again?" "My father needs me to defend and comfort him."

Act 4. A Police Court. "Do not ask me, your honor—I am an ex-convict." "Your silence will not help you." "It was dark and Mrs. Steme was that scared she was faint." "I hope, sir, yer honor believes in a future life, sor." "He wished to see his child; I am his child." "Grandfather, we love you." "I am his wife. Do not condemn him."

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ACT II—In Fortune's Shanty

Zekiel's misfortunes—The rent collector—Darkwood's insult—"Villain, you lie!"—Skinner's remorse—The New York detective—The bank robbery—Darkwood threatens—Jessie returns—The alderman married—"Sure it's a darlint little woife she is"—Zekiel's happiness—"Gosh! I ain't felt so gol-darned happy sinct I wuz a boy"—A trap for Darkwood—Jack and Jessie reunited—Priscilla pacified—Darkwood at bay—"Stand aside, as you value your lives!"—The detective fires—"You've done for me this time!"—Zekiel's forgiveness—Old Hick'ry farm restored.

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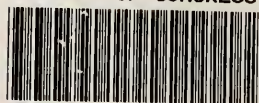
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