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Empty House*

by
Lindsey Barbee

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CHICAGO

THE EMPTY HOUSE

A COMEDY-DRAMA
IN THREE ACTS AND EPILOGUE

530

1540

BY

LINDSEY BARBEE

AUTHOR OF

"At the End of the Rainbow," "The Camouflage of Shirley," "The Dream That Came True," "The Fifteenth of January," "The Kingdom of Heart's Content," "Out of the Stillness," "The Real Thing After All," "Ruth in a Rush," "The Spell of the Image," "When the Clock Strikes Twelve," and "Let's Pretend—A Book of Children's Plays," Etc.



CHICAGO
T. S. DENISON & COMPANY
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OCT 10 1921



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By

LINDSEY BARBEE

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THE EMPTY HOUSE

FOR SIX MEN AND EIGHT WOMEN

CHARACTERS.

(Named in order of appearance.)

NORA.....	Who First Saw the Lights
LARRY FERGUSON.....	Typically Young America
FREDERICKA FERGUSON.....	With an Identity
TOM FERGUSON.....	A Would-be Playwright
BARBARA FERGUSON.....	To Whom It Happened
RETTA REEVES.....	The Mysterious Visitor
RALPH OVERTON.....	A Young Journalist
PEGGY PALMER.....	Of Witching Ways
ANTHONY ALLISON.....	Who Disappeared
FLORINE.....	With No Curiosity Whatever
NED.....	A Chauffeur
EDITH ALLISON.....	Who Almost Succeeded
CONSTANCE.....	Who Lived with Fancies
JUDGE LENNOX.....	The Family Lawyer

PLACE—A City.

TIME—The Present.

TIME OF PLAYING—About Two Hours and Thirty Minutes.

ACT I. Living room in the Ferguson apartment. Hallowe'en.

ACT II. Sun room in the Allison home. The following Tuesday.

(The curtain is lowered for a few moments during ACT II to indicate a passage of time.)

ACT III. Same as ACT I. The next morning.

EPILOGUE. Same as ACT I.

SYNOPSIS FOR PROGRAM.

ACT I. Mysterious lights. Mysterious visitor. Mysterious disappearance. Mysterious witch. Mysterious mirror. Mysterious stranger. And all on Hallowe'en.

ACT II. Anthony returns. Complications follow. Barbara gives back the ring. The ring, in turn, causes confusion. And there is a fight in the dark!

ACT III. An impromptu breakfast party. Another occupant of the house next door. The solving of the mystery. And another reflection in the mirror!

EPILOGUE. And here—the story ends!

STORY OF THE PLAY.

The sight of unaccustomed lights in an empty house—the story of a mysterious disappearance—the suggestion of a younger sister to weave a romance about everyday home characters—all these give Tom Ferguson, a would-be playwright, the nucleus of a plot. It is Hallowe'en. Barbara Ferguson has been disappointed because her best friend has failed to appear, thus breaking a college vow that the two should always be together on this mystic day. Tom, anxious to outline the plot of his drama, gathers the family about him, and has just finished his first sentence, "Well, it begins like this—" when the door bell rings and a mysterious visitor makes her appearance, with the story of a struggle with bandits at the entrance of the adjoining house. At the flashing of two lights outside she leaves abruptly. Later, a visit from Ralph Overton, a young journalist and former friend of Barbara, and the sensational entry of Peggy disguised as a

Hallowe'en witch, lead up to a discussion of the disappearance of Anthony Allison, a wealthy young fellow whose home is in the city.

Ralph, always eager for a good story, advances the theory that Anthony's only relative, a step-mother who does not quite "belong," may have had something to do with the affair. He adds that he had hoped, through a former member of his staff who had obtained the position of secretary with Mrs. Allison, to learn of any suspicious actions in the household, and regrets the necessary departure from the city of the secretary. Barbara, who has just lost her position, begs to be substituted for the secretary. Tom and Ralph object; but Peggy, who knows Mrs. Allison, volunteers to speak for Barbara, and eventually secures the place for her.

After her guests leave, Barbara has a queer experience. As she idly gazes into the mirror which the Hallowe'en witch has left, she sees the reflection of a gruesome figure crossing a plank which has been laid from the window of the opposite house to that of the Ferguson apartment. The figure proves to be a very weak and exhausted man who shows every evidence of a struggle, and who is, unquestionably, a gentleman. He rests for a moment, and when Barbara leaves the room he hastily scribbles a note, places it with a ring upon the table and staggers from the house. As Barbara, returning, stands bewildered, she glances at the newspaper. Immediately, it flashes upon her that the unknown visitor may be the missing Anthony Allison. The next day, in the exploration of the house next door, the stranger is found unconscious, and for two days Barbara and her younger brother and sister, Larry

and Fredericka, care for him, finding that his memory is quite gone.

At this point Barbara, who has become Mrs. Allison's secretary, is met with the astonishing news that Anthony Allison has returned, having been at a hunting lodge, and confirming the suspicion that the stranger was Allison, Fredericka brings the news that the unknown patient has gone. The returned Anthony seems different in many ways. But not until Fredericka makes the discovery that he is not the man to whom they have given aid is there a suspicion of an impostor. Complications follow. The mystery is solved by the exciting discovery that Mrs. Allison, the step-mother, whose first husband had been a twin brother of Anthony's father and whose son, also called Anthony, is an exact likeness of his cousin, is boldly attempting to substitute her own son for the heir and to effect the real Anthony's removal. On account of the likeness of the two, Mrs. Allison had never revealed the fact of her own son's existence, and the plan might have been successful had not the real Anthony escaped from his captors, seized his substitute, asserted his rights and proved his identity before it was too late. The scheming step-mother, the son and his wife—who proves to be the mysterious visitor at the Ferguson apartment—quietly leave the city. And what began so excitedly on Hallowe'en ends happily and peacefully as Barbara, again gazing in the mirror, finds there Anthony's reflection.

And just as you think it is ended, back you go to the very point where Tom begins his story. And you know that it all is the plot of the play he hopes to write, acted out before your eyes!

COSTUMES.

In Act I Nora appears in a pretty gingham frock with tiny cap and ruffled apron, Fredericka in girlish Peter Thompson dress, Larry in soft white shirt and dark trousers. Barbara, on entering, has a plain little gown with loose cape and tailored hat. She changes to pretty house dress. Peggy, under her witch's cape and hat, shows a simple evening gown. Retta is in evening gown with long dark coat. The men wear street suits, save Anthony who is in rough clothes, coatless, and with bloody handkerchief around his head.

In the first part of the second act, Barbara, Retta, Constance and Mrs. Allison appear in morning gowns, Mrs. Allison's more ornate than those of the others. Peggy wears a sport suit and Fredericka a strictly tailored riding suit. Ralph is in golf clothes. Anthony in morning suit. In the second part of the act the women wear evening gowns and the men dinner clothes. Anthony, when portraying the substitute Anthony in Act II, need make no change of costume or make-up, but should show unmistakably the difference in personality by a contrast in mannerisms and general atmosphere. The person who represents the other Anthony wears a similar suit.

In Act III Fredericka and Larry are in simple school clothes, Nora in a gingham dress, Peggy, Mrs. Allison and Retta in street suits. Barbara, in order that there may be no delay between Act III and the Epilogue, wears the same gown as in latter part of Act I. The men are all in morning suits.

In the Epilogue the same costumes as in Act I are used.

PROPERTIES.

ACT I.

Window seat.

Davenport with pillows.

Long table with lamp, magazines, framed photograph, newspaper and pencil.

Smaller table with electric lamp.

Two chairs and a hassock. Draperies, rugs, etc.

Book for Larry.

Book and tray with water carafe and glass for Fredericka.

Witch's costume, cane, reticule with hand mirror for Peggy.

Ring for Anthony.

ACT II.

Settee, tea cart, desk with time tables and mail and telephone, desk chair.

Long table, three chairs, floor lamp, rugs, draperies, etc.

Duster for Florine.

Flowers for Ned.

Ring and large feather fan for Barbara.

Memorandum book and pencil for Ralph.

Autumn leaves for Constance.

Memorandum for Mrs. Allison.

Cigarettes for Anthony. Also hat, overcoat and ring.

Ouija board for Peggy.

ACT III.

Same as Act I. In addition, a small table set for breakfast, with toast, coffee and coffee pot. Three straight chairs.

Tam and sweater and school books for Fredericka.

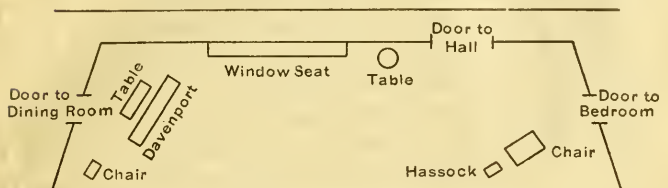
Books for Larry.
 Covered tray for Nora.
 Mesh bag for Peggy.
 Mirror for Barbara.

EPILOGUE.

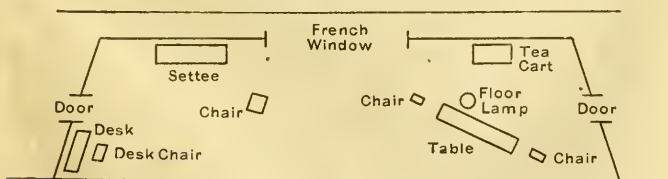
Same stage properties as in Act I.

SCENE PLOT.

ACT I, ACT III AND EPILOGUE.



ACT II.



STAGE DIRECTIONS.

R. means right of stage; *C.*, center; *R. C.*, right center; *L.*, left; *U. E.*, upper entrance; *R. D.*, right door; *C. D.*, center door; *L. D.*, left door; up stage, away from footlights; down stage, near footlights. The actor is supposed to be facing the audience.

THE EMPTY HOUSE

THE FIRST ACT.

The curtain rises upon the living room of the FERGUSON apartment—the type of room which invariably betrays the personality of those who dwell therein. The pictures are good, the rugs are rare and the furniture beautifully antique. A curtained arch to the left of the background reveals a hall beyond, while doors on either side of the room lead to adjoining rooms. There is a low broad window seat at the back of the room upon which a lamp that is placed on a nearby table throws its light. At the right near the front of the stage is a large davenport and behind the davenport is a long table bearing a lighted lamp, books and magazines. A large chair with hassock adorns the other side of the stage and a smaller chair is at extreme right near front of stage.

Upon the davenport sprawls FREDERICKA deeply engrossed in a book. She is too old to be called a child—in fact she would resent it—but too young to be called a woman. Correspondingly engrossed is twelve-year-old LARRY, who is curled up in the window seat. For several moments it is exceedingly quiet—only the turning of the pages breaks the silence. Suddenly the door at the right opens and NORA enters, as bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked and coquettish a colleen as ever came from the shores of old Ireland.

NORA. Masther Larry—

LARRY (*waving her off*). Sh!

(NORA *pauses, hesitates and advances to the center of the room.*)

NORA. Miss Fredericka—

FREDERICKA. Sh!

(NORA waits patiently, a bit disgusted at the eccentricities of the literary mind. Finally, LARRY throws down his book and rises excitedly.)

LARRY. Gosh, but that fellow was a humdinger! Beat up three guys single-handed, set fire to the old shack, found all the hidden treasure, rescued the girl who was tied to the railroad track, and started the airplane just as the villain came tearing along in a big red devil of a car! (Pauses.) Now, what do you think of that!

FRED. I think you've been reading trash, that's what I think. (Tosses her own book to the floor.) So have I. (Pauses.) Well, Nora, what is it?

NORA. Shall I be afther savin' Miss Barbara's dinner for her?

FRED. She's dining in the city—just telephoned. I forgot to tell you.

NORA. An' Misther Tom?

FRED. He's likely to pop in at any moment.

NORA. Then I'll be puttin' his things in the warnin' oven.

FRED. Don't you do it. If he can't get here in time for dinner he must do without it.

NORA (in great distress of mind). But I can't be lettin' Misther Tom go hungry.

FRED. (very firmly—you can see in a moment that authority is acceptable to her). Brothers must be disciplined.

NORA. But Misther Tom is such a nice brother.

FRED. Of course he is. (Then in a magnanimous spirit.) Both my brothers are all right.

LARRY (*not to be outdone in gallantry*). And both my sisters are just bully!

FRED. Now that the family relations are pleasantly established, what is that you wish to say, Nora?

NORA. I've just been sayin' it.

FRED. What else, I mean?

NORA. Now, Miss Freddie—

FRED. Something more than Barbara's dinner and Tom's welfare is on your mind.

NORA. Well, then, since you've been a mentionin' it, Miss Freddie, I've—I've—

FRED. (*impatiently*). Yes?

NORA. I've seen a light!

LARRY (*disgustedly*). Is that all! (*Goes back to the window seat.*)

NORA. But the light was out yonder. (*NORA grows very dramatic.*)

FRED. Isn't it perfectly respectable for a light to be—out yonder?

NORA. It was in the house next door!

FRED. Nonsense. Nobody lives there. (*But we notice that she sits up and takes notice.*)

LARRY. And it's an old, old, *old* place, all falling to pieces.

NORA. Just the same, somebody or somethin's got a light in there.

FRED. If it's *somebody*—it's likely a tramp—or a burglar—or an anarchist—or a Bolshevik.

LARRY. If it's *something*—it's a ghost—or a fairy—or a lightning bug.

FRED. Turn out the lights, Nora, and let's see for ourselves. (*Off goes the light and FREDERICKA and LARRY kneel on the window seat and peer out the window. As your eyes become accustomed to the darkness,*

you discern through the window another window not so far removed and evidently belonging to the house next door.) You're dreaming, Nora. No sign of a light. It's pitch dark.

NORA (*who has followed them*). Faith an' it comes an' goes—an' comes—an' goes.

FRED. For all the world like Tennyson's brook. (*Pauses.*) Well, it has evidently *came and went*.

LARRY. Gee whiz, Freddie, look how near that window is! Why, anybody could almost step across.

FRED. If he didn't mind being three stories up! That fact might make him hesitate.

NORA (*excitedly*). Look, Miss Freddie, look!

(*And there, sure enough, in the darkened window comes the faint glimmer of a light, but only for a moment.*)

LARRY. Gosh!

NORA (*in an awe-struck tone*). An' what are you supposin' it is?

FRED. A tramp, of course—or the reflection of somebody's light. Turn on the lamps, Nora.

(*And NORA turns on the lamps, very much disappointed over the failure of her mystery.*)

LARRY (*with nose glued to the pane*). It's raining.

FRED. (*going back to the davenport*). And it's cold. Trot out, Nora, and tell the janitor to fire up. There's no use in paying for heat we don't get.

NORA. Begorry, and I've told him twice this very evenin' an' all he does is to hit the pipes so as to make me think the steam's a-comin' on! (*And off she goes very reluctantly, R.*)

LARRY (*following FREDERICKA*). Are we very poor, Freddie?

FRED. Oh, we've lost some of our money—and

we've moved to a strange city—and have rented an apartment—and Tom and Barbara have gone to work—but that's all.

LARRY. That's a whole lot, isn't it? (*Perches on L. of davenport.*)

FRED. Depends upon how you look at it.

LARRY. Are we always going to live in an apartment?

FRED. Heaven forbid!

LARRY. How long before we can leave it?

FRED. That depends.

LARRY. On what?

FRED. Tom's play, for one thing.

LARRY. Which play?

FRED. The play that he's going to write—the play that every playwright is going to write—the Great American Play!

LARRY. Hasn't somebody written it by this time?

FRED. I should say not!

LARRY. Then how can Tom put it over?

FRED. Ask Fate—or Chance—or Luck—or whoever the old lady is who juggles the fortunes of playwrights!

LARRY (*after a pause*). Playwriting doesn't sound much like money.

FRED. Of course it doesn't.

LARRY. And if that's all we're depending upon—

FRED. But it isn't.

LARRY. What else?

FRED. Barbara's marriage.

LARRY (*thunderstruck*). Is Bob going to be married?

FRED. No, she isn't. That's just the point. But she *must*. And it's up to us to manage it.

LARRY. I don't see how Bob's marriage has anything to do with *us*.

FRED. (*very impressively*). Her captivity is our freedom!

LARRY. What do you mean by captivity?

FRED. Marriage, of course. It's the original article in that line.

LARRY. Then I don't want Bob to marry, unless she gets the right sort of husband.

FRED. (*scornfully*). The right sort of husband! Why, Larry, husbands are all alike. They may look different, but they really aren't. Any woman can shut her eyes and grab—and the one she grabs will be just like the one she doesn't grab.

LARRY. Then it's mean to wish one on Bob.

FRED. But I'm doing her a kindness. She's cut out for matrimony. Most girls are. They like it.

LARRY. Well, I don't see how it means any money to us.

FRED. Money? Who's talking about money? You asked how we could get out of an apartment. I'm answering you.

LARRY. Oh, are you?

FRED. Listen. Bob's all right as an older sister—she's a peach. But just the same, she's an older sister. And not until Tom goes off with his play and Bob goes off with her husband will we have a chance to live our own lives in our own way. Freedom is what we want, Larry—*freedom!*

LARRY. I feel free enough.

FRED. Well, *I* don't. (*Rises and strides up and down.*) There's an identity—an individuality—a something that's here—inside of me—and it's being suppressed. It's slipping away; it's dying by inches. I want to be

a human being, not an indefinite article! I want to grow—to expand—to— (*And right here there is the sound of a key in the door and FREDERICKA pauses in her oratory.*) There's Tom!

LARRY (*starting out the hall door*). Maybe he can help us find a husband for Bob!

FRED. Larry! (*Stamps her foot.*) Don't you dare mention such a thing to him. It's our business. (*Sits on arm of chair at L.*)

Out darts LARRY and in a moment TOM is escorted into the room. TOM is just the kind of a brother that a younger sister would delight to exploit at a Junior Prom. He looks the typical, clean-cut, wide-awake American and not a bit like a literary light. His friendly grin is most captivating and his initial greeting of "Hello, kid," is anything but erudite.

