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Wiggin

Old Peabody Pew



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The Old Peabody Pew:
Dramatized by Kate
Douglas Wiggin: From
her book of the same
Title.

Samuel French: Publisher
8-30 West Thirty-eighth St.: New York
Samuel French, Ltd.

26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND

LONDON

PRICE 35 CENTS



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THE OLD PEABODY PEW

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It may be presented by amateurs upon payment of royalty of five dollars, each performance payable to Samuel French three days before the date when the play is given.

Professional rates quoted on application.

The author suggests that there be no really eccentric dressing of the characters. Use old-fashioned costumes of twenty, thirty or forty years ago: but the moment that the costuming is overdone the play suffers in consequence.

Whenever this play is to be produced the following note must appear on all programs, printing and advertising for the play:

This play is a dramatization by Kate Douglas Wiggin of her own story entitled "THE OLD PEABODY PEW", and it is produced by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH of New York.

BY _____
attorney for the _____
of _____

THE OLD PEABODY PEW

(WRITTEN PRINCIPALLY FOR USE IN OLD-FASHIONED CHURCHES.)

Wing pews right and left and a pulpit platform connecting them furnish the stage. The wing pews must be kept vacant for the use of the players. The pulpit may be removed or set back close to the wall. The three pulpit chairs, with other plain wooden ones of old-fashioned style, furnish seats for the Carpet Committee. The audience must be put in the right spirit and given a general knowledge of the story by hearing the following extracts from the book. The sexton rings the church bell three times, and then three times again to preface the appearance of the reader. This is very important as the play needs no curtain and can even dispense with foot-lights. The ringing of the church bell fixes the attention of the audience and sets the key for the performance.

THE READER

“ Among the other hills of Edgewood, Tory Hill holds its own for peaceful beauty, and on its broad summit sits the white-painted meeting house.

The old church has had a dignified past, dating from that day in 1761 when young Paul Coffin received his call to preach at a stipend of fifty pounds sterling a year. But that was over a hundred and fifty years ago and much has happened since. The chastening hand of time has lain somewhat heavily

on the town as well as on the parish. When the sexton rings the bell nowadays, on a Sunday morning, it seems to have lost some of its old-time strength, something of its courage; but it still rings, and although the Davids and Solomons, the Matthews and Marks, of former congregations have left few male descendants to perpetuate their labors, it will go on ringing as long as there is a Tabitha, a Dorcas, a Lois, or a Eunice left in the community.

This sentiment had been maintained for a quarter of a century, but it was now especially strong in Edgewood, as the old Tory Hill Meeting House had been undergoing for several years more or less extensive repairs.

Mrs. Jeremiah Burbank was the president of the local Dorcas Society, and under her progressive rule there had been a new chimney, a new furnace and a cabinet organ. The greatest struggle of all had been for the women to earn enough money to shingle the roof, which had persisted in leaking for nearly half a century in spite of all expert advice and suggestion from the male members of the parish. The leaks were finally stopped and the Dorcas sisters leaned back in their rocking-chairs, drawing deep breaths of satisfaction. This temporary suspension of responsibility continued until a visitor from a neighboring city was heard to remark that the Tory Hill Meeting House *would* be one of the most attractive churches in the state *if* only it were suitably carpeted.

At the next meeting the Dorcases wearily took out their lead pencils, and when they had multiplied the surface of the floor by the price of carpet per yard, each Dorcas attaining a result entirely different from all the others, there was a shriek of dismay, for the product would have dismayed a Cræsus! Time sped and efforts increased, but the Dorcases were at length obliged to content themselves with

carpeting the pulpit platform and steps, their own pews, the choir and the two aisles, leaving the floor in the remaining pews, and the cushions for them, until some future year, unless certain prosperous or energetic parishioners, yielding to the force of example, should carpet and cushion their own pews.

How the women cut and contrived and matched that hardly bought ingrain carpet, in the short December afternoons that ensued after the purchase; so that, having failed to be ready for Thanksgiving, it could be finished for the Christmas festivities!

Many of you have belonged to such a band of faithful workers and when, in a moment, you see and hear them talking as they cut and stitch and sew it will seem like a little page of life opened before your eyes!

The love story too, that is hinted at in the first act as having begun in the church long ago, will be finished in your presence. Is there anything strange or out of place in that?

Is it not possible that many and many a modest romance has begun and grown under the shadow of this old steeple; one quite unlike that of this author perhaps, but still a romance? That of Kate Douglas Wiggin is an imaginary one of the meeting and the parting of two undeclared lovers; the secret waiting of the woman, the hopeless struggle of the man, and the glad reunion of the two in the house of the Lord, where their friendship had blossomed into love.

.

Here the Reader leaves the printed text and speaks the following lines.

So run the opening chapters of the book.
Now at the background will you take a look?

There is the Peabody Pew—the right wing, Number
Two

(It's all pure fiction, any pew would do!);
And this the very church, or so we'll make believe;
And now for you the romance we will weave
Of brightly colored threads with those of gray,
Ending, like all true love tales, in the nicest way.
The Dorcas members are the real thing, though;
When Duty calls they never answer "No."
Listen! they'll all be here in just a minute!
You'll *see* the play and likewise you'll be *in* it!
You are the congregation; do your share;
We'll act as if you really were not there!
Attention, please! The second bell you'll hear,
And straightway then the players will appear.

[The sexton rings the church bell three times.]

THE OLD PEABODY PEW

ACT I

CHARACTERS

THE CARPET COMMITTEE of the Edgewood Dorcas Society:

MRS. BAXTER, the minister's wife.

MRS. BURBANK, president of the Dorcas Society.

MRS. MILLER, wife of Deacon Miller, the sexton.

MRS. SARGENT, a village historian.

THE WIDOW BUZZELL, willing to take a second risk.

MISS LOBELIA BREWSTER, who is no lover of men.

MISS MARIA SHARP, quick of speech, sound of heart.

MISS NANCY WENTWORTH, who has waited for her romance ten years

and

JUSTIN PEABODY, sole living claimant to the old Peabody pew.

[One of the entrance doors of the church (both of course being behind the audience) opens audibly, and MRS. JERE BURBANK comes bustling in, with LOBELIA BREWSTER well in the rear. The voices are loud, as in an empty church.]

MRS. BURBANK (*halfway up the aisle, calls back*):
Shut the door after you, Lobelia! Deacon Miller's

made us a good fire; the church feels real comfortable, and we want to keep it so if we can, with the committee comin' in every ten minutes.

LOBELIA BREWSTER (*coming in, and up the aisle*): We're the first, as usual! Maria Sharp's got the key, and promised to be here at two o'clock. I don't know what we'd do if we couldn't unlock the church door with a hairpin, ~~now that the minister has these new-fangled notions against keepin' the key under a brick by the steps.~~

MRS. BURBANK (*ascending platform, where there are chairs and several heaps of carpeting on which work has evidently been done the previous day*): I don't know as it pays to be first, anywheres, Lobelia.

LOBELIA (*following her*): I guess it does, Mrs. Burbank. Perhaps that's the reason you're the Dorcas president.

