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Riverside Farm

A black and white illustration of a woman in classical attire, possibly a personification of Agriculture or a similar figure. She is shown in profile, facing right, wearing a long, draped gown. She holds a laurel wreath in her right hand and a trumpet in her left hand. The background is a simple, stylized architectural setting with a decorative border. The overall style is reminiscent of early 20th-century book cover art.

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RIVERSIDE FARM

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY

THOMAS LITTLEFIELD MARBLE

Author of "WON BY WIRELESS," "THE HESSIAN," etc.



PHILADELPHIA
THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY

1910

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Riverside Farm

CAST OF CHARACTERS

TITUS TRENT	<i>President of the National Paper Company</i>
MAURICE VAN DERZEE	<i>His nephew</i>
HARRY LOTHROP	<i>A civil engineer</i>
ZENAS BRADLEY	<i>Postmaster at Spruceville</i>
ELISHA DINSMORE	<i>A dispenser of news</i>
MISS LAVINIA BATTLES	<i>Owner of Riverside Farm</i>
LUCY RAY	<i>Her niece</i>
MATILDA BRADLEY	<i>Zenas' daughter</i>

SYNOPSIS

ACT I.—The village store and post-office at Spruceville. A summer morning. The arrival of the aeroplane.

ACT II.—The home of Miss Lavinia. Afternoon, two days later. A game of checkers.

ACT III.—Miss Lavinia's garden. Next morning. Cupid forms a trust.

TIME IN REPRESENTATION :—Two hours.

NOTE.—This play is published for amateur use only. Professionals are forbidden to use it except upon permission of the author, who may be addressed in care of the publishers.

COSTUMES

TITUS TRENT. Act I. Costume appropriate for aviation. Act II. Frock coat, with carnation in buttonhole; light trousers, patent leather shoes. Act III. Light summer suit, straw hat; carries walking stick.

MAURICE VAN DERZEE. Act I. Costume appropriate for aviation. Act II. Fashionable costume of white flannel. Act III. Light summer suit, straw hat.

HARRY LOTHROP. Costume appropriate for the rough outdoor work of a civil engineer.

ZENAS BRADLEY. Act I. Dark trousers and waistcoat, blue drilling shirt; no coat. Acts II and III. Same costume with coat.

ELISHA DINSMORE. Blue trousers and waistcoat, long linen duster; old-fashioned straw hat with broad brim, such as is worn in the hay field.

MISS LAVINIA BATTLES. Act I. Elaborate costume of figured silk, somewhat quaint and old-fashioned, but not at all ludicrous; wears mitts, and carries small brilliantly colored parasol. Acts II and III. Light summer gowns.

LUCY RAY. Act I. Light summer gown, gloves and parasol. Act II. Gown of white muslin or other material appropriate for a summer afternoon. Act III. Gingham dress, long checkered apron or pinafore, sunbonnet.

MATILDA BRADLEY. Light summer gowns.

PROPERTIES

Act I. Stick and jack-knife for Elisha. Letter for Miss Lavinia.

Act II. Checker-board and checkers for Miss Lavinia and Trent. Letter, book and card for Zenas. Telegrams for Van Derzee and Lothrop. Deed and stock certificate for Miss Lavinia. Check-book for Trent.

Act III. Basket of apples and apple-paring for Lucy. Telegram for Lothrop. Letter for Zenas.

ARGUMENT

In constructing a new mill, the National Paper Company finds it necessary to obtain a certain farm owned by Miss Lavinia Battles of Spruceville. Titus Trent, the president of the National Paper Company, anticipating Miss Lavinia's hostility to the new enterprise, secretly sells his controlling interest in the company before public knowledge of Miss Lavinia's opposition has caused the price of the stock to decline.

Hoping to overcome Miss Lavinia's objections and then repurchase the majority stock at the lower price, Trent comes to Spruceville in his aeroplane. Miss Lavinia, influenced by disparaging remarks which Trent has made about her business sagacity, determines to outwit him if possible. With this idea in mind, she quietly secures control of the National Paper Company, and then sells her farm to Trent as agent for the corporation.

Trent, elated at his success, endeavors at once to buy back his stock only to find himself at the mercy of Miss Lavinia. At this point Cupid takes a hand in the controversy, and all ends harmoniously.

Riverside Farm

ACT I

THE ARRIVAL OF THE AEROPLANE

SCENE.—*Interior of a country store and post-office. Counter R. C., back. Pigeonholes partially filled with letters and papers, back of counter. Scales, cash-register, etc., on counter. Barrels, boxes, cans, jars, etc., arranged according to capacity of stage. Door C., back, opening into street. Door in right wall of scene supposed to lead to up-stairs apartment.*

(*At rise of curtain, ZENAS BRADLEY is discovered back of counter, sorting mail. ELISHA DINSMORE is seated on a box, L. C., whittling.*)

(*Enter LUCY RAY, C. She pauses in doorway.*)

LUCY. Good-morning, Mr. Bradley. Is Aunt Lavinia here?

ZENAS (*heartily*). Hello, Lucy! Come right in. Your Aunt Laviny? (*Shakes his head.*) No; I ain't seen nothin' of her.

LUCY (*coming forward*). You haven't? Why, she promised to meet me here at ten o'clock. Possibly she's been delayed at Lawyer Holcombe's.

(*ELISHA stops whittling, and looks up eagerly.*)

ZENAS. Like enough, m' dear; like enough. They do say as how the law's amazin' slothful. (*Cordially.*) Won't ye step up-stairs an' see Matildy?

LUCY. Why, yes, thank you; I think I will.

ZENAS. Good! She'll be real glad to see ye. (*Opens door, C.*) Right this way. We're still livin' over the store, ye know, though Matildy's gittin' a leetle mite ashamed on

it—an' so's her ma, too, for that matter. They allow they'd like a brand new house an' all the fixin's. But I tell 'em to wait till the paper mill's built. Things'll be boomin' then, an' we can afford a whole lot o' frills with a clear conscience.

ELISHA (*disgustedly*). Huh! Mebbe there ain't goin' to be no mill.

ZENAS. There, 'Lisha, stop your croakin'. If ye're bound to be a prophet, jest look on the bright side o' things for a while.

LUCY (*approvingly*). That's a splendid philosophy, Mr. Bradley.

ZENAS. Wall, as I tell Matildy, it don't do no harm to be cheerful. The world wa'n't made in a minute, an' things'll come out all right if we jest give 'em time. But then, goodness knows, Matildy don't need much preachin'.

LUCY. She's a pretty dutiful daughter, I suspect.

ZENAS (*decisively*). She's a real good girl, if I do say it—and ambitious, too. Why, she works like a beaver along with her studies an'—

LUCY (*with surprise*). Studies?

ELISHA (*chuckling*). He, he, he! Guess civil engineerin's goin' to be her spesh-e-al-ity, ain't it?

ZENAS. Go 'long, 'Lisha! What ye talkin' 'bout?

ELISHA. What be I talkin' 'bout? Wall, I cal'late you ain't so turrible innocent. Seems to me I've heerd somewheres that this here young Lothrop's jest a teeny bit sweet on Zenas Bradley's daughter—seems as though I've heerd it.

ZENAS (*sarcastically*). Seems as though you've "heard" about all that's went on in these parts—an' talked about it, too.

LUCY (*applauding*). Bravo, Mr. Bradley, bravo! Do you know, I think men are every bit as fond of gossip as women are.

ZENAS. Some on 'em be, I'll admit.

ELISHA (*disdainfully*). Huh! Women's allus a-med-dlin'—

LUCY. Well, I for one haven't the slightest interest in other people's affairs. (*Naïvely.*) Besides, Matilda will tell me all about it! Oh, I'm just dying to have a good talk with her! (*Starts toward door R.*)

ELISHA (*rising quickly*). Wait; wait a minute, Miss Lucy.

LUCY (*turning*). Yes, Mr. Dinsmore, what is it?

ELISHA. Seems as though I've heerd your Aunt Laviny was turrible sot agin sellin' the farm to this new paper company. Don't know nothin' 'bout it, do ye?

LUCY (*innocently*). Goodness! How should I? Aunt Lavinia isn't very communicative on business matters.

ELISHA (*ruefully*). Y-e-s, I know. Reckon young Lothrop's been tryin' to buy the old place, though—been tryin' real hard, ain't he?

LUCY (*sweetly*). Really, Mr. Dinsmore, I cannot say. You'll have to ask Aunt Lavinia.

(*Exit LUCY, R. ZENAS closes door after her.*)

ZENAS. Ha, ha, ha! Guess ye met your match that time, 'Lisha. Didn't find out a whole lot, did ye?

(*ZENAS returns to his work behind counter.*)

ELISHA. Oh, I dunno! I found out 'bout Miss Laviny's consultin' Lawyer Holcombe. Cal'late little Miss Smartie didn't intend to let that information slip. But I guess I'm foxy enough to see how the wind's a-blowin'.

(*Returns to seat on box.*)

ZENAS. Wall, I hope Lawyer Holcombe advised Miss Laviny to sell.

ELISHA. So do I. She's actin' so cont'ry I guess the law'll have to take a hand before the National Paper Company gits a chance to build the new mill.

ZENAS. Wall, there ain't no question but what 'twould be a great thing for Spruceville.

