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Plain People

A Rural Play in Four Acts

By

DANA J. STEVENS

*Author of "Old Acre Folks," "The Sawdust Queen,"
"Miss Drusilda's Enemy," etc.*

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BOSTON

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Plain People

THE DIRECTORY

EZRA BROMLEY, *storekeeper.*
ALMIRA BROMLEY, *housewife.*
MARTIN JASPER BROMLEY, *college man.*
LIZA LIZ HANKINS, *brat.*
JUDGE JOTHAM MARLEY, *Christian.*
MELISSY WATKINS, *elderly maiden.*
JONAS JARROCK, *farmer.*
BELINDY JARROCK, *seamstress.*
HIRAM CURTIS PECK, *seller.*
APRIL BLOSSOM, *help.*

SYNOPSIS

ACT I.—Sitting-room behind Ezra Bromley's store. Morning.
ACT II.—The same. Some days later.
ACT III.—At the Jarrocks'. Some weeks later.
ACT IV.—At the Bromleys'. Later in the evening.



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Plain People

ACT I

SCENE.—*Sitting-room behind EZRA BROMLEY'S store. Afternoon. A pleasant, square, old-fashioned room about which everything is very quaint. Four doors in all open into it. In the right wall, R. 1 E., a door opens into the room from the store. This door has a bell that rings every time it is opened by characters coming in and going out. Beside the door and up stage is a large window which looks into the store and is covered with a curtain, which, when pulled aside, gives a view of a portion of the store. In the centre wall at C. a door opens into the room from the road outside. To the right of this door is a window giving a country view. In the left wall are two doors. L. 1 E., opens into an entry. L. 2 E., opens into a kitchen. Furniture is very old-fashioned and everything about the room is "country." In the back wall to the left of C. door is a low fireplace and mantel.*

(As curtain goes up a bell rings outside and a voice is heard.)

VOICE. Liza Liz? Liza Liz?—Go to the door!

(An instant, and then the door at L. 2 E. opens and a rather untidy little girl stumbles into the room. She is about twelve, is dressed in a pinafore, hair done pigtail fashion, and her face is streaked with gobs of molasses. She is sucking her fingers as if eager to get all the sweet. Before she opens the door she wipes her hands on her back.)

LIZA LIZ HANKINS *(entering)*. Gosh. Wonder who that is?
(She goes across to the window at back and peeks one side of

the curtain.) Oh, it's only Miss Watkins. I ain't er-goin' ter hurry.

(She takes her time about going to open the door, but finally opens it admitting an eccentric spinster rather extravagantly dressed and out of patience with long waiting.)

MELISSY WATKINS *(entering)*. Well, it is about time.

LIZA. Come right in, Miss Watkins. Sorry I hed ter keep yer waitin' so long.

MEL. Oh, you needn't make no excuses, I'm used ter it. Ain't I ben waitin' fer twenty year fer er man, and I ain't got one yet. *(Sits.)*

LIZA *(standing on one foot and regarding her with awe)*. Gosh. You be patient-like.

MEL. Oh, but I've hed plenty er offers, and you needn't think I ain't, Liza Liz; but—er, well they warn't the right kind. *(Gets warmed up.)* You see, there wuz—— *(She suddenly stops abruptly as she sees LIZA watching her, breathlessly drinking in every word.)* Well, there wuz.

LIZA *(disappointed)*. 'Course there wuz.

MEL. Where's Almiry Bromley?

LIZA. In the store.

MEL. Humph! Thought she hed some one purpose ter keep store so she wouldn't hev ter be there all the time?

LIZA. You mean Miss Blossom?

MEL. *(starting and sneering)*. Miss Blossom! What airs! Yer'd think she wuz one of them millionaires' gals what comes down here summers ter show off their good clothes and their bad manners. Miss Blossom. Humph! I call her April. What er name! Well, who else is there?

LIZA *(timidly)*. There's me.

MEL. *(with a snort)*. Good gracious! kin you keep er store? It's er wonder they'd let you handle things.

LIZA. I guess I kin keep store as well as any on 'em.

MEL. Yes, you kin keep the store; but the things all seem ter walk off.

LIZA *(offended)*. I think you're real mean, Miss Watkins.

MEL. Well, never mind what you think. You go and tell Mis' Bromley I've come ter see her 'bout somethin' particular-like.

LIZA *(going to door R., slowly)*. S'pose I'll hev ter. *(At door; aside.)* Old cat. *[Exit.*

MEL. *(alone)*. Now let's see what I've come ter say.

(*Thinks an instant.*) Yes, I've got it all down in my mem'ry—that's the best place ter put things. I ain't never fergot anythin' yet when once it's got there.

Enter ALMIRA BROMLEY, R., a sweet, motherly woman.

MEL. *rises and then sits down again.*

AL. Good-morning, Melissy, I'm so glad you ran in. You'll hev ter excuse the delay-like; but we are rather short of hands in the store this morning.

MEL. Where's April?

AL. Oh, she's there.

MEL. Who else is there 'sides her?

AL. Well, there's father; but he hed ter go hayin' fer er spell, and —

MEL. Oh, yes. I seen him goin' past the house. (*Suddenly.*) You ain't even asked me ter take my things off.

AL. (*flustered*). Yes—do.

MEL. Well, I can't. I only ran in er minute. (*Clears her throat and looks hard at AL.*) S'pose yer know what I've come fer?

AL. No.

MEL. (*looking at her an instant and then*). Well, that beats all. Ter think that with all your stock of good sense—and you've got er pile, Almiry Bromley—you can't see things as others see 'em.

AL. (*alarmed*). See what, Melissy?

(MEL. *rises, exasperated, and goes across to the curtained window at R., draws the curtain thus showing the store.*)

MEL. Look thar.

AL. (*looking casually*). What is it?

MEL. What is it? Men, of course. What else should it be? (*Looks off.*) There's Jonas Jarrock, Eben Stallard, Jonathan Marks, and my own nephew, Robert Marley, the Judge's son; and, my land, ef there ain't Hiram Curtis Peck, who's been payin' me attention these twenty year, er-standin' with the rest on 'em and er-leanin' over that counter.

AL. (*quietly*). Well, what of it, Melissy?

MEL. What of it? Who's behind that counter?

AL. Why, April, of course.

MEL. Of course.

AL. (*alarmed*). I don't understand you, Melissy.

MEL. Well, I'll make myself perfectly plain enough. (*Clears throat.*) I've been asked ter come here 'specially ter talk erbout that Blossom gal, and ter ask some 'barrassin' questions. Who is she? What is she? Where did she come from? That's what I want ter know.

AL. (*embarrassed*). Well, Melissy, I'm sorry, but I'd rather not talk of April's affairs.

MEL. 'Cause yer don't know anythin' erbout 'em. You took her in er stranger and put her ter work behind your counter in your store where she'd come in contact with us respectable people. And she er nobody, an outcast mebbe, yer can't tell nowadays. And ter think that all the men folks in the neighborhood do nuthin' but hang over that counter or around that store all day—and all night, too, perhaps. It's disgustin'.

AL. It's good for trade, Melissy.

MEL. It's good fer talk and scandal, you mean, Almira Bromley. Here we've knowed each other goin' on fifty-two year, and I never thought you'd countenance er thing like that. Everybody's talkin' erbout it. Why last night at the meetin' of the Village Improvement Society, Mis' Jones, she said —

AL. (*rising quickly and going across to window R. and drawing the curtain*). I'd rather you'd not tell me what Mrs. Jones said, Melissy. I'm sorry that you feel like this, and I am disturbed about the others; but there is no harm in it. April is a dear, good girl. It's true, p'raps, that we don't know much erbout her; but blood'll tell, as the sayin' is. She's been with us now goin' on eight months, and we love her more than you could think every day.

MEL. Well, yer needn't think that I'd be taken in as you hev, Almiry Bromley. I've just writ er long letter ter the Judge 'bout this gal, and the way his son, Robert, is er-runnin' 'round stark, starin' mad after her. Why all I git at home fer breakfast, dinner and supper is this Blossom gal. That nephew of mine is head over heels in love with her, and I'm worried sick over it, and it's all your fault. You no business takin' in er strange gal and puttin' her in everybody's face and eyes, just because she's got er pretty face, disgustin' manners and er simper.

AL. (*offended*). Melissy!

MEL. Well, I've hed ter hev it out, and now that I've hed my say, I feel better. I told Mis' Jones, last night, at the meetin' of the Village Improvement Society, that I'd call in

and hev er quiet talk-like, 'cause I thought, after you'd heard how general the feelin' wuz, that you might get rid of her.

AL. Oh, Melissy! You must speak to Ezra. He was the one who took April in.

MEL. (*rising hastily*). Well, I can't now. There's time enough. I'll call ergain. (*She crosses to door c. to go out.*) P'raps you'd better not say anythin' ter Ezra fer er spell.

(MEL. *is about to open the door to go out when it is swung open and EZRA enters. He pauses in the doorway, thus blocking MEL.'s exit completely. MEL. appears quite ill at ease.*)

EZRA (*entering*). H'loa, Melissy? How be yer?

MEL. Fair ter middlin'.

EZRA. Whar'd yer come from?

MEL. (*uncomfortable*). From—from the Judge's. Seen you goin' by with the hayin' team this mornin'.

EZRA. Yas. It's too pesky hot ter do much work, though, and besides there's too much ter think of with Martin Jasper comin' home from college this afternoon.

MEL. (*with an eloquent look at the store, R.; aside*). Another man.

EZRA. I've come back ter get another drink er that ras'bry juice April put up, Almiry.

AL. (*going L. 2 E.*). I'll get it for you, Ezra. (*At the door.*) Ezra, Melissy—Melissy don't think it looks well fer us ter keep April in the store. [*Exit.*]

EZRA (*turning on MEL.*). Why not?

MEL. (*uncomfortable*). Oh—oh, I ain't the only one. The whole neighborhood's begun ter talk and say things. Why, last night, at the meetin' of the Village Improvement Society, Mis' Jones, she said —

EZRA (*going to the mantel, getting his pipe, etc.*). Bah. I don't care that fer Mis' Jones. If Mis' Jones wants ter say somethin', why don't she talk erbout her own gal? She ain't erbove criticizin'.

MEL. Well, Mis' Larrabee, she told —

EZRA. Yas, Mrs. Larrabee, what is she? She's nuthin' but er gossip, anyhow. What does she know erbout my store? She ain't never been inside ter buy anythin'. If she wants things she goes down ter the county seat fer 'em.

MEL. Well, Mis' Higgins, she said —

EZRA. Well, it must hev been interestin' ter hear her talk.

Did she tell yer that she owes me er bill fer fifty dollars fer groc'ries, and that she's owed fer three year goin' on four, and that she can't pay it? No. She didn't tell yer that, Melissy; but she kin go nosin' eround ter Village Improvement Societies, Sewin' Circles and such like, talkin' erbout my affairs what don't consarn any one else, man, woman or beast.

MEL. Well, I don't know anythin' erbout that; but I wuz s'prised when Mis' Johnson, she up and said ——

EZRA. As how she sold me some spiled butter last week and then accused me er spilin' it, when she knew 'twas spiled. Did she tell yer that, Melissy?

MEL. No. (*AL. enters L. 2 E. with drink. MEL. flounces to door c.*) And I don't want ter know it. I ain't er-goin' ter stay here, and hev my friends exposed.

EZRA (*as she opens the door*). Wal, I'll do it if you'll give me the chance. If yer want ter know erbout folks, Melissy, jes' keep er store.

MEL. I see it's no use ter talk ter you, Ezra Bromley, but they'll come er time when you'll open your eyes and say ——

EZRA. That I know how ter manage my own business.

MEL. (*with a gasp*). Almiry, ain't he imperlite?

AL. (*going to MEL., at door c., having given EZRA the drink*). Don't speak any more about it, Melissy.