MRS. BURBANK: I never could make *out* the reason, so perhaps that *is* it! I've got to take off my hat; I can't ever seem to do good sewing with it on. ~~Can you?~~

(*Smooths her hair*)

LOBELIA (*taking her hat off*): Yes; I don't mind. I could sew as well as *some* of the Dorcas members if I took my *head* off!

MRS. BURBANK (*laughing*): You might say that of quilting; but I guess the most of us are equal to ~~carpet sewing~~, Lobelia. (*They take off wraps and put on aprons. Mrs. Burbank looks toward door*) Here comes Mrs. Miller. (*Calling down the aisle*): Close the door quick, Sarah Ellen! There's an awful draught!

[MRS. MILLER *bustles up the other aisle.*

MRS. MILLER: Why, I thought I'd be first. You been here long, girls?

LOBELIA (*getting ready for work*): Oh, no! Not more'n a couple of hours.

MRS. MILLER (*taking off wraps and putting on apron*): A couple of hours! That's good! You will have your joke, Lobelia! Mis' Sargent is right behind me, just coming over the brow of the hill, and the minister's wife'll be here soon.

LOBELIA: Well I declare, she's too good to last, Mis' Baxter is! I don't know what the Lord was thinkin' about when He sent us a minister that could preach, and a wife that would work!

MRS. MILLER (*taking a position where her speech can be heard*): And a perfect lady besides! Yes; I consider we're fixed for time and eternity, if only the Baxters'll stay. I'm so afraid he'll get a better call that I always want to cover him up with a tablecloth whenever a stranger comes into meeting.

[*Constant business, to be worked out at rehearsal: taking off wraps and hats and hanging them over pews; putting on aprons; taking out workbags; and settling down to work, but not so soon as to make a long, monotonous scene of sewing.*]

MRS. BURBANK (*Who is now sewing*): I feel just the same as you do about the Baxters. Of course, my being away from the village for a few years, I lost track of some of the ministers.

LOBELIA (*sewing*): Well, you didn't miss much. Some of 'em was good ministers, and some of 'em was good *men*, but hardly one of 'em was *both*. And that last one never even got 'round to being a human creeter! He was a tip-top preacher and when he came to sociables and picnics, always lookin' kind o' like the potato blight, I used to think how complete he'd be if only he had a foldin' pulpit under his coat-tails. They make foldin' beds nowadays,

an' I s'pose they *could* make foldin' pulpits if there was a market for 'em.

[*Enter* MRS. SARGENT.

MRS. SARGENT (*bustling up aisle quickly*): Foldin' pulpits! (*Slight pause while the interest of her entrance holds the audience*) Land sakes, I hope there won't be! I'm no friend to foldin' beds; but if they should invent a foldin' *pulpit*, the world would be duller than 'tis now!

[*Enter* MARIA SHARP *by the aisle on the other side.*

MARIA: What's that about foldin' pulpits? I hope the Dorcas Society ain't goin' into *that* business!

MRS. BURBANK: No danger! Did you shut the outside door, Maria?

MARIA: 'Course I did. I met Mr. Baxter just comin' from the Post-office. He had a letter in his hand for Nancy Wentworth. If she stops to read it she won't get her share o' carpet done.

MRS. MILLER: She'll stay later, then; she always does. (*With meaning, to the others*): Say! The minister took her a letter yesterday, so that makes two, now, this week. Mis' Buzzell's brother in Berwick says she had considerable attention when she visited there last winter. I hope we ain't goin' to lose her.

MRS. SARGENT: No danger! We shan't! When a girl's so young she hasn't *got* any mind it's easy enough for her to make it up. When she gets to the thinkin' age it's a dif'rent pair o' shoes!

MARIA: That's so! As I can testify.

LOBELIA: Yes; if you once get to comparin' men **you** might as well give up all idea of gettin' married.

Mebbe there's a little difference in men-folks but I guess there ain't any in husbands!

MRS. MILLER: I never thought Nancy had given up hope. She wears red an' I always think that's a sign.

MRS. BURBANK (*with a smile*) I think Nancy's red cape just suits her. It shows cheerfulness and courage.

MARIA (*has been taking off her rubbers and unpinning the skirt of her dress during the last speeches. She is now putting many pins into her mouth, and then sticking them into her waist*): Well, Nancy'd better get what attention she can in Berwick. There's none to spare hereabouts; and what there is Jane Buzzell takes—when she can get it. Sometimes I think widders are worse'n old maids that way.

MRS. SARGENT: There was plenty of attention for Nancy Wentworth once, for she was about the prettiest girl in Edgewood. She's pretty now; but she has a sad look she never used to have ten years ago. She had no eyes for anyone but Justin Peabody *then*.

LOBELIA: Humph! Men's eyes don't always face the same way as women's.

MRS. MILLER (*sewing, but speaking so as to get everybody's attention*): Well, if Justin Peabody hadn't gone away from Edgewood and stayed away I always thought that would have been a match. Nancy never let on a word to a soul, from first to last: but all the same, everybody could see she was in love with Justin, and he with her, from the time they was tall enough to sing out o' the same hymn book.

MRS. SARGENT: Well of course Justin wasn't in a position to offer marriage to any girl, those days.

LOBELIA: I never heard that men folks felt they had to offer anything *but* marriage to a girl! They

generally think that's enough, without mentionin', such triffin' inducements as board an' clothes!

MRS. MILLER: Well if he had offered, and she'd taken him, Nancy would 'a' been 'a' real helpmate. She wouldn't 'a' leaned too hard on any man.

MARIA: Nobody could have *leaned* on Justin Peabody without tippin' him over. I always liked him, but he wa'n't very stiff backed, Justin wa'n't!

MRS. SARGENT: Sh-sh! There's Nancy now, coming in with the minister's wife.

ALL: Hush-sh-sh!

[MRS. BAXTER and NANCY WENTWORTH enter from another door than the first one used.]

ALL: How d'ye do, Nancy. Good afternoon, Mis' Baxter.

NANCY (*brightly*): How d'ye do, all! Sorry to be late, but I'll make it up by sewing longer.

[MARIA begins sewing. She is seated on a corner of the platform in order to break up the stiff line of chairs.]

MRS. BAXTER: So will I. My custard curdled, and I had to run over to Nancy's and borrow another egg. (*Ascending platform steps*). Excuse my best dress, ladies. The minister's bringing home company to supper to-night.

MRS. BURBANK: Don't apologize! We're glad enough to see you, Mrs. Baxter, if you don't take a stitch.

[MRS. BURBANK shakes hands. Gives MRS. BAXTER her chair and takes another.]

ALL: Yes, indeed!

MRS. BAXTER: Thank you.

LOBELIA: And tell us how to make custard with one egg. I always *want* two; but my hens act as if they'd never heard o' custard.

[NANCY *seats herself and lifts two lengths of carpet.*

~~MARIA (standing suddenly, and speaking forcibly, with gesture): Sakes alive! Don't take that strip, Nancy! (NANCY starts at MARIA's sudden speech) Jane Buzzell sewed there last time, and the carpet'll fall right to pieces in your hands! You know her! She said she was depending on the tack hammer to finish her work.~~

NANCY: ~~Oh, well. I think I'll risk it.~~ . . .
I don't believe we've got more than an hour's sewing left, do you, Mrs. Burbank?