FRED. Tom, did you scrape the mud from your shoes?

TOM. You bet.

FRED. And did you leave your wet coat in the hall?

TOM. I did.

FRED. And have you—

TOM. Look here, Fredericka! A fellow doesn't need a wife as long as you're so particular about domestic details.

FRED. My future sister-in-law will thank me for producing a model husband. Had dinner?

TOM. Downtown. Where's Bob? (*Crosses behind table.*)

FRED. Also downtown.

TOM. All alone?

FRED. How should I know.

LARRY. Is it raining hard?

TOM. Black cats and Hallowe'en witches. Have you forgotten that it's Hallowe'en?

LARRY. What chance has a fellow for any Hallowe'en fun in an apartment house? No gates to take off; no front porch chairs to carry away—no nothing.

FRED. But there are bells to ring. Go punch all of them and give the old ladies a little exercise.

LARRY. Do you dare me? (*Comes to C.*)

FRED. "I dare do all that may become a man."

LARRY. Then I'll do it. (*And off he goes through hall door.*)

TOM. What have you been doing today?

FRED. *Doing!* What is there to do here, especially when it's Saturday and no school?

TOM. Cheer up! College next year and— (*yawns*). Gee, I'm tired. Guess I'll stretch out a bit. (*And he seeks the davenport.*)

FRED. What have *you* been doing?

TOM. Selling stocks and bonds. (*And he smiles to himself as if it were a happy memory.*)

FRED. You look happy about it.

TOM. I'm happy about something else.

FRED. What?

TOM. A Hallowe'en present that's come my way—a present that is going to influence my whole life from this moment on.

FRED. Who gave it to you?

TOM. A Hallowe'en witch.

FRED. What is it?

TOM. That's telling.

FRED. Don't tease, Tom.

TOM. I'm not teasing.

FRED. Not telling is teasing.

TOM. But it's something for everybody to hear.

Wait till Bob comes in. (*Pulls out his watch.*) It's getting late for her to be out alone—maybe I'd better hunt her up.

FRED. She can take care of herself. Lie still.

A door slams and in rushes LARRY from the hall, quite out of breath.

LARRY. *Sh!* She's after me.

FRED. Who's after you?

LARRY. The old lady on the first floor. I rang all the bells and she's mad. (*The door bell rings—a long, emphatic ring.*) There she is!

After a moment NORA enters from R.

LARRY. *Sh!*

NORA. Shall I be aafter answering the ring, Miss Fredericka? (*In response LARRY and FREDERICKA vehemently motion her to leave the room, which, spying TOM, she does reluctantly. Again the ring, which is not repeated.*)

TOM. Look here, kids, we'll be complained of.

FRED. Of course.

TOM. And kicked out.

FRED. More likely to have the rent raised.

LARRY (*who has been listening for another ring*). She's gone! (*He takes his book and repairs to the window seat.*)

FRED. (*rising*). Then we can settle down again. (*Takes newspaper from table.*) Here's the evening paper, Tom.

TOM. Too lazy to look at it. Pick out a few items, Freddie, and read them to me. Sit here where I can see you.

FRED. (*perching on the end of the davenport*). What'll you have?

TOM. Something lively.

FRED. (*after a moment*). A village of Armenians slaughtered by Turks.

TOM. That's too lively. Try again.

FRED. Wave of crime spreading. Ten murders, six hold-ups and five boy bandits all in one day!

TOM. Still too speedy for me.

FRED. (*after reading a moment to herself*). Good gracious!

TOM. What's the matter?

FRED. A man has disappeared, actually disappeared—no trace of him—no clue to his whereabouts—and—

TOM. History's full of mysterious disappearances and lost identities.

FRED. How can a man lose his identity? (*Rises.*) Why, I'd die if I lost mine!

TOM (*laughing*). I can believe that, Fredericka.

FRED. But, Tom?

TOM. Yes?

FRED. Wouldn't it make a great plot for a play?

LARRY (*suddenly alive to the situation*). Have you written *your* play, Tom?

TOM. What play?

LARRY. The play that every playwright is going to write—the Great American Play. (*Comes down to large chair at L.*)

TOM. Well, I should say not!

LARRY. When are you going to write it? (*Sits on arm of chair.*)

TOM. Not for a long, long time, maybe never.

LARRY. Why not?

TOM. I've too much else to think about.

LARRY. But you've *got* to write your play.

TOM. Why this sudden interest?

FRED. (*excitedly*). Listen, Tom! There were lights tonight—next door—in the old empty house! Wouldn't that help you out? Mysterious lights—strange disappearance—it sounds bully! (*Throws paper on davenport.*)

TOM (*after a pause*). It might be worked into some sort of a plot.

FRED. Of course it might.

TOM (*thoughtfully*). With the proper characters.

FRED. Why not take everyday characters? Why not take us? Bob will be all right, and you, and Nora, and as for Larry and me, we're *great!*

And NORA enters R., a bit disturbed.

NORA. Please, Miss Fredericka, the janitor's at the back door again.

FRED. You shouldn't be so attractive, Nora.

NORA. An' the lady on the first floor is complainin' of Mather Larry ringin' her door bell.

FRED. How does she know it's Larry?

NORA. She saw him.

FRED. Well, you tell the janitor to say that the devil rang her bell. Don't look shocked, Nora. I mean the Hallowe'en devil, of course.

TOM. Listen to me, Nora. Assure our esteemed neighbor that Larry was playing a Hallowe'en joke, and that he apologizes.

LARRY. I don't apologize! (*Goes back to the window seat.*)

TOM. And that the offense will not be repeated.

NORA (*coquettishly*). Yes, Mither Tom. (*And with a backward look at him she leaves the room at R.*)

FRED. Let's come back to the play. (*Sits on arm of davenport.*)

TOM. Agreed.

FRED. We have the setting, the characters—

TOM. And the nucleus of a plot. Any more suggestions?

FRED. Something to make the women weep.

TOM. They're too hard-hearted these days.

FRED. Don't you believe it. Women is women. (*Pauses.*) And then, if you'd make it a bit indiscreet—

TOM. What do you know about indiscreet?

FRED. I'm a modern girl, dear brother, not a mid-Victorian product.

TOM. What about the love interest?

FRED. Must you have it? (*Crosses to large chair.*)

TOM. The dear public demands it.

FRED. Then depend upon *yourself* for that. (*Sits herself.*)

TOM. You don't approve?

FRED. No! (*And she shakes her head vigorously.*)

TOM. It doesn't appeal to you?

FRED. No! (*And she shakes her head more vigorously.*)

TOM. And you're not keen for matrimony?

FRED. No! (*And this time the head is shaken most vigorously.*)

LARRY. Don't shake your head so hard, Freddie. You'll rattle your brains.

FRED. Oh, no, I won't. They're my chief possession, and I take good care of them.

LARRY. I hear Bob. (*And sure enough, there is the sound of an opening door.*)

In a moment BARBARA enters from hall, a bit damp but very smiling, very charming, and radiating a certain indescribable and intangible personality.

BARBARA (*leaning laughingly against the door*).
Had you given me up?

TOM. Just notified police headquarters.

FRED. What have you been doing all evening?

BARBARA. Having a perfectly heavenly time!

FRED. In all this rain?

BARBARA (*coming to C.*). "It isn't raining rain to me—" Only violets and daffodils—and—

FRED. Don't be silly, Bob. It's out of season for those particular flowers. Here, give me your coat. (*Rises.*)

BARBARA (*as she slips out of her coat*). I'm pretty well soaked. Perhaps I'd better change my gown. It won't take a moment, and then I'll report. (*She disappears within the room at the L. of the stage as FREDERICKA carries the coat through the other door.*)

TOM. Guess who came into the office today?

BARBARA (*from within the room*). I'm too light-headed to guess anything. Tell me this minute.

TOM. Ralph Overton. Do you remember him?

BARBARA. Remember him? Well, rather. He was my man for the senior dance.

TOM. Pretty hard hit, wasn't he?

BARBARA. Not permanently.

TOM. Once it looked as if he'd be my brother-in-law.

LARRY. Oh, Bob! Do you think he'd marry you now if you asked him?

BARBARA. *Larry!* How scandalous! And it isn't even leap year! Here, take these to Nora and ask her to dry them. (*And out come two mud-bespattered pumps.*) That's a darling.

LARRY. Anyway, you might try. (*And with the pumps he leaves the room at R.*)

TOM. Ralph's way up in the newspaper here.

BARBARA. Pretty work!

TOM. He's coming up to renew old acquaintances.

BARBARA. Suppose there's a chance of the dead past unburying its dead?

TOM. Who knows? (*After a pause.*) Heard from Peggy lately?

BARBARA. Not a word. I can't imagine what's the matter.

TOM (*sighing*). Another man, perhaps. (*Tosses aside the newspaper which he has been reading.*)

BARBARA. I shouldn't wonder. (*And out she comes for just a moment in a very bright-hued kimono.*) Tom, it's Hallowe'en.

TOM. Sure.

BARBARA. And Peggy isn't here. (*Sits in large chair.*)

TOM. Well, what of it?

BARBARA. Tom! Have you forgotten the Hallowe'en vow that Peggy and I made long ago when we were freshmen?

TOM. I had, for the moment. What was it, exactly?

BARBARA. The promise that we should always be together on Hallowe'en.

TOM. Freshman vows can't always last.

BARBARA. *This* one has—until today.

TOM. But Peggy's hundreds of miles away. You can't expect her to come.

BARBARA. I went to her last year. And now not even a word; not even a telegram. (*Pauses.*) Oh, well, people do forget and the sooner I learn it, the better! If everybody always remembered it would be a very different old world, wouldn't it, Tommy?

TOM. It would, indeed.

Just here FREDERICKA enters from R.

BARBARA. And anyway, a busy working woman hasn't time to dream dreams and to see visions, but—*(smiling to herself)* sometimes she does!

TOM. Hurry up and dress. Ralph may take a notion to come tonight.

BARBARA. Then I'll be ready. *(She disappears into the bedroom.)*

FRED. Who's Ralph?

TOM. An old flame of Bob's.

FRED. *(eagerly)*. Do you suppose the flame could be fanned up again?

BARBARA *(from the room)*. Well, I like that! Why are you and Larry so anxious to get rid of me?

FRED. The excitement of a wedding, I suppose. *(Gloomily.)* Life's so darn monotonous. *(Falls wearily into the large chair.)*

TOM. Would it cheer you up to know that your best friend is waiting for you at the stable around the corner?

FRED. Tom! *(Excitedly.)* You don't mean—you can't mean—Crescent Moon?

TOM. But I do mean it.

FRED. My very own horse!

TOM. Your very own horse! We don't believe in separating friends, Sis. *(Crosses to her and places his hands on her shoulders.)*

FRED. *(and for once in her life she is beyond expression)*. Tom—Tom—I—I don't know what to say. If it weren't so diametrically opposed to my principles, I'd—I'd kiss you! *(Rises.)*

TOM. Women often change their minds—why not their principles? *(She throws her arms about his neck.)*

BARBARA, *in a pretty gown, emerges from L. as LARRY dashes in from the kitchen.*

BARBARA. I've been in the secret, too, Freddie. Isn't it the best kind of a Hallowe'en present? (*Stands back of large chair.*)

LARRY. What's a Hallowe'en present? (*BARBARA seats herself.*)

FRED. (*meeting him at C.*). Crescent Moon, Larry, think of it! Crescent Moon!

LARRY. Honest? Then we aren't so awfully poor, are we? (*Sits on arm of BARBARA's chair.*)

TOM. We've not started to the poor house quite yet, sonny.

FRED. What's your Hallowe'en present, Tom? You said you'd tell us when Bob came.

TOM. I'll tell later on.

BARBARA. Then give me the chance to tell *my* story first.

TOM. So you have a story, too!

BARBARA. The most wonderful story you ever listened to.

LARRY. Tom has a play—haven't you, Tom?

TOM. Just the beginning of one.

BARBARA (*to TOM*). Really?

TOM. Really. (*Glancing at FREDERICKA who is perched on the left end of the table.*) Thanks to Freddie.

FRED. (*very modestly*). Oh, I just suggested.

BARBARA. Then let's hear about the play first of all—and leave the stories to the last.

LARRY. Oh, let's.

TOM. Shall we, Freddie?

FRED. Suits me.

TOM. All right, then. Come over with me and be

sociable. (BARBARA sits by TOM, and LARRY on the floor, R. of TOM.)

LARRY. Now we're ready.

TOM. Well, it begins like this—

(He pauses—a long impressive pause. Before he can proceed the silence is broken by the sound of the door bell—a long, emphatic ring, followed by a series of staccatos.)

BARBARA (rising). Good gracious, what a noise! Surely no guest would announce himself in so demonstrative a fashion. (NORA enters R. and glances inquiringly at her.) Yes, Nora, please. (Crosses to L.)

NORA passes through the hall and opens the front door. A confused murmur of voices is heard—a protest from NORA—and in a moment she re-enters, a bit frightened and followed by a half-hysterical young woman wearing a long dark coat over an evening dress.

NORA. Miss Barbara, she wouldn't give a name. She pushed right by me, and—

BARBARA (advancing). It's all right, Nora. You may go to bed now and I shall answer the door for the rest of the evening. (As NORA lingers.) That will do. (NORA goes out reluctantly R., smiling at TOM.)

STRANGER. I am very sorry to disturb you—and startle you. But I am frightened, and a bit faint, and—

BARBARA. Don't try to explain—now— (turns to FREDERICKA). Some water, please. (FREDERICKA leaves the room at R. By this time TOM has joined BARBARA and together they help the stranger to the large chair.) You are quite safe here. Relax a bit, and rest. Everything is all right.

STRANGER. I saw your light and didn't stop to

reason—but came right in. I didn't realize how strange it would seem to you.

BARBARA. We are glad that you acted upon impulse. (*As FREDERICKA enters with pitcher of water and glass on tray.*) This water will refresh you. (*And she takes the glass which FREDERICKA has filled and offers it. FREDERICKA stands back of table and LARRY sits in small chair down R.*)

STRANGER (*after drinking the water*). Now, I am quite myself. I'm ashamed to have caused all this trouble. I lost my head, I fancy, and— (*hesitates*) will I bore you if I tell my adventure?

TOM. It will disappoint us if you do not. (*He and BARBARA sit on davenport.*)

STRANGER. It isn't much of an adventure, but it seemed dreadfully threatening at the time.

BARBARA. I am sure it was alarming enough to frighten you.

STRANGER. I attended a dinner tonight—and on the way home, the mechanism of the car became seriously involved—as often happens you know. Rather than wait for the chauffeur to repair the break, I decided to walk, since my home is not very distant.

BARBARA. In this rain?

STRANGER. I had a violent headache—I wanted the air. And anyway I love the rain and the lights through the mist—and the dampness against my face.

TOM. What happened?

STRANGER. I had just reached the entrance of the house next door when two men sprang from the doorway and caught me between them.

BARBARA. How dreadful!

STRANGER. I was paralyzed for a moment. Then I remembered my gold mesh bag which I was carrying—

and flashed it before them. They loosened their hold and I struck one with the knob of my umbrella handle. He staggered—the other turned to him—and I *ran!* The entrance to your apartment was near—I didn't stop at the first floor—but kept on and on—until I saw your light. (*Pauses.*) And here I am.

BARBARA. You've been splendidly brave.

TOM (*rising*). I'll soon settle those ruffians for you. (*Starts toward the door.*)

STRANGER (*rising*). Please don't—*please!* (*Goes to back of chair.*) They've gone of course—and if they hadn't—I couldn't have you endanger yourself for me.

TOM. Nonsense! Anyway, there's your purse.

STRANGER. It had very little in it.

TOM. And your umbrella.

STRANGER. It doesn't matter.

TOM. And the fun of cracking their heads together.

STRANGER (*excitedly*). I won't hear of your doing it—I won't! It makes me faint to think of it. (*Staggeres a bit.*) I'll go to the window, if you don't mind. It's silly to be such a coward, but— (*TOM helps her to the window seat and she raises the window.*) There, that's better!

TOM (*leaning out the window*). By Jove, something is going on in the neighborhood. (*LARRY joins them.*) There's a covered wagon in the passageway. It's moving off—(*Even as he speaks a light is flashed in the opposite window—followed by another.*) Could that be some sort of a signal?

STRANGER (*suddenly rising*). Probably a signal of my bandits' departure. I'll leave too—with a thousand pardons for the intrusion and for the trouble I've caused.

TOM. Let me take you to your car.

STRANGER. It's in the garage by this time.

TOM. Then I'll see you to your home. You said it was near.

STRANGER. Not near enough to walk.

TOM. Then I'll call a taxi.

STRANGER. I shall appreciate it. (*Turns to BARBARA, who has been standing at C.*) And I am very grateful for your kindness. (*And it appears that the panic was momentary, for she has dismissed all traces of fatigue and excitement and appears quite composed and self-assertive.*)

BARBARA. I am very glad that we could be of service. (*And with a gracious nod the stranger leaves the room through the hall door, followed by TOM.*)

FRED. Do you believe that story? I don't.

BARBARA. She was certainly frightened when she entered.

FRED. She recovered pretty quickly when the lights were flashed. (*Pauses.*) We saw those lights earlier in the evening, Bob.

BARBARA (*going to the window*). I wonder if it is a meeting place for thieves and if the light *did* mean anything. (*Pauses.*) It's quiet now, but it makes one a bit nervous just the same.

LARRY. (*whose excitement has been simmering*). I just know there's a band of pirates over there and a hidden treasure in the cellar—and the flash of a light when anybody's sandbagged! And I just bet you that she's one of them and that they're all going off in that covered wagon.

FRED (*dryly*). That will make it rather awkward for Tom.

BARBARA (*thoughtfully*). Well, it *is* strange that she didn't give her name.