MEL. (*speaking over AL.'s shoulder to EZRA*). You'll find out what'll come fer takin' in er strange gal what ain't got no recommend ter her character.

EZRA (*who has seated himself by the fireplace, smoking, etc.*). Wal, her face is her character, and that's erbout all she needs, I reckon.

MEL. But s'pose your son Martin Jasper falls in love with her, like the rest er these crazy men?

EZRA (*after an instant's smoking, while she waits eagerly*). Wal, I should say, Bless yer, my children.

MEL. (*with a gasp*). Fer the land's sake, that's ernough fer me. (*To AL.*) I'm goin' this time, Almiry. [*Exit, c.*]

AL. (*closing the door, and then turning to EZRA, who is smoking quite unconcerned; upset*). I'm sorry you spoke as you did to Melissy, Ezra.

EZRA. I'm not. Did her good. P'raps it may make Mis' Larrabee trade. It may make Mis' Higgins pay that bill. Anyhow, I'm satisfied.

AL. (*going to him and placing her arms on his shoulders*). You always have an eye fer trade, Ezra.

EZRA. Wal, if I don't, who else has? (*Knocks the ashes out of his pipe.*) How long before that son of ours gits here? Didn't his letter say he'd be here in time fer supper?

AL. Yes, and the train's due at five somethin' er other.

EZRA (*drawing on his boots*). Then I guess as how I'd better be goin' erlong, so's ter git down thar in time ter take his grip sack. (*He gets up and crosses to door R.*)

AL. Oh, Ezra, if you're going through the store, you'd better ask April ter come in now. She's been out there all the morning and she must be tired. I guess them fellers'll go home, too, if she's out er the way.

EZRA (*going out R.*). All right, Almiry. [*Exit.*]

AL. (*alone; worried*). I do hope there ain't goin' ter be trouble and feelin's like, fer Melissy did seem terrible strong-minded and sot. Well, I ain't er-goin' ter worry over it. There's worry ernough with Liza Liz —

(*She starts suddenly for door L. 2 E.*)

Enter APRIL BLOSSOM, R., a very pretty, wholesome type of girl, unassuming in manner, neatly dressed and about twenty years of age.

APRIL (*looking in from door R.*). Mrs. Bromley?

AL. (*turning; startled*). Yes?

APRIL. Mr. Peck wants to come in. He's teased so hard that I haven't the heart to refuse. May I let him?

AL. (*flustered*). What fer? (*Recollects herself.*) Oh, yes — yes, of course. (*Goes out L. 2 E.; aside.*) Well, it ain't no use, and I can't help it. [*Exit.*]

APRIL (*speaking off R.*). You may come in, Mr. Peck.

Enter HIRAM PECK. He is a tall, lanky, bashful swain of about forty years of age, rather sandy complexion and typical country. He reads his lines in a meek but firm manner quietly. He appears much smitten with APRIL.

HIRAM. Thankee.

(*He appears embarrassed, and APRIL brings him a chair.*)

APRIL. Sit down here, Mr. Peck.

HIRAM (*business*). Thankee.

APRIL. Now what shall I give you to do? You know you would come in, Mr. Peck, and this is my busy day, and I've really so much to do that I can't entertain you.

HIRAM (*quietly*). Needn't do it, April. Needn't do it. I'll set 'n' watch yer.

APRIL (*laughing*). Oh, that would never do at all. (*Suddenly, as with an idea.*) I have it. Can you wind a yarn?

HIRAM (*embarrassed*). Wal—the—the fellers—they all say I'm tolerable fair at yarnin'.

APRIL (*laughing*). Oh, I don't mean telling stories. (*She has been up hunting, and comes down with a skein of yarn.*) I want you to hold this skein of yarn while I sit here in front of you and wind it into a ball.

(*Business. They sit. APRIL winds the yarn and HIRAM contemplates her for several instants and then.*)

HIRAM. You're allus busy, April.

APRIL. It's so pleasant to have something to do.

(*A pause while they work and then.*)

HIRAM. Did yer hear erbout the new job I got lately?

APRIL. Oh, how splendid. What is it?

HIRAM (*embarrassed*). Wal, it's—sellin' pep'mints. I'm agent fer the firm. Seed the advertisement in a Bostin paper, and Anna Katherina—thet's my sister; wal, Anna Katherina went down thar and they said they'd give me the chance if I wanted it. They sent up some samples, and I'm er-tryin' ter git orders. (*Quietly.*) Hev er pep'mint?

APRIL. No, thank you. I never eat them.

HIRAM (*surprised*). Sho!

APRIL (*laughing*). Yes.

HIRAM. Then yer don't know how good they be.

APRIL. They must be if you have them.

HIRAM. All the reason why yer ought ter try 'em, then.

APRIL (*quietly*). But I don't need one.

HIRAM. 'Tain't no use waitin' till yer need one. Pep'mints allus comes in handy. Good fer the digestion, good fer er cold, good fer rheumatics and the sour feelin's. (*Quietly.*) Yer better try one?

APRIL. Guess not to-day. (*A pause and then.*)

HIRAM. Mebbe yer will ter-morrer?

APRIL. Perhaps. (*A pause and then.*)

HIRAM. Better try one ter-day.

APRIL. I'd rather not, Mr. Peck.

HIRAM. Wal, yer may fergit it when ter-morrer comes.

APRIL. Oh, no, I shan't. (*A pause and then.*)

HIRAM. But I might fergit it if you don't.

(*An instant and then APRIL bursts out laughing.*)

APRIL. Oh, Mr. Peck, you are bound to give me a peppermint.

HIRAM. Wal, thar ain't been such good ones eround these parts fer er pesky long spell, and I want yer ter taste er them while they last. Hev one, April?

APRIL. I can't refuse you, Mr. Peck.

HIRAM (*quietly putting his hand into his pocket and producing a box from which APRIL takes a peppermint*). Thankee. (*As she passes the box back.*) Better take the box.

APRIL. Oh, I don't care for but one, Mr. Peck.

HIRAM. Better take the whole box.

APRIL. But I don't need a whole box.

HIRAM. Yer kin give erway what yer don't need.

APRIL. How much are they?

HIRAM. Ten cents. It's reasonable, April. It's reasonable.

APRIL. I'll take them and pay you some other time.

HIRAM (*quietly*). Thankee. (*There is a pause as they wind, and then HIRAM says, embarrassed.*) Whar'd yer git yer name, April?

APRIL. Don't you like it?

HIRAM (*quickly*). Yas, I do; but ain't it kind er queer?

APRIL (*quietly*). It was the month I was born in.

HIRAM. Sho. Yer wuz er shower, warn't yer?

APRIL (*quietly*). Yes. Mother didn't want to name me for anybody—(*sadly*) there was no one to name me for—and then she didn't want my name like that of any one else, so she called me—April.

HIRAM (*quietly*). Hez er pretty sound. Hez er pretty sound. (*Another pause and then.*) Sav, April, I know what it is thet makes us fellers hang eround you—at er respectable distance.

APRIL (*laughing*). What is it, Mr. Peck?

HIRAM (*embarrassed; quietly*). Wal—wal, you never say the things thet er feller would expect er gal ter talk erbout. Now, there's Melissy and my sister, Anna Katherina. They're allus er-talkin' 'bout some one er somethin' er other what somebody's got that's er little bit better than what they has. But you don't seem ter bother 'bout nobody.

APRIL (*embarrassed*). Oh, Mr. Peck, you're tangling up my yarn.

(*She leans forward to adjust the tangle, and so does HIRAM, and at this instant door c. swings open, and MEL. stands on the threshold. She discovers the pair and exclaims sharply.*)

MEL. Hiram Curtis Peck!

(*HIRAM and APRIL both rise. HIRAM is very much confused at being discovered by MEL., and stands shifting about first on one foot and then the other, while APRIL quietly untangles the yarn, taking in the scene quietly and amused. MEL. stands glaring at first one and then the other, and then she comes down between them.*)

HIRAM (*uneasily*). 'Twas only yarn, Melissy.

MEL. H'm. I'll believe that, Hiram Curtis Peck.

HIRAM (*quietly*). That's all 'twas.

MEL. I notice you ain't 'tall anxious to hold my yarn.

HIRAM (*quietly*). Yer never asked me, Melissy. Yer never asked me—did yer?

MEL. No. (*A pause while MEL. stands with her arms folded glaring straight ahead of her. HIRAM shuffles uneasily, glances at her timidly out of the corner of his eye, and then suddenly dives his hand into his pocket. MEL., sharply.*)

What you goin' fer?

HIRAM (*quietly*). Pep'mint.

MEL. H'm.

HIRAM (*timidly*). Hev—hev er pep'mint, Melissy?

MEL. No. (*A pause and then.*)

HIRAM (*quietly*). Yer—yer better?

MEL. (*sharply*). I allus know when I've hed enough, Hiram Curtis Peck.

HIRAM (*quietly*). Do yer?

MEL. (*exasperated*). Yes.

HIRAM (*quietly*). So do I, Melissy.

MEL. (*firing up*). Your sister says——

HIRAM (*quietly and soothingly*). Anna Katherina says a great deal, Melissy. Talks all the time, Anna Katherina does. 'Tain't much use ter set er great sight on what Anna Katherina says.

MEL. That don't hev nuthin' ter do with sellin' pep'mints, Hiram Curtis Peck.

HIRAM (*quietly, after a pause*). No — Better take er pep'mint, Melissy.

MEL. (*turning on him*). Hiram Curtis Peck, if you ain't the most exasperatin' critter I ever see.

APRIL. Oh, don't scold him, please; it was all my fault.

MEL. (*turning on APRIL*). I didn't ask you fer an opinion. I asked Hiram Curtis Peck fer —

HIRAM (*quietly holding out a peppermint*). Pep'mint, Melissy? (MEL. *turns in desperation and sees the peppermint; snatches it. HIRAM, quietly.*) There. Now—eat it. (MEL. *puts it in her mouth and grits her teeth hard to control her anger, and swallows it with difficulty. HIRAM, quietly, as she swallows.*) There.

MEL. (*turning on him*). Now, be you satisfied?

HIRAM (*quietly*). Like it, Melissy?

MEL. Be you satisfied?

HIRAM (*quietly*). Like it, Melissy?

MEL. (*snappishly*). Yes.

HIRAM (*quietly and soothingly*). I be satisfied.

(*He turns and goes to door c., back.*)

MEL. Where are you goin', Hiram Curtis Peck?

HIRAM (*opening the door; quietly*). Hum, Melissy. You and me — Goin' 'long? (MEL. *stands an instant undecided whether to stay and pitch into APRIL, or whether to go with HIRAM. She decides to go with HIRAM. HIRAM, as she turns to go up, quietly and soothingly.*) Knew you'd go, Melissy. Knew you'd go.

MEL. (*at the door*). I allus said you never knew when ter go.

HIRAM (*quietly*). You wuz there, Melissy. You wuz there.

MEL. (*going out; gushingly*). Hiram Curtis Peck.

(HIRAM *gives APRIL an eloquent look and goes out after her, and both exeunt. APRIL sits down and bursts into peals of laughter, and AL. enters L. 2 E.*)

AL. (*worried*). What's happened, April?

APRIL. A little tiff between Hiram and Melissy, and I am afraid that I was the cause of it.

AL. (*distressed*). I knew 'twould come, and Melissy, too? Oh, I'm all upset. I had no business to have left you two alone tergether.

APRIL (*getting up; surprised*). Mrs. Bromley?

AL. (*recovering herself*). Fergive me, dear, but I'm so worried. It's nigh time fer the men folks ter come, and Liza Liz ain't here ter lay the cloth.

APRIL (*gathering up her work, etc.*). I'll do it. I should have offered before, but you wanted to do everything in your son's honor.

AL. I know I did, dear. I am glad you're going ter hev er chance ter meet my son. We're very proud of him. He's er college man.