MRS. BURBANK: I don't think so. . . . Oh! How I wish we'd had the money to buy enough carpet for the whole floor at once! Sometimes I think our Carpet Committee did wrong to set the example and carpet their own pews and leave the others bare. Just stand up, girls, and look at 'em.

[*Each one rises as she speaks, holding work. Then, pointing in turn:*

MRS. MILLER: There's mine;—pink and blue Brussels.

MRS. BURBANK: Mine's striped stair carpeting, but I'm not a mite ashamed of it.

MRS. SARGENT: Mine is straw matting; but it's nice and new.

MARIA: Mine's a breadth of my parlor tapestry. 'Tain't exactly a church pattern but it cost three dollars a yard thirty years ago!

LOBELLIA: Look at mine! Red was all I had, and I could pick out my pew from the meeting-house common. The floor looks like Joseph's coat!

MRS. BAXTER (*graciously*): I mustn't be proud

if mine is new and like the aisle strips, for the Dorcas Society gave it to me.

MRS. MILLER: Well, you *deserve* the best, Mis' Baxter. (*Patting Mrs. Baxter's shoulder; all nod in agreement*)

NANCY (*affectionately*): So she does! I'm going to bring mine over and lay it after supper; it's all made. Who's going to tack down this piece?

(*They all sit*)

MRS. MILLER: The deacon and Mr. Burbank and Lobelia's father are coming in and try all the lamps to-night; so they said they'd tack down the platform carpet then. That'll be a mercy! We wouldn't have any trouble if we only had more men folks to help along.

LOBELIA (*standing to shake her skirt*): Or else none at all! If it wan't for dogs an' dark nights I shouldn't care if I never saw a man. It's havin' so few that keeps us all stirred up. If there wa'n't any anywheres, we'd have women deacons and carpenters and painters, and get along first rate, for somehow the supply o' women always holds out, same as it does with caterpillars an' grasshoppers.

(*All laugh*)

MRS. SARGENT: My goodness Lobelia! Your tongue cuts both ways like a new-fangled bread-knife.

MARIA: What's the good, anyway, of our slaving ourselves to death to buy carpeting for all the pews when half of 'em are never set in?

[*Somewhere during this conversation NANCY must touch some letters carried in her little workbag, as if she were thinking of them. The audience will note this.*]

MRS. SARGENT (*shaking her head sadly and continuing*): ~~People don't take church going so seriously as they used to.~~

LOBELIA: ~~Most of 'em take it so seriously they stay to home!~~

[MRS. BURBANK *has risen and moved to borrow some thread. She stands, threading needle and waxing thread, and is in a position to speak eloquently, her last sentences being a good-natured imitation of a Dorcas Society meeting.*

MRS. BURBANK (to MARIA): Don't lose heart, Maria. You know you'd be the last to let the floor go uncarpeted, or have the church closed. (*Speaking to the whole committee*): We've said dozens of times to one another that we would stand by this old meeting house and keep it from rack and ruin. Our grandfathers and our grandmothers have worshipped under this roof. Then isn't it our part to keep it tight against wind and weather? Our fathers and mothers trod this floor. Doesn't that make it a sacred spot to us? This church was handed down to us a hundred and fifty years ago as a precious heritage, and we're going to hand it down to the children, in our turn, sweet and clean, and good and sound. (*With a smile and quick change of manner*): All in favor, manifest it by the usual sign. Contrary minded? It is a vote!

[*All the women's right hands are raised, and laughter and applause follow. MRS. BURBANK sits.*

NANCY: Good, Mrs. Burbank!

MRS. SARGENT (*rising as at a meeting*): ~~There never are any contrary minded when Mis' Burbank's~~

in the chair. We can't work too hard for our dear old church!

MRS. BAXTER (*rising*): And, being the House of God, we are going to take as good care of it, at least, as we take of our own houses, and have as much pride in it.

(*Sits*)

MRS. BURBANK: (*Aside*) Isn't she lovely?

MARIA (*wiping her eyes*): I know! I'd work my fingers to the bone—only I do get discouraged. . . . Nancy, let's sing something. That'd make the sewing go easier.

NANCY: Shall we sing "Siloam"?

[*A second's pause of quiet sewing, to change the mood, then NANCY starts the hymn. The women sing very softly, without accompaniment. The hymn may be easily arranged for sopranos and first and second contraltos.*]

"By cool Siloam's shady rill,
How fair the lily grows;
How sweet the breath beneath the hill,
Of Sharon's dewy rose!

Dependent on Thy bounteous breath,
We seek Thy grace alone,
In childhood, manhood, age, and death,
To keep us still Thine own."

MRS. MILLER (*after the voices have died away, looking around the church*): That's a good hymn! It always kind o' rests me! Oh, if only we could have had the pews painted before we laid the carpet!

MRS. BAXTER: I never noticed how scarred and dirty they were till we began to make improvements.

NANCY: The hymn made me think of the story about the poor old woman and the lily. Do you remember?

MRS. BAXTER: I don't think I do.

NANCY: Someone gave her an Easter lily, and

she set it in a glass pitcher on the kitchen table. After looking at it for a few minutes, she got up from her chair and washed the pitcher until the glass shone. Sitting down again, she glanced at the window. She had forgotten how dusty it was, and she took her cloth and burnished the panes. Then she scoured the table, then the floor, then blacked the stove before she sat down to her knitting. And of course the lily had done it all—just showing by its whiteness how grimy everything else was.

MRS. BAXTER: ~~That's as true as the gospel, Nancy!~~ And I can see how one thing has led to another in making the church comfortable. But my husband says that two coats of paint on the pews would cost more than we can afford just now.

MARIA (*standing suddenly on the steps of the pulpit platform*): See here! How about cleaning 'em? I don't believe they've had a good hard washing since the Flood.

LOBELIA: *What, Maria?* You don't mean the Dorcas to scrub 'em?

NANCY: We've done everything else—why shouldn't we scrub? ~~There's nothing against it in the Orthodox creed, is there, Mrs. Baxter?~~

MRS. BAXTER (*smiling*): Why, no. Hezekiah himself "cleaned the temple," so the Bible says, you know.

MRS. SARGENT (*triumphantly*): So he did! Don't that beat all for a coincidence?

LOBELIA (*poking her neighbor*): I guess if there was any *real* scrubbin', Mrs. Hezekiah done it!

~~(General laughter and nods of approval)~~

MRS. BURBANK: I declare, girls, we *could* do it! Or, at any rate, we could wipe off the worst of 'em. I saw Deacon Miller had two pots o' water on the stove, and plenty of cloths, ready to wash the lamp

chimneys to-night. We could use 'em well's not, and then get some more ready for the men folks.

MRS. SARGENT: I wish Jane Buzzell would come. She ain't much on fine sewing, but she's certainly an elegant scrubber.

[*The WIDOW BUZZELL, middle-aged and very attractive, slams the outside door and comes up the aisle, speaking in a loud and genial voice.*]

MRS. BUZZELL: Well, here I am! Who's talkin' about my bein' an elegant scrubber?

CHORUS: All of us.

MRS. BUZZELL: I bet that compliment had an under side to it. Didn't the sexton scrub the platform?