ELISHA. That's right, an' I'll be doggoned if I kin understand what Miss Laviny's a-drivin' at. Ain't a bit like her to git so pesky notional.

ZENAS. Yes, but she's fond o' Riverside Farm, an' like enough hates to see the old place flooded.

ELISHA. I s'pose the big dam would set the water back prutty considerable. Cover up about half the farm, I guess.

ZENAS. Yes, the best half, too; young Lothrop admits 'twould jest about ruin the place. But then, he's offered Miss Laviny a whole lot more than the farm's worth.

ELISHA. I want to know! An' she won't take it? Wall, wall! (*Rises and crosses to R.*) Ain't that jest like a woman? No idee 'bout business—jest notions an' feelin's

an' sitch like. I swan I thought Miss Laviny was different, but I guess she ain't. Now old Squire Battles was fond enough o' Riverside Farm, but he was a leetle mite fonder o' drivin' a sharp bargain; took considerable pride in the matter, as it were. I allus thought Miss Laviny was a powerful sight like her old dad, an' I never knowed her to let sentiment stand in the way o' business afore.

ZENAS. Wall, mebbe she's playin' a shrewder game than we cal'late she is. Lothrop says she didn't like it a mite when she heard what the president o' the paper company said about her.

ELISHA. She didn't, eh? Wall, what did he say? I ain't heerd nothin' 'bout it.

ZENAS. Ye ain't? (*Comes from behind counter and advances to L. C.*) Wall, he said Miss Laviny wa'n't nothin' but a woman, an' jest naturally didn't know how to manage her affairs; said every woman who owned a ten-acre lot thought she had a gold mine. As for himself, he didn't propose to be held up by no cantankerous female; said he'd find a way to build his dam in spite o' Miss Laviny.

ELISHA. I want to know! Wall, what did Miss Laviny say to that?

ZENAS. She said to jest let him try it, an' the day he began work on his old dam she'd have one o' them injunctions served on him quicker'n a wink. An' I guess he thought she meant it too, for there ain't no dam there yet, an' Lothrop is still dickerin' with Miss Laviny.

ELISHA. Do tell! Wall, I guess the company must set quite a store by young Lothrop, 'lowing him to make all the 'gotiations.

ZENAS. I guess they do. Why shouldn't they? He's a mighty bright young fellow, an' if honesty an' perseverance count for anything, he's bound to win. (*Enter HARRY LOTHROP, C.*) Hello! Here's your chance to ask him all about it. Good-mornin', Harry.

LOTHROP (*advancing to c.*). Good-morning, Mr. Bradley. Ask me all about what?

ZENAS. Oh, 'Lisha wants to do a little interrogatin', I fancy.

LOTHROP (*humorously*). Can it be possible?

(*He stands looking at door, looking off R.*)

ZENAS. Yes; he 'lows you're a prutty valuable asset o'

this here National Paper Company. I was tellin' him he better git your idees on the subject.

LOTHROP. Well, I'd prefer somebody else's opinion, myself, but if I'm compelled to confess the truth, I'm afraid I don't stand in very high favor with the powers that be—just now, at least.

(He glances out door, off R., occasionally, during following speeches. Crosses to R.)

ELISHA *(crossing to c.)*. Do tell! I want to know! Why, what's the reason on't?

LOTHROP. I suspect it's no secret. Everybody knows I was sent to Spruceville to make the preliminary surveys for the dam and to purchase the farms which would be affected by the proposed construction.

ELISHA. Yes, I know. *(Winks surreptitiously at ZENAS.)* An' ain't ye done it?

LOTHROP. That again is no secret. You know perfectly well, Mr. Dinsmore, that Miss Lavinia Battles is bitterly opposed to the new enterprise.

ELISHA. He, he, he! I've heerd it hinted as how she was a leetle mite stubborn on the subject. Guess what President Trent said didn't mend matters much.

LOTHROP. Now look here, Mr. Dinsmore, I can't discuss Mr. Trent's affairs, you know.

ELISHA. Oh, don't git touchy. We all know Titus Trent's opinion o' Miss Laviny. I must say, though, I didn't expect he'd show his feelin's quite so plain. Cal'late he must be gittin' prutty old an' crabbed.

LOTHROP. Not at all. He's very courteous usually, and he isn't old either—forty, perhaps.

ELISHA. Married, I s'pose.

LOTHROP. No.

ZENAS. Why, 'Lisha, didn't I tell ye what he said 'bout women?—said they was idiots where business is concerned, an' I guess business is the only thing that appeals to Titus Trent.

ELISHA. Wall, I'd jest like to see him once.

LOTHROP. You'll certainly have the opportunity. He's coming here to-day.

ELISHA. No? Ye don't say!

LOTHROP. Yes; his nephew Maurice Van Derzee wired

me yesterday that he and Mr. Trent expected to reach Spruceville this morning.

ELISHA. Is that a fact? Why, it's almost train time now.

LOTHROP. Oh, they're not coming by rail.

ELISHA. Ain't they?

ZENAS. O' course not! Seems as though ye're dreadful old-fashioned, 'Lisha. None o' them magnets, or whatever ye call 'em, travel in the "choo-choo" cars any longer. They own big automobiles, an' come an' go whenever they please.

ELISHA. I want to know!

LOTHROP (*laughingly*). You've got another guess, Mr. Bradley. Motor-cars are altogether too antiquated for these kings of finance. Listen. Titus Trent and his nephew are coming to Spruceville like eagles—on the wing.

ZENAS. What! Ye don't mean to say they can fly!

LOTHROP. Assuredly. They're regular aeronauts.

ZENAS. But—but——

ELISHA. Je-ru-sa-lem, Zenas! They're comin' in a flyin'-machine!

LOTHROP. Exactly—in an aeroplane.

ZENAS. Wall, wall! Don't that beat the Dutch?

ELISHA. Ye bet it does! My, but I'd like to git a look at the pesky thing!

LOTHROP. Oh, you'll see it fast enough. Maurice Van Derzee is a spectacle for gods and men when he emulates the dicky-birds.

ELISHA. Is he the fellow that runs the air-ship?

LOTHROP. Yes—he's the aviator.

ELISHA. Do tell! (*Rises.*) Wall, I guess I'll keep a sharp lookout so's not to miss the fun. He's likely to strike town any minute, I s'pose.

LOTHROP. Yes; and I think you'll know it when he strikes.

(ELISHA goes to doorway c., and stands looking off R.
ZENAS returns to counter, and LOTHROP crosses to L.)

(*Enter* MATILDA BRADLEY and LUCY, R.)

MATILDA. Come again, dear, when you don't have to hurry.

LUCY. Yes, Matilda, I surely will. I'd stay longer now,

but Aunt Lavinia must be ready. (*Observes* LOTHROP.) Oh, here's Mr. Lothrop! (*Advances to c.*) Matilda has been telling me the news, Mr. Lothrop, and I do want to congratulate you.

LOTHROP. Thank you very much indeed, Miss Ray.

ELISHA (*from doorway*). He, he, he! Guess somebody's let the cat out o' the bag this time.

LUCY. Oh, bother!

LOTHROP. Never mind, Miss Ray. It's really no secret. We're going to announce our engagement very shortly.

ELISHA. Wall, wall! I——

LOTHROP. Better watch out, Mr. Dinsmore. You don't want to miss that flying-machine.

ELISHA. By hockey! that's so. (*Looks off R.*) Don't see nothin' on it yet, but there's Miss Lavinia comin' down the street.

LUCY. Really? Then I think I'll be going on to meet her.

ELISHA (*excitedly*). Hold on! There's a big spot over there on the horizon. 'Tain't a bird, an' 'tain't a balloon, nuther. See! it's growin' bigger every second. By the great horn spoon, it's one o' them airy-planes, jest as sure as I'm a livin' critter!

ZENAS (*running to door*). You don't mean it!

ELISHA. Yes, I do. (*Points upward and to R.*) Look there.

LUCY. My! isn't it exciting? An air-ship in Spruceville!

(*She moves toward doorway followed by the others.*)

MATILDA. Oh, we're right up to date, I tell you.

LOTHROP. I should say as much.

(*Takes box from L. and places it at side of door. MATILDA stands on box and looks over the heads of ZENAS and ELISHA. LOTHROP and LUCY turn toward c., and are less excited than the others. LUCY is at the right of LOTHROP.*)

LUCY. Darius Green is vindicated.

ZENAS. Ye bet your life he is! Jest look at the thing; it's comin' like a streak o' lightning.

ELISHA. Gee whiz! Ain't it a whopper?

ZENAS. Anybody in it?

ELISHA (*shading eyes with hand*). Can't jest make out. My eyesight's gittin' a leetle mite dim. What do you think, Matildy?

MATILDA. There are two passengers.

ELISHA. I want to know!

LOTHROP. Of course! Titus Trent and his nephew.

MATILDA (*turning toward* LOTHROP). Goodness gracious! you don't mean that the president of the National Paper Company's coming to town?

LOTHROP (*grimly*). Yes, that's exactly what I mean.

MATILDA (*with surprise*). But surely not in an aeroplane?

LOTHROP. Certainly. He wants to astonish the natives.

MATILDA. Well, I must say he's astonished me already.

ZENAS. Look, look! The old machine is droppin' to earth.

LUCY (*looking out doorway again*). Yes, yes; they're going to alight.

LOTHROP. What! Here in the square?