APRIL (*going to door L. 2 E.*). Indeed?

AL. Yes. Father wuz bound he'd hev the best eddication thet he could afford, and there warn't no place good enough fer him.

APRIL (*casually*). What college did you send him to?

AL. Sparhawk Hall.

APRIL (*with a start, dropping her work—up*). Strange!

AL. No—no, 'tain't. You don't mean ter tell me that you ain't never heard er Sparhawk Hall?

APRIL (*picking up the work and controlling herself*). No—no—not that. I meant that I hadn't heard that your son was at college before.

AL. We ain't great talkers here, April. Pa don't say much. He believes in listenin'. (*Goes to her.*) We wanted ter s'prise yer, April.

APRIL (*dazed*). Sparhawk Hall—Bromley—oh, if it should be?—If he is the same? No, it is impossible—and yet—yet—

AL. (*coming to her and putting her arms about her*). We wanted ter s'prise yer, April.

APRIL (*recovering herself, with a nervous, hysterical little laugh*). Yes—yes—you did. (*Helplessly.*) I don't know what to do.

AL. (*laughingly*). Don't run away.

APRIL (*breaking away from AL.; aside*). Run away? Can she know? (*Aloud, regaining her composure.*) Sha'n't I be in the way, Mrs. Bromley?

AL. Fer the land's sake, you tell that ter Ezra and git his answer. (*Crosses to L. 2 E.*) I'm going to lay the cloth. (*Aside; going out.*) I do wish Melissy hadn't upset things by comin' in here an' tattlin'-like an' gettin' me ter thinkin'.

I feel as if there wuz somethin' disagreeable in the air. I really do. [Exit.

APRIL (*alone; knock on door c.; startled*). I wonder who that is? I—I don't dare open the door. If it should be he? Oh, how foolish of me to suspect such a thing. True—the names are similar; but it cannot be possible that he and Jasper are the same. (*She laughs.*) How—how absurd of me! (*She goes to door c., opens it and discovers JONAS JARROCK.*) Oh, it's you, Jonas. Won't you come in?

Enter JONAS awkwardly; he is a tall, pleasant-faced, good-natured country man about thirty. He is much smitten with APRIL.

JONAS. I can't stop fer long, 'cause Belindy's waitin' down the road er piece. You see thar's goin' ter be er singin' meetin' at the Methodist Meetin' House ter-night, and Belindy thought—no, 'twas me thought—no, 'twas both of us thought as how you'd like ter go along with us.

(*He watches her eagerly.*)

APRIL. Oh, but it's too early.

JONAS. Oh, I don't know. Anyway Belindy and me's goin' long so's we kin git good places.

APRIL. But we haven't had supper yet.

JONAS. Wal, yer be behind time.

APRIL. We are waiting for Mr. Bromley's son who's comin' from college. Mr. Bromley has gone to the station to meet him.

JONAS (*regarding her earnestly*). Yas, I've heerd tell thet Bromley wuz er-comin' home soon. I guess you won't want er go then?

APRIL. No, I'd better not. It wouldn't be best now, Jonas.

JONAS (*awkwardly*). It's too bad. Belindy will be so disappointed. We counted on hevin' you set with us same's you did last time. We heerd as how Eben Stallard wuz comin' ter ask yer, and we thought we'd start early so as ter git ahead of Eben. Yer—yer ain't er-goin' with Eben, April?

APRIL. No. I'd rather go with you and Belindy, Jonas. You won't be disappointed as long as I'm not going with Eben, Jonas?

JONAS (*moodily*). No-o.

(*Door c. opens and BELINDY JARROCK enters flushed and excited. BEL. is a tall, pretty girl, neatly dressed.*)

BEL. Excuse me for coming in without knockin'; but Jasper's come.

APRIL (*with a little cry; startled*). Jasper?

(*JONAS notices her agitation, which she tries to conceal; while BEL. rattles along unconscious.*)

BEL. Yes, and he looks so fine—a regular swell; and Mr. Bromley's with him. They're out in the barn now. You're goin' with us, April?

APRIL (*who has suddenly made up her mind*). No, but I'll walk down the road with you and Jonas. Let's go.

JONAS (*opening door c.*). Come, April.

(*APRIL gives a little hysterical laugh and they all go out. An instant after they exit door L. 2 E. opens and EZRA enters. He seems a bit disappointed at seeing the room empty but turns and speaks off L. 2 E.*)

EZRA (*speaking off*). Come right in, Jasper.

(*A tall, good-looking young fellow of about twenty-one enters L. 2 E. He is bright, manly and very businesslike.*)

MARTIN JASPER BROMLEY (*entering and looking about him*). And here is the same old room. Yes, everything looks just as it did when I left last summer. There's your corner where you smoke, dad, and there's mother's old rocker. I wonder if it will ever wear out. Oh, it seems as if I had been gone years instead of months.

EZRA. Sho! What's struck yer? Don't yer like it?

JASPER (*quickly*). Yes, it's all right enough; but somehow when I went back there this fall things weren't the same.

EZRA (*regarding him quizzically*). Wal, I 'spect things does change rapid at college.

JASPER (*recovering himself*). But come, let's not talk of that any longer. What's been going on here? Who's dead? Who's married? Who's been born? And what have you on the place that is new since I've been gone?

EZRA (*going to window up R. and looking out casually from time to time during scene so as not to attract JASPER'S attention*). Wal. P'raps I kin answer the last question first.

JASPER. What additions have you made?

EZRA. Wal—wal, we've got one addition thet's er corker.

JASPER. What is it, a new cider-press?

EZRA. No.

JASPER. I'll bet it's a new haying machine?

EZRA. Guess again.

JASPER. Well, let's say a horse. You needed one badly before I went away.

EZRA. No, thet ain't it. Guess again.

JASPER. Some Jerseys, perhaps?

EZRA. No. Yer goin' the wrong way.

(An instant while JASPER thinks and EZRA watches him eagerly.)

JASPER. I'll bet it's a hired man?

EZRA. Yer gittin' warm. Yer gittin' warm.

JASPER. Well, I'll have to grow cold again, for I can't stretch my imagination any further.

EZRA. And you er college man.

JASPER. What is it?

EZRA *(glancing out of the window)*. It's coming. *(Goes to door L. 2 E.)* You stay right here, and don't move while I git—out.

JASPER *(following him across to door L.)*. Get out? What do you mean, father?

EZRA *(going out)*. Stay and see. [Exit.]

(Door C. opens and APRIL enters. She discovers JASPER as he turns and discovers her. An instant in which they gaze at each other in amazement and consternation and then.)

APRIL. You?

JASPER *(springing forward and embracing her)*. April? It isn't you? It isn't you, dear?

APRIL *(struggling to escape)*. Let me go, Jasper! Let me go!—Oh, don't, dear. Don't.

JASPER. No, I won't let you go, dear. Oh, you don't know what all this past year has been to me. I've been groping in the dark trying to find my sunlight.

APRIL. You mustn't talk any more like that, and you must let me go—please? Please.

JASPER. Oh! But I love you, April, and you know it.

When I went back to college this term and found you gone I was almost crazy. I couldn't believe it. It didn't seem true. Why did you go away? Why?

APRIL. I—I got a better place.

JASPER. I don't believe it.

APRIL. Well, it wasn't right for me to stay, Jasper.

JASPER. Why?

APRIL. I—I can't tell you.

JASPER. I can. You left because you had stolen my heart, and you knew that I loved you and that you loved me, wasn't that it? Wasn't that it?

APRIL (*quietly*). I don't dare to say.

JASPER. I knew it. I felt it. Oh, April, why—why didn't you leave me some word? Oh, if you'd only known how I've passed the winter! But I've found you and on my father's place. What are you doing here?

APRIL. I—I'm in the store.

JASPER. You—in the store?

APRIL. Yes. I had to do it, Jasper. I had to get something to do in order to live. I lost my school, and my friends all went, too, and—and I was all alone.

JASPER. Why didn't you send for me?

APRIL. I—I couldn't, dear.

JASPER. You were afraid to?

APRIL (*in a whisper*). Yes.

JASPER. Well, it's all over now.

APRIL (*frightened*). What do you mean?

JASPER. I mean that fate has brought you to my home, to my people, to be one of us.

APRIL (*startled*). Jasper!

JASPER. You must. You shall. You never shall leave me again. I—I can't bear it, April. I—I can't bear it.

APRIL. I don't understand.

JASPER. You love me, April?

(*An instant's embarrassment and then.*)

APRIL (*quietly*). I—I—yes.

JASPER. Then marry me!

APRIL. Oh, I couldn't do that, Jasper. I couldn't do that. Your father and mother—they scarcely know me—you—you scarcely know me. You don't know who I am, Jasper. You don't know who I am.

JASPER (*taking her in his arms*). I know that you are the dearest, sweetest girl in the world. When you took care of me there at college when I was so ill, how I used to sit for hours and just look at you. I loved you from that first day when I lay on my cot so ill that I didn't care whether I lived or died, and you brought me a world of—sympathy. That was enough for me, April. I wanted to live, I wanted you, and I want you now. I don't care for any one else but you—you—you.

APRIL. Jasper, you hurt me. You—you never have treated me like this before.

JASPER. No, because I didn't dare to. But I've missed you, April, and absence makes the heart grow fonder, as the saying is, and I couldn't help it. I felt that it was my right, April. My right. Isn't it?

APRIL (*after an instant's confusion and looking down*). Jasper.

JASPER (*overjoyed*). I knew it. I knew it.

(*They are standing in each other's arms at C. when door L. 2 E. opens and EZRA enters and discovers them. JASPER and APRIL appear greatly confused while EZRA is very much astonished.*)

EZRA (*to JASPER*). I see you've discovered the new addition.

JASPER. Father, I want to talk to you.

EZRA (*knowingly*). H'm. (*To APRIL*.) I only just come in to tell yer, April, thet thar's er little red box er-waitin' fer yer at the post-office.

APRIL (*startled*). A red box?

EZRA. Yas. Joe Hemmenway said as how 'twas post-marked from Yankton, South Car'liny.

APRIL (*agitated*). I—I'll go and get it. (*She crosses to door C. and opens it and then turns; to EZRA.*) Have I time to go to the Corners before supper?

EZRA (*with a knowing look at JASPER*). Lots.

JASPER (*eagerly taking the hint*). May—may I go with you, April?

APRIL (*in door C.; quietly*). If you wish.

(*They go out C., leaving EZRA staring after them in amazement.*)

EZRA (*finding his voice*). Wal, the flies in this'house don't lose no time getting stuck on the molasses.

(He appears uncertain and troubled and AL. enters L. 2 E.)

AL. What yer thinkin' erbout, Ezra?

EZRA *(quietly)*. Wal, I'm makin' up my mind ter say,
Bless yer, my children.

*(He indicates door C., to which AL. goes and looks off as the
curtain comes down.)*

ACT II

SCENE.—*The same. Several days later.*

(As the curtain goes up LIZA enters L. 2 E., talking off.)

LIZA. I think you're real mean, Belindy Jarrock, just as mean as you kin be. I always hed the bowl ter lick, and I don't care what yer say, yer might, at least, have give me the spoon. *(She slams the door and stands sulkily.)* Wish the folks would come home. It's so stupid settin' twirlin' yer fingers, and I'm so hungry I could just eat a hoss. *(Knock on door c., rather timidly.)* Wonder who that is. *(Goes to the door and throws it open, discovering JONAS standing on the threshold.)* Oh, it's you, Jonas. Do, fer pity's sake, come in and set down.

JONAS *(entering, rather embarrassed; he carries a large bouquet of wildflowers)*. Thanks. But I don't think I'll set down.

LIZA. Well, there ain't nothin' to hurt yer.

JONAS *(embarrassed)*. I can't stay but er moment. Will—will yer tell April I've come fer somethin' particular?