NANCY: Yes. But we're going to wipe down the paint on some o' the worst pews.

MRS. BUZZELL: Well, why don't you? And say girls, why don't you scrub the steeple! The weather vane looks kind o' dusty too. But I don't care! I'd rather scrub than sew, any day.

LOBELIA: We thought so, Jane, by your coming at three, when the meeting was at two!

MRS. BUZZELL: Mebbe you won't be so free with your talk, Lobelia, when you hear I stayed to home frying doughnuts to bring over here to kind o' hearten us up. . . . How you gettin' on?

MRS. BURBANK: We've about finished sewing, Jane.

MRS. BUZZELL: I'm glad of that!

(General laughter)

MRS. MILLER (*to Mrs. BURBANK*): Then suppose you take my piece, Elvira, and let me go and get the water.

LOBELIA: I'm through with my piece so I'll go too. If we've got to scrub let's begin before dark;

though I guess we could see the dirt fast enough any time o' night!

MARIA: I brought along some cloths and towels for the men-folks, and left 'em in the back o' the church. They'll come in good.

[MARIA leaves platform after MRS. MILLER and LOBELIA. MRS. BUZZELL turns in the aisle and joins them. They go down the aisle and disappear quietly to the place where the stove presumably is. This leaves MRS. BURBANK, MRS. BAXTER, MRS. SARGENT and NANCY on the platform, first finishing their pieces of work, and then clearing up. This gives opportunity for quiet conversation about former times and the old Peabody pew. Both here and in the conversation preceding NANCY'S entrance the love story must be clearly given to the audience.]

NANCY (*has folded her work, starts to go down to the Peabody pew*): There is nobody here to clean the right-wing pews, so I will take those.

MRS. BAXTER: You're not making a wise choice, Nancy. The infant class sits there, you know. Families don't seem to occupy those pews nowadays, Mrs. Burbank.

MRS. SARGENT: I can remember when every seat in the whole church was filled. The one in front was always called the "deef pew," and all the folks that was hard o' hearin' used to set there.

MRS. BAXTER: The front wing pew hasn't been occupied since I came here.

MRS. SARGENT: No; Squire Bean's folks moved to Portland. The one back o' that is the old Peabody pew—where you're standing, Nancy, ain't it?

NANCY (*turning her face away*): I believe so; it's so long ago I can hardly remember.

MRS. SARGENT: I know 'tis—because the aisle

runs right up, facin' it. I can see old Deacon Peabody settin' in that end, same as if 'twas yesterday.

MRS. BURBANK (*standing and folding carpet*): ~~He had died before Jere and I came back to live. In my time Justin Peabody sat in the end. Esther, the pretty sister, sat next, and up in the corner Mrs. Peabody, in her handsome crêpe shawl. You used to sit with them sometimes, Nancy. You and Esther were great friends.~~

NANCY: Yes, we weré. (*Lifting the old cushion*): ~~Oh! What's the use of scrubbing and carpeting when there are only six hassocks and twenty cushions in the whole church! I must mend this.~~

~~LOBELIA (*coming up aisle with pail and cloth, and going to front of left wing*): I shouldn't trouble myself to darn other folks' cushions.~~

~~MARIA (*joining her, and beginning to wipe paint*): I don't know why! I'm going to mend my Aunt Achsa's cushion, though we haven't spoken together for twenty years. Hers is the next pew to mine, and I'm going to have my part of the church look decent, even if she is too stingy to touch her own pew. Besides there aren't any Peabodys left to do their own darning, and Nancy was friends with Esther.~~

~~NANCY: Yes; it's nothing more than right—considering Esther.~~

[MRS. BUZZELL *has come up the aisle with a basket of doughnuts in one hand and a pail in the other. Any noise with pails, or any violent scrubbing must be avoided, especially when one of the characters has a "point to" make.*]

MRS. BUZZELL: Though he don't belong to the scrubbin' sex, there is one Peabody alive, as you know, if you stop to think, Maria; for Justin's alive.

and livin' out West somewheres. At least, he's as much alive as ever he was: he was as good as dead when he was twenty-one,—but his mother was always too soft-hearted to bury him. (NANCY *shows distress at the description of her former lover. A second's pause*) Have a doughnut, girls? This is the contribution basket. It'll be kind o' pleasant to take something *out* of it once in a while, instead of puttin' *in*. (*She passes doughnuts*)

MRS. BURBANK: I know Justin Peabody's alive and doing business in Detroit, for I got his address ten days ago, and wrote asking him if he'd like to give something toward repairing the old church.

MRS. MILLER: Hasn't he answered?

[NANCY *tries to hide her interest in Mrs. Burbank's reply. Then, while the others talk, she takes the Bible from the Peabody pew rack, also the letter from her belt or her pocket, opens the envelope, and standing in the pew so that she may be seen, quickly copies the quotations from a certain gospel referred to later.*]

MRS. BURBANK: Not yet. • Folks don't hurry about answering when you've asked 'em for a contribution. I wrote to George Wickham—he's the mayor of Wells, Montana. What do you think he sent me? (*Suspense*) Fifty cents. (*All show amusement or amazement*) When I wrote him a receipt I felt like saying what Aunt Polly did when the neighbors gave her a little piece of beef: "Ever so much obleeged—but don't forget me when you come to kill the pig."

(*Laughter*)

~~MRS. SARGENT (calling to Mrs. Baxter, who is moving toward one of the pew rails in the right wing): Don't touch James Bruce's pew. Mis'~~

Baxter! He don't worship with us now. He's turned Second Advent.

MRS. BAXTER (*good-naturedly*): Well, the pew's Orthodox, Mrs. Sargent, and it needs cleaning.

MRS. SARGENT: I'll do it, then. He was in my Sunday-school class, and I feel responsible for him, though he *was* Maria's beau one time. (*Points this remark at MARIA, who is standing up on the pew opposite and wiping the glass of the windows*) They say he's going to marry Mrs. Sam Peters, who sings in their choir, as soon as her year's up. They make a perfect fool of him in that church.

MARIA (*with energy from her place of vantage*): You can't make a fool of a man that nature ain't begun with. I don't want him, and I can't see that Mrs. Peters will better herself much!

MRS. BUZZELL (*mounting on platform and wiping woodwork of pulpit chairs, where she is in a prominent position*): I don't blame her, for one! If there's anything duller than cookin' three meals a day for yourself, and settin' down and eatin' 'em by yourself, and then gettin' up and clearin' 'em away after yourself, I'd like to know it. I shouldn't want any good-lookin', pleasant-spoken man to offer himself to me, without he expected to be snapped up—that's all!

LOBELIA (*at work on some of the front-pew rails*): You needn't explain, Jane. We all know you're ready to take a second risk.

(*Genial approval from all, including JANE BUZZELL herself*)

MRS. SARGENT: If you've made out to get one husband in this county, Jane, you can thank the Lord—and not expect any more favors.

MRS. BUZZELL (*cordially*): That's so! I used to think my Thomas was poor company, and complain I couldn't have any conversation with him;

but land! I could talk *at* him, and there's considerable comfort in that! And I could pick up after him.