ZENAS. Exactly. Right in the middle o' the street. See! The air-ship is floatin' down jest as easy as a feather.

ELISHA. Glory be! Ain't she a picture? Looks like a great floppin' bird.

ZENAS. Guess Spruceville's goin' to be some surprised.

ELISHA. Yes, siree! 'Tain't every day we harbor an airy-plane.

ZENAS. Watch her descend. Jest as gentle! There! She's almost landed.

ELISHA. Sakes alive! Miss Laviny's crossin' the road. She's right underneath the plaguey contraption.

ZENAS. By mighty! She don't see it.

LOTHROP. Maurice Van Derzee is shouting to her.

LUCY. She's looking up.

MATILDA. Mercy! She's frightened half out of her wits.

ZENAS. There! The air-ship has landed, and right at her very heels.

LUCY (*starting as though to go out door c.*). Quick! Let me go to her.

ZENAS (*restraining her*). No need on it. She's hur-ryin' this way. Guess she thinks the day o' judgment's come, an' that Satan's arter her. (*Speaks off R.*) Right this way, Miss Laviny; don't git flustered.

(*Enter MISS LAVINIA BATTLES, C. She is dressed elaborately, but with a touch of quaintness, and has, for the moment, a somewhat dishevelled appearance. She carries a sealed and addressed letter in her hand. LOTHROP crosses to R., and MATILDA comes down stage to L. MISS LAVINIA comes forward from doorway to C., with LUCY on her right and ZENAS on her left. ELISHA remains at door looking out.*)

MISS LAVINIA. Flustered? Well, I guess if two live men fell at your feet straight out of the open sky you'd be some flustered. I declare I don't know what this world's coming to. Nobody has any respect for anything. Don't you suppose if the Almighty ever intended to have men fly he'd have given 'em wings?

ZENAS. Mebbe so, Miss Laviny; mebbe so.

MISS LAVINIA. Of course it's so. Oh, I've no patience with this age of motor-cars and aerograms and aeroplanes. I love the good old days, and I don't care who knows it. (*To ZENAS.*) Here, Zenas, mail this letter, please. I want it to go at once.

ZENAS (*taking letter*). All right. I'll 'tend to it right away. (*Glances at address on envelope.*) H'm! Brokers. That don't look very much like the old days. Goin' to take a leetle flyer in the stock market, Miss Laviny?

MATILDA. There, there, pa! If you read fewer postal cards and addresses and licked more stamps, I guess Uncle Sam's patrons would be just as well satisfied.

ZENAS. Eh? Oh, no offense, Miss Laviny; no offense.

(*Goes back of counter with letter.*)

MISS LAVINIA. Certainly not. I don't mind a moderate amount of curiosity. (*To LUCY.*) Lucy, look here.

LUCY. Yes, Aunt Lavinia.

MISS LAVINIA (*in a loud whisper*). Tell me, is my hat on straight?

LUCY. Just a bit awry, Aunt Lavinia. (*Straightens MISS LAVINIA'S hat and arranges her costume generally.*) There; that's better.

MISS LAVINIA. Well, I wonder I'm not disjointed. It was a real gymnastic feat to avoid that aeroplane. Who are the people, anyhow, and where do they come from?

LUCY. Don't ask me. Mr. Lothrop can tell you.

MISS LAVINIA (*to ELISHA*). Have they anchored the air-ship in the street, Elisha?

ELISHA. Yes; and one o' the passengers is comin' this way. (*LOTHROP goes to door c.*) I guess he's the one they call the avy-ater.

(*LUCY moves to r. MISS LAVINIA steps to front of counter and stands talking to ZENAS across the counter.*)

LOTHROP (*looking out doorway*). By Jove, you're right! It's Maurice Van Derzee.

(*Enter MAURICE VAN DERZEE, c. He pauses in doorway. ELISHA is at left and LOTHROP at right of door.*)

VAN DERZEE. Beg pardon, everybody; my uncle, Mr. Titus Trent, wishes me to inquire — (*Observes LOTHROP.*) Why, Harry, old man, you're just the chap I'm looking for. (*Shakes hands with LOTHROP.*) Did you get my telegram?

(*They come down stage to c.*)

(*Exit ELISHA, c.*)

LOTHROP. Yes, and I observed your picturesque descent.

VAN DERZEE. Oh, I'm the champion aviator all right. Came near colliding with a fair damsel as we landed, but shouted a warning just in time. Thought I saw the lady in question making tracks for this gorgeous emporium. If somebody will point her out I'd like to apologize.

LOTHROP. There's not the slightest reason why you shouldn't. Miss Battles is the person aggrieved. No doubt she'll be willing to absolve you.

VAN DERZEE (*disconcertedly*). Oh, I say! You don't mean Miss Lavinia Battles?

LOTHROP. The very same! (*Takes him by arm.*) Come along. You must be nice to her. Miss Battles, permit me to present Mr. Maurice Van Derzee, a very dear friend of mine and a nephew of Mr. Trent, the president of our company.

MISS LAVINIA. How-do-you-do, young man?

(*LOTHROP crosses to l., and stands at MATILDA'S side. VAN DERZEE is at l. c.*)

VAN DERZEE. Oh—er—er—very well, I thank you. I—I trust my aeroplane didn't alarm you—er—unduly.

MISS LAVINIA (*advancing to R. C.*). Well, we're not accustomed to flying-machines in Spruceville; I was startled for the moment, that's all.

VAN DERZEE. Yes, these air-ships are a bit frightful at first. You'll get used to 'em, though.

MISS LAVINIA. Not if I know myself. We're plain country folk down here, Mr. Van Derzee, and we don't take kindly to innovations. Doubtless your uncle has learned as much already.

VAN DERZEE. Ah! You know Uncle Titus, then?

MISS LAVINIA. My dear boy, don't act so innocent. Everybody understands why Mr. Titus Trent has come to Spruceville. He hopes to succeed where Mr. Lothrop has failed; and I miss my guess if you don't know all about it.

VAN DERZEE. By Jove, Miss Battles, you're awfully frank!

MISS LAVINIA. I've no reason to be mysterious. Tell your uncle I anticipate our meeting with pleasure.

VAN DERZEE. Do you really? I'll certainly tell Uncle Titus. He'll be delighted, I'm sure.

(*Enter TITUS TRENT, C., while VAN DERZEE is speaking.*)

TRENT (*advancing to C.*). He will, eh? Well, not if you keep him waiting out there any longer. That aeroplane has certainly made a hit with the natives of Spruceville. I've answered a million questions, I'll wager. Come, let's find young Lothrop and get busy.

VAN DERZEE. I've found him already. (*Indicates* LOTHROP.) This is Harry. You remember him, surely.

TRENT. Ah, yes—of course. How are you, Lothrop?

(*They shake hands.*)

LOTHROP. I'm first rate, thanks. Sorry I can't say as much of this dam proposition.

TRENT (*lightly*). Oh, we'll adjust the matter, never fear. I was a little angry at first, but there's nothing like a flight through the azure sky to cool one's heated passion. Tell me, have you arranged an interview? When may we see this—er—gentle Amazon?

VAN DERZEE. Sh! Miss Battles is right here. Let me

introduce you. (*Turns to MISS LAVINIA.*) Miss Battles, this is my uncle, Mr. Trent.

(*MISS LAVINIA acknowledges the introduction with a slight obeisance. VAN DERZEE moves up stage and stands leaning against counter. He is evidently impressed with LUCY, and watches her, though not obtrusively.*)

(*Exit ZENAS, C., in the direction of the aeroplane.*)

TRENT (*blantly*). My dear madam, I am charmed to make your acquaintance. Mr. Lothrop has mentioned your name so frequently of late that I feel we are not altogether strangers.

MISS LAVINIA. Do you, indeed? I think I may safely return the compliment.

TRENT. By George, that's fine! I predict we'll get on famously.

MISS LAVINIA. I hope so, I'm sure.

TRENT. So do I, Miss Battles—so do I. Do you know, I was fearful you'd resent our endeavors to secure your land. So few women are able to take the larger view!—to comprehend the vast, impersonal forces at work in the financial world! But it's different with you. You're far too wise to harbor the least bit of animosity. 'Pon my word, you're almost as—as broad-minded as—a man!

MISS LAVINIA. Well, I declare! You mean that for flattery, I suppose.

TRENT (*hastily*). No, no! I'm in dead earnest. You see things in their right relations. You have a keen sense of humor, too.

MISS LAVINIA. Have I, actually?

TRENT. You surely have, and it's a mighty important possession, let me tell you. Now that talk about enjoining us from constructing our dam—that was what I call a bit of genuine jocularly. By George, when I heard it, it made me laugh like—like anything! Do you know, I felt ever so good-natured, and from that moment I entered our little game with zest.

MISS LAVINIA. Really? May I ask if you've enjoyed it?

(*LOTHROP joins VAN DERZEE at counter.*)

TRENT. By George, I have! Oh, I don't mind confessing, Miss Battles, that you've got a little the better of

me, thus far ; but it's something no woman ever did before, and, by George ! it's aroused my admiration.

MISS LAVINIA (*dryly*). Thanks.

VAN DERZEE (*to* LOTHROP). I say, old man, introduce me, won't you ?

LOTHROP. Why, certainly. (*Approaches* LUCY.) Miss Ray, allow me to present Mr. Van Derzee.