LIZA. Can't.

JONAS. Why not?

LIZA. She ain't here ter tell.

JONAS. Has she gone out? *(Disappointed.)*

LIZA. Yep. Her and Jasper and Pa and Ma Bromley hev all gone ter ride down ter the Corners.

JONAS. The Corners?

LIZA. Yes, and you never could guess what fer.

JONAS *(eagerly)*. What fer?

LIZA. 'Ter git married.

JONAS *(overcome)*. Married?

LIZA. April and Jasper. The weddin' wuz ter come off at 'leven o'clock, and they must be on their way back by this time. *(Notices his agitation.)* What is it?

JONAS *(recovering himself quickly)*. I—I didn't know tha—that April cared for Jasper in that way.

LIZA. Oh, she knew she hed er good thing and she grabbed it, like any sensible girl.

JONAS. They—they were married at the Corners?

LIZA. Yes, and Parson Jenks pulled 'em through. (*There is a silence while JONAS stands fingering his bouquet, at a loss quite what to do.*) Do set down, Jonas, and stay er while. Belindy's here, and they'll be back soon.

JONAS (*sadly*). No, thanks, Liza. (*Goes up.*) I—I only ran in ter see Miss Blossom, but now she's Mrs. Bromley, thar ain't nuthin' fer me ter do but clar out. (*Opens the door to go.*) I'll come in when they come back.

LIZA. Do. It'll be such er relief from spoonin', I s'pose. This kissin' ferever makes me sick.

JONAS (*who has been wondering what to do with the bouquet, coming down*). I—I don't s'pose you'd like er bouquet, would yer, Liza Liz?

LIZA (*quite overcome*). Fer me? Really fer me? Oh, Jonas, I ain't never hed er bouquet give me before in my life by er feller. Oh, I'm so pleased.

JONAS (*sadly giving her the flowers*). It's yours—Liza.

(*He turns and goes out c. After an instant, during which the astonished LIZA looks after him and then at the bouquet, she says, emphatically.*)

LIZA. Well, there's one thing sure, and that is I've hed my eye on the wrong feller all the time.

(*She appears tickled to death with the bouquet, and going to table sits down and arranges the flowers, smells of them, etc.; BEL. enters L. 2 E.*)

BEL. (*entering with a dust-pan and broom*). Liza Liz?

LIZA. Go 'way; I'm busy.

BEL. Now, come, be a nice girl and behave.

LIZA. I won't; you're stingy.

BEL. Oh, what pretty flowers.

LIZA. They're mine, and you ain't er-goin' ter have er smell.

BEL. I don't want to, dear, if you feel that way. I'm sorry we can't get along well together; but you must mind what I say. Now, dear, there is some time yet before the folks come back, and I've got so much to do, and this room does look awfully dusty. Come, be a good girl, and clean up nice.

LIZA. Sha'n't.

BEL. Please.

LIZA. Won't.

BEL. (*dropping the broom and going out and closing door L.*). Well, don't, then.

LIZA (*alone*). Gee, but she's mad. (*She hums to herself and arranges the flowers an instant or two and then a knock at door C.*) More lovers! (*Goes up to window R., back, and peeps out.*) It's that Mis' Watkins. That old gossip can't keep out er here fer five minutes. Well, she can come in when she gits good and ready, I'm goin' ter dust.

(*She goes across and takes the broom and starts in to sweep violently, paying no attention whatever to the knocking on the door. Finally there are several quick knocks on the door; LIZA sweeps harder and harder, and MEL. opens door C. and looks into the room, encountering a cloud of dust. MEL. sneezes.*)

MEL. (*looking in*). Whatever is it?

LIZA. Dust.

MEL. (*indignant*). I guess not. I've come ter call.

LIZA (*sweeping*). There ain't any one ter home.

MEL. (*entering*). Ain't they got back yet?

LIZA. No.

(*MEL. goes to sit down in a chair, but LIZA anticipates her and takes the chair and places it up in one corner.*)

MEL. (*trying to ignore the incident*). I see 'em go past Miss Jones's er long time ergo. Land, I never did see such style as Almira Bromley put on, and I never thought Ezra could look like er real man before.

(*Starts for another chair.*)

LIZA. They did look fine, didn't they?

MEL. Yes. (*She is just about to slide into the chair when LIZA takes it away and puts it with the other, and MEL. controls her temper as best she can while LIZA appears quite unconscious of MEL.'s position. MEL., after an instant.*) I don't see what they went off in such style fer. It's er mystery ter me. There wuz Ezra and Almira on the back seat, and Jasper and that Blossom gal on the front.

(*An instant and then LIZA stops sweeping, and leaning on the broom and looking hard at MEL., says.*)

LIZA. Ever been in love, Melissy?

MEL. (*with a gasp of astonishment*). What er question!

LIZA. Well, you've got an awful grudge against April.

MEL. What do you mean?

LIZA (*sweeping*). 'Fraid she'll cut yer out, I do believe.

MEL. (*with a gasp*). Why, Liza Liz Hankins! how you do talk. I ain't er-goin' ter listen ter such trash.

(*She makes for door c.*)

LIZA. You needn't if you don't want to.

MEL. (*soothingly*). I allus thought you hed manners.

LIZA. Fer company.

MEL. Ain't I company?

LIZA (*sarcastically*). Sometimes.

MEL. You impudent little trollop! If you wuz mine, I'd wallop yer good.

LIZA (*taking another chair as she starts to sit*). Wouldn't yer have er grand time doin' it, Miss Watkins?

MEL. (*overcome*). Well, I declare. I declare. I—I must sit down.

LIZA (*meekly*). Try the floor.

(*MEL., exasperated, goes across to the chairs up stage, and taking one brings it down, sits in it, folds her arms and regards LIZA.*)

MEL. I'm just goin' ter tell Almiry Bromley 'bout you, the minute she gits back.

LIZA (*sweeping*). I don't care.

(*After an instant, during which MEL. watches LIZA; then thinking better of it, she says sweetly.*)

MEL. Liza, what hev they gone fer?

LIZA (*in the same tone of voice*). What'll yer give me if I tell yer?

MEL. A piece of choc'late cake.

LIZA (*eagerly*). Kin I hev as big er piece as I want?

MEL. Yes.

LIZA. Well, April and Jasper's gone ter git married.

(*A pause, during which MEL. stares at her speechless with consternation, and then.*)

MEL. Married? Jasper and that gal? He's goin' ter

really marry her, and after all I've said. Oh, Liza Liz, this is too much. This is too much. I'm all upset.

LIZA (*alarmed*). Gosh! I should say yer wuz.

MEL. Ezra Bromley must be crazy ter do such er thing—ter countenance it. I told the Judge this mornin' he ought ter come down here the first thing and see Ezra Bromley before it's too late. (*Gets up and makes for door c.*) But it's not too late now, and I'm er-goin' right straight home and bring Judge Marley down here. He knows erbout this gal. (*Going out.*) Oh, I never shall fergive myself. I shall never fergive myself. [*Exit.*]

(LIZA stares after her an instant and then.)

LIZA. I wonder what's up? There's goin' ter be some kind of er squall, and I guess I better get the room ready ter squall in.

(*Places the chairs back and adjusts the room generally.*)

Enter BEL., L. 2 E., in much excitement.

BEL. They've got back, Liza. They've just come into the yard. Oh, how nice the room looks.

LIZA. I did it, Belindy.

BEL. I'm glad you changed your mind, Liza.

LIZA (*going out L. 2 E., with the broom, etc.*). No, Miss Watkins did it. [*Exit.*]

(*Door c. opens and AL. enters, followed by EZRA. They are a bit hysterical.*)

AL. Oh, Belindy, it was lovely. Oh, you can't imagine. And Parson Jenks did speak so fine.

EZRA. Yes, the folks of this village don't know what er fine speaker he is. (*Sits down to take off his shoes.*) I'm goin' ter petition the next meetin' ter give him more wages.

BEL. Where—where's April?

AL. (*quickly*). Mrs. Jasper Bromley? Oh, she stayed with Jasper.

EZRA. Thar unhitchin', Belindy. Startin' in ter git used ter housekeepin' the right way. The fust thing Almiry and me did when we got back from bein' married wuz ter unhitch the hoss.

AL. (*laughing*). Can you remember that? (*She crosses to*

bureau and proceeds to put away bonnet, cloak, etc.) The next thing we did wuz eat. How is things, Belindy?

BEL. (*who is up looking sadly out of window R. C., unobserved by AL. or EZRA, who are both a bit excited*). Doing well.

EZRA. It's thirty year next month, Almiry.

AL. It don't seem that long ter me, Ezra.

EZRA. Nor ter me either.

AL. Why, I can remember just as plain how you and me went.

EZRA. But we warn't all alone, Almiry. Thar wuz Joshua Stebbins fer comp'ny. He—he stood up with me.

AL. And I hed Nancy Wilkins with me. (*She is on her knees laying cloak in bottom drawer. EZRA is leaning on bureau looking at her. BEL. is up at window, forgotten, looking out.*) Do you remember how I cried, Ezra? I couldn't help it. I just couldn't, I wuz so happy.

EZRA (*embarrassed*). Gosh! I don't know what I did.

AL. I do. You blushed.

EZRA. Say—did I?

AL. I kin remember it as if 'twuz yesterday. (*Closes drawer and gets up.*) I shall never fergit your face when you turned around after we wuz made man and wife.

EZRA. That's the only time in my life I ever felt foolish, Almiry. I didn't know what ter do.

AL. Well, you did the right thing when you kissed me.

EZRA (*embracing her*). Wal, we're seein' it all over ergain ter-day, Almiry, you and me, and we're goin' ter hope they'll be just as happy as you and me, Almiry.

AL. (*quietly*). Yes—Ezra.

BEL. (*at window*). Here comes April.

AL. (*crossing to door L. 2 E.*). Good land! I'm fergittin' everything. There's them things cookin', Belindy. (*Going out.*) You better come and help, Ezra. [*Exit, L. 2 E.*]

EZRA. No, I'm goin' ter git off these shoes fust, Almiry. (*Crosses to L. 1 E.*) I thought I wuz gettin' er good bargain when I beat thet drummer down, but he knew I wuz gettin' licked, and I kin feel it. [*Exit, L. 1 E.*]

(*Loud, merry laughter out C., as BEL. turns from window. Door C. is thrown open, and APRIL bursts into the room, slams door and leans against it, panting. She secs BEL., and with a cry embraces her.*)

APRIL (*hysterically*). Belindy! I'm married! I'm married to Jasper, Belindy. I'm his wife. His wife! Oh, but I don't feel any different, Belindy. I'm just the same girl, but I'm so happy. Oh, you don't know how happy I am, Belindy.

BEL. (*quietly*). I'm glad you're happy, April. I'm glad.

APRIL (*eagerly*). You'll tell Jonas, right away, won't you, Belindy?

BEL. (*quietly*). Yes, just as soon as I go home. He'll—he'll be glad, too. For he'll know that you've got the right man, and that ought to make any girl happy.

APRIL. I feel it, Belindy. I feel it.

AL. (*outside; calling*). Belindy, are you coming?

(*The two separate, and BEL. hastens off L. 2 E. As she exits, JASPER is heard calling outside.*)

JASPER. April? I say, April? Oh, April?

APRIL. It's Jasper, Belindy. My husband.

(*She laughs merrily and, struck with an idea, goes to door c., and locks it and stands waiting. An instant and then the door is tried, then a knock, then an impatient voice outside says.*)

JASPER. I say, April, let me in?

APRIL (*laughing*). Say please?

JASPER. No, I won't.

APRIL. Yes?

JASPER. Sha'n't.

APRIL. Oh, you mustn't talk that way to Mrs. Jasper Bromley. Mrs. Jasper Bromley.