FRED. And that she didn't stop on the first floor—

BARBARA. And that—(*The bell rings. Everybody jumps.*) Dear me! How silly we are! I'll go, Freddie. (*BARBARA disappears into the hall and opens the door. In a moment they hear her say:*) Why, Ralph Overton! After all these years.

FRED. That's Bob's old flame. This is where we clear out.

LARRY. Maybe he'll ask her again.

FRED. Then for heaven's sake give him the chance. Get your book and come on!

And they hurry through the bedroom door as RALPH and BARBARA enter from hall. RALPH is just the sort of man that one likes at first sight.

RALPH (*drawing BARBARA to the center of the room*). You haven't changed a bit.

BARBARA. Watch out, Ralph! Even the journalist's cloak can't cover rank prevarication.

RALPH. I mean it.

BARBARA. Nonsense! Why, I've found my first gray hair. I've rubbed my first wrinkle. And as to experience—well, the Sphinx herself has nothing on me!

RALPH. Imaginative still, I see.

BARBARA. Only practical. Necessity has made me so.

RALPH. Where's Tom?

BARBARA. Playing knight-errant to a distressed damsel. He'll be back in a moment.

RALPH. He needn't hurry. (*Catches BARBARA's hand and draws her to the davenport.*) Let's get acquainted all over again.

BARBARA. Not in that strong light, Ralph! Me for

the shadows! (*And, breaking away from him, she takes refuge in the large chair.*)

RALPH. Provoking as ever. (*Sits on davenport.*)

BARBARA. Unfortunately objectionable characteristics insist on staying with us. But, of course, you know all about that.

RALPH. What's the subtle inference?

BARBARA. Find out for yourself.

RALPH. It's mighty good to see you again, Bob! Why, the very last time I had a chance to squeeze your hand was at the senior play—when I was hero to your heroine.

BARBARA. Years and years ago!

RALPH. Not so bad as all that.

BARBARA. And if I remember correctly, you went just a little farther than squeezing my hand.

RALPH. Can't a leading man have *any* privileges?

BARBARA. Dear me! We're growing reminiscent and it's a sure sign of old age.

RALPH. "Backward, turn backward, O Time in your flight—"

BARBARA. Don't get poetical, Ralph. That's worse than being reminiscent.

RALPH. Well, would you prefer my being sentimental? That's the next act in my repertoire.

BARBARA. Cut it out, then. Tell me about yourself, instead.

RALPH. Tell me about *yourself*. (*Takes small chair and places it near BARBARA.*)

BARBARA. I asked you first. Play fair.

RALPH (*scating himself*). There isn't much. I started in as a cub reporter, managed to balance myself on two or three rungs of the ladder of success—

BARBARA. And have climbed to the top!

RALPH. No such thing. Like Jack's beanstalk, that particular ladder goes up, and up, and up, and disappears into the clouds. It's darn hard to climb.

BARBARA. I'm proud of you, anyway.

RALPH. Your turn now.

BARBARA. Oh, I'm a failure, Ralph—a real failure.

RALPH. I've seen plenty of failures. You don't look as if you belonged in that class.

BARBARA. Then I'm camouflaging.

RALPH. I shouldn't wonder.

BARBARA. I really am. For the real me is very different from that glorified person whose future I planned in my college days.

RALPH. What has happened?

BARBARA. After father's death certain investments went wrong. We sold our home and moved to this strange city. Tom had a fine position offered him here and I had a chance to become a private secretary.

RALPH. Lucky employer.

BARBARA. I lost my job today.

RALPH. It's an outrage.

BARBARA. Oh, no it isn't. The real secretary came back from her vacation. I was only a substitute. So you see, I wasn't inefficient. That's one comfort.

RALPH. Lots of chances for the college woman these days. Don't worry.

BARBARA. I'm wondering if *you* can't give me a job.

RALPH (*leaning forward*). Bob, I'd give you a job for life if you'd only take it. (*Places his hand over hers.*)

And at this moment which would have meant so much for LARRY and FREDERICKA, TOM enters from hall.

TOM. Hello there, Ralph!

RALPH (*meeting him*). Hi, Tom! Butting in at the wrong time, as usual.

TOM. I've been butting into a mystery, all right. (*Crosses to R.*)

RALPH. Pass it along. Mysteries are right in my line. (*Reseats himself.*)

TOM. Did you tell him about our nocturnal visitor, Bob?

RALPH. I haven't given her a chance.

TOM. Well, she appeared all of a sudden, taking refuge with us after a tussle with two hold-up men at the doorway of the empty house next door. (*Sits on davenport.*)

RALPH. Ran right up to the third floor, did she?

TOM. Exactly. And stayed until she saw two lights flash in the opposite window. You see, we're on a level with the third floor in the other house.

RALPH. I see.

TOM. I could see she didn't want me to tag along, but I put her in a taxi and saw her off, though she had assured us that she lived near enough to walk.

RALPH. All sorts of queer things are happening. And young Allison's disappearance is the queerest of all.

TOM. Haven't heard of it.

RALPH. Why, it's been in the headlines in all the papers.

TOM. Which proves how much I read them.

BARBARA. What happened?

RALPH. Anthony Allison is a wealthy young fellow here in the city—decent chap in every way—Yale man,

reserved, charitable and rather literary. Three days ago he disappeared absolutely and there hasn't been a clue.

TOM. I remember. My kid sister read something about it.

BARBARA. Any reason why he should disappear?

RALPH. None whatever, that we know of. It looks like foul play.

BARBARA. Any enemies?

RALPH. Don't think so. Of course, nobody ever really knows about the other fellow's enemies.

BARBARA. But if he is the type you picture, an enemy doesn't seem possible.

TOM. Married?

RALPH. No. (*Pauses.*) No family but a step-mother.

TOM. If it were a mother-in-law, the mystery would be solved.

RALPH. I don't know but that the step-mother plays some part.

BARBARA. Gracious, Ralph, it begins to get thrilling. What else?

RALPH. Tony's mother died when he was a child. His father devoted all his time to the boy and they became regular pals. Then the widow of old Allison's only brother—a twin brother by the way—arrived on the scene.

TOM. What about the brother?

RALPH. Evidently the black sheep of the family. Total estrangement, died abroad.

BARBARA. And the widow?

RALPH. Stunning, undoubtedly clever, but not quite the real thing. To make a long story short, old Allison married her.

BARBARA. Poor Tony!

RALPH. "Poor Tony" is right. It almost killed him, but for his father's sake he stuck it out. Old Allison lived only a short time, and since his death about a year ago Tony has been at home as little as possible.

BARBARA. And the step-mother is enjoying his inheritance?

RALPH. Part of it, at least.

TOM. Women have their nerve.

BARBARA. A merciful providence endowed them with it, dear brother, as a natural protection against the tyranny of man.

TOM. But you haven't any proof that Mrs. Allison is connected with the disappearance, have you?

RALPH. None whatever. We're just surmising. You see, it would make a corking good story for the paper.

TOM. Wouldn't it? No wonder you're interested.

RALPH. And we had just congratulated ourselves that we had the inside track when fate double-crossed us.

BARBARA. How?

RALPH. Well, about two weeks ago Mrs. Allison advertised for a private secretary and a former member of our staff applied for the position and was engaged. After Tony's disappearance we persuaded the secretary to do the paper a good turn by keeping her eyes open.

BARBARA. Then what happened?

RALPH. Telegram called her to California.

TOM. Can't you substitute someone?

RALPH. Not very well.

BARBARA. Yes you can.

RALPH. How?

BARBARA. Substitute me! I'd love it. (*Rises and crosses to RALPH.*)

TOM. You're crazy!

BARBARA. No, merely out of a job. (*Turns to TOM.*)

TOM. Then settle down at home.

RALPH. I'm afraid it can't be managed, Bob. (*Rises.*)

TOM. And if it could, I don't want you mixed up in the case.

BARBARA. But it's a real opportunity. (*At this point the door bell rings.*) Dear me, this is our busy evening.

TOM. I'll go. (*And he leaves the room.*)

BARBARA. I mean it, Ralph. Isn't there any way of my getting that position?

RALPH. Not a chance. Mrs. Allison must have engaged another secretary by this time.

(*In the meantime TOM seems to be conversing in low tones with the unknown visitor. He enters apparently perturbed.*)

TOM. Bob, there's a very queer old lady out here who insists on seeing you. Are you expecting anyone?

BARBARA. Why, no.

And before TOM can answer, the queer old lady appears, pushes by him and makes her way to BARBARA. She is quaint and a bit picturesque in a long, loose black coat and a large black bonnet under which may be seen wisps of gray hair. She is leaning somewhat heavily on a cane and over her arm is flung an old-

fashioned reticule. For the present we'll call her the OLD LADY.

OLD LADY. I am looking for Miss Barbara Ferguson. (*She speaks in a quavering voice.*)

BARBARA. I am Miss Ferguson. Won't you be seated? (*And she guides her to the chair which she has just left. TOM takes small chair and places it in its first position.*)

OLD LADY. I'm a late visitor, my dear—a late visitor. What will you say if I tell you that I'm a Hallowe'en witch?

BARBARA. Why—why—(*RALPH crosses back of large chair. TOM stands back of table.*)

OLD LADY. A Hallowe'en witch—one who reads the past, who knows the present, who sees the future. (*And she fumbles in her reticule.*) Ah, here it is, my dear—here it is! A mirror—a magic mirror! The elves sent it to you! (*And she draws forth a hand mirror of usual size.*)

BARBARA (*hesitatingly, she takes it*). But what am I to do with it?

OLD LADY (*and her voice sinks to a whisper*). Look in it tonight when the clock strikes twelve. (*Pauses.*) When the clock strikes twelve!

(*BARBARA crosses, lays the mirror on the table and draws TOM to one side.*)

BARBARA. TOM, what shall I do? She's mad.

TOM. Let her alone. She'll go pretty soon.

OLD LADY. You don't believe I'm a Hallowe'en witch do you, my dear?

BARBARA (*coming to her*). I'd rather believe that you're my fairy godmother. Or have fairy godmothers gone out of fashion? (*Seats herself on the hassock at the OLD LADY'S feet.*)

OLD LADY. You don't need a fairy godmother, my dear. You have bright eyes and rosy cheeks and a happy heart. (*Pauses.*) You have everything but— (*Pauses again and laughs to herself.*)

BARBARA. But what?

OLD LADY. But love. That will come, my dear, that will come. (*Leans forward and whispers.*) Perhaps it will come tonight. (*As she leans forward she drops her reticule. RALPH restores it to her and as he does so she catches his hand and holds it for a moment.*) What a strong, clever hand it is! And what clever fingers! Fingers that have woven the threads of romance, of sorrow, of happiness, of intrigue. (*Pauses.*) Beware lest they write the story of tragedy!

RALPH (*joining TOM*). She gets on my nerves! (*But TOM says nothing.*)

OLD LADY (*as she lightly touches BARBARA'S hair*). There is a shadow on your brow, my dear, a shadow. Perhaps it is one of anxiety. Perhaps a friend has disappointed you.

BARBARA (*quietly*). A friend has disappointed me.

OLD LADY. If I were to grant a Hallowe'en wish, what would it be?

BARBARA. Something that all your magic could not bring about, fairy godmother.

OLD LADY. Tell me.

BARBARA. The wish that my friend might be with me.

OLD LADY. The wish is granted. (*And she rises excitedly. Off comes the bonnet with its gray hair skillfully attached, off comes the long dark coat; and there smiling, flushed and altogether captivating, stands PEGGY. For a moment the bewilderment is complete.*)

PEGGY (*in quite a different tone*). I fooled you!

BARBARA (*throwing her arms about her*). Peggy!
Peggy!

PEGGY. Dear old Bob!

BARBARA. Hallowe'en witch and fairy godmother all rolled into one.

PEGGY. Did you think that I really had forgotten?

BARBARA. I was pretty blue about it. (*To Tom.*)
Were you in the secret?

TOM. Rather. Peg couldn't have pulled it off without my help. (*Sits in small chair.*)

PEGGY. Listen to the man! When did Peggy Palmer ever need any wits but her own? (*Stands back of chair.*)

RALPH. Never! (*He has moved right of chair.*)

PEGGY. Had you pretty well scared, didn't I, Ralph?

RALPH. Think I'll own up to it? Come, shake the strong, clever hand that manages so many emotional stunts.

PEGGY. And is to beware of tragedy. (*As she takes his hand.*) It's fun to see you again, Ralph. It makes me feel young and kittenish and college-y.

BARBARA. But why—(*And down they sink on the davenport.*)

PEGGY. Well, of course, I've been planning all the time to be with you. Did you really think I wouldn't come?

RALPH (*sitting in large chair*). What is this mysterious something about Hallowe'en?

PEGGY. What is it? Haven't you ever heard of the Hallowe'en vow?

RALPH. Never.

PEGGY. Dear me, what a benighted heathen! The Hallowe'en vow, Ralph, was taken when we were freshmen. We stood over the chafing dish, crossed our sil-

ver hatpins, and vowed that in years to come we'd do our very best to be together on the particular day made sacred to black cats, baneful witches and naughty devils. (*Rises.*) Come on, Bob, it's time for the vow.

BARBARA. We haven't the chafing dish, nor the hatpins. (*Rises.*)

PEGGY. But our spirit is one and inseparable, now and forever! Ready!

(*And clasping hands they repeat together*):

By the green, green eyes of the black, black cat—

By the topmost peak of the witch's hat—

By the magic broomstick on which she sat—

We swear!

That never mountain or plain or sea

Shall dare to separate you and me

On Hallowe'en nights of the years to be—

We swear!

TOM. Pretty profane, isn't it, Ralph?

RALPH. And some day you'll break it, little freshmen. (*The girls are seated.*)

PEGGY. No we won't. Only battle, murder or sudden death can separate us. (*Leans toward BARBARA in a characteristically impulsive way.*) Bob, I do love you!

BARBARA (*correspondingly demonstrative*). And I was never crazier about you than I am this very minute.

TOM. Why so exclusive?

BARBARA. But you haven't explained your very extraordinary appearance.

PEGGY. I'm visiting here—an aunt and uncle. Came last night and have been perishing all day to see you. But I *did* want a dramatic entry!

BARBARA. You had it!

PEGGY. How's everything?

BARBARA. Fine, except that I've lost my job.

PEGGY. That's nothing. Where are the youngsters?

BARBARA. In bed, I hope.

TOM. Don't make the mistake of calling Freddie a youngster.

PEGGY. I suppose she *is* growing up.

BARBARA. Sixteen and a freshman-elect.

PEGGY. Bob, we're getting old.

RALPH. Let's not return to the subject of age. Bob and I have already thoroughly discussed it, and have relegated it to the dim and dusty past where it belongs.

PEGGY. Far be it from me to resuscitate the old thing! Suppose we take up the conversation just where you left off when I made my sensational entry.

BARBARA (*as she takes the paper which is lying on the davenport*). We were becoming properly thrilled over Anthony Allison's disappearance.

PEGGY (*sighing*). Poor Tony.

BARBARA. Do you know him?

PEGGY. I've known him for years. The aunt and uncle whom I am visiting were close friends of his father.

RALPH. Then you must have seen the step-mother.

PEGGY. Quite often.

RALPH. What do you think of her?

PEGGY. Well— (*Pauses.*) She doesn't quite fit in. Do you understand what I mean?

RALPH. We do.

TOM. And now that you're under cross-examination, did Anthony Allison run away?

PEGGY. Tony isn't that kind.

RALPH. Then what part did his step-mother play?

PEGGY (*after a pause*). I have no right to suspect her. Nobody has. As far as we know she has always been on good terms with Tony, and she certainly seems to grieve over this affair.

RALPH. So you've seen her?

PEGGY. Today. She is quite frantic—doing everything in her power to find him.

RALPH. Does she live alone?

PEGGY. Except for a niece, Miss Reeves, a rather stunning creature of whom nobody has ever heard.

BARBARA. Peggy, has Mrs. Allison a secretary?

PEGGY. Hers has just left. Why?

BARBARA. I want the place.

TOM. See here, Sis—

BARBARA (*interrupting*). I want the place! Listen, Peggy. The secretary who has just gone had promised Ralph to watch, and to report to the paper. She was forced to leave the city, and Ralph won't give me a recommendation.

RALPH. I can't, I tell you.

PEGGY. But *I* can.

BARBARA. Peggy!

PEGGY. Of course I can. Mrs. Allison will listen to me. Bobby, the job is yours.

TOM (*disgustedly*). That's just like a woman.

RALPH. No *reason* whatever.

PEGGY. Reason! What do we care for reason?

BARBARA (*jumping up*). And now, Ralph Overton, you'll give me the very same directions that you gave the other secretary. (*They withdraw to the other side of the room.*)

PEGGY (*as TOM hastily flops down beside her*).

TOM, hurry and ask to take me home before Ralph does.

TOM. What makes you think he is going to ask you?

PEGGY. I feel it. A girl can always feel those things. (*Pauses.*) Don't you want me?

TOM. I'll break every bone in his body if he dares to get ahead of me!

PEGGY. That would be awkward for him, embarrassing for me and expensive for you! For of course you'd be responsible for doctor bills.

TOM (*after a moment*). How well did you know Anthony Allison?

PEGGY. Well enough to *bite* him.

TOM. *What?*

PEGGY. He still has the scar on his wrist. It was a punishment for teasing me when I was five and he was nine.

TOM. Have your attentions to him always been so *marked*?

PEGGY. I haven't broken his heart yet, if that's what you mean.

(*Once more and for the last time in this act the door bell rings. This time, we shall characterize it as a pugnacious ring.*)

TOM. I'll go, Sis. (*And he does.*)

RALPH. I wonder if the visiting vamp has returned.

PEGGY. What visiting vamp?

RALPH (*teasingly*). Ask Tom. He evidently made a hit with her.

PEGGY. *Tom!* (*And her expression changes.*)

VOICE (*from the front hall*). Look hyah, boss, Ah

can't have no more complaints comin' in 'bout you-all.

TOM. But wait, Charles, let me explain.