(*They acknowledge the introduction. LOTHROP rejoins MATILDA at L.*)

VAN DERZEE (*coming forward*). Miss Ray, this is my uncle, Mr. Trent.

TRENT. Glad to know you, young lady. (*To* MISS LAVINIA.) A relative of yours, Miss Battles ?

MISS LAVINIA. Lucy is my niece.

TRENT. She's a very pretty girl. I thought she resembled you. (*Indicates* MATILDA.) And this other young lady ?

LOTHROP. Miss Bradley—Mr. Trent and Mr. Van Derzee.

(*They bow.*)

TRENT. There ! Now we're all acquainted. A nice little party, I declare ! Do you know, that's what I like about a country village—everybody knows everybody else. It's all so nice and cozy. Miss Battles, I trust my nephew and I may have the pleasure of calling at Riverside Farm a little later. We're quite eager to visit your charming home. Don't tell us we're not welcome, please. I'll carry a flag of truce along if you say so.

MISS LAVINIA. Oh, Lucy and I are not afraid of hostilities. Come by all means. We shall be glad to see you.

TRENT. That's awfully good of you, I'm sure. Now we're getting on !

MISS LAVINIA (*inscrutably*). Do you think so ?

TRENT. I'm confident of it. Why, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if we were able to settle our little differences quite—er—amicably.

MISS LAVINIA. Mr. Trent, pray don't labor under any misapprehension. Our differences are not trivial, and I warn you that any attempt at compromise will certainly fail.

TRENT. Dear me ! How emphatic we are !

MISS LAVINIA. Riverside Farm has been owned by my family for generations, and is very dear to me. I have been advised by competent authority that not a single acre of land can be taken from me without my consent. Why, then, should I entertain any of your propositions?

TRENT. Why, indeed? Believe me, Miss Battles, I understand your feeling perfectly. It's only natural, of course. But please bear in mind that we don't intend to ruin the place altogether, and it often happens, you know, that a bit of personal sentiment must be sacrificed for the welfare of the race.

MISS LAVINIA. For shame, Mr. Trent! Do you think I have the least particle of sympathy with those grasping financiers who, for a few paltry dollars, would flood our meadows and turn the wooded mountains I love into bleak and barren hills?

TRENT. Oh, we shall adopt the most approved methods of forestry, Miss Battles. The mountains will be wooded again in years to come.

MISS LAVINIA. Small good it will do us who are living to-day. Really, your notions of human welfare are distinctly humorous. (*Imitates TRENT.*) By George, they make me laugh like—like anything!

TRENT. Miss Battles, I'm sorry to have you treat the matter with levity. I've come to Spruceville to make you a very generous offer——

MISS LAVINIA (*scornfully*). Generous offer, indeed! Why, I suppose you think I'm going to prove a sort of female Esau, don't you? Well, if you do, you may as well climb back into that ungainly air-ship of yours and fly away home. There are things that money can't purchase, Mr. Titus Trent. (*Impressively.*) Riverside Farm is not for sale.

(MISS LAVINIA stands near C. with TRENT on her left.

LOTHROP is at extreme L., and MATILDA is on his right.

LUCY is at extreme R. with VAN DERZEE at her left.)

ACT II

A GAME OF CHECKERS

SCENE.—*Interior of MISS LAVINIA'S home. The room is furnished somewhat quaintly, but in good taste. Writing-desk and chair at R. Empty vase or rose jar on desk. Table at L. Checker-board and checkers on table. Sofa, chairs, etc. Large double doors c., back, opening into garden. These doors are left open during the entire act, and all entrances are made through the open doorway. There should be at least one other door in the scene, but its location is not important.*

(*At rise of curtain, MISS LAVINIA is discovered seated at left, and TRENT at right of table. They are playing a game of checkers. Only a few of TRENT'S checkers are left on the board, and the moves in the game should be arranged beforehand and carefully rehearsed so that MISS LAVINIA may win at the proper time.*)

TRENT. It's your move, Miss Lavinia. (*Hastily.*) I beg your pardon, but it's so tremendously easy to call you that. Everybody else does, you know.

MISS LAVINIA. Oh, I don't mind—not in the least.

TRENT. You don't? Now, that's fine. And it's mighty good of you to invite us here.

MISS LAVINIA (*moving a checker*). Oh, we are glad to see you. There! It's your turn again.

TRENT. So it is. (*Contemplates the checker-board with a puzzled air.*) Well, well! I guess you've got me cornered this time. I'm an awful duffer at checkers. Why, I haven't played the game in twenty years.

MISS LAVINIA. It's a good deal like the financial game, don't you think?

TRENT. Well, rather! (*Moves checker.*) There! Capture that fellow if you can.

MISS LAVINIA (*frowning*). Um! (*After a pause.*) I think I'll get him yet. (*Moves checker.*)

TRENT. You do, eh? Well, 'not if I know myself. (*Deliberates a moment, then moves checker.*) Ah! (*With consternation.*) By George! I——

MISS LAVINIA (*"jumping" Trent's checker, and removing it from board*). The game is mine, Mr. Trent.

TRENT (*dolefully*). Yes, I see it is. You're certainly a clever woman, Miss Lavinia. You've given me a neat little demonstration of strategy.

MISS LAVINIA (*quizzically*). Don't you think you ought to profit by it?

TRENT. Possibly. In what way would you suggest?

MISS LAVINIA. Shouldn't it teach you not to underestimate my skill in that other little game we're playing, you and I?

TRENT (*feigning innocence*). I don't believe I quite comprehend your meaning.

MISS LAVINIA (*smiling faintly*). Don't you? I'll be more explicit, then. There's a big meadow lot down there on the river bank not so very different, except in size, from one of the spaces here on this checker-board —

TRENT. Ah! I see the point. And if I attempt to occupy that square of land? What then?

MISS LAVINIA (*decisively*). Our little game of checkers will repeat itself. Take warning, Mr. Trent. Don't make the fatal move.

TRENT. Ha, ha, ha! By George, Miss Lavinia, your views are unique.

MISS LAVINIA. Are they?

TRENT. Indeed they are! But like the views of most women, they're superficial.

MISS LAVINIA (*with sarcasm*). Actually!

TRENT. As I told you once before, big enterprises are governed by immutable laws. If we obey those laws, we succeed; if we oppose them, we're brushed aside like the human atoms we really are.

MISS LAVINIA (*whimsically*). I see. We're swept off the checker-board!

TRENT. Precisely. Only you mustn't forget that the Power behind it all isn't playing a game of any sort. The end was decreed from the start, and whether we like it or not, creation jogs along in the appointed way.

MISS LAVINIA. Really! And what is the appointed way, may I ask?

TRENT. Is there any question about it? Isn't life the one indispensable element of progress?

MISS LAVINIA. I think so. That's one reason why I

want to keep that meadow lot. (*Confidentially.*) Do you know, it yields ever so many bushels of potatoes.

TRENT (*with disgust*). Potatoes! Food for a few hungry mouths, while my great industry would stimulate the minds of millions of people.

MISS LAVINIA. Is it possible? What a public benefactor you are!

TRENT (*rising*). Why, bless your soul! I deserve no credit. I'm merely an instrument of Destiny, that's all. I own a great newspaper, Miss Lavinia, and this new mill which we're going to build (*smiling*), down there on your checker-board, will exist simply to feed my printing-presses. Your forests will be turned to paper, the paper stamped with words, and those words carried to the four corners of the globe that men may have mental life and—er—have it more abundantly. (*Crosses to R.*)

MISS LAVINIA. My! That makes my little agricultural ambition look like pretty—small potatoes, doesn't it?

TRENT (*emphatically*). Of course it does. The greatest good to the greatest number—that's the way the tide of evolution's drifting, and it pays to go with the tide.

MISS LAVINIA. Pays in dollars and cents, do you mean?

TRENT. Yes, in dollars and cents. There are plenty of golden opportunities for the man whose eyes are open.

MISS LAVINIA. I dare say you're right. I expect your eyes are pretty wide open most of the time, Mr. Trent, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if you'd found a way to make money out of this National Paper Company already.

TRENT (*laughing affectedly*). Ha, ha, ha! That's rich. Make money out of such a corporation! Why, how could it possibly be done? Tell me how you'd do it, Miss Lavinia, and perhaps I'll try.

(*Sits in chair near desk.*)

MISS LAVINIA. Well, let's assume that the value of the National Paper Company's stock depends a good deal on the ease with which the company acquires certain water rights.

TRENT. Certainly; that's a fair assumption.

MISS LAVINIA. And let's assume that you, the president of the company, foresaw from the first a little opposition on the part of a certain—what is the expression Lawyer Holcombe uses?—oh, yes!—riparian owner.

TRENT. Umph! Meaning yourself, I suppose.

MISS LAVINIA. Exactly. Now just at the start before any opposition—er—developed, there would be a demand for the stock.

TRENT. Would there? How so?

MISS LAVINIA (*flatteringly*). Any venture that Mr. Trent approved would look good to the public, of course.

TRENT. Oh, I see.

MISS LAVINIA. And Mr. Titus Trent, who organized the company himself and didn't pay an exorbitant price for his shares, would be only too glad to dispose of a few choice certificates just to live up to his motto, "The greatest good to the greatest number."

TRENT. Very clever, Miss Lavinia, very clever! But granted that what you say is true—that I have already sold my stock—how do you account for my continued interest in the company?