MRS. BAXTER (*now standing in a wing pew and wiping glass on her side*): It's queer; but it does seem to make life worth while to have a man about the house to take steps for and trot 'round after.

NANCY: Yes, if he's a good one, like dear Mr. Baxter.

MRS. BUZZELL (*wiping and dusting on pulpit platform*): Well, we are all human an' it don't do to be too partic'lar. There's just three husbands among the eight women scrubbin' here now, and the rest of us is all old maids and widders. Nancy's only housemate is a cat. That don't hardly seem right, but what can you do? No wonder the men folks move away, like Justin Peabody. A place with such a mess o' women-folks ain't healthy to live in!

LOBELIA (*putting her cloth in a pail of water on a prominent corner of the platform*): I've no patience with men, gallivantin' over the earth! I shouldn't want to live in a livelier place than Edgewood, seems 's though. We wash and hang out Mondays, iron Tuesdays, cook Wednesdays, clean house and mend Thursdays and Fridays, bake Saturdays, and go to meetin' Sundays. As there ain't but seven days in a week I don't hardly see how they can do any *more'n* that in Chicago. . . . Nancy, if you scrub any harder on the Peabody pew you'll take the paint off. There! I've finished my share, and I'm going home now.

NANCY: This is the third pew I've done. They look pretty clean on this side, Mrs. Burbank. I've got to come back after supper to lay my own pew carpet, and I'll do a little more then, if you say so.

MRS. BURBANK: Gracious, no! You've done the worst ones, anyhow. You must all be real tired. (*Puts on wraps*)

MRS. MILLER (*coming forward*): Well, 'tain't precisely a *novelty* to scrub a church Saturday

afternoon, when you've just done your own kitchen floor, and pantry, and shed!

(Looks pointedly at LOBELIA, then getting her things together)

MRS. BAXTER: Do you really scrub your shed, Lobelia?

MARIA: Land, yes. She scrubs her hen-house, Lobelia does.

LOBELIA: Well, there's a good many that would bear scrubbin'! Good night, all. (On platform): I declare, now that I look at the floor, it's fairly unchristian, with our spots o' carpet.

MRS. SARGENT: We've done our best—and let's hope that folks will look up and not down. It ain't as if they was goin' to set in the chandelier. Come, Mis' Burbank, we must be goin'.

MRS. BUZZELL: One thing comforts me, and that is, the Methodist chapel ain't got any carpet at all.

MRS. BAXTER (playfully): Mrs. Buzzell! Mrs. Buzzell!

MRS. BUZZELL: I only mean, now they can't talk about our spots! Come on, Maria. I'm goin' home to my beans. Only me to eat 'em—and plenty for a good, hearty man!

(Passes down aisle)

MRS. SARGENT (starting): Aren't you coming, Nancy?

NANCY: Yes, in a few minutes.

~~MRS. SARGENT (backing down the aisle and speaking to NANCY and MRS. BAXTER): You just wait and see if the Methodists don't say they'd rather have no carpet at all than one that don't go all over the floor. I know 'em!~~

[General business of clearing up, getting on wraps and moving toward the door has gone on during the last speeches. Good-bys from all, and faint

chatter, growing fainter. MRS. BAXTER *is the last in line.* NANCY *is putting on her hat and coat.*

NANCY (*calling* MRS. BAXTER *back*): Emily! Will you come back just a minute? . . . Do you know what I believe I'll do? Christmas and New Year's both coming on Sunday this year, there'll be a great many out to church. Instead of putting down my own carpet, that'll never be noticed, I'll lay it in the old Peabody pew: the minister always goes up that side, and it looks so forlorn!

MRS. BAXTER (*beside her, at entrance to Peabody pew*): I think that's a nice idea, Nancy. The wing pews are so conspicuous, and they're always empty. But I don't like to have you come back—the church'll be so cold.

NANCY: Oh, I'll just run home and eat my beans and brown bread, and come back with the carpet before six o'clock. I'll be all through before the men come in to work. (*Hesitatingly*): And—Emily! (*Goes to platform hurriedly and finds workbag in chair*)

MRS. BAXTER (*turning*): Yes, dear.

NANCY: Come here a minute. I want to show you something. (*Sits in chair on corner of platform, MRS. BAXTER standing beside her on the steps below, as she takes two letters from workbag*) You know Mr. Baxter brought me a letter from New York yesterday, and I told you it had nothing in it but one line, and no signature: "Second Epistle of John, Verse 12." I looked it up, and it's this (*reads from back of an envelope*): "Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full." (*Speaking*): I thought at first it was from that Mrs. Emerson who sang in the choir last sum-

mer, and that maybe she was coming back for Christmas.

MRS. BAXTER: She was a good Bible scholar, I remember. Do you suppose she *is* coming?

NANCY: I don't know; but I've got another letter this afternoon.

MRS. BAXTER: *Another?*

NANCY: Here it is. Isn't it queer? It says: "Second Epistle of John, Verse 5." I've just copied it from the Bible (*reads from the back of another envelope*): "And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another."

(*The women are close together looking at each other*)

MRS. BAXTER: It isn't signed, but I'm sure it *isn't* Mrs. Emerson. The handwriting tells no tales, for it's like print.—(*Searchingly*): Is there anybody else, Nancy?

NANCY: No. (*Turning her head and speaking with tears in her voice*): Once—once—I thought there might be (*brushing a tear away*), but it was long ago—I've put it quite out of my mind and—there's nobody now.

MRS. BAXTER (*putting her arm around her*): There's Mr. Baxter, and me, and—why, Nancy, there's the whole village! Everybody likes you.

NANCY: I know, and I'm grateful; and, Emily (*taking both her hands, and speaking with a sense of humor*), of course you'd rather have the whole village "like" you than—the minister—"love" you, wouldn't you?

MRS. BAXTER (*with an affectionate gesture*): Forgive me, Nancy. I was trying to say the comforting thing; but I know that it wasn't true. I wouldn't change my husband for a thousand villages.

NANCY: I thought so. Come; we must be going.

And don't fancy I'm really unhappy; I'm not! (*Takes up her belongings*) I'm used to it; though the letters unsettled me somehow.

[MRS. BAXTER *starts ahead down the aisle rather rapidly; when halfway down she speaks back without turning.*

MRS. BAXTER: You'll have to bring your lantern when you come back, Nancy.

NANCY (*settling her hat and buttoning up her coat as she walks*): Yes, and my tack hammer, and some clean cloths and towels for the lamps.

MRS. BAXTER (*turning, half way down aisle*): Why not come to supper at the parsonage, Nancy?

NANCY (*joining her and speaking so as to be heard plainly*): No, Emily, dear. I've got to feed my cat! The minister is your family—'Zekiel's mine.

[*They close the inside door, and noisily slam the outside one, to show the audience they have left the church.*

[*Give time for applause.*

[*After NANCY and the minister's wife have left the church there is a minute's pause, after which the sexton rings the church bell three times, then three times again. Then the Reader rises from his or her seat in the front "body pew," steps out and gives the second extract from the book, giving a hint of the love story during NANCY'S temporary absence from the scene.*

THE READER

"While Nancy is running across the church common, eating her lonely supper and feeding 'Zekiel,

the cat, her only housemate, I will tell you a little about Justin, the only living claimant to the old Peabody pew.