VOICE. You can't explain nothin' 'bout that thar little devil ringin' the old lady's door bell.

TOM. It was a joke.

VOICE. Jokin' ain't got no place in apartment houses—an' you-all have been makin' too much noise for the folks underneath you.

PEGGY (*under her breath*). The Hallowe'en vow! We must have shrieked.

TOM. All right, then, we'll be good.

The door slams. TOM enters dejectedly.

BARBARA. We'll be put out. I just know it.

TOM (*gloomily*). Let's hope not. If there's anything that takes the starch out of a fellow, it's to see his Lares and Penates piled on a moving van.

PEGGY (*still whispering*). I'm going—I couldn't stay a moment after this. (*As BARBARA protests.*) Anyway, I'll see you tomorrow, Bob, and the next day, and the day after that. (*Kisses her.*)

RALPH. I'll see you home, Peggy.

PEGGY. That's dear of you, Ralph, but Tom asked me first.

RALPH (*with the density of a cheerful idiot*). Then I'll trot along too in case of holdups. (*TOM's expression is not friendly; he stalks out ahead.*) Good night, Bob, and good luck to the new secretary. (*Shakes BARBARA's hand.*)

BARBARA. Good night, Ralph. I'll send you an S. O. S. if necessary.

PEGGY (*to RALPH*). If you're going with us, you might as well make yourself useful. Pick up my witch's costume.

RALPH (*blithely obeying*). Sure.

PEGGY. My coat is in the hall.

RALPH. I'll get it. (*And off he dashes.*)

(BARBARA strolls with PEGGY to the archway of the hall. PEGGY disappears and the front door slams.)

BARBARA goes slowly back. Softly humming to herself, she straightens the furniture and puts out the light on the large table. Then, on a sudden impulse, she takes the hand mirror which the supposed witch has given her and looks into it smilingly, her back to the window. The clock strikes twelve. As the strokes of the hour ring out her expression changes and her eyes grow wide with terror. By the light at the back of the room you see that a plank has been laid from the window sill in the deserted house to that in the apartment, and that a strange and gruesome figure is slowly making its way across the plank. The figure staggers through the open window and slowly and painfully straightens itself. BARBARA does not cry out, but lays down the mirror and quietly gazes at THE MAN before her. He wears the roughest of clothes. His coat is gone, his arm is injured and around his head is bound a bloody handkerchief.

THE MAN (*very quietly and very weakly*). Please don't be frightened. I am not such a ruffian as I look and I am not a thief.

BARBARA (*just as quietly*). I am sure of that.

THE MAN. The door to the room was bolted—this was my only way out. I waited until your guests were gone, and took the risk. (BARBARA does not answer. The man makes his way to the table, fills a glass with water and drains it.) I'm done up, I'm afraid. May I rest a moment? (For reply BARBARA crosses to the davenport and arranges the pillows. THE MAN sinks

upon it exhaustedly and closes his eyes. BARBARA stands near and for a few moments there is no sound. Finally he opens his eyes, smiles the faintest suspicion of a smile—and the smile is very winning.) I'm a gentleman. Can you believe it?

BARBARA. I'm sure of it. Please let me call your friends or bring help.

THE MAN. Don't. I'll soon be all right and I must face this thing alone. (*Again he pauses.*) Will you take my hand, just to show me that you bear me no ill will in spite of this unwarrantable intrusion? (*BARBARA unhesitatingly takes the outstretched hand.*) Thank you. Your faith in me is something to remember.

BARBARA. You're very weak and faint. Won't you lie quiet until I make some coffee? It will strengthen you, and it will take me only a moment or so. (*And without waiting for him to reply she leaves the room at R.*)

(*THE MAN, with an effort, rises from the davenport and limps slowly to the table where he finds a pencil. Tearing a leaf from a magazine he writes a few words upon it, and slipping a ring from his finger he lays it, with the paper, upon the table, and slowly makes his way to the hall door. He has disappeared when—*)

BARBARA returns from the dining room.

BARBARA (*as she crosses to the davenport*). The water's boiling and I shall soon— (*She sees that he is gone, her voice trails off into nothingness and just then the front door closes. She goes slowly to the table, spies the ring, takes the paper and reads the message, which is only three words, "I thank you."*) As she stands irresolute and very bewildered her eyes

rest upon the newspaper which lies upon the davenport. She reaches for it; her expression changes, the look of bewilderment becomes one of enlightenment, she whispers:) I wonder—

AND THE CURTAIN FALLS.

THE EMPTY HOUSE

THE SECOND ACT.

SCENE.—*Sun room in the ALLISON home, very bright and attractive with its wicker and cretonne furniture and its wide open French window which reveals a landscape of autumn coloring. A desk with a telephone is placed down the right of stage and a table with two chairs is on the left. Back of the table is a floor lamp; on one side of the French window is a pretty tea cart and on the other a small settee; a large chair is down center. There are curtained arches on either side, the one on the right leading to the dining room, and that on the left to the hall. The curtain rises upon FLORINE busily whisking her feather duster in all directions and frisking her immaculate self back and forth and to and fro. FLORINE'S hair is a marvel of waves, pyramids and puffs upon which her dainty cap is poised like a butterfly; her black gown with its fluffy apron is almost apologetic in trimness, for is it not an unworthy garb for one whom fate should have cast in the role of a footlight soubrette? Her high-heeled slippers tap frivolously as she casts an inquisitive eye upon each letter in the pile of mail adorning the desk, calmly helps herself to a tempting bonbon in the silver dish upon the table and keeps a watchful eye upon the door as if expecting an intruder. The intruder appears, a very natty chauffeur, who answers to the name of NED, also seriously interfered with by fate and destined for greater roles. He carries a large bunch of hothouse flowers.*

FLORINE. My word! How you startled me! (Of

course he didn't startle her and he knows that he didn't.) I've been looking for the gardener to bring these from the conservatory. (*And away she goes to the table, placing the flowers in a large vase.*)

NED. Some doin's at our place last night.

FLORINE. Rather! 'Tain't every family that can boast a disappearin' act and a returnin' hero all in a week.

NED. Have you seen him?

FLORINE. Seen him! (*Kisses her finger tips airily.*) He has ev'ry movie actor run to the top of the pole and yellin' for help. Seen him! Well, I could just keep on seein' him!

NED. What time did he come in?

FLORINE. Close on to midnight. Ev'rybody else had gone to bed, but I was suspicionin' something just on account of Mrs. Allison and Miss Retta bein' so excited like. So I stayed up, too. When there's to be any fireworks, trust little Florrie to be right there with bells on!

NED. How did he get here?

FLORINE. Search me. First thing I knew there was talkin' in the library, real loud and confused-like, so I stopped at the door a minute. Not that I wanted to listen, for I ain't curious by nature, not a bit, but I thought it was my duty to make sure it wasn't burglars. Burglars is so bold these days that you can't tell them from real people.

NED. What did you hear?

FLORINE. Ev'rybody talked at once. Then Mr. Allison said something about pulling it off all right—and his mother said she must let the papers know all about it.

NED (*coming down C.*). She sure let 'em know.

Front page is blazin' with it—and all because the guy happened to have a wad of cash. Any poor bird could have dropped out of sight for good and all, and who would have cared?

FLORINE. You talk like a Bol-shee-vee-kee. If this house should ever be blown up I'd have you spotted right away.

NED. And to think that it was nothin' but a huntin' trip after all. Funny Mrs. Allison didn't know about it before.

FLORINE. Paper said that she didn't get his message.

NED. Funny she didn't know when he was comin' home.

FLORINE. She did know. (*Sits on arm of chair at R. of table.*)

NED. She didn't tell the paper that.

FLORINE (*confidentially*). Well, anyway, yesterday I was straightenin' Mrs. Allison's dresser and I saw a little piece of paper under the cushion. I pulled it out and read it—not that I was curious, Ned, but it's my duty to keep everything right in place.

NED. What did it say?

FLORINE (*very impressively*). It said, Tonight. (*Rises.*) And it was signed Tony. (*Sighs.*) Just like the movies!

NED. The whole thing's like the movies.

FLORINE. With Miss Retta for heroine.

NED. What has she to do with it?

FLORINE (*comes to him*). I just happened to be passin' Mrs. Allison's room yesterday and I heard Miss Retta cryin' and Mrs. Allison talkin' very cross-like. I stopped to listen—not that I'm a bit curious,

for I'm not—but I felt it my duty to be on hand if anything happened.

NED. Well?

FLORINE. I couldn't understand Mrs. Allison, but Miss Retta kept sayin', "I'm afraid, I'm afraid," just like that.

NED. Well, I don't want to be in any mix-up!

FLORINE. You're not likely to stay long enough.

NED. Huh?

FLORINE. We've all been here just a few days. You're new, I'm new, the gardener's new, and cook's new. And what's happened to the rest of 'em can happen to us!

BARBARA *enters from the hall.* NED *beats a hasty retreat through the window and FLORINE flourishes the duster even more vigorously.*

BARBARA. Good morning, Florine.

FLORINE. Good morning, Miss Ferguson. (BARBARA *sits herself at the desk and attacks the pile of mail.*) Have you seen the mornin' paper?

BARBARA. No, I haven't. I arose a bit late.

FLORINE (*in a dramatic whisper*). He's back!

BARBARA. Who's back?

FLORINE. Mr. Allison. (*Takes paper from table.*)

BARBARA (*rising*). No! (*Mechanically, she takes the paper which FLORINE offers.*)

FLORINE. Came last night. (*Somewhere in the house a bell sounds.*) There's the bell. (*And she goes L. through hallway. For a few moments BARBARA stands deep in thought, then she opens the paper and reads it carefully.*)

Suddenly, like a whirlwind, the curtains part and PEGGY enters from L.

PEGGY. Barbara, have you heard the news? (*Runs to her.*)

BARBARA. I'm just reading it.

PEGGY. Isn't it wonderful?

BARBARA. Too wonderful to believe.

PEGGY. Aunt and uncle are out there with Mrs. Allison and Ralph is—

BARBARA. *Ralph!*

PEGGY. We're on our way to the Country Club.

BARBARA. It is glorious golf weather. (*And her tone is a bit wistful.*)

PEGGY (*with an arm about BARBARA'S neck*). Never mind, old dear, you won't be cooped up all the time.

BARBARA. I'm not cooped up at all.

PEGGY. Then you like the place?

BARBARA. Immensely.

PEGGY. I'm glad. (*Sits in chair at C.*)

BARBARA. I owe it to you, you know.

PEGGY. And, after all, you can't play Sherlock Holmes. Tony's return has spoiled everything.

BARBARA. Peggy, do you really believe this story? (*And she glances at the paper.*)

PEGGY. Believe it? Why, of course! We were all wrong to suspect Mrs. Allison, Bob. She's crazy about Tony, just crazy, and so happy over his return.

BARBARA. Did you see him?

PEGGY. He isn't up. Notoriety has changed his Spartan habits.

BARBARA. Why do you say that?

PEGGY. Because, as a general thing, Tony, the sun and the lark all rise together.

BARBARA. And do you think it's possible for him to have been so far removed from newspapers as to be ignorant of all this commotion over his disappearance?

PEGGY. It was only five days. And Tony's hunting lodge is about the loneliest place there is.

BARBARA. And he goes there all by himself?

PEGGY. Surely. We all went up for a week-end once. It's frightfully dreary. Way off from a railroad, strong in scenery, whispering pines, scary old night owls. Ugh!

BARBARA. Don't you think it's strange that he didn't tell Mrs. Allison that he was planning the trip?

PEGGY. He didn't plan it. He decided it all of a sudden. He had started home from the office, and took a notion to spend a few days at the lodge.

BARBARA. Without any luggage?

PEGGY. He had everything there.

BARBARA. And he went right to the train?

PEGGY. Exactly. Scribbled a note to Mrs. Allison.

BARBARA. Which she never received, the paper says.

PEGGY. Messenger boys aren't always trustworthy.

BARBARA. Lots of things aren't trustworthy.

PEGGY. Since Tony's back safe and sound, why should we bother?

RALPH *enters from L.*

PEGGY. Come, cheer up your lady sleuth, Ralph, she's grouchy because she's been cheated out of a mystery. (*Crosses to chair L. of table and seats herself.*)

RALPH (*greeting BARBARA*). Tough luck, isn't it, Bob? And it shows just how far the editorial imagination can distort itself without anything real to go on. How's the job?

BARBARA. Splendid. I like it. (*Again sits at desk.*)

RALPH. And now there's no mystery to bother about. (*Sits at C.*)

BARBARA. I'm not so sure.

RALPH. Nonsense! Tony's back and it's all very simple. (*Pauses.*) My conscience troubles me.

BARBARA. Why?

RALPH. Because I even suspected Mrs. Allison.

PEGGY. Journalists, and especially editors, are very queer people.

RALPH. In what respect?

PEGGY. Their consciences are like wee bits of pearls all wrapped up in lots and lots and lots of cotton.

BARBARA (*suddenly*). Have you time to listen to something?

RALPH. Plenty of time, haven't we, Peggy?

PEGGY. All morning.

BARBARA. And do you think I'm wilfully wasting my employer's time?

PEGGY. She's busy with aunt and uncle. Please tell us.

BARBARA. Well, it happened on Hallowe'en.

RALPH. The night we were there.

BARBARA. Yes, but later. (*Pauses.*) I told you about the lights, didn't I?

PEGGY. Yes.

BARBARA. I was standing by the table—alone—when I saw a plank laid from the window in the opposite house to the one in ours. And a man was slowly making his way across the plank.

PEGGY. Bob, you dreamed it! Nothing so thrilling as that ever happens in real life!

RALPH. What did you do?

BARBARA. I let him come.

RALPH. You should have called for help.

BARBARA. No. He was a gentleman. And he was exhausted and ill.

RALPH. What did he say about his tight rope performance?

BARBARA. He was escaping from the room opposite. The door had been bolted on the outside.

PEGGY. How perfectly ripping!

BARBARA. I left the room. When I came back he was gone. (*Suddenly.*) Peggy, did you ever see Anthony Allison wear this? (*And from her pocket she draws the ring which the mysterious stranger had left.*)

PEGGY (*crossing to her left*). Never, to my knowledge. Did the man leave it? (*BARBARA nods.*) Oh, Bob! You don't think, you can't think, that it was Tony!

BARBARA. I did—until this morning.

RALPH. Impossible. This fellow was probably an ordinary thief.

BARBARA. Oh, no he wasn't. (*Pauses.*) That wasn't all.

PEGGY. Oh, I just felt it wasn't. (*Ecstatically.*) I love anything melodramatic—dark nights, mysterious lights, and the hero with a bloody handkerchief about his head. (*Runs back to her chair.*)

BARBARA. He did have a bloody handkerchief about his head!

PEGGY. Heavenly!

RALPH (*impatiently*). Go on with the story.

BARBARA. I forgot to remove the plank—and early next morning Larry and Freddie discovered it.

PEGGY. I can just see them discovering it!

BARBARA. And after I told them, nothing would do but to explore the house next door.

RALPH. And you found nothing.

BARBARA. We found every evidence of a fight. And we also found the mysterious man.

RALPH. But why should he go back there?

BARBARA. Too ill to go further, I suppose. He was unconscious. Since then we have cared for him as well as we could.

RALPH. Why haven't you told Tom, or me?

BARBARA. It was my story.

RALPH. But the man might have died.

BARBARA. His hurts aren't serious and good food has brought him back.

RALPH. Doesn't he tell you who he is and why he's over there?

BARBARA. Oh, Ralph, he can't, he can't. Why, he doesn't remember his own name.

RALPH (*whistling*). By Jove! (*Rises.*)

BARBARA. He must have been struck on the head.

RALPH. Then his memory may come back as quickly as it left him.

BARBARA. That's why I haven't called a doctor. I've felt all along that it is not a case for publicity.

RALPH. After our golf game, Peggy, I'll run over and look things over. Barbara, you're to keep out of it from now on. (*After a moment.*) He might make a corking story. (*Strolls to back of stage.*)

PEGGY. And you thought it was Tony. Well, I can see how you would.

BARBARA. But my story isn't finished. It goes on, and on, and on. And this is the part I can't understand. (*Pauses.*) You remember that I told you of the mysterious girl who rushed in that night, and who watched for a signal from the opposite house?

PEGGY. The visiting vamp! Of course.

BARBARA. I found out yesterday that she is Miss Reeves.

RALPH (*turning*). Miss Reeves! Mrs. Allison's niece?

BARBARA. The very same. I recognized her at once, but she didn't seem to recognize me.

RALPH. Say! There may be a story here, after all. (*Sits on settee.*)

PEGGY. Story! Story! Don't you ever think of anything but a story?

RALPH. Occasionally. (*And out comes his little notebook in which he scribbles vigorously.*)

PEGGY. Anyway, it's Bob's story. And it all happened on Hallowe'en.

BARBARA. Mysterious man—mysterious woman—

PEGGY. And mysterious me!

BARBARA. My Hallowe'en witch! (*Crosses and kneels by her.*)

PEGGY (*once more assuming the witch's voice*). Ah, here it is, my dear, here it is! A mirror, a magic mirror! The elves sent it to you. (*Suddenly.*) Bob, did you use the mirror?

BARBARA (*after a pause*). I did. Silly, wasn't it?

PEGGY. You look guilty. (*Pauses.*) Did you see the man in the mirror? (*As BARBARA nods.*) Bob!

BARBARA (*rising*). And the clock was striking twelve!

Fortunately for PEGGY's overworked nerves, Mrs. ALLISON enters from the hall, very stately, very smiling, very gracious and apparently very sure of herself. She is charmingly gowned, and if she is a bit ornate and wears too many jewels for the morning, one is inclined to forget it.

MRS. ALLISON. Good morning, Miss Ferguson. (*As*

BARBARA *acknowledges the greeting.*) Peggy, dear, your aunt's last word to me was a reminder that luncheon is at one and that there are invited guests. (BARBARA *crosses to desk.*)

PEGGY (*rising*). Then it's up to Ralph to use his perfectly good memory in my behalf. For all I have is a forgettery. Time for us to be off, anyway.