MISS LAVINIA (*rising*). Oh, the company's all right. You simply want to gather a few extra shekels while it's getting under way. And to accomplish this result it's quite essential that the public lose faith in your industry. You invite trouble: it's part of the game. A young civil engineer without a particle of business experience is sent to Spruceville to purchase Riverside Farm. You know he's not the sort of person to succeed. If he ——

TRENT (*rising*). But, my dear Miss Lavinia, Mr. Lothrop is an exceedingly efficient engineer.

MISS LAVINIA. Certainly. That's another example of your excellent foresight. You don't want his time entirely wasted. Well, what's the result? I refuse to sell my farm. Your work is held up. There's no immediate prospect that the dam will be constructed, and the stock of the National Paper Company goes to smash, just as you expected it would all along.

TRENT. Yes—that's a matter of ancient history.

MISS LAVINIA. I know it is; but now we come to modern times. (*Moves to right of table.*) The occasion for vigorous action has arrived. Mr. Titus Trent means business. Does he send a representative this time? Hardly. He comes himself—comes as the gods come, out of the open sky; and he prates about human welfare and the duties of the individual to the race! And the moment he secures an option on Lavinia Battles's meadow lot, his brokers will

buy up a controlling interest in the National Paper Company, and they won't pay a tenth part of what the stock is really worth, or what Mr. Titus Trent originally sold it for. (*Pauses as though out of breath.*) There! That's the way you money barons play financial checkers, or I miss my guess.

TRENT. By George, Miss Lavinia, you're a marvelous woman!

MISS LAVINIA. No; merely a sensible one.

(*Turns and goes up stage to doorway.*)

TRENT. It's the same thing. But tell me, what reason have I to suppose you'll ever give me an option on that meadow lot? Your conduct hasn't suggested it thus far.

MISS LAVINIA (*turning toward him*). Oh, you're not an imbecile. It's only a question of time. I can bother you some, of course; but you're bound to prevail in the end, and you know your own powers too well to doubt it. After all, there's something in what you say, and I guess I'm foolish to oppose you any longer.

TRENT (*with astonishment*). Why, you don't mean ——?

MISS LAVINIA. I mean that I'm getting tired of conflict, and I've half a mind to surrender.

TRENT. What!

MISS LAVINIA. Yes, I mean just what I say. I expect an important letter this afternoon. If it comes, I'll give you a definite answer.

TRENT. Well, by George! Talk about woman's consistency! This is too easy. Where's Maurice? I must see him at once.

MISS LAVINIA. He's in the garden with Lucy.

TRENT. He is, eh? Do you know, my nephew has taken a great fancy to your niece. He talks about her constantly, and seizes every opportunity to visit Riverside Farm.

MISS LAVINIA. Well, I guess Lucy doesn't find his attentions very—irksome.

TRENT. I'm glad—by George, I am! She's a dear little girl, and I'd like to have her in the family.

MISS LAVINIA (*smiling*). Isn't that anticipating a little?

TRENT. Oh, I don't know; stranger things have happened. Well, I don't like to disturb love's young dream, but I must certainly see Maurice.

MISS LAVINIA. I'll ask Lucy to send him in. (*Calls off R.*) Lucy!

LUCY (*outside*). Yes, Aunt Lavinia.

MISS LAVINIA (*speaking off R.*). Tell Mr. Van Derzee his uncle wishes to speak with him. (*To TRENT.*) I suppose you're going to buy back that stock on the strength of my—er—capitulation, aren't you, Mr. Trent?

TRENT (*evasively*). Er—it's well to be prepared for emergencies. The last sales were absurdly low.

MISS LAVINIA. And the next will be absurdly high, I suspect—that is, if I withdraw my opposition.

TRENT. Oh, very likely. Stocks are often erratic, you know.

(*Crosses to L. and stands at left of table.*)

MISS LAVINIA (*moving to right of doorway*). So I've been told.

(*Enter LUCY. She carries a large bouquet.*)

LUCY. Mr. Van Derzee has just received a telegram. He'll be in directly.

TRENT. A telegram! What's up, I wonder.

LUCY. I'm sure I don't know. Mr. Lothrop and Matilda brought the message over from the village.

(*Crosses to R. and busies herself arranging flowers in vase on desk. When she has finished she joins MISS LAVINIA, who still stands at right of doorway.*)

TRENT. It's probably from Burroughs, the clerk of our corporation.

MISS LAVINIA. Maybe things aren't going just right in your absence.

TRENT. Maybe not. I——

(*Enter VAN DERZEE. He carries an open telegram.*)

VAN DERZEE (*to TRENT*). I've just had a wire from Burroughs. It's rather important, I think.

TRENT. It is, eh?

VAN DERZEE (*advancing to C.*). Yes; he says the sales of National Paper stock for the past few days have increased considerably.

TRENT. H'm! How about the price?

VAN DERZEE. Oh, that's still very low.

TRENT. Good! I was afraid our trip to Spruceville would be regarded as a favorable omen.

VAN DERZEE. Well, it looks as if somebody did regard it that way. (*Glances at MISS LAVINIA doubtfully.*) Shall I speak freely?

TRENT. Certainly. (*Smiles.*) Miss Lavinia is quite expert in stock manipulation. Her advice may be valuable.

VAN DERZEE. Very well. It's a pretty significant circumstance, I think, that every share of stock sold during the week has been purchased by a single brokerage house.

TRENT. The deuce you say! Why, that would indicate ——

VAN DERZEE. That some one is buying for control.

TRENT. By George, it can't be that I've delayed too long! Have you answered the telegram?

VAN DERZEE. Yes; I've requested Burroughs to wire us the name of the purchaser as soon as the stock is transferred on the books of the company.

TRENT. That's right—that's right. I couldn't have done better myself. (*With a puzzled frown.*) But, by George! I don't understand it. Perhaps I ought ——

(*Enter ZENAS.*)

ZENAS. Here's a letter for ye, Miss Lavinia—registered an' special delivery, too. Cal'late it must be prutty important.

MISS LAVINIA. Oh, it has come, then. Thank you very much. (*Comes forward to desk.*) Where do I sign?

(*Sits at desk.*)

ZENAS (*coming forward and indicating a place in a little book which he carries*). Right there, if you please.

MISS LAVINIA. Here?

ZENAS. Yes; that's right. (*MISS LAVINIA writes name in book.*) Now sign the card. Yes; right on that dotted line. (*MISS LAVINIA signs card which he hands her.*) That's correct. (*MISS LAVINIA returns book and card to ZENAS.*) Thanks. (*Hands letter to MISS LAVINIA.*) Here's the epistle.

MISS LAVINIA (*opening letter*). Ah! It's the letter I was expecting. (*To ZENAS.*) Won't you sit down? I know you'll be interested to hear the news.

(MISS LAVINIA *is seated at desk. ZENAS is at her left. TRENT stands near table, and VAN DERZEE is on his right.*)

ZENAS (*eagerly*). The news!

MISS LAVINIA. Yes. (*Turns her chair toward front.*)
I've decided to sell the farm.

ZENAS. What! Not to——

MISS LAVINIA. To the National Paper Company—yes.
Mr. Trent has convinced me that it's a duty I owe society.

TRENT (*with surprise*). You've really made up your mind, then?

MISS LAVINIA. Yes; this letter has banished all doubts.

(VAN DERZEE *joins LUCY.*)

ZENAS. Wall, I cal'late it's a mighty wise decision. I'm sartin ye'll never regret it.

MISS LAVINIA. I hope not, I'm sure.

ZENAS. Guess I'll tell 'Lisha. He'll be dreadful relieved to learn ye're actin' so sensible.

(*Exit through doorway, c.*)

MISS LAVINIA (*to TRENT*). Are the terms I quoted Mr. Lothrop satisfactory?

TRENT. Perfectly. I'll give you the company's check for that amount at once.

(*Sits at table, takes out check-book, writes check, rises, crosses to R., and hands check to MISS LAVINIA.*)

MISS LAVINIA (*taking check*). Thank you. (*Takes document from desk.*) Here's the deed. Lawyer Holcombe prepared it recently.

TRENT. Well, well! How expeditious! (*Glances at deed.*) All executed, too. I suspect your decision isn't quite as sudden as I thought.

MISS LAVINIA. Ahem! (*Imitates TRENT'S manner.*) It's well to be prepared for emergencies.

TRENT. So I perceive. (*Crosses to L., and sits at right of table.*) H'm! Let's see. (*Reads portions of deed.*) "Lavinia Battles of Spruceville," and so forth, and so forth, "to the National Paper Company, a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of——"

Um-h'm. (*Mumbles words as though reading rapidly to himself.*) "A certain piece or parcel of land bounded and described ——" Um! (*Reads silently for a moment.*) Seems to be all straight enough. I'll have our attorneys look up the title. No encumbrances, I suppose?

MISS LAVINIA (*nonchalantly*). Oh, yes.

TRENT. Eh? What?

MISS LAVINIA. There's quite a large mortgage, but I'm going to discharge it with the money you've paid me.

TRENT. A mortgage?

MISS LAVINIA. Exactly. I had to raise a pretty substantial sum of money the other day. Zenas was right about that flyer in stocks. Lawyer Holcombe advised me to ——

TRENT (*grimly*). I think I'll have to make the acquaintance of this Lawyer Holcombe. I'm not sure that he isn't responsible for many of my troubles.