JASPER. Mrs. Jasper Bromley, will you open this door?

APRIL (*laughing*). Say please?

JASPER (*after an instant and then*). Please. (*APRIL throws the door open and JASPER runs in laughing, catches APRIL in his arms, and they stand c.*) My wife.

APRIL. Yes.

JASPER. Mine to do just what I wish with.

APRIL. If I choose.

JASPER. No, you have nothing to say. You're mine. You gave yourself to me, the parson gave you to me, and you can't take back the gift.

APRIL. I might try.

JASPER. I shouldn't let you.

APRIL. Then I'm your prisoner.

JASPER. Right here in my arms, and I'm going to hug you so tight, and never let you go.

APRIL. Then I'm very glad, Mr. Jasper Bromley, that I can only be married but once.

JASPER (*earnestly*). Jasper Bromley. Aren't you sick of that name?

APRIL. No, I love it. I wonder how it will look in writing? (*She goes up to the mantel, takes pen, ink and paper, and sits at table and writes. JASPER leans over her shoulder. APRIL writing; aloud.*) Mrs.—Jasper—Bromley——

JASPER (*quickly taking pen and writing*). Mr.—Jasper—Bromley——

APRIL (*writing*). Mrs.—Martin—Jasper—Bromley——

JASPER (*business as before*). Mr.—Martin—Jasper—Bromley——

APRIL (*same business*). Mrs. Martin Jasper Bromley takes great pleasure——

JASPER (*quickly taking pen and writing*). In being Mrs. Martin Jasper Bromley.

APRIL. Oh, that wasn't what I was going to say at all.

JASPER. But you do, don't you?

APRIL. Yes.

JASPER (*writing*). Mr. Martin Jasper Bromley takes great pleasure——

APRIL (*taking the pen quickly and writing*). In having Mrs. Martin Jasper Bromley.

JASPER (*laughing*). Good. (*Embraces her.*) I do, April, dear. We're both together now. We're both for each other. We're—we're married. (*They stand c.*)

Enter AL., L. 2 E.

AL. Come—come—come, this will never do for a housewife. There's no time for love-making with two great hungry male monsters ter feed. We must set the table. We'll eat in here.

(*She goes up and pulls table down stage, gets utensils, etc., while the other two join in. All is bustle and excitement through this scene.*)

APRIL. Let me help?

JASPER. Let me?

APRIL. No, this is woman's work, and you're a man.

JASPER. But I am your husband, and as such I command you to allow me to help.

AL. (*laughing*). Dear, dear! I never did see such children. Do let him, April.

APRIL. But he'll break something.

JASPER. Then you can have an excuse to scold me.

APRIL. I couldn't do that.

AL. Oh, it'll come easier by and by.

(*They all laugh. JASPER and APRIL are arranging the table-cloth.*)

APRIL. I believe this goes this way.

JASPER. No, it goes this way.

APRIL. You don't know anything about setting a table. It goes this way.

JASPER. And you're only learning. It goes this way.

APRIL. But that's the wrong side up.

JASPER. What does that have to do with eating?

APRIL (*as AL. comes down with her arms full of china; laughing*). Mother —

JASPER. Mother —

AL. (*laughing*). I ain't er-goin' ter say which way. 'Tain't no use ter get mixed up in any argument. All I can say is —

APRIL } (*eagerly*). Yes —

JASPER }
AL. (*business*). Put the dishes eround.

(*They each take what she holds out and eagerly set the table. Door L. 2 E. opens, and BEL. enters.*)

BEL. Everything is ready, Mrs. Bromley.

Enter EZRA, L. 1 E.

EZRA. Well, I've come ter carve. I feel ugly enough ter carve er bear.

APRIL (*laughing*). And on my wedding day?

EZRA. Wal, I don't really mean that, but I could carve that drummer if I met him. (*Sees table; disappointed.*) What, ain't the victuals cooked?

AL. Yes, you set right down in your place. Where are you goin' ter sit, April?

APRIL (*with a shy look at JASPER*). Beside Mr. Martin Jasper Bromley.

JASPER. Of course; how could you ask such a question, mother?

(*They sit, and AL. and BEL. go up to door L. 2 E.*)

APRIL (*to AL.*). Aren't you and Belindy coming, and where's Liza Liz?

AL. (*as they go off*). You all set right still and we'll bring in the good things. [*Exeunt AL. and BEL.*]

EZRA. Wal, don't be long.

(*An instant and then LIZA runs in L. 2 E.*)

LIZA (*going to her place at the table and sitting*). Oh, here yer are, April; you're goin' ter get it.

(*An instant while all exchange glances of surprise, and then.*)

APRIL. What do you mean?

LIZA. Fer marryin' Jasper.

(*They all laugh, and then APRIL says.*)

APRIL (*playfully*). Oh, you jealous child.

LIZA. It ain't me. It's Melissy Watkins.

EZRA (*getting interested*). That old grudge, eh?

APRIL (*surprised*). What of Melissy Watkins?

LIZA. Oh, she come here while you wuz gone, and when I told her you and Jasper hed gone ter git married, she nearly threw er fit all over the place.

APRIL (*startled*). Liza Liz, what do you mean?

LIZA. I mean just what I say, and lots more, too. Oh, she took on somethin' terrible. She's gone ter tell the Judge, and he's comin' here.

APRIL (*thoroughly alarmed*). I—I don't understand you, Liza. I—I don't understand—Jasper.

JASPER (*uneasy*). Don't listen to her tattle, April.

EZRA. What can Judge Marley hev ter say ter me?

(*A loud knock on the door is heard.*)

LIZA (*after a short pause*). Well, he's come ter say it.

EZRA (*quietly; calling*). Come in.

(*Door C. opens admitting JUDGE MARLEY, a large, handsome man, of a rather overbearing and dissipated type. He is followed by MEL.*)

JUDGE (*darting an ugly look at APRIL*). Good-mornin', Ezra.

EZRA. Good-mornin', Judge; glad ter see yer lookin' so well from yer trip. Set down. Set down, Melissy.

MEL. (*quickly*). No, we can't stop.

(*A pause while the JUDGE clears his throat.*)

JUDGE. I hear you've been married, Jasper?

JASPER. Yes. (*Introduces APRIL, who looks frightened.*)
My wife, Mrs. Martin Jasper Bromley.

JUDGE (*coolly*). Yer don't say?

EZRA (*sharply*). What is it, Judge? What's the trouble? Thar's somethin' I don't like the matter?

JUDGE (*quietly*). There is.

EZRA. What is it?

(*An awkward pause, and then the JUDGE whispers to MEL.*)

JUDGE. I can't tell it before her.

(*JASPER leaps to his feet with a bound. APRIL puts out her hand and holds him back with a sharp cry.*)

APRIL. Jasper!

EZRA. What do you mean?

JUDGE. I mean just what I say. I've come here with a purpose; it concerns her, and I can't speak before her.

JASPER (*finding his voice*). Look here, Judge Marley, you are speaking of my wife.

APRIL (*frightened*). Jasper!

JUDGE. I know whom I'm speaking about. I haven't been away for nothing. If I had come here this morning, as Melissy wished me to, you never would have been married.

JASPER. By God!

APRIL (*hysterically*). What do you mean, and what have I done? Who are you to come here and make such insinuations? What have I done to you, a stranger, that you should talk like this?

JASPER. April, dear?

APRIL (*well worked up; hysterically*). I want to know. I want to know. It's my right. It's my right.

EZRA. Yas, it's her right, Judge. Yer better speak out.

JUDGE. I can't here.

EZRA. Whar then?

JUDGE. In the other room. (*Indicates store, R.*)

JASPER. Never!

JUDGE. I can't before that gal.

APRIL (*thoroughly alarmed, getting up*). I'll—I'll go out, Jasper—Mr. Bromley.

EZRA. } You stay here.

JUDGE. }

EZRA (*to JUDGE*). And you tell.

(*A pause, during which JUDGE exchanges looks with MEL., while the others watch breathlessly.*)

JUDGE (*after an instant*). I'll whisper it ter yer, Ezra.

JASPER (*as EZRA gets up quickly*). Father?

EZRA. He won't tell no other way, Jasper. (*He crosses to JUDGE, while the others sit intense.*) Now, what is it? (*An instant or two of breathless silence while JUDGE whispers to EZRA. APRIL looks frightened at JASPER, who waits with feverish impatience and intense strain, his eyes glued on the two men. MEL. is laboring under intense excitement. An instant and then EZRA starts, changes color, then raises his head and looks JUDGE full in the eye for a full instant.*) Judge Morley, is it——

JUDGE. Yes. (*In a loud whisper, aside, to EZRA.*) She never had a father!

JASPER (*with a sharp cry, springing forward*). Father?

EZRA (*stopping him with a gesture and sinking back into his seat. A full instant while EZRA stares at JUDGE; then, raising his arm, points to door C.*). You—git—out.

(*JUDGE turns pale, but quietly takes up his hat from the chair into which he had dropped it, and goes silently out C. APRIL rises in terror; JASPER seems like one dazed.*)

APRIL (*faintly, trying to speak*). What—what is—it?

EZRA (*turning to MEL., and same business as with JUDGE*). And—you—too.

MEL. (*with a gasp*). I—I didn't think yer would blame me.

[*Exit quickly, C.*]

(*EZRA stands with bowed head. JASPER stares at him speechless. APRIL has risen and looks from one to the*

other, imploringly, trying to speak. At last EZRA turns and goes quickly to door L. 1 E.)

EZRA (*after a pause, throwing the door open; hoarsely*).
Jasper?

JASPER (*leaping up as from a shock*). Father?

EZRA. Come in here. [Exit, L. 1 E.]

(JASPER goes quickly out after him and closes the door.

APRIL gives a little moan, stretches out her arms after JASPER, and, as the door closes, she collapses and sinks down by the table sobbing hysterically. LIZA, who has been an interested spectator all through this scene, watches her sadly, and, at last, unable to stand it any longer, she says.)

LIZA. Ain't they mean ter take erway er feller's appertite?
(*The child's speech brings APRIL to her senses; she leaps up, dashes the tears from her eyes, and stands for an instant at a loss just what to do; then she goes straight across to the place where she had hung up her things, and puts them on, while LIZA stares at her in amazement. She then goes to door C., and without looking back, opens it and goes out, closing it after her. LIZA, having recovered herself, gets down from the chair and goes quickly to window R. C., and looks out. As she goes to the window.*) I do believe — (*Looks out, and then runs across to door L. 2 E., calling.*) Oh, Mis' Bromley! Mis' Bromley!

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE.—At the JARROCKS', several weeks later. A large room more simply furnished than the Bromleys'. In the back wall, and directly C., is a long window with glass doors, which opens out onto a verandah, which can be seen outside at opening. Long, cheap curtains hung at window. In the right wall, down at R. 1 E., is a fireplace and mantel with a large hearth. Fire burning brightly in fireplace. Above that, at R. 2 E., a door leading out-of-doors. In the left wall are two doors; L. 1 E. opens into a bedroom and L. 2 E. opens into a kitchen. A very few straight-backed chairs of old-fashioned type, one rocker and a small haircloth sofa. A small round table a little to L. C.—so as not to obstruct view through window at back.

(As curtain goes up, BEL. enters L. 2 E., and carries a red table-cloth, which she proceeds to spread upon table. After so doing she crosses to mantel and taking down a small lamp lights it and crosses to table with it as JONAS enters R. U. E.)

BEL. Is that you, Jonas?

JONAS. Yas, I'm goin' 'long, Belindy. Want anythin'?

BEL. Oh, Jonas, you're the best brother in the world.

JONAS (*coming down*). No, I ain't, Belindy, 'cause there's lots er fellers every bit as good as me.

BEL. Wasn't it you who thought of takin' in—April?

JONAS (*quietly*). Wal?