RALPH. Tell Tony I'm sorry not to see him, Mrs. Allison.

MRS. A. Why not come back later on? (*As a sudden thought strikes her.*) Better still, why not help to celebrate his return with an informal dinner party? You will come, both of you?

PEGGY. Of course.

MRS. A. And it will be a splendid opportunity to become better acquainted with Miss Ferguson. (*To BARBARA.*) May I count on you, my dear?

BARBARA. Yes, and thank you, Mrs. Allison.

PEGGY. Barbara has a perfectly nice brother, Mrs. Allison.

MRS. A. Who evidently is advertised by his loving friends. Then, by all means, Barbara must produce the brother. And I'll ask the Judge in order to even up the party.

PEGGY (*rapturously*). Isn't it just wonderful to have a prodigal son in the family? (*Goes back stage to RALPH.*)

RALPH. Goodbye, Mrs. Allison. I trust you don't resent our monopoly of your private secretary.

MRS. A. On the contrary, it's quite a recommendation for Miss Ferguson. (*As RALPH and PEGGY leave the room at L.*) Don't let him win the game, Peggy.

PEGGY (*from off stage*). The prospects of a party

will help me to win any old game. Goodbye, everybody.

MRS. A. (*joins BARBARA at desk*). We are all feeling very happy this morning, Miss Ferguson. (*Pauses.*) Of course, you've heard of Mr. Allison's return.

BARBARA. I've just been reading of it. And I'm very glad for you.

MRS. A. (*crossing and seating herself L. of table*). Tony is like my own son. When he disappeared last Thursday and sent no word, I became a bit hysterical and notified police headquarters. I see now that I acted hastily.

BARBARA. Excessive anxiety excuses any hasty action, I'm sure.

MRS. A. And to think that all the excitement was due to a careless messenger boy.

BARBARA. "Trifles have tottered temples."

MRS. A. Undoubtedly. (*Pauses.*) Did I quite tire you out yesterday?

BARBARA. Not at all. For a first day in a new position it was most satisfying and quite ideal.

MRS. A. Those are exactly the adjectives I choose to apply to my new secretary.

BARBARA. That is kind of you.

MRS. A. And it is needless to add that your work is quite perfect. (*Pauses.*) Today I shall introduce you to the manuscript which is my real reason for employing a secretary.

BARBARA. A manuscript?

MRS. A. An autobiography upon which Mr. Allison had worked from time to time. He took much interest in it; and now it is my wish to keep it in permanent form.

BARBARA. It will be interesting.

MRS. A. I trust so. I wish the pages edited and typed. And the fact that you are a college graduate makes me quite content to entrust the work to you.

BARBARA. Shall I begin on the manuscript today?

MRS. A. After you have sent the checks which you will find on the desk in my sitting room. The manuscript is in the right-hand drawer. Later you can bring it to me here and I shall give what few directions I have.

BARBARA (*rising*). Very well, Mrs. Allison. (*And she starts toward the hall door.*)

MRS. A. Just a moment, Miss Ferguson.

BARBARA (*turning*). Yes?

MRS. A. My niece tells me that you and your brother were most kind to her in her terrifying experience of Saturday night.

BARBARA. We were glad to be of service. (*Pauses.*) I had thought that Miss Reeves did not recognize me.

MRS. A. Her failure to recognize you was due to an overwhelming surprise at seeing you here and to a fear that you would think her conduct most unusual.

BARBARA. I see.

MRS. A. But her foolishness in running such a risk has caused me to reprove her very sharply. (*After a pause.*) If you agree, we shall forget the affair entirely.

BARBARA. Certainly, Mrs. Allison. (*And she passes through the hall curtain, L.*)

Left to herself, Mrs. ALLISON'S poise disappears. She crosses to the desk. Her expression changes and she seems nervous and preoccupied. From the French window RETTA enters.

RETTA. Have you explained to Miss Ferguson? (*Crosses to her.*)

MRS. A. I have tried to. If you had met the situation fairly and naturally there would have been no need for explanations. You have complicated matters, Retta.

RETTA. She took me by surprise.

MRS. A. (*sharply*). Don't allow anyone to take you by surprise. It's the weak spot in one's armor.

RETTA (*suddenly, as if panic-stricken*). I'm afraid, I'm afraid, I'm afraid. (*Crosses to chair L. of table.*)

MRS. A. (*following and shaking her angrily*). Never let me hear you say that again, *never!*

RETTA. I can't help it, I can't! I've nerved myself up to this point. I've done all that you've asked, but now, now—(*Sinks into the chair.*)

MRS. A. Hush!

RETTA (*wildly*). It's all wrong. I feel that someone knows.

MRS. A. (*leaning over her*). Listen, Retta. Am I the woman to fail in any undertaking?

RETTA. Sometimes I think you haven't a heart.

MRS. A. Such an opinion in regard to my shortcomings should hardly come from you. (*At C.*) Don't you owe the very clothes you wear to me?

RETTA. Yes.

MRS. A. And are you forgetting Tony?

RETTA (*rising*). Forgetting Tony? When every thought, every danger, every move has been for him? (*Pauses.*) Oh, Edith, suppose that Tony forgets me.

MRS. A. He can't forget you. (*Stands by desk.*)

RETTA. You are so sure of everything. (*Sits in chair near C.*)

MRS. A. I am forced to be sure.

RETTA. And you take such risks—such terrible risks.

MRS. A. (*laughing a little harshly*). I have always taken risks—an inheritance from my gambler father and my spendthrift mother whose recklessness forced a girl of sixteen to depend upon her own wits. (*Sits at desk.*)

RETTA. But wits and cleverness mean success.

MRS. A. Was it success to marry gay, dashing John Allison, only to find that he had squandered his fortune, that he lived from day to day? Success to be driven from place to place always facing debt and poverty? Success when he could give me none of the things I wanted?

RETTA. But you loved him.

MRS. A. For what I thought he could give me.

RETTA. Edith!

MRS. A. And his death brought me my chance! What John Allison failed to give, his brother lavished upon me.

RETTA. Are you making him a fair return for his kindness?

MRS. A. (*rising*). How dare you speak to me of return of kindness? When I am playing this last card for you—for Tony—and for our peace and prosperity in years to come. Why, I'm just about to lay hold upon what I've craved and dreamed of for years, money, beauty, power, position for me and mine. (*Defiantly.*) And I'm going to have them! (*Pauses.*)

RETTA. Don't look like that, Edith. You frighten me.

MRS. A. Don't be hysterical. (*In a matter of fact tone.*) Let us make our plans.

RETTA. Are the servants safe? (*Looks around anxiously.*)

MRS. A. Certainly they are safe. All of them are

new and quite unaccustomed to the household and to the family.

RETTA. There's Miss Constance.

MRS. A. Miss Constance is very far from being a servant.

RETTA. But she's here.

MRS. A. Don't be foolish, Retta, Constance will always make her home here.

RETTA. Who is she, anyway?

MRS. A. A dear friend of Mr. Allison's first wife. She has lived here for years and has always been devoted to the boy.

RETTA. Then she will—understand.

MRS. A. Nonsense! She is very frail—spends most of the time in her room, and isn't interested in the affairs of the household.

RETTA. Is she dependent upon you?

MRS. A. Hardly. Mr. Allison left her well provided for and stipulated in his will that as long as she wished her home should be here.

RETTA. Doesn't she annoy you?

MRS. A. (*carelessly*). I never think of her, and seldom see her. Most of her meals are served in her room. Of late years she has been a creature of her own fancies.

RETTA (*eagerly*). Then her testimony would not be regarded?

MRS. A. Hardly.

RETTA. She was talking to a man this morning, a rough looking man with a cap pulled over his face. And she gave him a suit case to carry away.

MRS. A. Probably one of her numerous charities.

RETTA. I want to be sure.

MRS. A. Then call her in and ask her. She's out in

the garden. (*Pauses.*) We are having a dinner to-night.

RETTA (*rising*). No!

MRS. A. Why not?

RETTA. So soon?

MRS. A. The sooner, the better.

RETTA. But something will happen. (*Crosses R. of table.*)

MRS. A. Nothing will happen. (*After a moment.*) Be on your guard tonight, Retta, and it will be all over. Then—a long cruise, a winter abroad, and everything forgotten.

RETTA. But I can never forget! (*Again hysterical.*) I'm afraid! I'm afraid!

CONSTANCE *appears at the French window, as delicate, as dainty and as fragile as a flower. A filmy shawl is around her shoulders. Her hair is just touched with gray, and in her hand she carries a cluster of red and yellow autumn leaves.*

MRS. A. Won't you join us, Constance? (*As she goes forward to meet her.*) You remind me of a very lovely autumn that follows a dewy spring and a rainbow summer.

CONSTANCE. I am autumn only in years and thoughts, Edith. The gorgeous coloring is for you. See, you might easily be a sovereign in the rich red glow of dreams realized—in the golden sunshine of love and friendship. (*And she touches the leaves in turn.*)

MRS. A. Pretty fancies, as usual. (*Returns to desk.*)

CONSTANCE. As one grows older, she lives with fancies, and memories. The fancies come and go, but the memories stay. (*Stands back of chair at C.*)

MRS. A. Even the sad memories?

CONSTANCE. Sad memories must be interwoven with

happy ones, Edith. Grief never stings. It is only conscience that turns the dagger in the heart! (*Is it imagination, or does she look at RETTA?*)

MRS. A. (*hastily*). Why talk of gruesome things when we are celebrating Tony's return?

CONSTANCE. Tony is not here.

MRS. A. Why, Constance, he came last night. I told you early this morning. Surely you remember. (*Sits at desk.*)

CONSTANCE (*quietly*). Tony is not here.

MRS. A. He'll be down in a few moments, and you may see for yourself.

CONSTANCE (*as if to herself*). Does one ever see the heart? (*Unconsciously Mrs. ALLISON shrinks away.*)

RETTA (*with an effort*). Who was the man with whom you were talking this morning, Miss Constance?

CONSTANCE. A friend whom I could help.

MRS. A. There are so many who depend upon you for just that help, Constance. Doesn't it weary you?

CONSTANCE. This man needed a friend. (*And she moves toward the hall.*)

MRS. A. Where are you going?

CONSTANCE. To place the leaves where Tony can see them when he comes.

MRS. A. But Tony is here.

CONSTANCE (*as if she had not heard*). When he comes. (*And she leaves by the French window.*)

RETTA. What did I tell you, Edith?

MRS. A. Imagination! Remember that Constance lives to herself. Her conversation is strange. She is not like us.

RETTA. But she sees what we don't see, she hears what we don't hear. She knows! She knows!

ANTHONY. Knows what?

*He has entered from hall door L. during RETTA's speech, and stands in the archway. He is, as far as features are concerned, the mysterious visitor of Hal-
lowe'en.*

MRS. A. Nothing of any importance. Did you sleep well, Tony?

ANTHONY. Like a top. (*As he glances around.*) All set for the first act, I see. (*Crosses to C.*) Well, let's be sure of the cast of characters before we go any farther. There's Aunt Edith—(*with a laugh*).

MRS. A. Hush, Tony!

ANTHONY. Aunt Constance, and Cousin Retta. (*Draws RETTA to him.*) How do you like that, Retta, old girl?

RETTA. Be careful, Tony—the servants.

MRS. A. Listen. (*And she speaks in a low, emphatic tone.*) We are having a dinner tonight to celebrate your return. You will meet Judge Lennox, the family lawyer, Ralph Overton, a young journalist, with whom you play golf at the Country Club, and Peggy Palmer, whom you have known since your childhood.

ANTHONY. Am I in love with Peggy?

MRS. A. Certainly not!

ANTHONY. Any reason why I shouldn't be? (*And he stretches himself luxuriously in the large chair L. of table.*)

MRS. A. (*sharply*). None of that.

ANTHONY (*taking out a cigarette*). Hand me a light, Retta. Forgot my match safe. (*She does so.*) And toss me the paper, Aunt Edith—(*again the laugh*) I want to look at myself! (*Opens the paper which Mrs. ALLISON hands him.*) Pretty good likeness for a newspaper shot, isn't it?

Mrs. A. If you read the accompanying article, you will find a mention made of Anthony Allison's reserve of manner and polish of speech. (*Scats herself again at desk.*)

ANTHONY (*tossing away the paper*). Don't want to read anything, too tired. (*Yawns.*) Gee, it's good to be back at this sort of thing, good to know that it's yours to keep!

RETTA (*who is sitting R. of table*). Don't say *that*, Tony, until you know, until you're sure.

ANTHONY. *Know?* Don't I already know? *Sure?* Has fate ever dealt me a losing hand? "Nothing venture, nothing have." It's a pretty good old motto, Retta, and it's proved a pretty good old pal.

Mrs. A. (*who has been scanning time tables*). Tony, I'm planning to leave Thursday night.

ANTHONY. Thursday night. Just a week from the date of my disappearance. Thursday's all right with me.

Mrs. A. And we can make the steamer sailing on the tenth.

ANTHONY. Sailing where?

Mrs. A. For France.

ANTHONY (*losing some of his languor*). France! Then that means Paris, Retta. Paris!

RETTA (*rising*). No, no.

ANTHONY (*rising and crossing to C.*). With an adventure around every corner, a smile on the face of every pretty girl you meet, a good fellow always ready to clink a glass with you! Lights, excitement, music, color— That's Paris! That's life! (*Draws RETTA to him.*)

RETTA. Let's go to some quiet little place. Please, Tony. Please, Edith.

MRS. A. (*warningly*). Aunt Edith, Retta.

ANTHONY. Quiet little place! What's the matter with you, Retta? And what chance has a big bankroll in a quiet little place?

MRS. A. (*coming to him and placing her hand on his shoulder*). We'll go anywhere you say, Tony; anywhere. It's for your happiness, your pleasure, and you shall have no wish ungratified. It's what I've dreamed of, worked for. And it's come at last.

ANTHONY (*pushing her aside*). Cut out the heroics—and get me another light, Retta. My cigarette's out. (*Sits again in large chair.*)

BARBARA *enters from hall with the manuscript. She hesitates as she sees that Mrs. Allison is not alone. RETTA sits L. of table.*

MRS. A. It's quite all right, Miss Ferguson. Please come in. (*As she advances.*) May I present my stepson, Mr. Allison? (ANTHONY *gazes at her frankly—almost insolently—but there is no sign of recognition on his part as he acknowledges the introduction—without rising. Barbara bows slightly in return—if her heart is beating a bit faster no one is the wiser—and goes to the desk.*) Miss Ferguson is my private secretary.

ANTHONY. And what need have you for a private secretary?

MRS. A. Your father's autobiography. Miss Ferguson is preparing it for publication. (*To BARBARA.*) Right here is a paragraph which may prove confusing. Wouldn't it be better to shift it to the preface? (*And they talk together in low tones.*)

ANTHONY (*to RETTA*). Where did you get her?

RETTA. She's a friend of Peggy Palmer (*hesitates*). It was her home I entered that night when—Oh! I told you—

ANTHONY. Has she caught on to anything?

RETTA. Why should she?

MRS. A. (*turning*). Such beautiful weather, and here we sit! Come with me, Tony, and I'll prove that your hunting lodge hasn't a monopoly of color and foliage. And then you may be off to business.

ANTHONY. No business for me today. (*But he rises and follows her to the French window.*) Come along, Retta! (*And with an apologetic nod and smile at BARBARA, RETTA joins him.*)

MRS. A. (*as RETTA and ANTHONY pass through the window*). And Miss Ferguson?

BARBARA. Yes, Mrs. Allison?

MRS. A. While you are at the telephone, will you make three reservations on the eastern train for Thursday night?

BARBARA. Certainly.

MRS. A. We are leaving for a short trip. But in my absence your work will continue. (*Goes off L.*)

BARBARA *is puzzled, excited and a bit angry, and for a few moments she is busy with her own thoughts. Then she looks in the telephone book, takes down the receiver and is about to interview central when galloping hoofs are heard approaching. She replaces the receiver and turns in time to see Crescent Moon dash up to the window. Guiding his destinies is FREDERICKA, very boyish, very determined and very dashing in her trim riding suit. (If impracticable to show horse through window, this action may be merely suggested.)*

BARBARA (*startled*). Freddie! (*Rises.*)

FRED. (*waving her crop*). Stay right where you are. I'll come to you. (*And off she jumps, giving Crescent Moon's nose an understanding rub.*)

BARBARA. Is Larry—

FRED. Larry's all right, and Tom's all right, and I'm all right. No domestic disaster has forced me to make a Paul Revere of myself. (*Whereupon she comes closer and delivers with great gusto the weighty words.*) He's gone!

BARBARA (*after a moment*). Well—I rather expected it.

FRED. Expected it? Perhaps you also expected him to go—as he did go—without a word—without a sign?

BARBARA. Was it reasonable to hope for any demonstration, when he wasn't quite himself? (*Sits at desk.*)

FRED. He was himself last night when Larry and I took him his dinner.

BARBARA. What do you mean?

FRED. I mean that he was absolutely normal. He asked all sorts of questions, and wanted the newspapers for three days back.

BARBARA. Why didn't you tell me?

FRED. I thought it would be better to wait until this morning, and to be sure that all his sense had come back.

BARBARA. That wasn't wise, Freddie.

FRED. I don't know why it wasn't wise. Larry and I have been the chief purveyors of food and water. Surely it was our affair.

BARBARA. Did he mention me?

FRED. *You?* No, why should he? But he seemed tremendously interested in Larry and me. (*Pauses.*) I talked a lot.

BARBARA (*sharply*). Talked? About what?

FRED. (*shrugging her shoulders*). How should I remember? Anyway, he liked it. (*Angrily.*) And now he's off, leaving nothing but that old bloody handkerchief. It all goes to prove what I've told you over

and over again. That all men are snares—and cheats—and deceivers!

BARBARA. Not all of them, Freddie.