MISS LAVINIA (*rising*). Troubles? Why, you've got the land, Mr. Trent, and I give you my word that this mortgage sha'n't bother you a bit. What more do you want?

TRENT. Oh, I'm not worrying about the mortgage. I've got more important things in hand just now. I must ——

MISS LAVINIA (*sweetly*). Get control of the National Paper Company, mustn't you?

TRENT (*rising*). By George, Miss Lavinia, your conduct is perfectly incomprehensible. First you warn me not to occupy that meadow lot, and declare you'll sweep me off the checker-board if I try. The next instant you do a little hocus-pocus act, and out pops a deed of your entire property. Do you mind telling me what your game really is?

MISS LAVINIA. Not in the least. It's a sort of checkers, and my conduct isn't half as inexplicable as it seems. I haven't renounced my ambition to win the game—not a bit of it! But before you can sweep your opponent off the board, he's got to make a move, hasn't he?

TRENT (*doubtfully*). I suppose so.

MISS LAVINIA. Very well, then. You've just accepted a deed of Riverside Farm for the National Paper Company.

TRENT. I certainly have.

MISS LAVINIA. Now can't you see that in taking that deed you've given me just the opportunity I've been waiting

for?—an opportunity to put you to utter rout. Don't you realize what a stupid, silly move you've made?

TRENT. No, I'll be hanged if I do! Maybe I'm dense, but — Well, I haven't any time to waste in solving riddles. (*Turns to VAN DERZEE.*) Maurice!

VAN DERZEE (*coming forward to C.*). Yes, Uncle Titus.

TRENT. Get into the air-ship and start for New York at once. Buy a controlling interest in National Paper as quickly and as quietly as possible.

MISS LAVINIA. Well, well! I didn't make such a bad guess after all. (*Returns to seat at desk.*)

TRENT (*to VAN DERZEE*). Don't let it be known that I'm figuring in the deal. Create the impression that we can't secure the water privileges, and that I'm going to unload. The public still thinks I'm in control.

MISS LAVINIA. My, but this is an education in high finance!

TRENT (*continuing*). Employ a dozen different brokers. You know how to work the game. Now fly, my boy, fly! There's not a minute to lose.

MISS LAVINIA (*rising*). One moment, Mr. Trent. I don't want your nephew flying off on a wild-goose chase. It's only fair to tell you that all the brokers in Christendom couldn't purchase a controlling interest in the National Paper Company.

TRENT. Couldn't, eh? Well, why not, if you please?

MISS LAVINIA. Because I've got a certificate for the majority of the shares right here in this envelope (*taking letter from desk*), and it's not for sale.

TRENT. Why, what—what are you talking about? Have you lost your senses?

MISS LAVINIA. I was never more sane in my life. (*Takes certificate from envelope.*) See? It's an innocent-looking document, but it cost a lot of money. Why, I had to mortgage the farm and sell some of my other stocks to buy it. I'm sorry it doesn't bear the autograph of President Trent. The vice-president's signature isn't nearly so distinguished looking. Maybe it's just as effectual, though.

TRENT. Well, I'll be —

(*Enter LOTHROP and MATILDA.*)

LOTHROP. A telegram for Mr. Trent.

TRENT (*impatently*). Yes, yes; where is it?

LOTHROP (*producing telegram*). Here it is.

VAN DERZEE. Let me read it for you, Uncle Titus. Perhaps it contains bad news.

TRENT. All right. (*Crosses to left of table.*) Go ahead.

(VAN DERZEE *takes telegram from* LOTHROP *and opens it. LOTHROP, MATILDA and LUCY remain standing near doorway. VAN DERZEE advances to C.*)

VAN DERZEE (*looking at telegram*). It's from Burroughs.

TRENT. Well, well! What does he say?

VAN DERZEE. Patience, Uncle, patience! He says that a certificate for the majority stock of the National Paper Company was issued yesterday to Lavinia Battles of Spruceville.

TRENT. What! Why, it—it can't be true. You're joking. Yes, yes; that's it—a practical joke. Ha, ha, ha! Don't you remember, I said Miss Lavinia had a sense of humor; and, by George, you're all in league with her! Oh, I've found you out, you rascals!

(MISS LAVINIA *crosses to L., and stands at right of table.*

VAN DERZEE *crosses to R., and stands near desk.*)

MISS LAVINIA. No, Mr. Trent, you're wrong. This isn't a practical joke. Just as sure as you're alive the destiny of the National Paper Company rests in my hands.

TRENT. What! In the hands of a woman!

MISS LAVINIA. Yes, in the hands of a cantankerous female. That's what you called me, isn't it? Well, I guess you've got to reconstruct your notions about the gentle sex. Some of us who own ten-acre lots know how to turn them into gold mines.

(*Enter ELISHA.*)

ELISHA. How-d'y-do, Miss Laviny? Zenas says —

MISS LAVINIA. Come right in, Elisha. I want you to spread the news, and I guess you're pretty expert in that capacity.

ELISHA (*grinning*). Wall, I allus try to do my best.

MISS LAVINIA. Tell all your neighbors and friends that I've sold the old homestead to the National Paper Company. The free and unlimited right of flowage is theirs, the dam will be constructed at once, a gigantic mill erected on yon-

der river bank, and the wealth of the eternal hills will be ground to pulp that "men may have mental life, and—er—have it more abundantly"!

ELISHA. Well, I'll be doggoned!

VAN DERZEE. Shades of Cræsus! Once that report strikes the market, the price of National Paper stock will bump the rafters.

MISS LAVINIA. Of course it will. It can't be stopped—at least, not by mere "human atoms."

MATILDA (*to LUCY*). Land sakes alive! What is your Aunt Lavinia talking about?

LUCY. Goodness me! I haven't an idea.

MISS LAVINIA. Oh, it's very simple, girls. (*Mimicks TRENT.*) "Big enterprises are governed by immutable laws," aren't they, Mr. Trent?

VAN DERZEE. Great Jupiter! Talk about gold bricks! Uncle Titus, we're a couple of jays, that's what we are. (*Laughs grimly.*) Ha, ha, ha! We thought we'd gather honey down here in the country amid the flowers and the bees. And instead—we're stung for our pains! Come, let's spread our poor clipped wings and flutter back to old Manhattan.

LUCY (*coming forward impulsively*). Oh, Mr. Van Derzee, surely you're not going to leave us so soon!

VAN DERZEE. Depend upon it, Miss—Miss Lucy, I—I'd much rather remain in Spruceville if I could. You've been no end jolly, and I—I like you immensely. By Jove, I do! But Uncle and I are altogether too innocent. Really, we ought not to be at large. (*To TRENT.*) Speak up, Uncle Titus. It's so, isn't it? We've been——

TRENT (*gazing at MISS LAVINIA with mingled amazement and admiration*). Buncoed—by—a woman!

(TRENT *is at left and MISS LAVINIA at right of table.*

VAN DERZEE *stands near desk, and LUCY is on his left.*

MATILDA and LOTHROP *are in doorway, and ELISHA is at left of doorway.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

CUPID FORMS A TRUST

SCENE.—MISS LAVINIA'S garden. Entrances at R. and L., well back. House or set cottage at R. Rustic benches at R. and L. View of a river in the distance, if practicable. No particular setting is essential, but if the stage facilities permit, there should be flowers in profusion, and the scene should suggest the typical old-fashioned flower garden.

(At rise of curtain, LUCY, carrying a basket of apples, enters from L., and is met by VAN DERZEE, who approaches from R.)

VAN DERZEE (*cordially*). How-do-you-do, Miss Lucy? Lovely morning, isn't it?

LUCY. Indeed it is, Mr. Van Derzee. (*Quotes.*)

“Just as lovely a morning as ever was seen
For a nice little trip in a flying-machine.”

VAN DERZEE. By Jove, you're right! It's far too glorious to be tied to earth. One feels like expanding, somehow.

LUCY. Well, there's lots of room up there in the sky.

VAN DERZEE. Yes, that's so. See, there isn't a cloud anywhere, and the aeroplane is waiting. Come, let's leave this prosaic old world for a while, and sail off into the—er—cerulean depths like—like two happy skylarks! Come—what do you say?

LUCY (*laughing*). Thank you, Mr. Van Derzee, not this morning. I'm afraid we'd come down like poor Darius Green

“In a wonderful whirl of tangled strings,
Broken braces and broken springs.”

VAN DERZEE. Why, you've learned that old yarn by heart, haven't you?

LUCY. Yes. Aunt Lavinia and I repeat it every time we're tempted by you or Mr. Trent to venture into the air-ship.

VAN DERZEE. Oh, you need have no fears. Uncle Titus and I understand the gentle art of aviation. Times have changed since poor old Darius buckled on his wings.

LUCY. Yes, that's true. Everything goes soaring nowadays.

(Sits on bench, L., placing basket of apples beside her.)

VAN DERZEE. Even the price of National Paper stock.

LUCY. Ha, ha, ha! Wasn't Aunt Lavinia clever? I thought you and Mr. Trent were going back to New York in deep humiliation.

VAN DERZEE. Well, we were a bit chagrined. Who wouldn't be? But this morning Uncle Titus is lost in admiration at Miss Lavinia's strategy. Why, he can't talk of anything else. Really, I believe the poor old duffer's in love.