BEL. (*after a pause*). I don't know what I should have done without her, Jonas. I should have died. I know I should. 'Twas April that took care of me during that long fever, and brought me back to you.

JONAS (*quietly*). Yes. Yer wuz ailin' er long time, Belindy, and April ain't hed much rest. She wuz eround yer, hoverin' over yer, constant. And she goin' through er great strain, too. Said tendin' ter you would make her fergit. She must be wore out.

BEL. I'm going to take care of her now.

JONAS. We'll both do it, Belindy. But I reckon April ain't

one er the kind ter need lookin' after. She settled them Bromleys up pretty quick. Wouldn't even go back thar fer her clothes.

BEL. My white dress makes her look like er real lady, Jonas.

JONAS (*quietly*). She is er real lady, Belindy. She's true blue kind.

BEL. The Bromleys have been mighty mean to April.

JONAS. They couldn't help it after what the Judge told 'em.

BEL. You don't believe his stories, Jonas?

JONAS. No. He don't hold nothin' er mine. (*Suddenly*.) Whar's April?

BEL. She's gone down the road a piece to gather some goldenrod. (*Goes to him and takes his hand; quietly.*) It's too bad it couldn't have been, Jonas.

JONAS (*quietly, embracing her*). Would you have wanted her for a sister after all that's been said about her, Belindy?

BEL. (*hurt*). Jonas, you don't think I would believe all those lies? Oh, Jonas!

JONAS. No, Belindy. It ain't in your natur', and it ain't in mine. P'raps after all, Belindy, it's better the way 'tis.

BEL. (*quietly*). P'raps 'tis.

JONAS (*quietly*). She's too good fer me, anyhow. Er feller with half an eye can see that. No, Belindy, if I can't hev April, I ain't never goin' ter get married. You and me will keep house tergether, always. Won't we?

BEL. If you say so, Jonas.

JONAS (*quickly, to conceal his emotion*). Guess I'd better be goin' 'long ter git Hank. (*He goes to door R. 2 E.*) I'll try and get back in time ter take yer ter meetin'. We ain't been fer er spell and I think it would do both you and me good. [*Exit.*

BEL. I'll be ready.

(*She crosses and sees him off R. 2 E., then comes down after closing the door. LIZA is seen outside window C., on the verandah. She knocks on the window and, as BEL. turns, she opens it and comes into the room. She is dressed in the most gorgeous combinations of colors imaginable, and wears a remarkable hat of several different shades, but withal she is a most pathetic figure.*)

LIZA (*opening the window*). Ben watchin' yer and makin' up my mind ter come in.

BEL. (*as LIZA stands awkwardly in the window*). Come right in and sit down, Liza.

LIZA (*quickly entering and sitting, relieved*). Gee! Ain't I glad I'm in.

BEL. (*taking some work and seating herself by the table which has been pushed up back L.*). Where have you been all this time?

LIZA. Livin'. Didn't think you'd care ter hev me come around, and I stayed erway till I couldn't stand it any longer, and besides, the Bromleys wanted me ter come.

BEL. The Bromleys?

LIZA. Yes. They've hed er letter from Martin Jasper, and they wanted me ter come around here and see how the land lay. I promised 'em I wouldn't tell. (*A pause and then.*) We heard through Melissy and her crowd that you've been sick, and that April wuz takin' care of yer. Are yer better?

BEL. Yes.

LIZA. How's April?

BEL. She's well.

LIZA. Glad of it. Where be she?

BEL. Down the road after goldenrod.

(*A pause and then.*)

LIZA. I ain't see you ter speak ter since April left our beds and board.

BEL. (*quietly; working*). No.

LIZA. Trade's fallen off fierce, Belindy. Why, they don't begin ter sell the cigars, tonics and such things menfolks likes, that they used ter. You don't trade at our store 'tall now?

BEL. No. Jonas likes to go down to the county seat once a week, and he can buy in bulk much cheaper.

LIZA (*suddenly*). You ain't noticed my new dress?

BEL. (*as she gets up to show it off*). It is a new one, isn't it?

LIZA. Well I guess, and it cost six cents er yard, too. I think it wuz dead cheap fer the money.

BEL. I should say so.

LIZA. Where's Jonas? Ain't he comin' in?

BEL. Jonas has gone to the station to bring Hank home.

LIZA. Oh, his time's up, ain't it? Wonder what he'll get inter next? I'm glad I didn't waste any er my feelin's or 'fection on him. (*Suddenly.*) Say, Belindy?

BEL. Well?

LIZA (*embarrassed*). Did yer know your brother Jonas give me er bouquet erbout some weeks ago? I ain't never breathed er word ter er soul. Yer see it was this way. He come ter our house ter see April, and she hed gone with Jasper ter be married, and he hed er big bouquet—er tremendous one—and he give it ter me. I've pressed all them flowers, and broke my back doin' it, too, and put 'em erway in my big Bible. (*Titters.*)

BEL. (*looking at LIZA an instant; then quietly*). I know all about it, Liza Liz. Jonas told me. He intended to give those flowers to April, but he knew she wouldn't want them, so he gave them to you.

LIZA (*finding her voice; with a gasp, indignantly*). Oh, wasn't he mean? Oh, I do think that was the meanest thing. I ain't never taken er second-handed thing before in my life. If I'd er knowed that wuz the way of it I'd hev never took 'em. (*Quickly.*) When did yer say Hank wuz comin'?

BEL. He ought to be here at any moment.

LIZA. I'm just er-dyin' ter see him, and I guess he is ter see me, too.

(*Door R. 2 E. is thrown open and APRIL enters. She is dressed in white with a pretty hat, and her arms are loaded down with goldenrod. The gaiety with which she plays the following scene with LIZA and in her other scenes in this act appears forced.*)

APRIL. I've been gone a long time, Belindy. (*She discovers LIZA and with a cry drops her goldenrod and makes for the child embracing her. BEL. goes out quietly R. 2 E. Hysterically.*) It's Liza. It's Liza Liz.

LIZA (*as APRIL sits down on the floor c., while she is standing beside her*). 'Course. Who else do yer s'pose 'tis?

APRIL (*surveying her delightedly*). How brilliant you look, child.

LIZA. Yes. I allus wuz er dazzler.

APRIL. And how you've grown, dear.

LIZA. Yes, er few months makes er great difference in er girl er my ambition and envirotemper. Just think, I'm er-goin' ter let down my dress soon—I'm goin' on thirteen—and do up my hair. How do yer think my hair would become me, April? Them new-fangled notions will make me look skinny. And, say, my waist is half an inch bigger eround, and I can't run near as fast as I used ter. (*APRIL laughs.*) You ain't changed

much, April. Oh, I'm so glad I come, 'cause it does seem good ter see yer once again. Ain't yer goin' ter ask erbout the folks?

APRIL (*getting up, quietly*). I hope they're well.

LIZA. Yes, fair ter middlin'. They ain't never gotten over it, April—that day you left. Somehow things is different now. 'Tain't like it used ter be at all down there. Mis' Bromley, she's changed lots; Mr. Bromley don't scarcely speak now, 'cept when he has ter—and—(*timidly watching the effect of her words*) Jasper —

APRIL (*after a pause; quietly*). Yes?

LIZA (*boldly*). Your husband.

APRIL (*quickly*). Don't call him that, dear. Don't call him that.

LIZA. But he is, isn't he?

APRIL. Perhaps so.

LIZA. But weren't you married ter him?

APRIL. Yes.

LIZA. Well, what else can yer call him, then?

APRIL. You don't understand, Liza. I scarcely do myself. Things came about so suddenly when they went into that room together, and I knew they doubted me. They doubted me. Oh, that cut me like a knife. I couldn't stay one instant after that, Liza. (*After an instant, controlling herself; quietly.*) Yes, I'm Jasper's wife—in name; but I shall never be anything else.

LIZA. You've got the ring, and you never showed it ter me.

APRIL (*looking down at it, sadly*). Yes. It's only a mockery now.

LIZA. Well, I ain't never seen er girl like you be, and I guess the Bromleys ain't either. Trade's bum, April.

APRIL (*quietly*). I'm sorry.

LIZA. Well, I wouldn't be if I wuz treated the way you wuz.

APRIL (*quickly*). You mustn't talk like that, Liza.

LIZA (*quickly*). Oh, I know er thing er two, and you needn't think I don't. Mis' Watkins has come back ter trade, and so hev the rest of her cronies. They buy two cents' wuth er this and three cents' wuth er that just fer the tradin' stamps. Nice customers they be. I reckon there won't any one git rich quick off er them.

APRIL (*holding her off and looking at her*). What a chatter-box you are, Liza Liz.

LIZA. Well, I can't help it, it's human natur', and I guess that's all there is to it. (*A pause and then.*) What are yer goin' ter do?

APRIL (*quietly*). I'm going away to-morrow.

LIZA. Fer good?

APRIL. And all.

LIZA. Gosh all hairpins! Where yer goin'?

APRIL. I've been waiting for a school—just a little country place, somewhere. And I shall go there and bury myself, and try to forgive and forget.

LIZA. Do yer mean it, April?

APRIL. Liza, dear, you don't understand me. I can never be anything more than I have been. I must live. I can't stay here.

LIZA. But ain't yer goin' ter wait till Jasper comes back?

APRIL (*bitterly*). Do you think I would go back to that house after this? No. I'm free, and can do as I like. True, I'm married, but my husband has cast me off—(*bitterly*) an unused garment.

LIZA. Jasper's been gone ever since that day you left, April. He and Mr. Bromley walked the floor all the rest er the day in that room, and the air wuz blue-black and yaller tint. Oh, I heard 'em. You ought not ter feel so against Jasper. I'm sure he loves you.

APRIL (*bitterly*). He loves me! Come, Liza, let us talk about something else. I'm trying to do my best to forget it all.

LIZA. I can't.

APRIL. Then, dear, you can't stay any longer.

LIZA. Oh, April, you ain't er-goin' ter send me home?

APRIL. Yes, Liza. I've left the Bromleys now. I'm my own mistress and may do as I please. To-morrow I leave this village for good. (*Embraces her.*) I'm glad you came to see me, dear. Good-bye, be good, and remember me—sometimes.

LIZA. April, I ain't never hed er friend like you.

APRIL. You will some day, dear.

LIZA. I'm goin' right back and tell the Bromleys I've seen you, and I'm going to tell them just what I think of them.

APRIL. They believed that what they did was for the best, child. (*Sadly.*) Perhaps it is, who can tell?

LIZA (*at door R.*). I can, and in my very best Sunday go-to-meetin' verangular. [*Exit*, R. 2 E.]

(APRIL *stands c. an instant and then* BEL. *enters* R. 2 E.)

BEL. (*quietly ; coming down*). You sent Liza away?

APRIL. Yes. I couldn't bear to have her speak any longer about—them.

BEL. Liza says you're going to-morrow, April?

APRIL. Yes, Belindy, I can't stay here forever. You're better now, and you don't need me, and there is nothing to keep me here now.

BEL. You're quite welcome to stay, April. Jonas and I —

APRIL. Yes, you and Jonas. Oh, you've been so kind, Belindy, and so very comforting to me, and I appreciate it so much. Oh, you don't know, Belindy—you can't realize all a woman passes through when she loves, when her whole heart and soul is completely taken up with the one person she cares most for in all the world —

BEL. (*quietly ; with feeling*). Yes, I can, April.

APRIL (*looking at her eagerly*). Have you been in love, Belindy?

BEL. (*dropping her head ; quietly*). Yes. Before you were. I didn't know that he cared for you though.

(*An instant during which APRIL looks at her ; then, as the truth dawns upon her, she utters a sharp cry.*)

APRIL. Belindy! (*As BEL. buries her head in APRIL'S arms, weeping quietly.*) You loved him! You loved him! And I came between. Oh, Belindy!

BEL. (*sobbing*). No, you didn't. You didn't! You just was there.