FRED. Every woman has an exception, I suppose. I have two exceptions—Tom and Larry.

BARBARA. Some day you'll have another.

FRED. No, I sha'n't. And to think of the time I've wasted on him, the food I've carried him, the—(*Sits R. of table.*)

BARBARA. Don't rave, Freddie. He's here.

FRED. *Here?*

BARBARA. He happens to be Anthony Allison, who disappeared so mysteriously and who came back this morning just as mysteriously. (*And she flaunts before FREDERICKA's eyes the long suffering paper, which lies where ANTHONY has thrown it.*) And whose memory, doubtless, is just as good as yours and mine.

FRED. (*after glancing through the paper*). You knew this all along?

BARBARA. I suspected it.

FRED. And didn't tell me?

BARBARA (*in imitation of FREDERICKA's shrug*). Why should I?

FRED. To think that I didn't find it out for myself: and after I'd read about the disappearance, too. (*Crumpling the paper.*) I hate for anybody to put anything over on me! (*Rises.*)

BARBARA. Watch out! That paper is Allison property.

FRED. Are you *sure* it's the man?

BARBARA. Absolutely sure. I met him, not fifteen minutes ago.

FRED. Did he recognize you?

BARBARA. Not by the flicker of an eyelash.

FRED. And after all you've done for him. (*Pauses.*)
I hate him!

BARBARA. It is rather a peculiar situation, isn't it?
Especially since he vows he's been at his hunting lodge.

FRED. (*disgustedly*). And to think I cut school—for
this!

BARBARA. Again! Oh, Fredericka! It's the third
time in a month. What am I to do with you?

FRED. Do nothing. (*Comes to her.*) For I've had
perfectly worth while reasons every time, and breaking
a few rules and regulations keeps me from being a
standardized product of the educational system. You
wouldn't want me to be a standardized product, Bob.
Now, would you?

BARBARA. I'm afraid I haven't been wise in advising
you, or in disciplining you. Sometimes you worry me
dreadfully, Freddie.

FRED. (*coming closer*). Now listen to me, Bob, and
don't you ever forget what I tell you. I say a lot that
I mean and a lot that I don't mean, and I vow I'll do a
lot that I'll never do. For down in my heart I know
what's right and what's good, and there's never a bit of
need in worrying about me. (*After a moment.*) Do
you believe me? (*Places her arm around BARBARA'S
shoulder.*)

BARBARA. Of course I believe you.

FRED. Then I'll be off again, and if Crescent Moon
lives up to his record, we'll be on time for *Arma virum-
que cano*. (*Runs to window and turns.*) I sing of
arms and a man! Quite appropriate, isn't it, Bob?
And if we could—(*She stops and gazes intently before
her and ANTHONY, sauntering into view, looks toward
Crescent Moon.*)

ANTHONY. Pretty horse.

FRED. (*curtly*). I think so. He's mine. (*And she looks so closely at him that he feels the scrutiny.*)

ANTHONY. Have I ever met you before?

FRED. (*slowly*). I don't think so! (*And still she gazes intently.*)

ANTHONY (*vainly endeavoring to make friends with Crescent Moon*). Your horse doesn't seem to like me.

FRED. He's very particular in choosing his friends.

ANTHONY (*good naturedly*). Then in that case I'd better be off. (*And he departs whistling.*)

FRED. (*watches him out of sight, then turns.*) Bob!

BARBARA. Oh, Freddie, you were impertinent!

FRED. Impertinent! What do I care! (*Runs back to BARBARA.*) Why, Bob, you're crazy, *crazy!* There's not a sign of any wound upon his head. And even if there were, I'd know that he isn't the man. (*Pauses.*) He isn't the man, Bob!

And the curtain falls for a few moments, in order to indicate the passage of a few hours. When it rises, JUDGE LENNOX, at R. of table, RALPH at C., TOM, in desk chair, and ANTHONY, L. of table, are seated in the sun room enjoying the pipe of peace. The French window is closed and the lamps are lighted.

RALPH. Then to what do you attribute this so-called wave of crime, Judge Lennox?

JUDGE LENNOX. To idleness, for one thing. To inflated prices, for another. And (*with a laugh*), chiefly to original sin!

RALPH. Which we all possess in fullest measure. And, even if we escape the law we're pretty apt to fasten it on the other fellow. Why, Tony, a few days ago I was doing my best to hold somebody responsible for your disappearance!

ANTHONY. But why should anyone be interested in effecting my disappearance.

RALPH. Foolish question, Tony. Think of your wealth.

ANTHONY. I *am* thinking of it!

RALPH. And what a ransom you could pay to a desperate bandit.

ANTHONY. Well, if any fellow could pull off a clever stunt like that and get the best of me, I'd deserve to disappear and to lose my money, every cent of it! A man who can't hold on to his dollars might as well pass them on to one who can. (*There is an awkward pause.*)

JUDGE. That statement is hardly compatible with your ideas of morality and justice, Tony. For your generous sentiment in regard to the wise disposition of your inheritance has hitherto distinguished you from most young men of equal wealth and position.

ANTHONY. In what respect am I different?

JUDGE. In that you are always willing to aid any worthy cause. That is why I have no hesitancy tonight in asking you for a generous subscription to head the fund for the suffering masses in Europe.

ANTHONY (*after a moment*). Sorry, Judge, but I can't help you out.

JUDGE. Surely I misunderstand you.

ANTHONY. No you don't. I need my money for schemes of my own and I can't spare a cent at present: not a cent. (*Roughly.*) Why should we be mixed up in these European affairs, anyway? The people brought it upon themselves. Now let them get out of it.

JUDGE (*rising and finding it difficult to control his surprise and indignation*). Suppose that America had taken such a stand when Europe so desperately needed help in the world war?

ANTHONY. Perhaps we shouldn't have had so many worthless soldiers idling around and expecting the world to give them a living!

TOM (*has been growing restless and more restless. Now he can restrain himself no longer. He rises*). I am a stranger to this city, Mr. Allison, a stranger to you and a guest in your home. Nevertheless, as an ex-service man and a witness of what happened "over there," I resent your statement. And what's more, I declare it a direct and an absolute untruth.

ANTHONY (*rises angrily*). You've insulted me, Ferguson. (*Crosses to TOM.*)

TOM. But you've insulted America!

RALPH (*quickly stepping to TOM's side*). Never mind, Tom. Tony isn't quite himself tonight.

JUDGE. And as a winner of the Croix de Guerre, he could hardly be disloyal to his country.

Fortunately at this moment, PEGGY appears at the hall door. Under her arm is a ouija board.

PEGGY. Aren't you ever going to join us? (*Comes to C.*) Surely you've smoked your old cigars by this time. What have you been talking about, anyway?

JUDGE. The wave of crime, for one thing. Any suggestions?

PEGGY. Only the request that you criminal lawyers won't go on a strike and leave us in the lurch.

JUDGE. We promise.

And before PEGGY can answer, MRS. ALLISON, RETTA and BARBARA enter from L.

MRS. A. What chance has a woman when a good cigar is rival! So we forget our pride and come to you. (*Comes down R. with JUDGE.*)

PEGGY. Why, we've even been forced to amuse our-

selves with the ouija board. (*Holding out the board.*)
Who'll test fate with me?

JUDGE. Not I. Ouija has long since been consigned to the Ananias Club.

PEGGY. Ralph? (*RALPH stands by BARBARA, who is on settee.*)

RALPH. And endanger my professional reputation? not much!

TOM. I'm in no mood for ouija. (*Stands back stage with RETTA.*)

PEGGY. Oh, aren't you?

ANTHONY. Well, I am. Come along, Peggy, and give me a chance to hold your hand. (*TOM glares.*)

PEGGY (*in surprise*). And this from the dignified Tony! Why, I didn't suppose that you'd ever hold anybody's hand. (*Sits L. of table.*)

ANTHONY. Then it's time to begin, isn't it? (*Draws chair from R. of table close to her.*)

(*And while they laughingly arrange for the ouija test, JUDGE LENNOX draws MRS. ALLISON aside.*)

JUDGE. Mrs. Allison, I'm worried about Tony.

MRS. A. Worried! In what way?

JUDGE. Something is wrong. He's changed; and tonight he has made some very reckless and dangerous statements.

MRS. A. Oh, I was afraid of it.

JUDGE. Then you've noticed, too, that he is different?

MRS. A. I have. He's not himself. He broods over things. He has been working too hard. That's why I am planning to go east with him immediately. The change may be of benefit. And my niece, who accompanies us, will help to amuse him.

JUDGE. That relieves my mind. I couldn't quite understand why—

PEGGY (*calling*). Mrs. Allison!

MRS. A. Yes? (*Crosses to PEGGY and ANTHONY, followed by JUDGE.*)

PEGGY. Tony says that he believes in ouija.

ANTHONY. I do. I honestly do.

MRS. A. Tony is joking, as usual.

ANTHONY. I'm not joking. Ouija told me a lot of things that are really so, and I never make any sort of a plan without going to a fortune teller.

MRS. A. (*sharply*). You can't expect us to believe all that nonsense, Tony. Come, Peggy; what is to be the fateful question? (*RALPH and BARBARA come slowly down R.*)

PEGGY. Let me see. (*As they place their hands upon the board.*) Oh, I know. (*Then in a very serious tone.*) What happened on Hallowe'en?

RALPH (*in the meantime has drawn BARBARA to front stage*). Anthony Allison is a changed man. Something has happened to him, Bob.

BARBARA (*smiling provokingly*). Even journalists are sometimes stupid. (*Lays her fan upon the desk.*)

RALPH. What do you mean?

BARBARA. Are you sure that he is Anthony Allison?

RALPH (*after gazing steadily at her for a moment*). Do you think——?

PEGGY (*in a very startled tone*). Why, Tony!

ANTHONY. What's the matter?

PEGGY. Where's your scar?

ANTHONY. What scar?

PEGGY. The scar I gave you. Surely you remember.

MRS. A. (*hastily*). Scars don't always last, Peggy.

PEGGY. But this has always been very plain. I can't understand.

TOM (*sarcastically*). Perhaps he has been to a beauty doctor.

RETTA (*who has made her way to the door at L.*). Are you all so infatuated with ouija that you haven't time for me? I've some fetching French songs that I'm anxious to try if I may bribe you to be audience for a few moments.

RALPH. No bribe is necessary, is it, Barbara?

BARBARA. Hardly. (*BARBARA and RALPH pass out L. as RETTA holds the curtain.*)

RETTA. And the songs are worth listening to, aren't they, Aunt Edith?

MRS. A. Indeed they are. Come, Peggy. You and Tony can continue the séance later on.

PEGGY. Surely.

RETTA. And Tony! I'm waiting for you! (*ANTHONY joins RETTA and they pass out L. together.*)

MRS. A. Judge, I am anxious for your opinion of Retta's voice. We think she shows great talent, and while we are in New York, we intend to—(*She and the JUDGE pass out L., talking as they go.*)

TOM (*barring PEGGY's way*). What do you care about hearing that old music?

PEGGY. I just adore French songs, even if I can't understand them.

TOM. Just the way I feel about you.

PEGGY. There's Barbara's fan. (*She starts toward the fan which BARBARA has left on the desk.*) I'll take it to her.

TOM. No, you won't take it to her. She doesn't need it. (*Pauses.*) Look here, Peg, I've asked you

three times this evening to see me alone and every time you've said, "In a minute."

PEGGY. Well you should be glad that I say the same thing each time. It shows stability of mind. (*From the other room comes the echo of RETTA's songs.*)

TOM. You've been entirely too busy with your friend, Anthony Allison.

PEGGY. What about you and the visiting vamp? (*Stands back of chair at C.*)

TOM. Nonsense. (*Follows her.*)

PEGGY (*demurely*). Of course, Tony is very attentive tonight.

TOM. He's a cad, that's what he is!

PEGGY. Remember, you're speaking of a very dear friend.

TOM. I take great pleasure in repeating, he's a cad!

PEGGY. How dare you! Why, I've known him for years. We played together when we were children.

TOM. I don't care how long you've known him, how often you've played together, nor how many times you've bitten him. He's a cad!

PEGGY (*eagerly*). How could that scar disappear, Tom? How could it?

TOM. I can't keep track of the disappearances in this family. (*Softly.*) What I'm interested in is the re-appearance of Peggy.

PEGGY. Peggy came back on Hallowe'en.

TOM. But she's been so elusive ever since, that it hasn't meant much to me.

PEGGY. Better improve the present moment then.

TOM. Exactly. (*Thrusts her into the chair and sits on the arm. A long silence follows.*)

PEGGY. Is this your idea of improving the present moment?

TOM. No, it isn't.

PEGGY. Well?

TOM. How can I do very much with the present until I know what the future holds?

PEGGY. What do you want it to hold?

TOM. You.

PEGGY (*rising*). Don't you think it a bit foolish to leave it entirely to the future?

TOM. Peggy! (*And the irony of fate decrees that at this touching moment there should come a noise at the French window, a noise as if some one were attempting to open it, while across the room falls a shadow.*)

PEGGY. Look, Tom! Look! Someone at the window! (*And as TOM springs to the window and she follows him, the shadow disappears.*) There he is! (*Points.*) There, where the light falls upon the driveway. (*Pauses.*) Why, it's Tony!

TOM. Tony! Nonsense. The man has an overcoat and hat.

PEGGY. There! He's gone! It was Tony, Tom! It was! (*At C.*)

TOM. Well, if he desires to ramble over his own grounds it's no business of ours. (*Goes back to her.*) What do we care about Anthony Allison anyway, Peggy? What do we care?

PEGGY. Nothing in the world, Tom, absolutely nothing. (*And fate interferes again. This time the telephone rings.*)

TOM. Must I answer it?

PEGGY. Answer it? Of course. (*And TOM, much against his will, makes his way to the telephone. While his back is turned PEGGY tiptoes to the archway and disappears.*)

TOM. Hello * * * This is Mrs. Allison's home

* * * What's that? * * * Certainly, I'll give him the message. * * * Let me get that straight * * * Yes. The office wants him immediately. I'll tell him. (*Hangs up receiver.*) What do you suppose Ralph's newspaper wants with him at this time of night? (*Turns.*) Great heavens—she's gone again! (*And he follows her.*)

As TOM turns, CONSTANCE appears at the doorway. R., and when TOM has left the room she hurries to the French window, opens it and steps outside. In a moment she is joined by ANTHONY, whom she draws into the room. Over his dinner coat is flung a light overcoat and he carries a soft hat in his hand.

CONSTANCE. It's the very first chance I've had, Tony. The room has been occupied all evening.

ANTHONY. I know. I've watched. Only a moment ago I tried the window. (*Pauses.*) What could I have done without you, Aunt Constance?

CONSTANCE. I've been waiting all these years, Tony, to hear you say that.

ANTHONY. Then I've been a thoughtless sort of a fellow and I haven't shown what I really feel; for all I am I owe to you.

CONSTANCE. I loved your mother, Tony. And her last word to me was to love her boy. Since that day, all my happiness has been centered in you.

ANTHONY. And now all my future depends upon you.

CONSTANCE. You are in danger?

ANTHONY. Not enough to worry about.

CONSTANCE. You will be careful?

ANTHONY. I promise you.

CONSTANCE. I'm frightened, Tony. You seem my very own boy.

ANTHONY. I am your own boy. (*Impulsively.*) Oh, why couldn't my father have chosen you instead of the other one!

CONSTANCE. Your father could do no wrong, Tony. Remember that.

ANTHONY (*suddenly understanding*). Then you cared for him?

CONSTANCE. I think I have always cared. (*BARBARA'S laugh comes through the archway and she is heard to say, "Wait until I find my fan."*) That is Miss Ferguson (*as she sees the fan*), and she is coming here.

ANTHONY (*thrusting his hat and coat into her hands*). Then let me see her alone. Wait for me in the little study. (*And very gently he guides her through the door R.*)

BARBARA *enters from the hall and crosses to the table. ANTHONY is standing at the back of the room. She takes the fan and is about to go when ANTHONY advances.*

ANTHONY. Miss Ferguson.

BARBARA (*in surprise*). Why, Mr. Allison! You startled me. I saw you but a moment ago in the drawing room. (*And again, she starts through the door.*)

ANTHONY. I have something to say to you.

BARBARA. Anything you may say can hardly be of interest to me. You will excuse me?

ANTHONY. Please listen. (*Pauses.*) If only for the memory—of the other night.

BARBARA. You are rather slow in remembering the other night.

ANTHONY. On the contrary, every word, every incident, is imprinted upon my heart. (*They stand at C.*)

BARBARA. Then—today has been something of a masquerade?

ANTHONY. Life is a masquerade, isn't it?

BARBARA. Perhaps so.

ANTHONY. We seldom show our real selves. We seldom share our deepest emotions. (*Pauses.*) That is why I have no words to tell you how much your help has meant to me.

BARBARA. Are you quite yourself again?

ANTHONY. Quite. Last night after that terrible indescribable period of oblivion my memory came back in time to be of service to me.

BARBARA. I'm glad, oh so very glad!

ANTHONY. I left without a word of appreciation—of gratitude. Is your understanding great enough to pardon this?

BARBARA (*after a pause*). I'm sure it is.

ANTHONY. Do you think you can trust me a little longer? Until I may tell you everything?

BARBARA. Haven't I trusted you from the very first?

ANTHONY. You have been everything to me; everything!

BARBARA. Then your pledge of gratitude becomes my pledge of friendship, of understanding. (*Takes the ring from her gown.*) Your ring. (*Pauses.*) Will you wear it?

ANTHONY. Always. (*And he slips on the ring and takes both her hands.*) For if it brings me so much in the present, perhaps it will promise me even more in the future. (*And he kisses her hand.*)

Outside the door MRS. ALLISON *is heard calling, "Miss Ferguson."* BARBARA *looks questioningly at ANTHONY but he nods and passes to the back of the room.*

BARBARA. Yes, Mrs. Allison. Here. (*As Mrs. ALLISON enters with memorandum in hand.*) I've been hunting for my fan.