LUCY *(eagerly)*. In love? Not with Aunt Lavinia?

VAN DERZEE. Yes, with your Aunt Lavinia. And, by Jove, I don't blame him either!

LUCY. Oh! Then you're fond of Aunt Lavinia?

VAN DERZEE. Tremendously! *(Significantly.)* She's your aunt, you know.

LUCY. Yes, I know.

VAN DERZEE *(after a pause)*. Of course I—I don't believe there's anybody anywhere that's—that's half as—as nice as you are.

LUCY *(shyly)*. Why, Mr. Van Derzee!

VAN DERZEE *(advancing toward her)*. Oh, yes, it's so. To tell the truth, I didn't want to come to Spruceville. I—I thought it'd be dull and—and uninteresting here; but Uncle Titus insisted, and, by Jove, I'm glad he did, for I shouldn't have known you otherwise. *(Places basket on ground and sits on bench beside her.)* You remember that first morning when I saw you at Mr. Bradley's store—why, I just knew I'd met my fate. Didn't you feel that way, too?

LUCY. Why, I don't know. Y-e-s, I guess I—I did a—
—a little.

VAN DERZEE. And don't you care for me? Couldn't you —

LUCY. Why, Mr. Van Derzee, I've known you such a little while, I——

VAN DERZEE. Don't you believe in love at first sight? I do.

LUCY. I—I'm not sure. Perhaps——

(*Enter MISS LAVINIA from house.*)

MISS LAVINIA (*speaking as she enters*). Lucy, where in the world are those apples? (*Observes VAN DERZEE, who rises quickly.*) Oh, good-morning, Mr. Van Derzee.

VAN DERZEE (*slightly confused*). Ah—good-morning, Miss Battles.

MISS LAVINIA. I don't like to interrupt your visit, Mr. Van Derzee, but Lucy and I are going to make pies—apple pies—this morning, and I guess somebody hasn't hurried very fast with the apples.

LUCY (*rising*). I'm awfully sorry you've had to wait, Aunt Lavinia.

MISS LAVINIA (*laughingly*). Yes, you look repentant.

VAN DERZEE (*recovering his composure*). Oh, I say! I'm a crackerjack at peeling apples. I'd like to help—honestly I would. Let me take your place, Miss Lavinia.

MISS LAVINIA (*with mock severity*). Miss—what?

VAN DERZEE (*disconcertedly*). Oh, by Jove! I've done it now. You'll never forgive me. Such familiarity is—so unpardonable. (*Audaciously.*) But really you look so—so young and—and pretty it's the most natural thing in the world to call you Miss Lavinia.

MISS LAVINIA (*smiling*). Well, I guess you're Titus Trent's nephew, fast enough.

VAN DERZEE. Oh, I mean it—truly I do.

MISS LAVINIA. There, run along! Make apple pies if you want to.

(*LUCY crosses to R., and stands in doorway.*)

VAN DERZEE. Thanks awfully. (*Mischievously.*) By the way, Uncle Titus is coming over this morning.

MISS LAVINIA. I know he is. He's on the way now. I saw him from the kitchen window.

VAN DERZEE (*significantly*). Ah-ha! Then it's time for us to make—apple pies. (*Takes basket and joins*

LUCY. MISS LAVINIA *crosses to L.*) Farewell! (*Enter TRENT, R.*) Oh, here's Uncle Titus! (*To MISS LAVINIA.*)

He's awfully downhearted this morning. Don't be too severe with him—Aunt Lavinia!

(*Exeunt LUCY and VAN DERZEE through door of house.*)

MISS LAVINIA. "Aunt Lavinia"! Well, of all things! Did you hear that, Mr. Trent? What does the rogue mean, I wonder? He's dreadfully audacious. (*Sits on bench, L.*)

TRENT. Most rogues are. I wish I dared to be.

MISS LAVINIA. I've noticed your timidity. But after all your nephew has a winsome way with him.

TRENT. I wonder if he takes it from his Uncle Titus?

MISS LAVINIA. Well, if he took anything worth while from his Uncle Titus he'd have to fight for it, that's certain.

TRENT. Oh, I don't know! Am I so awfully beligerent?

MISS LAVINIA. Aren't you?

TRENT. Why—no. I've always flattered myself that I have an extremely pacific disposition.

(*Sits on bench, R., placing hat and stick beside him.*)

MISS LAVINIA. H'm! If the truth were known, I'll wager you're planning all kinds of warlike maneuvers this very moment.

TRENT (*innocently*). Dear me! Why should I be planning anything of the sort?

MISS LAVINIA. Because you want to control the National Paper Company.

TRENT. Granted. But why be pugnacious about it? That isn't the way the modern financier attains his ends. By the way, what's the price of the stock this morning?

MISS LAVINIA. I'm sure I don't know. I haven't any to sell, and if I had, I'd sell it in the market where free competition determines the price.

TRENT (*smiling*). You talk like a book on economics. Haven't you heard that men don't find competition healthy nowadays?

MISS LAVINIA. Yes; but I'm not a man.

TRENT (*rising*). No; I know you're not. You're a woman, and, by George, you're the queen of your sex! (*Humbly.*) Miss Lavinia, I—I want to apologize for all the unkind things I've said of you. My only excuse is that I—I didn't understand. I'm a pretty crusty old bachelor, and

I haven't seen much of women. I didn't suppose the Creator made 'em like you. And, by George, I guess he doesn't! I guess you're the exception that proves the rule.

MISS LAVINIA. What arrant nonsense!

TRENT (*advancing toward her*). The very first moment I set eyes on you, I—I felt somehow that you were different from the other women I had known. And even before that, when Lothrop wrote us about the stand you were taking, I—I tell you I was mightily impressed. Of course, I didn't comprehend my feelings well enough to realize just what the trouble was, and that's how I happened to say—well, the things I said. You know the result: I came to Spruceville. I didn't really care about that meadow lot. I thought I did, but it wasn't so. Why, bless your soul, do you suppose I'd have risked my neck in that tippy aeroplane if I hadn't wanted to make an impression in your eyes? The fact is—and I discovered it only yesterday—I—I—love—you——

MISS LAVINIA (*gasping*). You—what?

TRENT (*resolutely*). I love you, Miss Lavinia. (*Abruptly*.) Will you marry me?

MISS LAVINIA. Well, upon my word! So that's the way of modern finance, is it? When competition proves too expensive, just combine. And matrimonial combination too! Well, I like your assurance!

TRENT. I'm sorry, Miss Lavinia. I was afraid you'd misunderstand me. I'm a pretty unworthy old scamp, I admit. But I'm sincere—truly I am.

MISS LAVINIA. My! but you must be in desperate straits. You, a professed woman-hater, to talk of marriage!

TRENT. Ah, but I've had a change of heart.

MISS LAVINIA. Have you, indeed? How interesting!

TRENT. I'm not the same individual as when I came here. Why——

MISS LAVINIA. Protestations are useless. I don't believe in magic, Mr. Trent.

TRENT. Don't you? Not even in the magical power of love?

MISS LAVINIA (*shaking her head doubtfully*). I'm afraid you could never convince me that love has wrought a miracle in the case of Titus Trent.

TRENT (*shrewdly*). Do you want to be convinced?

MISS LAVINIA. I—I don't know. Perhaps I do.

TRENT. Then I'll not despair. I'm pretty persistent,

Miss Lavinia, and I want you more than—than I can tell. I'm not going to try your patience any further. I guess the—the psychological moment hasn't come. But please consider what I've said, and be good to me if you can. I think I'll be going now. (*Goes to bench, R., and takes hat and stick.*) Good-morning.

(*Starts up stage. MISS LAVINIA rises, hesitates a moment, then turns quickly toward him.*)

MISS LAVINIA. Wait, Mr. Trent. I—

(*TRENT turns.*)

(*Enter LUCY and VAN DERZEE from house. LUCY carries a long apple-paring in her hand.*)

LUCY (*vivaciously*). Oh, Aunt Lavinia! Maurice has peeled the apple splendidly, and you know they say if you take a paring and swing it around your head three times like this (*business of flourishing apple-paring*), and then let it fall, it will form the initial letter of the name of the man you're going to marry. And, oh, Aunt Lavinia! I did it, and—and what letter do you think it made? A perfectly magnificent "V"!

VAN DERZEE. And that stands for "Van Derzee," you know. I guess that's all just now except congratulations.

MISS LAVINIA. Well, I declare! The spirit of combination is certainly abroad this morning.

TRENT (*coming forward*). I hope it's contagious. (*To LUCY and VAN DERZEE.*) My dear children, you have my best wishes.

VAN DERZEE. Thanks, Uncle Titus.

LUCY (*coquettishly*). Yes, thank you so much—Uncle Titus!

TRENT. Oh, by George! Say that again. I hope it's prophetic. 'Pon my soul, I—I wish I were your uncle.

LUCY. Well, you're surely going to be—one of these days.

(*Enter LOTHROP and MATILDA, R. LOTHROP carries a telegram. MISS LAVINIA is at L., TRENT at L. C., LUCY, C., and VAN DERZEE, R. C.*)

LOTHROP. Another telegram, Mr. Trent.

TRENT (*irritably*). Hang the telegrams! I'm not doing

business this morning. (*To VAN DERZEE.*) You may read it, Maurice, if you like.