APRIL. Oh, but if he had never seen me, dear, it might have been different. You two would have been married, and then how happy you would have been.

BEL. (*sobbing*). I'm not so sure.

APRIL. Perhaps—perhaps you will yet—Belindy.

BEL. (*looking up, startled*). What do you mean?

APRIL. After I'm gone away.

BEL. (*embracing her and clinging to her*). No—no—no! Don't go, April. Stay with us. Stay with Jonas and me. There's room for you.

APRIL. Yes, but there's more room out there, Belindy, where I can forget and bury myself, and no one knows me. Here, I know everybody, every nook and cranny holds some-

thing to remind me of happy moments. No, dear, I'm going to-morrow. (*The rumbling of a wagon heard outside.*) I'm going to-morrow.

JONAS (*outside*). Whoa, thar.

BEL. 'There's Jonas! Does he know?

APRIL (*crossing to L. 1 E.*). No; I—I can't tell him, Belindy. You do it. [*Exit.*]

Enter JONAS, R. U. E.

BEL. Did you get Hank?

JONAS. No, train's late. Won't be here for two hours, so I thought I'd come back and let him foot it. 'Thought I'd find April along the road, and give her a ride home, but I guess she's beat me home.

BEL. She's—here, packing.

JONAS. Packin'—what fer?

BEL. Goin' erway.

(*A silence and then.*)

JONAS. When?

BEL. To-morrow. (*Goes to him and places her hand on his shoulder; quietly.*) Perhaps—perhaps it's better, Jonas. Then we can forget. We can both forget.

Enter APRIL, L. 1 E.

APRIL. Belindy, have you seen my little black worsted shawl; the one you knit for me? (*Sees* JONAS.) Oh, you've got back, Jonas.

JONAS (*quietly; eyeing her*). Yes.

APRIL (*confused*). And Hank, did he come?

JONAS (*eyeing her*). No.

APRIL (*dropping her eyes*). His mother will be so disappointed. (*To* BEL.) Isn't that strange about the shawl, Belindy?

BEL. (*taking the hint*). It can't be lost. (*Crosses to L. 2 E.*) I'll look in the kitchen. [*Exit.*]

(*A pause of embarrassment between APRIL and JONAS after her exit. After an instant, APRIL looks up and meets his steady gaze.*)

JONAS (*quietly*). Whar yer goin' ter-morrer, April?

APRIL. I'd—I'd rather not tell you, Jonas.

JONAS. I wish yer would.

APRIL (*quietly*). Why? —

JONAS. Because—because if he should ever want to know.

APRIL. He shouldn't.

JONAS. Oh, you don't know Jasper. He's gone for er purpose, as true as I'm er-standin' here, and if he should come back and want ter know whar yer'd gone ter —

APRIL (*quickly*). You'd tell him?

JONAS. Yas. 'Twould be his right.

APRIL (*bitterly*). His right! Ha! His right. He forfeited his right when he believed that man's story. When he went into that room.

JONAS (*quietly*). Yer acted too quickly, April. I know it ain't none er my business, and I ain't got any right ter speak erbout it to yer, and I ain't said er word erbout it all till now; but yer goin' erway and—and I allus liked Jasper, and I think yer ought ter waited, April. Yer ought ter waited.

APRIL. I couldn't let a man kill my pride, Jonas.

JONAS (*after a pause*). Won't yer tell me whar ye're goin'?

APRIL (*after an instant's thought*). Jonas, if—if he should ever come to you—and ask for me—you may give him the address I leave.

JONAS. You won't leave no word?

APRIL (*quietly*). No.

(*Door R. 2 E. opens and BEL. enters with the shawl.*)

BEL. Here's the shawl, April.

APRIL (*taking it*). Thank you, Belindy. (*Crosses to R. 1 E.*) Isn't it most time for meeting? [*Exit.*]

JONAS (*quickly*). I clean fergot it, April. Git on yer hat, Belindy.

BEL. (*as they both make ready*). What did she say, Jonas?

JONAS. I made her promise ter leave word whar she wuz er-goin'. It might come in handy if I should want ter take er hand. I'm gettin' my dander up fast, Belindy, over all this mess. It's been goin' on fer weeks now and neither one of 'em has shown er two spot, and if it wasn't prayer-meetin' night, Belindy, I might be tempted ter git inter another kind of er meetin'.

BEL. (*pausing in the act of putting on her hat and looking at him in astonishment*). What do you mean, Jonas?

JONAS (*pacing the floor*). Git on yer hat, Belindy, 'fore I git mad.

BEL. (*business ; aghast*). Jonas!

JONAS. Git on yer hat before I swar.

BEL. (*quickly*). I'm—I'm ready, Jonas. You go out and bring the horse ound ter the door, and I'll turn the lamp down.

(*As she starts to turn the lamp down there is a knock on door R. 2 E.*)

JONAS. Yer better turn up the light, Belindy. 'Tain't no use meetin' folks in the dark.

BEL. (*business*). We'll be late for church, Jonas.

JONAS (*going to open the door ; quietly*). May not git thar 'tall, Belindy. (*He throws open the door and exclaims.*) Wal, by gun!

(*He steps back, admitting EZRA and AL. They enter rather timidly. Both are pitiful figures, and show the degree of suspense they have been laboring under. Their forced gaiety is pathetic. They stand huddled together through part of the opening scene. AL. has hold of EZRA'S hand. There is great constraint through most of the scene, which EZRA and AL. do their best to lift.*)

EZRA. It's only Almiry and me, Jonas. Don't yer know us?

JONAS (*coldly*). Yas, I know yer.

(*A pause and then.*)

EZRA. Didn't expect us ter come like this, did yer?

JONAS. I knew yer would some time.

(*A pause, and then AL. says quickly.*)

AL. (*going to BEL.*). Oh, Belindy, I'm so glad to see you.

(*She kisses her, and BEL. submits coldly to the salute.*)

JONAS. We wuz just erbout ter go ter meetin'.

EZRA (*quickly and helplessly*). Then we won't keep yer, then. (*Turns to go R. 2 E.*) Come, Almiry.

(*They go up to the door while JONAS and BEL. exchange looks ; suddenly JONAS says, as they open the door to go out.*)

JONAS. Wal, I ain't 'tall pertickler 'bout goin', and Belindy ain't neither, seein' as how we ain't either of us been fer six weeks. (EZRA and AL. turn.) S'pose you've been often?

EZRA (*bitterly*). No, I ain't hed the heart, Jonas.

JONAS (*looking at BEL.*). Guess they better set down, Belindy?

BEL. Yes, do sit down.

EZRA } (*wincing*). Thank yer.
AL. }

(*A pause and then.*)

JONAS. How's trade, Ezra?

EZRA. Bad. Pretty bad lately.

JONAS. Customers pay?

EZRA. Most on 'em do. Few keeps gittin' somethin' fer nuthin'.

JONAS (*after a pause*). Who yer got ter help yer?

EZRA (*quietly*). Nobody.

JONAS (*after a pause*). Don't see how yer kin git erlong.

EZRA. Oh, there ain't so much ter look after as when—as when —

(*He stops, unable to go on, and JONAS says, quietly.*)

JONAS. Yer hed April.

(*There is a pause in which AL. and EZRA exchange looks while the other two wait for them to make the next move.*)

EZRA. That—that brings us ter the object er our comin' here ter-night, Jonas. Almiry and me, we heard—that is Liza come home ter-night, and she says as how April's goin' erway.

JONAS (*quietly*). Yes.

EZRA (*beginning to grow angry*). What right hez she ter go erway?

JONAS. What right?

EZRA (*warming up*). Yas, sir. She's my son's wife, and she chose ter leave our roof without our permission and seek shelter here with you and your sister, but she ain't got no right ter go farther.

JONAS (*getting excited*). See here, Ezra Bromley, you driv that gal out er your house —

EZRA. That's er lie.

AL. (*alarmed*). Ezra!

JONAS. — And she come here ter me and I give her er home, and she's goin' ter do just what she thinks is right ter do fer her and hers, and I shan't stop her.

EZRA (*breaking down*). It wuz all er misunderstandin'—er terrible misunderstandin', Jonas. Jasper's gone ter look inter what Judge Marley said —

JONAS (*bitterly*). What Judge Marley said? What does Judge Marley know erbout April? What right has Judge Marley ter interfere, and what right hev you ter let him? And you believed him. You let him come between Jasper and April.

EZRA (*brokenly*). I ain't never fergave myself, Jonas. I— I was so excited that day, Jonas. Oh, you don't know. It all came so like er thunderbolt—the weddin'—the dinner—the good times, and then the Judge, and—and—I wanted time ter think, I didn't know what ter do—I didn't know what ter say—I wanted ter git erway somewhere—somewhere to think—think clearly.

JONAS. And yer didn't doubt her?

EZRA. Not for an instant.

JONAS. And did yer believe the Judge?

EZRA. Not fer an instant.

(*A pause, and then JONAS looks at BEL., and says.*)

JONAS (*quietly*). Guess they better take off their things, Belindy.

BEL. (*to AL. and EZRA*). Yes, do.

EZRA (*quickly*). No, thanks, Jonas,—we—we understand how you feel agin us—Almiry and me. Don't we, Almiry?

AL. Yes.

EZRA. And we don't blame yer er bit. I know as how I've allus hed the repteration fer bein' er fair and square man, Jonas, and you be too, and I only did what I thought was right. Jasper and I hev hed it out, and he's gone, and he won't come back till he kin clear April. Almiry and me, we're all broke up erbout it. Almiry, you tell him the rest.

AL. We heard April was goin', Jonas, and we brought this ter her.

(*Produces a box done up in red paper. The box is square.*)

JONAS. }
BEL. } The red box.

AL. Yes, it's hers. She left it behind when she went.

S'pose she wuz too proud ter take it. Thought she'd leave it fer us ter open —

JONAS (*bitterly*). 'Course, as long as yer doubted her.

EZRA (*quickly*). But we ain't opened it. We ain't opened it.

AL. It's been in that top drawer where she put it ever since the morning of the day she was—married, and we thought perhaps she'd come fer it.

JONAS (*bitterly*). April? You don't know April. You don't know her. She worked fer yer, and give yer the best she hed; but yer don't know her. No. The minute a mean sneakin' varmint comes eround with his pisen you get bit. Yer believe what yer hear.

EZRA (*wincing*). Don't reproach us, Jonas.

JONAS (*with feeling; strong*). I'd hev married April and not asked any questions, and if the Judge hed told me, I'd hev killed him.

(*Silence, and then EZRA says faintly.*)

EZRA. I believe yer would, Jonas, and April would never hev fergiven yer.

JONAS. I don't care. A man like that ain't got no right under God ter live, just ter come 'tween folks' happiness like that.

EZRA. But there's lots er them in the world, Jonas.

JONAS. Yes, lots er them. And folks toady ter 'em, and scrape ter 'em, and think they're so grand, and tell how much they do fer charity, when they don't know the meanin' of the first thing erbout charity. (*They are startled by a loud knocking on door R.*) Who's that, I wonder?

BEL. You better go, Jonas.

JONAS. Wal, whoever it is, they ain't wanted here now.

EZRA (*as JONAS gets up; emphatically*). No, they're not.

(*JONAS gets up and opens door R. a trifle, but it is suddenly pushed open and MEL. flounces into the room followed by HIRAM. She plays all of this scene totally unconscious of the constraint of the other characters, which HIRAM notices to his embarrassment.*)

MEL. Good-evening. Howdy, Ezra? Howdy, Almiry? What is it? Good old-fashion reunion? I knew yer'd git tergether when yer come ter yer senses. Come right in, Hiram

Curtis Peck, and don't leave the door open behind yer ter chill the air. Ain't it cold, Almiry?

AL. (*coldly*). Yes.