MRS. A. I won't detain you a moment, my dear. It's only to remind you that a copy of this list which Judge Lennox has just given me is your first duty for tomorrow. I shall probably not be down until after you arrive, so I wish to make a note of it tonight.

BARBARA. I shall give it my attention first of all, Mrs. Allison.

(*Mrs. A. seats herself at the desk, places the memorandum on file and BARBARA passes out L., not without a backward glance at ANTHONY, who comes slowly down the stage.*)

MRS. A. (*glancing around*). Tony! I thought you were with Peggy.

ANTHONY. Perhaps I was.

MRS. A. But you tired of her and followed Miss Ferguson, I presume. Up to your old tricks? Well, drop them. Nothing must interfere with my plans.

ANTHONY. And what *are* your plans?

MRS. A. You know what they are; to leave as soon as possible. After your actions tonight and your reckless speeches, the departure cannot be made too soon. You will—(*and as her eyes note the ring on his finger she stops abruptly, almost terror-stricken*). Where did you find that ring?

ANTHONY (*carelessly*). Along with the rest of the inheritance.

MRS. A. But I saw it! That last day—I saw it!

ANTHONY. In dreams, perhaps.

MRS. ALLISON turns again to the desk. She is very nervous but manages to write a few words upon the

envelope which she then places in the drawer. ANTHONY immediately passes quietly through the door on the right of the stage. For a moment or so there is no sound but the scratching of Mrs. Allison's pen. When she again raises her eyes ANTHONY is standing in the archway that leads to the hall.

ANTHONY. I'm through with that crowd in there. Peggy Palmer bores me to death. Retta gets on my nerves.

Mrs. ALLISON. So you thought you'd try Miss Ferguson. As I told you before, it won't do.

ANTHONY. Miss Ferguson? The girl won't look at me.

Mrs. A. Don't be foolish, Tony. I heard you talking to her as I entered.

ANTHONY. Entered where?

Mrs. A. Here, of course.

ANTHONY. But I've just come in.

Mrs. A. What do you mean?

ANTHONY. I've just come in. What else *could* I mean?

Mrs. A. (*rising and speaking excitedly as she catches his hand*). Where is your ring?

ANTHONY. What ring?

Mrs. A. The ring you wore a moment ago.

ANTHONY. I don't know what you mean. I haven't a ring. Never have had one. (*As Mrs. Allison staggers a bit.*) What on earth is the matter with you?

Mrs. A. (*weakly*). I'm faint—and tired. I'll get some water—and rest a bit. (*And she leaves the room at L.*)

(ANTHONY gazes after her bewilderedly, then yawns and is about to sink into the big arm chair when an arm shoots out from the doorway on the right, touches the

switch and extinguishes the lights, leaving the stage in perfect darkness.)

ANTHONY (*in terror*). What's this? Who are you?
(*Someone laughs and a mocking voice replies, "I wonder." Another person takes the part of the real ANTHONY during the struggle in the dark, and of the impostor when ANTHONY lights the match. The regular player talks for both.*)

ANTHONY. I'll call for help.

VOICE. Oh no you won't. Outside that window there are those who are waiting for my signal.

(*There is the sound of a scuffle, a falling body, and then a match flares; while one sees ANTHONY, the real ANTHONY, as he strikes a match and gazes down at his victim.*)

CURTAIN.

THE EMPTY HOUSE

THE THIRD ACT.

SCENE: *Same as ACT I. On the window seat are flung FREDERICKA'S bright sweater and tam and LARRY'S cap. The morning sunshine streaming through the window brings into strong relief an impromptu breakfast party. Around a small table or tea cart in the center of the room are gathered ANTHONY, facing audience; FREDERICKA, on R., and LARRY, on L., FREDERICKA presiding over a mammoth coffee pot. Three straight chairs are used around the table.*

LARRY. And you left him in the very same room?

ANTHONY. In the very same room where they left me.

LARRY. Is he hurt?

ANTHONY. Not a bit. Just scared.

LARRY. That's not fair. He ought to be beaten up, just as you were.

FRED. With a bloody handkerchief around his head.

LARRY. Gosh, but I was surprised when you whistled to us this morning!

FRED. So was I. I certainly never expected to see you again at that window.

ANTHONY. Bully of you to give me some breakfast.

FRED. We like you, Tony. You don't mind if I call you Tony, do you?

ANTHONY. I should say not. (*Leans toward her.*) You don't mind if I call you Freddie, do you?

FRED. I like it. (*Very impressively, after a pause.*) I was the one who discovered that he wasn't you.

ANTHONY. Of course you were. You've been the best sort of pal to me.

FRED. And I'll keep on being a pal if you want me.

ANTHONY. You bet I do.

FRED. (*holding out her hand*). Then shake.

ANTHONY (*retaining her hand*). What did you think of me when I left without any sort of message, without a word of thanks?

FRED. What did I think? That you were just like all the rest of the men.

LARRY. Will it all be in the papers?

ANTHONY. Not if I can keep it out.

LARRY. That's not fair, either. I want to see my name in print.

FRED. Larry just craves notoriety. When he had scarlet fever, he wouldn't let us take down the sign until he had had a chance to see it.

ANTHONY. But it's hardly a story for the newspapers.

FRED. And it isn't finished yet. When is it to be finished, Tony?

ANTHONY. As soon as Ralph comes.

FRED. And where?

ANTHONY (*motioning to the window across the way*). Over there, I imagine.

FRED. Why not here?

ANTHONY. That's out of the question.

FRED. And why?

ANTHONY. Because family difficulties are not usually settled in other people's drawing rooms.

LARRY. This isn't a drawing room. It's just an apartment.

FRED. Larry and I want to be in at the finish; please, Tony.

LARRY. Barbara isn't here. And we're not going to school, are we, Freddie?

FRED. School? I should say not! We're making history today, Larry, not studying it.

ANTHONY. Aren't you supposed to be at school?

FRED. Of course.

ANTHONY. Then do you think it is quite square to stay away?

FRED. (*squirring uneasily*). Don't put it that way.

LARRY. And anyway, it isn't the first time we've cut.

ANTHONY. That isn't the point. Is it the fair thing to do?

FRED. (*after a moment*). I don't suppose it is. You've spoiled everything, Tony.

LARRY. But, Freddie——

FRED. Now, Larry, don't argue it. (*In a tone of finality.*) We are going to school.

ANTHONY. That's a good fellow. (*Pats LARRY on shoulder.*)

FRED. (*rising and dramatically brandishing the coffee pot*). But I did so want to be a part of the excitement, to have a hand in unraveling all the mysteries and to be a moulder of human destiny! (*Suddenly remembering her duties as hostess.*) Let me pour you some more coffee, Tony. (*Sits.*)

ANTHONY. Please. (*After a pause.*) That poor fellow over there hasn't had a bit of breakfast.

FRED. He doesn't deserve any.

ANTHONY. That's pretty cruel.

FRED. If feeding a man is the way to his heart, starving him may help to find his conscience.

LARRY. Let's beat him up.

FRED. Hit a fellow when he's down? Oh, Larry!

LARRY. But he hasn't lost a thing; not even his memory.

ANTHONY. I imagine he is a bit strong on memory just at present.

In the meantime FREDERICKA has crossed to the door at R. She opens it quickly, and there stands NORA.

NORA. An' sure, Miss Freddie, I was just a thinkin' you'd be needin' me.

FRED. So you listened to make sure.

NORA. I wasn't a-listenin'. I was just a-comin' in.

FRED. (*returning to table*). And I was just about to ask you to fix a tray.

NORA (*who has followed FREDERICKA into the room, and is gazing languishingly at ANTHONY*). Yes, Miss Freddie.

FRED. With grapefruit and toast and plenty of coffee.

NORA (*still absent-mindedly*). Yes, Miss Freddie.

FRED. (*impatiently*). You're not hearing a word I say.

NORA (*mechanically*). Grapefruit—toast—and plenty of coffee. Yes, Miss Freddie. (*And still she lingers.*)

FRED. Well?

NORA. Is it for the gentleman?

FRED. No, it isn't. It's for someone outside.

NORA. Holy saints! Is the hospital next door a-startin' up again?

FRED. Never you mind about anything but that tray.

NORA (*half to herself, as she pauses by the window*). Sure an' I'm a-thinkin' that the evil eye keeps a glarin' at us from over there! (*And she passes out R.*)

ANTHONY. So Barbara isn't here?

FRED. Stayed all night with Peggy, and went to work from there.

ANTHONY. Does she ever mention me?

FRED. No. Why should she?

ANTHONY. Oh, I thought perhaps—she had said something.

FRED. (*after due reflection*). That's funny.

ANTHONY. What's funny?

FRED. She asked if you had ever mentioned her.

ANTHONY. What did you tell her?

FRED. I said, "No, why should he?"

LARRY (*who has been lost in reflection*). Tony, are you married?

ANTHONY. No such luck.

LARRY. Luck? People don't always call it luck, do they?

ANTHONY. That depends.

LARRY. Well, wouldn't you like to be married?

ANTHONY. That depends, too.

LARRY. I know of a perfectly bully girl.

ANTHONY. Who?

LARRY. My sister.

ANTHONY. Fredericka?

LARRY. Well, I should say not. Freddie's never going to marry.

FRED. How do you know?

LARRY. You said so.

FRED. Well that was three days ago. I reckon I have a right to change my mind.

LARRY. I mean Barbara.

ANTHONY. Oh, I see! Why are you so anxious to get rid of her?

LARRY (*impressively*). Her captivity means our freedom.

ANTHONY. But I shouldn't be that sort of a husband.

LARRY. Husbands are all alike. They may look dif-

ferent, but they aren't. Any woman can shut her eyes and grab. And the one she grabs will be just like the one she doesn't grab.

ANTHONY. That's rather a remarkable sentiment.

LARRY. Freddie said so.

FRED. That was three days ago.

ANTHONY. What does Barbara say concerning your plans for her welfare?

LARRY. Oh, she doesn't know.

FRED. And she'd make just a wonderful wife, Tony. (*But in some way or other the former enthusiasm in regard to BARBARA'S captivity is lacking. She turns in her chair, facing audience.*)

LARRY. What's the matter with you, Freddie? You don't act as if you wanted Barbara to marry.

FRED. Of course I want her to marry.

ANTHONY (*thoughtfully*). Well, the proposition is worth considering, anyway.

FRED. She might not like you, Tony. (*Turns.*)

ANTHONY (*half to himself*). I've been wondering about that very thing.

FRED. And you'd be disappointed if she didn't, wouldn't you?

ANTHONY. Well, nobody likes to be in the discard.

FRED. (*very determinedly, as she leans toward him*). I've never thought of myself in a domestic role, Tony. It doesn't appeal to me. But rather than have you disappointed, I'll sacrifice all my principles.

ANTHONY. You mean—

FRED. If Bob won't have you—I will!

ANTHONY. What a wonderful little pal you are! (*After a moment.*) Suppose I should ask you—first?

FRED. (*after a struggle with her principles*). I think I'd like it.

LARRY. Why, Fredericka Ferguson, you've gone back on every single thing you've ever said!

FRED. Oh no, I haven't. Tony is just my third exception. That's all!

And NORA enters from R. bringing the covered tray which ANTHONY takes as he rises.

NORA. Sure and there's enough toast for a regiment.

FRED. That's all right. Now clear off this table and put it away. We're off to school. (*As she speaks she slips into her sweater, dons her tam and catches up her books. LARRY takes his cap and follows ANTHONY and FREDERICKA out through the hall.*)

NORA (*left to herself, makes several trips back and forth, removing the dishes, placing the three chairs at back of stage and finally carrying out the table, all the time talking to herself*). Faith an' I'm a gettin' mighty tired of stayin' in a place where I never know what's goin' to happen; where strange gentlemen are a takin' breakfast; where trays are bein' carried out when you don't expect them to be carried out; and where— (*She leaves the room at R. and for a moment or so the stage is clear.*)

Then PEGGY dances into view from the hallway—very radiant and very gay—followed by BARBARA, more serious and pre-occupied.

PEGGY. Nobody home, Bob!

BARBARA. Why should there be? The children are at school. And Tom's off, of course.

PEGGY (*on davenport*). But Tom's coming back just for me. We're going to ride way off into the country—and we're going to lunch by ourselves.

BARBARA (*indifferently*). Is that so? (*Sits in large chair.*)

PEGGY. You don't seem excited.

BARBARA. Why should I be? (*Pauses.*) I'm—bothered.

PEGGY. I should think you would be bothered, poor old dear. Losing two jobs within a week is a bit disorganizing.

BARBARA. I didn't lose this one. I gave it up.

PEGGY. What's the difference? It's gone. (*Goes to her.*) Bob, what made you act so hastily? (*Sits on arm of chair.*)

BARBARA. I didn't act hastily. I argued it over and over to myself, last night, after we left the house. And I decided I couldn't take the risk.

PEGGY. What risk?

BARBARA. The risk of being in the house—if anything should happen.

PEGGY. What could happen?

BARBARA. Many things. There's something wrong.

PEGGY. Nonsense. And even if there were, isn't that one reason you wanted the position?

BARBARA. Well—it's different now.

PEGGY. Why is it different?

BARBARA (*after a pause*). I can't explain—yet.

PEGGY. It seems to me that you're pretty mysterious. What did Mrs. Allison say when you telephoned that you wouldn't continue the work?

BARBARA. She was confused, almost hysterical. And that isn't like Mrs. Allison, is it?

PEGGY. Hardly.

BARBARA. Something happened to Tony last night.

PEGGY. Why, Bob, how silly. He went to bed with a headache. Mrs. Allison made perfectly good excuses for him. (*Walks to table.*)

BARBARA. And was more or less agitated while she

was doing it. (*Pauses.*) I know something happened.

PEGGY. Well, I hope not. Poor Tony has had enough.

BARBARA. I'm not so sure of that. (*Rises.*)

PEGGY. Bob, you seem to have a grudge against Tony.

BARBARA (*as she passes into the bedroom*). Not against the real Tony.

PEGGY. You do say such strange things. If I didn't have so much else to think about I'd worry over you.

BARBARA (*from the bedroom*). And what have you to think about, I'd like to know?

PEGGY (*taking Tom's picture from the table and gazing at it rapturously*). Something—perfectly—wonderful!

BARBARA. Then hang on to it.

PEGGY. I intend to. (*Pauses.*) Bob?

BARBARA. Yes?

PEGGY. Which is Tom's favorite chair?

BARBARA. The big one. Why?

PEGGY. Oh, nothing. (*Curled up in the chair and smiles ecstatically to herself. Then after a moment.*) Bob?

BARBARA. Yes?

PEGGY. What are Tom's favorite colors?

BARBARA. Pink and blue. Why?

PEGGY. Oh, nothing! (*Another silence, then.*) Bob?

BARBARA. What is it now?

PEGGY. When you come in again, bring me a mirror.

BARBARA. Why do you want a mirror?

PEGGY. Why do people usually want mirrors?

BARBARA. Come in here, then. You can see yourself much better.

PEGGY. I can't leave Tom's chair.

BARBARA (*emerging*). I never heard such silly talk. (*Hands her a mirror.*) You're a fit subject for an alienist.

PEGGY. An alienist! I'm just as good an American as you, Barbara Ferguson.

BARBARA. An alienist, dear child, tampers with the brain, not with immigration.

PEGGY. What's that to me? (*Holding up the mirror.*) Why, this is the mirror brought by the Halloween witch.

BARBARA. The very same.

PEGGY (*busily surveying herself*). Served the purpose, didn't it?

BARBARA. Perhaps.

PEGGY (*after gazing at herself from all angles*). Do I look nice this morning?

BARBARA (*critically*). Nice enough.

PEGGY. Nice enough for somebody?

BARBARA (*walking to the table*). You're downright silly this morning. Something's gone to your head.

PEGGY (*running to her and laying the mirror on the table*). To my heart, Bobbie—just to my heart! (*A door slams.*)

BARBARA. That's Tom.

PEGGY. Then he mustn't find me!

BARBARA. But you said you were to meet him here.

PEGGY. I am. Oh, I am!

BARBARA. Then why—

PEGGY. Don't tell him I'm any place around. That's a dear! (*And she disappears into the bedroom L.*)

TOM *enters from hall—also beamingly radiant.*

TOM. Hello, sis. Peggy come?

BARBARA. You don't see her, do you?

TOM. I don't see anything *but* her.

BARBARA. Your vision is keen.

TOM. According to the tradition about fellows like me, I shouldn't have any vision at all. (*Stretches himself on the davenport, gazes into space and smiles to himself. To the uninitiated the smile might appear silly.*)

BARBARA (*sharply*). What is the matter with you?

TOM. Oh, nothing!

BARBARA. Have you heard anything about Anthony Allison? (*Sits on L. of davenport.*)

TOM. Heard anything about him? I never again want to hear his name.

BARBARA. That is rather impossible, I'm afraid.

TOM. But I've seen him.

BARBARA. Where?

TOM. On the corner with Ralph Overton.

BARBARA. When?

TOM. Just now.

BARBARA (*eagerly*). Haven't you any suspicions about last night? Don't you think it's strange about the sudden headache? Don't you—(*As TOM once more resumes his indescribable, ineffable smile.*) You're not hearing a word I say. (*After a moment.*) Tom! What is the matter? (*Crosses to L.*)

TOM. Oh, nothing.

BARBARA. It seems impossible for me to obtain any satisfactory information. What's wrong with everybody? (*Pauses.*) Tom! (*For TOM has risen and with the same rapt expression has seized upon a tiny mesh bag which PEGGY has left in the big chair.*)

TOM (*idiotically, as he holds it up*). It's Peggy's!

BARBARA (*impatiently*). What of it?

TOM. Then she's here!

PEGGY (*appearing at the door of the bedroom*). Of course I'm here. (*Ecstatically.*) Tom!