(*LOTHROP hands telegram to VAN DERZEE, and remains standing on his right. TRENT places his stick on bench, L.*)

MATILDA (*to LUCY*). Why, Lucy dear, how happy you're looking! (*Advances toward LUCY.*)

LUCY (*shyly*). I—I am happy. Let me whisper something. (*Whispers to MATILDA.*)

MATILDA (*incredulously*). No?

LUCY (*nodding*). Um-h'm! Oh, Matilda, isn't it splendid?

MATILDA (*rapturously*). Oh, perfectly lovely!

(*They embrace and then withdraw to bench, R., where they seat themselves.*)

(*Enter ZENAS, R. He carries a letter.*)

ZENAS. 'Morning, Miss Lavinia. Here's another one o' them special delivery letters. They're comin' thick an' fast nowadays. (*Hands letter to her.*)

MISS LAVINIA. It's from Lawyer Holcombe. He went to New York day before yesterday to look after my—er—business affairs.

TRENT (*with disgust*). Lawyer Holcombe! Oh, if I ever get my clutches on that fellow —!

(*Crosses to R., and joins VAN DERZEE. LOTHROP goes up stage to LUCY and MATILDA. ZENAS seats himself on bench, L.*)

(*Enter ELISHA, R.*)

ELISHA (*to MISS LAVINIA*). Wall, Miss Lavinia, I've spread that news prutty promiscuous. Guess every one in Spruceville knows it now.

(*VAN DERZEE has opened telegram and read it during the above dialogue. MISS LAVINIA has also read her letter.*)

VAN DERZEE. Yes, and they know it in the city, too. (*To TRENT.*) Burroughs graciously informs us that National Paper stock has advanced forty points since yesterday.

TRENT (*shrugging his shoulders*). Indeed !

(*Turns and walks to extreme L., where he stands with back toward the others.*)

MISS LAVINIA. H'm ! And Lawyer Holcombe advised me to sell my stock when I could realize half that profit.

ZENAS (*solicitously*). Better sell it now, Miss Lavinia. I cal'late it's worth a fortune. I'll telegraph your brokers if ye say the word.

VAN DERZEE (*trying to attract TRENT'S attention*). Ahem !

ELISHA. Guess ye ought to do as Zenas tells ye, Miss Lavinia. (*Withdraws to back of stage.*)

MISS LAVINIA (*with hesitation*). Why, I—I don't know what to do.

VAN DERZEE (*nervously*). No, no ; of course not. (*Still trying to attract TRENT'S attention.*) Ahem !

MISS LAVINIA (*reflectively*). Lawyer Holcombe's advice has always been pretty practical.

ZENAS. It surely has.

VAN DERZEE (*as before*). Ahem !

MISS LAVINIA. There doesn't seem to be any real good reason why I should disregard it now.

ZENAS. None whatever.

(VAN DERZEE *crosses to TRENT*. MISS LAVINIA *crosses to R.*)

VAN DERZEE (*with exasperation*). Come, Uncle Titus, surely you'll not allow that stock to be sold under your very eyes. Let me make an offer. Quick ! What shall it be ?

TRENT (*turning*). Gently, Maurice, gently ! I've made Miss Lavinia an offer already. The decision rests with her.

VAN DERZEE. Oh, I don't want to interfere of course.

ZENAS (*eagerly*). What's the answer, Miss Lavinia ? Shall I telegraph the brokers ?

MISS LAVINIA. Well, I —

LOTHROP (*coming forward to c.*). Don't be hasty, Miss Battles. Depend upon it, Mr. Trent will give you a square deal.

MISS LAVINIA. Oh, I'm all at sea. I suppose it's awfully unbusinesslike not to take advantage of a rise in prices.

ZENAS. You bet it is !

MISS LAVINIA. Still ——

VAN DERZEE. Think it over, please. Don't sell the stock to-day—that is, unless you care to accept Uncle Titus's offer.

MISS LAVINIA. His offer isn't a very—liberal one.

VAN DERZEE. Isn't it? Then perhaps I can persuade him to be a bit more generous. Anyway, I'll try.

MISS LAVINIA. Please don't trouble yourself.

VAN DERZEE. No trouble, I assure you.

MISS LAVINIA. All things considered, I guess I ought to sell.

ZENAS (*delightedly*). Good! I'll hurry to the telegraph office.

ELISHA (*eagerly*). An' I'll go too.

(ZENAS and ELISHA start up stage toward R., but stop and turn toward front as VAN DERZEE speaks. LOTHROP rejoins LUCY and MATILDA. MISS LAVINIA crosses to C.)

VAN DERZEE (*sharply*). Hold on, Mr. Bradley! (*Turns toward TRENT.*) Are you crazy, Uncle Titus? (*Places his hand on TRENT's shoulder compellingly.*) We can't let that stock escape us now.

TRENT (*calmly*). Really?

VAN DERZEE (*impatiently*). It's no time to assume indifference when your head is in the lion's mouth.

TRENT. Tut, tut, my boy! That isn't very complimentary to Miss Lavinia.

(*Crosses to C., and stands at MISS LAVINIA's side.*)

VAN DERZEE (*turning toward TRENT*). Why, Uncle Titus, what ails you? I never saw you act like this before. Don't you want to own that stock?

TRENT (*quietly*). My dear Maurice, I haven't the slightest interest in the matter.

VAN DERZEE. What!

TRENT. The National Paper Company may go hang for aught I care.

VAN DERZEE. Well, if this isn't the limit! Here we've migrated to Spruceville like a bird with a broken wing; bolstered up the old aeroplane every few miles and taken a new flight—all for the glory of a soulless corporation. And

now you say that that corporation may go hang for all the interest you've got in the matter.

TRENT. My dear nephew, don't be so turbulent, I beg of you. There's only one thing in the world I care about, and Miss Lavinia knows what that is.

MISS LAVINIA (*looking at TRENT steadily*). Titus Trent, is that the solemn truth?

TRENT (*returning her gaze*). Miss Lavinia, it certainly is.

(*There is a brief pause, during which MISS LAVINIA continues to look searchingly at TRENT. She turns at last as though satisfied with her inspection, and speaks decisively.*)

MISS LAVINIA. Well, I guess most people would call me gullible, but I've come to the conclusion that you mean what you say.

TRENT (*joyfully*). Ah!

MISS LAVINIA (*to ZENAS*). Zenas, I've changed my mind; you know it's a woman's prerogative. You may tell the neighbors that Mr. Trent and I are enemies no longer.

ZENAS (*with surprise*). What! Ye don't mean that ye've buried the hatchet?

MISS LAVINIA. Yes, that's precisely what I mean. And—and, Zenas, I guess you may also tell them that—that Cupid has formed a trust.

(*She turns to TRENT with hands extended, and he takes both her hands in his.*)

TRENT (*ecstatically*). My dear Lavinia!

(*LUCY, ZENAS and ELISHA come forward.*)

LUCY. Why, Aunt Lavinia, what has occurred? I—I don't understand.

MISS LAVINIA (*shyly*). Well, I—I'm not going to speak any plainer.

ZENAS. Wall, I cal'late you've spoken plain enough. Come, 'Lisha, let's tell the neighbors.

ELISHA. Tell the neighbors? Ye jest better believe we'll tell the neighbors. Come along, Zenas—come along.

(*Exeunt ZENAS and ELISHA, R.*)

VAN DERZEE. By Jove, this is just the best ever! Why, we'll have a triple wedding.

LUCY (*excitedly*). Oh, Aunt Lavinia, is that it? (*Rushes to VAN DERZEE and takes both his hands impulsively.*) Isn't it perfectly glorious?

VAN DERZEE. Indeed it is.

(MATILDA and LOTHROP *come forward.*)

MATILDA. Oh, Miss Battles, I'm so glad! Do tell us how it happened.

LUCY. Yes, Aunt Lavinia, how did it happen?

MISS LAVINIA. Oh, you imps of mischief! Do you think I'd tell you—even if I knew?

MATILDA (*beseechingly*). Please do.

VAN DERZEE. We're all in the trust together, you know.

MISS LAVINIA. Well, there really isn't anything—er—at all—exceptional to tell. (*To VAN DERZEE.*) You see your Uncle Titus is so—so masterful——

TRENT. Masterful? Well, I like that! 'Pon my word, I've been as docile as a lamb. Why, this little woman has hectored and—and browbeaten and—outwitted me at every turn. And, by George, I love her for it!

MISS LAVINIA. Well, everything has ended harmoniously.

LUCY. We'll have a triple wedding, just as Maurice suggests.

VAN DERZEE. Then we'll join the army of aeronauts——

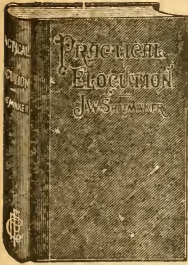
TRENT. And sail straight to Paradise in the aeroplane.

(MISS LAVINIA *is near C., with MATILDA on her right and TRENT on her left.* VAN DERZEE *is at extreme L., with LUCY on his right.* LOTHROP *is at extreme R.*)

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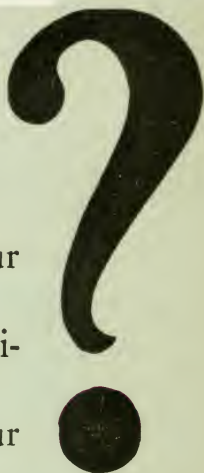
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