The Edgewood branch of the Peabody family were all of unblemished birth, character and education, but few of them had ever made good in business affairs.

The farm dwindled during the long illness of Justin's father. His death was soon followed by that of Justin's mother, and then by that of his frail sister Esther. Justin, though only twenty-one, struggled to maintain the home acres and make a living on them; but, although pests of all kinds flourished on his land, the crops never did!

He finally left the farm and engaged in a business in the nearest city; but it was something quite unsuited to his abilities and after a year of discouragement he relinquished that hope of amassing wealth.

He came back to Edgewood under a cloud of depression, convinced himself that he was destined to be a failure, and quite upheld in his opinion by the entire neighborhood, who criticized and admonished him until he was sore and embittered.

He drew his slender patrimony from the bank and left the village without a good-by to anyone but Nancy. Even that was a stiff and formal affair that froze the heart of the girl who loved him, and who believed he only needed to be helped and cheered to achieve something worth while.

Justin shook Nancy's hand and told her that he was off for the West, where a position of quite unknown and uncertain character awaited him. His own heart was like lead in his breast; and there was something in his throat that would have been a sob had he voiced his true feeling; but turning at the gate of Nancy's house he lifted his hat once more and said:

“Well! You’ll see me back when my luck turns, Nancy!”

Even that brief phrase had a hint of explanation, a hint of balm in it; and on that balm Nancy Wentworth had lived, for no messages or letters ever came to supplement it. As a matter of fact Justin’s luck never had turned to any appreciable extent.

Once in the ten years he had lost money in an investment that bade fair to round out his too slender salary. He had nothing to offer a woman, and his pride forbade the entangling of a wife in his troubled affairs. He always hoped, or fancied he hoped, that Nancy would marry, but was particularly glad when he found out twice in his ten years’ absence that up to that time she had not.

So was life going with him when on a stormy night in December he was walking from his place of business toward the dreary house where he ate and slept. As he turned the corner he heard a woman say to another, while they watched a man stumbling down the street:

“Going home will be the worst of all for him—to find nobody there!”

That was what “going home” had meant for Justin Peabody these ten years; but he afterward felt that it was strange that the thought should have struck him so forcibly on that particular day.

Entering the boarding house, he found a letter with the Edgewood postmark on the hall table, and took it up to his room, his heart beating with mingled hope and fear.

He kindled a little fire in the air-tight stove, watching the flame creep from shavings to kindlings, to small pine and then to the round, hardwood sticks; then when the result seemed certain he closed the stove door and sat down to read the letter.

His heart fell to find it from a stranger, but the

writer, Mrs. Burbank, president of the Edgewood Dorcas Society, asked him, simply and graciously, for a contribution to help the women keep the old Tory Hill Church in repair. The very mention of the church sent his thoughts back to his dead father, mother, sister, and another woman who had been dearer than all.

Whereupon all manner of strange things began to happen in his head and heart and flesh and spirit as he sat there alone, his hands in his pockets, his feet braced against the legs of the stove.

It was a cold winter night, and the snow and sleet beat against the windows. He looked about the ugly room: at the washstand with its square of faded oilcloth in front and its cracked bowl and pitcher; at the rigors of his white iron bedstead, with the valley in the middle of the lumpy mattress and the darns in the ruffled pillowcases.

Then he leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. His soul sickened and cried out like a child's for something more like home. It was as if a spring thaw had melted his ice-bound heart, and on the crest of a wave it was drifting out into milder waters. He could have laid his head in the kind lap of a woman at that moment and cried:

"Oh, comfort me! Give me companionship or I die!"

The wind howled in the chimney and rattled the loose window sashes; but the pressure of the Edgewood letter in his hand had worked a miracle. It was a June Sunday in the boarding-house bedroom; and for that matter it was not the boarding-house bedroom, at all: it was the old meeting house on Tory Hill.

The windows were wide open, and the smell of the purple clover and the humming of the bees were drifting into the sweet, wide spaces within. He was sitting in the end of the old Peabody pew, and

Nancy was beside him—dark-haired Nancy, under the shadow of her muslin hat.

“By cool Siloam’s shady rill,
How fair the lily grows;
How sweet the breath beneath the hill,
Of Sharon’s dewy rose!

The melodeon gave the tune, and Nancy and he stood to sing, taking the book between them. His hand touched hers, and as the music of the hymn rose and fell, the future unrolled itself before his eyes: a future in which Nancy was his wedded wife, and the happy years stretched on in front of them until there were little curly heads in the old Peabody pew, and mother and father could look proudly along the line at the young things they were bringing into the house of the Lord.

The recalling of that vision worked like magic in Justin’s blood. His soul rose and “stretched its wings” as he sprang to his feet and walked up and down the bedroom floor. He would get a few days’ leave and go back to Edgewood for Christmas, to join, with all the old neighbors, in the service at the meeting house; and in pursuance of this resolve he hastily packed his valise and started for the railway station without any supper.

He did not dare write Nancy after the long silence between them. He wanted to see her and try to guess his fate by a look into her face; but he could not resist sending a mysterious message from New York and another from Boston. On a sheet of white paper he simply printed the first time:

“Second Epistle of John, Verse 12”; and the second sheet carried merely another line: “Second Epistle of John, Verse 5.”

If Nancy looked up these references—and what

woman would not?—she might possibly remember a boy-and-girl letter of the same sort that had once passed between them when they were schoolmates. He was a failure. Everything his hand touched turned to naught, but he had never loved any woman but Nancy. If he took the risks, and if she would take them, perhaps after all he could make a better living for two than for one. At any rate he would go home and, if she were still free, tell her that he was an unlucky good-for-naught, and ask her if she would try her hand at making him over.

At this moment he has finished his supper at the Tory Hill Tavern and is walking to Nancy Wentworth's house as fast as his feet will carry him. He pauses by the old church, to wonder at its whiteness; its fresh-painted blinds; its newly gilded weather vane. A pale, vagrant light wanders from place to place inside the building; one of the outer doors is ajar, and he steps softly into the little entry.

Meantime Nancy is there before him, doing her last womanly offices for the dear old Peabody pew. She does not see him, and after a few moments he feels that he is witnessing something sacred, never intended for his eyes; and filled with love and gratitude and reverence he tiptoes out of the church to knock at the door and give her warning before he enters to put his case before her.

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TO BE SPOKEN SOFTLY YET DISTINCTLY

Now, friends, imagine that you are not here,
 Nor lights, nor voices; Nancy will appear
 To carry on the work she loves so well.
 She does not know that Justin's come to tell
 The story that she's waited long to hear;
 That story's not for us at all; her tear,
 Her smile, and Justin's—these shall sacred be,

Forever hidden both from you and me.
The sexton for the last time rings the bell;
It's Nancy's entrance and my exit—fare you well!

[*The sexton rings the church bell three times*]

ACT II

[NANCY opens outside door, closes it hard, enters and walks up aisle with a lighted lantern, a hammer and a small roll of carpet already cut to fit the Peabody pew, so that it needs little tacking. She puts carpet on the pew cushions, takes a small kerosene stove from under the front wing pew, lifts it to platform, lights it and puts a flatiron on top. She ascends platform, puts her coat over a chair and takes off her hat. Then she turns up the skirt of her dress, goes to the Peabody pew and quickly puts in the few tacks needed to keep the pew carpet temporarily in place. She is out of sight for a few seconds only, during which the audience hears the tap of the hammer.