TOM. Peggy! (*Starts toward her.*)

BARBARA (*coming between them*). So that's what's the matter! Now I understand! (*With one arm about TOM's neck.*) Tom, you dear! (*And the other about PEGGY.*) Peggy, I'm the happiest girl in the world!

PEGGY. No you're not! I am! Oh, Bob! Bob! I'm going to be your really-truly honest-to-goodness sister!

TOM. And I'm—(*What TOM is about to say is never finished. For the bell rings sharply and clearly.*) Good heavens! Nothing ever starts in this family that the bell doesn't ring!

PEGGY. Let's answer it, Tom.

TOM. Of course.

PEGGY. For we're going, anyway.

BARBARA. Going where?

TOM. To Paradise. That's where! (*And off they run through the hall.*)

NORA *enters from R.*

NORA. Why, Miss Barbara, I wasn't expectin' to see you—

BARBARA. I changed my plans, Nora. I shall be here during the day. You need not answer the bell.

NORA. Yes, Miss Barbara. (*Exit R.*)

BARBARA *turns to see MRS. ALLISON and RETTA standing in the doorway.*

BARBARA. Why, Mrs. Allison, I—

MRS. A. Doubtless you are surprised to see me, Miss Ferguson; but your telephone message this morning left no alternative but a personal interview. (*Crosses to front.*)

BARBARA. I am sorry to have caused you any in-

convenience. Won't you be seated? (MRS. ALLISON *seats herself in the large chair.* RETTA *crosses to window seat.*)

MRS. A. You will pardon me, I am sure, Miss Ferguson, if I say that you have offered no sufficient excuse for leaving my household so unexpectedly.

BARBARA (*sitting on davenport*). I regret very much my change of plan, Mrs. Allison.

MRS. A. That is not the point. Why have you left?

BARBARA. For entirely personal reasons.

MRS. A. Were your surroundings unpleasant?

BARBARA. On the contrary, you made my stay delightful.

MRS. A. Was the compensation insufficient?

BARBARA. Oh, no.

MRS. A. Then, in all fairness to me, you should be frank in regard to the situation.

BARBARA. As I said before, my reasons are personal.

MRS. A. Perhaps—something happened.

BARBARA (*hesitating*). Nothing happened.

MRS. A. (*sharply*). My son—

BARBARA (*hastily*). Mr. Allison in no way has influenced my decision.

MRS. A. (*losing to some extent her self-possession*). Then what has? You were my guest last night. You declare that your surroundings were pleasant and your work interesting, and yet without a legitimate excuse you leave my employ. I insist upon an explanation.

BARBARA. Yielding to a caprice is my very weak defense.

MRS. A. But it is not an explanation. (*Pause.*) I am waiting. (*And at this moment RETTA, who has been gazing nervously out of the window, rises with a slight exclamation.*)

BARBARA. What is it, Miss Reeves? (*Rises.*)

RETTA (*controlling herself*). A foolish case of nerves, I'm afraid. I've just remembered that—over there—I met my Hallowe'en adventure.

(*The bell sounds.*)

BARBARA. You will pardon me while I answer the bell? (*As she leaves the room, RETTA comes hurriedly to MRS. ALLISON.*)

RETTA (*excitedly*). I saw him!

MRS. A. Where?

RETTA. In that room, across—

MRS. A. Nonsense.

RETTA. It was! It was! I had just a glimpse, but—(*goes back to window.*)

MRS. A. Then the girl knows something. I am sure of it.

BARBARA *re-enters, followed by ANTHONY and RALPH.*

MRS. A. (*rises*). This is indeed a surprise, Tony. I didn't think your acquaintance with Miss Ferguson of long enough standing to admit of an informal morning call. (*RALPH and BARBARA cross to R.*)

ANTHONY. I have already apologized to Miss Ferguson for the early hour. I should not be here, nor would my friend, if we hadn't seen you enter.

MRS. A. (*laughingly*). The inference is flattering.

ANTHONY. Experience has taught me that opportunities, even the most trivial, are not to be neglected.

MRS. A. (*lightly*). But opportunities sometimes come too late. Retta and I are just leaving. Our car is waiting.

ANTHONY. I shall insist upon your remaining for a few moments to listen to a matter of business, we'll say.

Mrs. A. But, my dear Tony, isn't it a bit unusual to transact business in other people's houses?

ANTHONY. Not in this case. Please be seated. (*She sits, unwillingly.*)

Mrs. A. I have other plans for the morning.

ANTHONY. They will wait. They *must* wait.

Mrs. A. Aren't you rather dictatorial?

ANTHONY. Only persistent. I have something to say.

Mrs. A. Then I shall linger just long enough to listen. Please hurry.

ANTHONY. Last Thursday, according to the newspapers, I went away.

Mrs. A. An old tale, by this time.

ANTHONY. But a false one.

Mrs. A. What do you mean?

ANTHONY. That the disappearance was not of my own choosing. As I was leaving my office, after dark, someone called me from a taxi. Answering the call, I was blindfolded, bound, and taken far into the country. I remained there until Saturday evening, when my captors brought me to the house next door. (*Glancing at BARBARA.*) Fortunately for me, the room in which I was imprisoned is opposite this.

Mrs. A. But you said you went to the hunting lodge!

ANTHONY. That was your story, not mine.

Mrs. A. I don't understand.

ANTHONY. I think you do. (*Pauses.*) Later on, in a battle with the guard, my strength proved the greater, so we changed clothes. When his accomplices came with their covered wagon, he, not I, was carried away.

Mrs. A. Carried away! How ridiculous!

ANTHONY. Perhaps. Rather than join the band of ruffians, I went back into the room, hoping to escape

later. The bolt was slipped and I found myself a prisoner.

MRS. A. You talk like a madman!

ANTHONY. I was, just that, for two days afterwards. Memory deserted me, and not until it came back did I realize what had happened.

MRS. A. It is in rather poor taste, Tony, to joke about the matter. To us it was serious.

BARBARA. Mr. Allison's story is quite correct. He crossed from that window to this, and made his escape from our apartment.

ANTHONY. Aunt Constance proved my friend as ever. She gave me clothes, she gained my entrance into the house last night in time for the dinner party.

MRS. A. Again, I don't understand.

ANTHONY. Again, I think you do. You recognized me by my ring.

RALPH (*stepping forward and crossing right of Mrs. Allison*). And this is where my part of the story begins. Last Friday, for reasons of my own and in the interests of my paper, I cabled Paris for certain information. (*Pauses.*) Paris was your home, I believe?

MRS. A. Yes.

RALPH. While your guest last night, I was summoned to the office.

MRS. A. (*rising*). What possible interest can this have for me?

RALPH. Just a moment. The answer to my cable stated that Edith Allison, who afterwards became the wife of her brother-in-law, in this country, had one son, Anthony, and that three weeks ago this son and his wife sailed for America.

MRS. A. Nonsense.

RALPH. Why did you fail to mention to Mr. Allison the existence of this son?

MRS. A. Because no such son existed.

ANTHONY. The other Anthony, evidently a namesake of my father, is at present in the very room over there, which a few days ago served as my hiding place.

RETTA. It *was* Tony! I knew it! (*Comes to Mrs. Allison.*)

MRS. A. (*Angrily*). Hush!

RALPH. Sometimes fate plays us a trick, and gives two people faces so alike in every detail that one cannot be distinguished from the other. (*Pauses.*) The sons of twin brothers might easily claim such a similarity in appearance.

MRS. A. I shall not listen.

RALPH. And upon such a similarity depended the success of your scheme, a scheme doubtless perfected after your second marriage and your acquaintance with the step-son so like your own Anthony.

ANTHONY (*at R.*). My elimination—his substitution—and you were all to live happily forever after! Am I correct?

MRS. A. You have no proof for such an accusation!

RETTA. But I have! (*As Mrs. Allison starts to protest.*) And I shall speak, Edith, I shall speak! I've been quiet too long! I've yielded too long! I refuse to surrender what little independence is left to me.

MRS. A. Retta, you do not know what you are saying.

RETTA. But I do know the harm you have done to Tony and me. How you have almost smothered the little spark of manhood in him by your ambitious schemes, by your disregard of what is right and honor-

able, by your indulgence of his whims. Oh! I know—too well!

ANTHONY (*crossing to her*). You are his wife?

RETTA. I am his wife. Alone with me, away from his mother's influence, he is not the contemptible creature whom you have seen in an unfamiliar setting.

MRS. A. You are rather late in advancing this sentiment, Retta.

RETTA. You know that I never wanted the money and the luxury. I begged to stay where we were. From the very first I feared discovery and disgrace—even last Saturday night, when I brought the money to your band of ruffians, and watched, from that window, the signal that they were leaving with the supposed victim.

(*For a moment there is a tense silence. RALPH crosses to BARBARA, ANTHONY strolls to the back of the room and stands quietly watching MRS. ALLISON, as with angry eyes she turns to RETTA. But RETTA, with no return of the old fear, meets her gaze calmly and defiantly.*)

RETTA. You see, I am no longer afraid.

MRS. A. (*turning defiantly to ANTHONY*). Well, what are you intending to do?

ANTHONY (*quietly*). Am I likely to take any public stand against my father's wife, even though her return for his kindness has been so unspeakable? (*Pauses.*) Only let me suggest that the three reservations for Thursday night be used, and that you become a permanent resident of some other city.

MRS. A. Do you think that for a moment I would linger *here*—to be taunted by the wealth, the prosperity that I craved for my son, that was almost in my grasp? I have always hated you, Anthony Allison! You, with my son's very features! From the day I met you, I

vowed that my Anthony should take your place—should have your inheritance.

ANTHONY. And had not a merciful providence intervened—

MRS. A. *You would have been far away, without money, and with nothing but a ridiculous story to win back your position and your possessions. By that time my Anthony would have been firmly established and who would have believed you? (Then, to herself.) And to think that I failed!*

ANTHONY (*coming to RETTA, who stands by hall door*). Is there anything I can do for you, Miss Reeves? Anything that—

RETTA. Thank you, no. There is but one thing for me to do, one thing that I wish to do. That is to go to Tony. (*Pauses.*) This time I shall make a man of him! (*Then, with a look at MRS. ALLISON, she turns and leaves the room through the hall.*)

MRS. A. (*as a silence follows*). Well, the battle seems to be finished, doesn't it? And, after the battle, a graceful retreat. (*Turns.*) Good morning, Mr. Overton. Your acuteness in solving—mysteries, shall I say?—will doubtless prove of inestimable benefit to you as a journalist. Good morning, Miss Ferguson. I regret the loss of my charming secretary. And as for you, Tony, perhaps you will see me to my car? (*And, graciously chatting, she takes ANTHONY'S arm and leaves the room at hallway.*)

BARBARA. It's terrible, isn't it, Ralph? And it all shows how little we understand human hearts and human motives. (*Sits on davenport.*)

RALPH. Can the love for her son, ambitious and selfish as it is, be counted in her favor? (*Sits by her.*)

BARBARA. When its gratification would have meant misfortune for someone else? Never!

RALPH. We stumbled upon a bit of tragedy after all, didn't we? And very unconsciously we've been drawn into it.

BARBARA. Until, as we retrace each event, each incident, it seems too extraordinary, too fantastic, to be a part of everyday existence.

RALPH. But everyday existence is full of strange stories, strange characters and strange happenings.

BARBARA (*laughingly*). And everyday existence bids us think of everyday jobs. Once more, I am stranded.

RALPH (*after a pause*). Bob, on that very first day when you came back into the eternal scheme of things, I offered you a job for life.

BARBARA. Please don't Ralph—please!

RALPH. Don't say that, Barbara. (*Lays his hand on hers.*)

BARBARA. But I can't say anything else.

RALPH. We're such good pals, Bob—we've always been. What else matters? And love would come.

BARBARA. But it wouldn't.

RALPH. You mean there is someone else? (*Rises.*)

BARBARA (*after a pause*). I wouldn't be fair to you, Ralph, if I denied it. (*As he turns sharply and walks away.*) Oh, I'm sorry! (*Follows him.*)

RALPH. Don't be sorry for me, Bob. I'm a lucky fellow to have your friendship. And you know, don't you—that my first thought is for your happiness? (*He takes her hands, gazes steadily at her, then, without another word, he turns and leaves the room. In a moment his gay whistle comes floating back.*)

BARBARA follows him to the hall door and stands

there—almost depressed. As the outside door closes, she turns and slowly crosses to the table. Mechanically she takes the mirror which PEGGY has left there and starts to carry it to the bedroom. At the large chair she hesitates, raises the mirror and gazes therein. As if in answer to her thoughts, ANTHONY enters, and she sees him reflected in the mirror. For a moment he stands irresolute, then quickly crosses to her.

ANTHONY. Barbara, for the second time, the mirror shows the same reflection. It may be chance. It may be magic. But I choose to believe that, from out this wide, wide world, our paths were destined to cross. (*Pauses.*) Ever since you gave me your faith, your friendship, I have known that I could be satisfied only with your love. (*BARBARA rises and crosses to the table. He follows her.*) The Lady of Shalott saw only shadows of the world in her mirror. For us there is the reflection of love, of happiness of days to be. (*Quietly.*) Will you share it with me?

(And for the last time in this play of mine she hesitates. Then she turns, and he reads his answer in her eyes.)

CURTAIN.

THE EMPTY HOUSE

THE EPILOGUE.

SCENE: *Same as ACT I. The curtain rises upon TOM, BARBARA, FREDERICKA and LARRY, grouped as they were in the first act when TOM said "Well—It begins like this—" and you realize that what you have just been seeing and hearing is only the story of the play as TOM tells it. Back you go to the first act and take up the conversation from that very point.*

TOM. And that's all.

FRED. It's wonderful, Tom, just wonderful! And will you write it just as you've told it to us?

TOM. I'll try to.

FRED. And will Larry and I be really important?

TOM. Of course.

LARRY. Gosh, but I like myself in that play. (*Struts to L.*)

TOM. What do you think, Bob?

BARBARA. I've no words to tell you, Tom. I just love it! That's all.

TOM. Does it sound too improbable?

BARBARA. Not at all. Even truth sometimes sounds improbable.

TOM. Have I caught up all the loose ends?

BARBARA. Every one.

TOM. And do you like yourself?

BARBARA. Tom, I never was the dear you've made me out.

LARRY (*in large chair*). You've put in Florine, the funny little maid we used to have, haven't you? And Ned, the chauffeur, and Judge Lennox.

TOM. But Mrs. Allison, Retta and Aunt Constance are all imaginary.

FRED. Why did you choose Anthony Allison to be the real hero?

TOM. Because I like him; because he's Bob's particular friend; and because he has a regular stage name.

FRED. (*after a pause*). Tom, I could have loved that man. (*Comes down front.*)

BARBARA. Freddie!

FRED. As he was in the play, I mean. You don't meet them like that in real life.

BARBARA (*smiling*). Oh yes, you do.

FRED. What do you know about it?

BARBARA. Well, I happen to know Anthony Allison, that's all.

LARRY (*who has wandered back stage*). Gee, how I'd like to see somebody really crawling along a plank.

FRED. (*joining him*). And how I wish that Tony were over there, with a bloody handkerchief around his head. (*Turns.*) We'll never be able to endure common, everyday living after all this excitement.

BARBARA. Would my story help to cheer you up?

FRED. Oh you *did* have a story, didn't you? Is it any good? (*Sits on arm of large chair.*)

BARBARA. The most wonderful story in the world.

LARRY. You said that before. (*Sits on window seat.*)

BARBARA. But it's true.

FRED. Let's have it, then.

BARBARA. Well, I'm going to marry Anthony Allison!

TOM (*taking her hand*). I've been looking for just this very thing, sis—and I'm happy!

BARBARA. That makes *me* happy! (*as LARRY and FREDERICKA are silent.*) Why, Freddie—Larry—

LARRY (*going to her*). I don't want you to go away from me.

BARBARA. Who says I'm going away from you? Never! (*With an arm about his neck.*)

FRED. Some way or other, Bob, I don't see how I can do without you. (*Turns her back.*)

BARBARA (*going to her*). You need never do without me. I'll still be your older sister just the same. (*As the bell rings.*) There's Tony! I'll go.

TOM. And so shall I. (*And they hurry from the room.*)

FRED. (*after a long and melancholy glance at LARRY*). Freedom seems just as far off as ever, doesn't it, Larry?

As NORA enters R.

FRED. Never mind, Nora. They've gone.

NORA. An' sure, Miss Freddie, the policeman says that all the lights were made by some bad boys playing burglar in the empty house next door.

LARRY (*settling into despondency*). Life is just one disappointment after another. (*NORA goes out R.*)

And into the atmosphere of gloom comes ANTHONY with TOM and BARBARA. BARBARA crosses to davenport. TOM stands near hall door.

ANTHONY (*halting as he sees the pessimistic pair*).—Am I as bad as all that?

LARRY. No—You're all right. (*Goes to him.*)

FRED. In the play, I promised to be your real pal.

ANTHONY (*puzzled*). In the play?

BARBARA (*laughingly*). Tom's been outlining his

play to us, Tony, and has taken us for his characters.
(*Sits on arm of davenport.*)

ANTHONY. Tell it again, Tom. (*Stands back of BARBARA.*)

BARBARA. And—oh, Tony!—you crawl from one window to another—and I see you in my mirror—as the clock strikes twelve.

ANTHONY. Rather different from an unromantic proposal in a pouring rain.

BARBARA. But not half so nice.

FRED. Tom, you said *you* had a Hallowe'en present.

TOM. I have.

FRED. From the Hallowe'en witch?

TOM. Exactly.

FRED. And that it would influence your whole life.

TOM. It will.

LARRY. Then where is the present? (*He stands by FREDERICKA.*)

TOM. Close at hand.

FRED. And is it *real*?

TOM. More real than the plot of a play, the disappearance of a hero and the mystery of an empty house!

And into the room comes PEGGY. With an exclamation of joy, BARBARA rushes to her and

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

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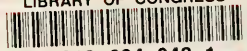
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