[Just as she rises, JUSTIN enters noiselessly and comes softly halfway up the right-hand aisle, where he stands motionless, in view of two-thirds of the audience.

[NANCY, ignorant that she is watched, takes the old hymn book from the pew rack, carries it to platform, "tries" the iron, carefully irons out a few of the leaves, turns out flame of stove, kisses the page of the open book, lays it against her cheek and replaces it in the rack. Then she quietly kneels on a hassock in the pew and bends her head over the rail in front for just an in-

stant's prayer. NANCY must be within the view of the audience to hold the interest. If the platform is too low the ironing may be done on the seat of a chair and she may even kneel there if necessary. The following scene will be more effective if the church can be slightly darkened.]

[JUSTIN covers his eyes and bows his head.

[NANCY rises in a moment, looks at the pew tenderly, goes slowly and sadly to the platform, and, just as she is about to put on her red cape, her loneliness overcomes her; she sinks into the chair and, burying her face in the cape, gives way to tears.

[The moment this happens JUSTIN shows that he feels he is watching what is not intended for his eyes. He retreats very softly, "backing" down the aisle on tiptoe quickly and closes the inside door behind him; then knocks once, then twice, more loudly.

[NANCY starts, sits up in the big pulpit chair, brushes tears away, smooths hair.

JUSTIN (*opening door and speaking through the chink*): Hello! Don't be frightened! Is Miss Nancy Wentworth here?

NANCY (*startled and tremulous*): I'm here. Who—what's wanted?

JUSTIN (*opening the door and striding halfway up the aisle*): You're wanted, Nancy; wanted badly, by Justin Peabody, come back from the West.

[NANCY rises, stands silent, moves toward center of platform, her hand on her heart.

NANCY: Is it—can it be—Justin Peabody! or is it Justin Peabody's ghost?

JUSTIN (*coming to end of aisle and facing platform*): No, it's Justin Peabody himself. I said I'd come back to you: when my luck turned, Nancy. Well, it hasn't turned, after all; but I couldn't wait any longer for a sight of you? Have you given a thought to me in all these years, Nancy?

NANCY: What do you think? You said you'd come back to me when your luck turned. Don't you think I've remembered that?

JUSTIN (*humbly*): I think perhaps you have; for all women are good, and you are better than the best. But I won't come a step nearer till I tell you that I'm still a failure, as men go; though I've never loved any woman but you. Does that make any difference?

NANCY (*smiling tearfully*): Well, a man isn't wholly a failure who can say that.

JUSTIN (*stepping nearer*): You ought to despise me for coming back again with only myself and my empty hands to offer you.

NANCY: What you've just told me means they aren't quite empty.

JUSTIN (*with wonder*): Do you count—love?

NANCY (*earnestly*): A woman always counts love. (*Coming one step nearer*): Why didn't you write, Justin? How could you keep silent all this time, without giving me a sign, even of friendship?

JUSTIN (*one step nearer*): I don't know! I was too discouraged to think of anything but my failure. I wasn't sure that you really cared anything about me; and how could I have written, or asked you to marry me, when I hadn't a dollar in the world?

NANCY: There are other things to give a woman besides dollars, Justin.

JUSTIN (*going nearer but still awaiting a warmer welcome*): Are there? Well, you shall have them all, Nancy, if you can make up your mind to do

without the dollars, for dollars seem to be just what I can't manage! Here's what I've come back from Detroit to say.—In spite of all, will you marry me, Nancy? You know, you must have known how it used to be with us in the old days.

NANCY (*retreating*): Yes, I know; but that was long, long ago! And all the time since then I've been trying to push you out of my mind and heart.

JUSTIN (*humbly*): I don't wonder! I'm not surprised.

NANCY (*turning quickly*): I didn't say I'd altogether succeeded, but it seems to me I ought to think it over.

JUSTIN: You've had ten years, Nancy, dear.

NANCY: *You* have had ten years, *I* haven't! I never think whether I'll marry a man till he asks me. Let's talk about it. Nobody'll be coming in. We've got to get acquainted all over again somehow. You're almost like a stranger! I never thought to marry a stranger and go West with him!

[NANCY turns and sits on one of the chairs on the platform, and JUSTIN sits beside her.

JUSTIN (*arm on back of NANCY's chair*): You don't seem a stranger to me! You, sitting beside me here makes me feel as if I'd been dead all these years, and just born over again. I've led a hard-working, honest life, Nancy; and I don't owe any man a cent—the trouble is that no man owes me one! I've got money to pay two fares back to Detroit on Monday, although I was terribly afraid you wouldn't come with me. Will you? I love you and I need you!

(*Draws her a little nearer*)

NANCY: Well, if I'm loved, and needed, I—guess I'll go!

(*Hides face in hands or drops head on JUSTIN's shoulder*)

JUSTIN: ~~God bless you, dear, and make me worthy of your confidence! Life has been all up~~

hill with me so far. Now it will be easier travelling, with you beside me.

[*He bends down and kisses her hair. Momentary pause. NANCY lifts her head.*

NANCY (*with an almost maternal tenderness*): Has nothing turned out well with you in business, Justin, dear? What's been the matter?

JUSTIN: I saved nearly a thousand dollars once, and was all ready to come back and see if you were still unmarried; but I invested it, hoping to make it two thousand, and—lost it all. Then I got more discouraged than ever.

NANCY: Of course! Anybody would! (*turns away to hide tears*) And nobody to go home to and tell all about it.

JUSTIN: Don't sympathize with me, Nancy! I'm not used to it; and the first thing you know, I should cry like a child.

NANCY (*wiping her eyes, half smiling, half tearful*): If you cry I shall too; so don't! You don't feel so discouraged now, do you?

JUSTIN (*right arm around back of chair, other hand takes hers*): Discouraged? No! I don't believe Cræsus feels any richer than I do this minute—but there'll be a good deal of planning at the beginning, Nancy, for we shall be poor. I'm getting sixty dollars a month, and I have a couple of hundred saved for furniture. We can manage only three rooms at first, I'm afraid.

NANCY: Can I keep hens? I can always make hens pay!

JUSTIN: Hens? In three rooms, Nancy?

NANCY: Won't there be any yard?

JUSTIN: No yard, I'm afraid! Yards don't go with three rooms—in Detroit.

NANCY: Shan't we have any trees?

JUSTIN: Oh, yes! A few! but you're the tree I want to dig up and take West, and plant and live under, and be buried by!

NANCY (*with a hint of tears*): Oh, Justin, you make me so happy I can hardly bear it! And I've had hens and yards and trees for thirty years. Doing without them will be a change. I can take in sewing.

JUSTIN (*straightening his shoulders and folding his arms*): No, you can't, Nancy. I need your backbone and ingenuity; but if I can't ask you to sit with your hands folded for the rest of your life, as I'd like to, you sha'n't use them for other people. You're marrying me to make a man of me, I hope, but I'm not marrying you to make you a drudge.

NANCY (*looking up at him and putting her hand on his shoulder*): Oh, Justin! There's something wrong somewhere; but we'll find it out together, you and I, and make it right. You're not like a failure. You don't even *look* poor. And I'm not quite a pauper. There'll be the rent of my little house, and a carload of my furniture—and there's my cat, 'Zekiel.

JUSTIN (*laughing*): If I remember right, there's a cat in Detroit we could get, just to begin house-keeping with.

NANCY: There's no cat in Detroit like my 'Zekiel (*takes hold of his coat lapel*); and they'll raise your salary, perhaps, when you tell them you've got a wife to take care of. (*Clasps hands*) Oh, I see it all, and it's going to be as bright and happy as it can be! Don't you see that if we love each other, *that's* the chief thing, and the little worries and difficulties will gradually disappear?

JUSTIN (*rising and pacing platform*): Oh, Nancy, dear, true Nancy! Your faith rebukes me! I'm ashamed that I've been a coward, waiting all this time, when you surely would have made *my* happiness, and I might have been trying to make *yours*. (*Sitting*) Can you forgive—and forget?

NANCY (*looking up at JUSTIN*): I forgot and forgave everything, fifteen minutes ago, Justin. Married people should start even: it's the least they can do. And love always wipes out everything else on the slate!

JUSTIN: Bless you, dear! (*Lifting her hand and kissing it*) Then I'll call for you to-morrow morning, after the last bell has stopped ringing, and we will walk up the aisle and sit together in my pew through the service. That will be equal to an announcement, especially if you take my arm going up the aisle. It will show without a word what we've promised to be to each other, and it's the only thing that will make me feel sure of you, after all these mistaken years. Have you got the courage?

NANCY: I shouldn't wonder! If I had courage enough to wait for you all this time I've got courage enough to walk up the aisle with you, and marry you besides—listen! (*Rises at the sound of distant sleigh bells the cue being the word "wait"*) I think I hear sleigh bells. (*JUSTIN rises*) It must be Deacon Miller to do the lamps. (*Pause, during which they both listen*) No; they've gone by. But they're certain to be here soon. They always come in by *that door* (*indicating one*), so we'll slip out by the other, shall we? Then we needn't meet anybody. I don't feel like it, do you?

JUSTIN (*ardently*): No; I feel like meeting you every minute—but nobody else! (*Both laugh and blush*) Now let's settle the *one important thing*! We'll be married right after meeting to-morrow, shall we? and go home to Detroit next day. (*Sigh of joy*) Oh! I never thought I should call Detroit *home*.

NANCY: Nor I!

JUSTIN: But it *will* be, with you!

NANCY: Yes it *will* be—with you!

JUSTIN: Why didn't you take that man in Berwick?

NANCY: What man in Berwick?

JUSTIN: Were there so many? I don't wonder!

NANCY: How did you know anything about Berwick?

JUSTIN: I always got all the news I could!—Why didn't you take him Nancy?

NANCY: I don't know quite. Perhaps my heart was "mortgaged," Justin.

JUSTIN: That makes me hope it belonged to me! Everything I ever had was always mortgaged!

NANCY: But this time *you* can foreclose, Justin, don't you see?

JUSTIN: Yes, and I'll give you a mortgage on *my* heart!

NANCY: By what you say, I've always had one, so I foreclosed just a few minutes ago of my own accord. I hope you don't mind?

JUSTIN: No, for the first time in my life I positively like losing something. ~~It's only my heart and you've given me a better one in its place.~~ That's what makes me feel so rich I suppose. What do you think I am going to put into the plate to-morrow morning? (*Takes out ten-dollar bill*) *This!*

NANCY (*taking bill for a moment*): Ten dollars! Justin! Can you afford it?

JUSTIN: No; but I'm going to give it just the same—unless you think I'd better not.

NANCY (*between laughing and crying sinks into a chair*): No, no! I'd *love* to have you give it! I've been on the Furnace Committee, and the Organ Committee, the Shingling Committee and the Carpet Committee, and I've never seen a ten-dollar bill

before. Give it, even if we live on bread and milk for a week. (*She rises again*) I just glory in you! Oh, how Deacon Miller will stare! I only hope he won't faint in the aisle. And the Dorcas Society will be so pleased.

JUSTIN: It will come back to us, Nancy. I feel sure it will.

NANCY: And so do I. Let's look straight into each other's eyes and say solemnly: "We'll be married; we'll be happy; we'll prosper in the West; and we'll come back every summer, to sit in the dear old Peabody pew." Say it after me!

JUSTIN: All right! It'll be a sort of preparation for to-morrow's ceremony. (*He repeating*): "We'll be married; we'll be happy; we'll prosper in the West; and we'll come back every summer, to sit in the dear old Peabody pew"—bless its heart! (*They give each other a straightforward kiss. Looking at another pew, back in the body of the church*): Poor, lonesome Wentworth pew! I'm sorry for it!

NANCY: My cat, 'Zekiel, can sit there! He'll be the only Wentworth left—after to-morrow!

TABLEAU

END OF PLAY

As there is no curtain, my own performances of the play were finished thus: Nancy takes Justin's arm after her last speech and faces the audience quietly. The members of the Carpet Committee took their places in the rear pews of the church at their exit, ready to be called when the time comes. I read the little epilogue as author, but have changed and shortened it to make it suit the Reader, who steps again quietly from the front pew and speaks:

As skilled magicians from the vasty deep
 Summon the spirits they themselves create,
 So with her pencil, emblem of her craft,
 The author fashioned Justin and his mate.
 From out the pages of her simple book
 They make their bow before you here to-night,
 And then, their story having well begun,
 Swift as they came, they vanish from your sight.

‡*The Reader here beckons to NANCY and JUSTIN in turn, and while she speaks the following lines they walk singly from the platform, like the figures in a dream, and take their places side by side at the threshold of the Peabody pew, facing the audience. JUSTIN takes hymn book and, opening it, holds it with NANCY, but there is no other movement.*

THE READER

·Come, Nancy, dear as any living child;
 Come, Justin, true and staunch, tho' slow to woo;
 As if 'twere real, we long to hear you sing
 The good old hymn tunes in the old-time pew.

‡*The organist plays "Siloam" once through, very softly. On the third line of the verse NANCY and JUSTIN raise their eyes for a long look at each other, then drop them again.*

THE READER

And now the women of the modest tale,
 Pious as Dorcas, free from vulgar show,
 I summon for the author once again
 That they may make their curtsies ere you go.
 Elvira, leader of the Dorcas band,
 Precede your faithful sisters up the aisle.

Good Mistress Miller, follow in her train,
And genial Widow Buzzell, bow and smile.
Now Mistress Sargent, wise in village lore;
Maria, sharp of tongue but sound of heart;
And neat Lobelia, who's no friend to man,
Perhaps because she's never felt Love's dart.
Last comes the parson's wife, sweet Nancy's friend;
Her curtsy, then the reader's—then the end.

[The members of the cast have come slowly up one aisle, crossed before the audience and curtsied, going down the other aisle. NANCY and JUSTIN follow arm in arm, and the reader joins the disappearing procession, last in line.]

THE END





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