MEL. (*standing, with HIRAM behind her*). Saw the light when we wuz er-goin' by, and Hiram Curtis says, "Let's go in."

HIRAM (*as they all dart him a freezing look; abashed*). I never.

MEL. (*coldly; firmly*). Hiram Curtis Peck, you said it.

HIRAM (*meekly*). Guess I did, Melissy.

MEL. Hiram is so in love with me, he don't know half what he does say. (*Looks for a chair.*) Sit down, Hiram.

HIRAM. Thar ain't no chair.

MEL. Well, find one. Bring me that one over there and you kin stand fer er spell and rest yer lean, long, lanky limbs. (*Sits; to AL.*) Yer look real well, Almiry. (*There is no answer, and instead there is a pause which threatens to become embarrassing for MEL., and she says quickly.*) You ain't er-goin' ter hear the new minister, be yer?

ALL (*coldly*). No.

(*Another pause and then.*)

MEL. (*quickly*). Did yer go last Sunday?

ALL (*coldly*). No.

MEL. (*quickly*). Thought I didn't see yer. (*Another pause, and then.*) Been at all lately?

ALL (*coldly*). No.

MEL. (*in a loud whisper to HIRAM*). You say something.

(*A short pause of embarrassment while HIRAM fidgets, and then he says.*)

HIRAM (*meekly*). Hev er pep'mint?

ALL (*indignant*). No.

MEL. (*exasperated*). Ain't you sold all them things yet, and don't yer know enough ter keep them things in yer pocket and fergit 'em once in er spell?

HIRAM (*meekly*). Couldn't think of anything else ter say.

(*A pause, and then MEL. sees the red box in AL.'s lap and exclaims.*)

MEL. If there ain't er red box!

AL. (*quickly*). It belongs ter April—we brought it ter her.

MEL. Dew tell. Heard anythin' from Jasper?

EZRA (*quickly*). No.

AL. (*quickly*). He's erway on a little business trip.

MEL. (*eagerly*). Oh, that wuz it. The Judge wuz er wonderin' what he went erway fer. Oh, he's doin' so much good, the Judge is. He's given erway er fortune, almost, sence he's been home. They wuz all talkin' erbout it at the meetin' of the Village Improvement Society last night, and Mis' Jones said they ought ter draw up er petition or er certificate of thanks and present it ter him as er sort of er memorial fer his birthday, ter-morrer. Just think, it's his sixtieth birthday, and he's consented ter hev er party and er caterer down from Boston and all them things, and I'm eround invitin' all the folks ter come. You're all comin', er course. (*A pause and then MEL. to cover up her embarrassment runs on.*) It's goin' ter be er great day fer this village, and they kin all thank the Judge fer it. He's so good, so generous, and such a real Christian — (JONAS has been having hard work all through this scene to hold his temper, but at this he can stand it no longer and a gesture of impatience attracts MEL.'s attention.) I'm glad you agree with me, Jonas.

JONAS (*in a rage*). Melissy, you go home.

(MEL. *pauses, gasps, looks at him in astonishment, and then almost shrieks.*)

MEL. What?

JONAS. You git.

MEL. What—fer?

JONAS. Don't stop ter ask, you git.

MEL. (*getting quickly up and collecting her scattered senses; dazed*). Go—go home? Yes—yes—certainly—certainly. Good-evening. (*To HIRAM, as they go out R. 2 E.*) That's all your fault, Hiram Curtis Peck. If you hadn't said —

HIRAM. Hev er pep'mint?

MEL. (*with a shriek*). No.

[*They exeunt.*]

(*An instant and then EZRA and AL. get up.*)

EZRA. I guess there's nothing more to be said, Jonas. Almira and me hev said all we kin. We've suffered lots since that day, and we've been prayin' fer it ter come eround all right ter make the young folks happy. We can't do no more till Jasper comes back.

AL. We—we couldn't see April?

JONAS (*coldly*). No.

EZRA (*brokenly*). Come, Almiry, it ain't no use. (*At door R. 2 E.*) It ain't time yet. (*About to open the door.*) Will yer give her the box?

JONAS. I'll leave it here upon the table where she can see it—where she can take it—if she wants ter.

EZRA. Thank yer, Jonas. Come, Almiry.

AL. (*throwing her arms about BEL. and kissing her; with feeling*). Good-night, dear. Give April this for me.

EZRA } (*going out R.*). Good-night.

AL. }

JONAS. } Good-night.

BEL. }

(*An instant during which JONAS paces the floor while BEL. stands watching him.*)

JONAS. Belindy, I'm all worked up. Let's go fer er ride somewhere.

BEL. (*quietly*). I'd like ter, Jonas.

JONAS (*as she turns the light down*). You and me has hed er good many er them rides lately, Belindy. It's the best kind er medicine. (*At door R. 2 E.*) Bundled up warm?

BEL. Yes. [*They exeunt.*

(*An instant or so after they have gone out APRIL enters quickly R. 1 E., dressed for going away.*)

APRIL. They've gone to church, and I can get away before they return. Oh, they would forgive me if they understood how hard it is to say good-bye. Good-bye! (*She goes to window C. and raises the curtains so that a clear view through the window can be had.*) It's still clear, and moonlight. (*Goes to the lamp on the table and turns it up.*) I wonder what time it is? I thought they'd never go. I do so want to catch that eight-fifteen train. (*She has turned up the light and has gone to the clock on shelf R. and has started to go back to the table again when she sees the box on the table with the light from the lamp pouring on it. She gasps, then stares at it in astonishment.*) How—how came that here? (*Bitterly; with a laugh.*) Oh, the irony of fate. (*She stands holding it in her hands an instant.*) No, I've no use for you any longer. Even if I should open you now, your contents would be a mockery. (*Starts for the fireplace R.*) No, I'll burn it. I'll burn it, I'll burn it. (*She is about to throw the box into*

the flames when an idea comes to her.) I wonder if it would do any good to open it? I'm married. (*Bitterly.*) Married! (*She seats herself upon the floor before the fireplace and in front of an old-fashioned chair so that she is hidden from sight of any one entering the room and casually looking about and opens the box.*) Papers—letters—legal documents. Ah! A will.—And a marriage certificate. A marriage certificate. (*She is intensely engrossed in reading.*) My mother's name! —Oh! And my father's name. They were legally married. They were legally married. Thank God! Thank God! (*She bursts into hysterical tears and buries her face in her arms on her knees and weeps silently for an instant.* JUDGE, *unkempt, wild-eyed and without a hat, is seen climbing over the verandah outside window c. He glances into the room during this scene.* APRIL *looks through the papers feverishly.*) Here's—here's a letter—written in my mother's handwriting to me. (*Reads aloud.*) "To my darling little girl. Now that you are married, dear, and have some one to protect you, and watch over you, I am willing that you should open this box and read all that it contains so that you will be warned in time and never have to suffer as I have. I want you, dear, to be warned of ——"

(She utters a sharp cry and reads on feverishly.)

Enter JUDGE, c.

JUDGE (*muttering to himself*). It's here. It's here. Melissy saw it. Saw it to-night. No, it must be darker. I can't be found out. I can't be found out. I'll turn the light down so they won't see. They won't see.

(He turns the light down and APRIL looks up.)

APRIL. Why, how dark it is! (*Startled; hears* JUDGE *fumbling about.*) There's some one in this room. Some one has turned down that light. Yes, and the window is opened. (*Rises with her papers and box.*) Who's there?

JUDGE (*turning up the light with a cry*). Ha!

APRIL (*discovering him*). You?

JUDGE (*going for the papers*). Give me those papers.

APRIL. No. They're mine. I've found you out, Judge Marley. You ruined my mother.

(She faints and falls c.)

JUDGE (*snatching the papers ; feverishly*). Tell them. Tell them. Tell them. But I've got the proofs. I've got the proofs.

(*He makes for the window to escape.*)

JASPER (*blocking his exit*). And I've got you, Judge Morley, and we're going to have it out. (*Tableau.*)

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE.—*Same as Act I. At the BROMLEYS', a few moments after the previous act.*

(As curtain goes up; AL. is discovered seated knitting at right of small table L. C., on which a lamp is burning, while on the other side LIZA sits reading a newspaper. An instant after curtain goes up AL. lays down her work, wipes her eyes with her handkerchief and blows her nose.)

LIZA *(looking up quickly)*. Mis' Bromley, you're cryin'.

AL. I ain't, neither.

LIZA. Yes, you be.

AL. No, I ain't.

LIZA. Yes, you be, 'cause I kin tell by the complexion of your voice.

AL. *(indignant)*. Liza Liz Hankins, ain't you got no manners, ter contradict yer elders like that? You just keep still, and don't you move nor open your mouth for five whole minutes, no matter what yer hear.

LIZA. It ain't goin' ter take that long, is it?

AL. Be still.

LIZA. I am. I ain't movin' er mite.

AL. But your tongue is.

LIZA *(quickly)*. No 'tain't. I'm talkin' through my teeth. *(AL. subsides in despair and there follows an interval of silence; finally LIZA begins to get restless, steals several looks at AL., and then, unable to stand it any longer, says timidly.)*

Mis' Bromley? *(No answer.)* Mis' Bromley?

AL. *(sharply)*. What is it now?

LIZA *(faintly)*. I—I got er itchy place.

AL. What of it?

LIZA. Kin—kin I scratch it?

AL. Yes, if you do feel that bad.

LIZA *(business)*. There, I do feel better.

(Door C. opens and EZRA enters well muffled and carrying a lantern.)

EZRA. Settin' down, Almiry?

AL. Good land, Ezra Bromley, I ain't er railroad train.

EZRA. No, didn't spec' yer wuz.

(*He blows out the light in the lantern, then takes off his things and hangs them up on door c., then goes to fire-place to warm his hands L. C., during following.*)

AL. If I wuz as slow as you be I'd never get anything done. It does seem as though you wuz forever shutting up the barn.

EZRA. Wal, it's gettin' cold fer September, and I wanted ter look at them young trees.

AL. Got the hoss tied up?

EZRA. Yas. (*Discovers LIZA.*) Liza settin' up?

LIZA (*quickly*). Mis' Bromley said I could till you got back from the Jarrocks' for tellin' you about April. 'Sides, I can't sleep when I go ter bed so early.

EZRA. Sho; why not?

LIZA. Oh, I'm too big, generally; but ter-night, after seein' April, I can't git ter sleep, anyway. My thoughts won't let me. I do think it wuz awful mean the way you treated April.

AL. (*aghast*). Liza!

EZRA (*quietly amused*). Wal, if I ain't persessed! What do you know about the way we treated April?

LIZA (*warming up*). Oh, I know all about it. 'I can see things if I do have to sit and listen when growed-up folks has the floor.

EZRA (*coming down to his chair in which LIZA is sitting*). Wal, it's bedtime now.

LIZA. Oh, can't I sit up this once?

AL. (*sharply*). Liza Liz Hankins, you go to bed!

(*LIZA whimpers, sulks, then gets down from her chair, slams the newspaper down on the table, and scuffs out L. I E.*)

LIZA. I'm so mad I shan't sleep all night. [*Exit.*]

(*EZRA stares after her an instant, and then bursts into a loud laugh.*)

AL. I wish you wouldn't, Ezra.

EZRA (*calming down*). That gal knows a thing or two, Almiry.

AL. (*sighing*). Yes, and it's not my way to beat it out of her, like my folks did to me.

EZRA (*sitting L. C., taking out his spectacles, etc.*). Paper come?

AL. Yes.

EZRA. Wonder what there is fer news that ain't old news?

AL. (*as he takes up paper*). If you don't mind, Ezra, I wish you'd read it out loud.

(*He looks through paper while she knits, and after several instants.*)

EZRA. Luke Hanson's goin' ter build er new addition ter his house.

AL. Well, I do declare! that is news. But come ter think of it they ain't hed no new clothes this year.

EZRA (*reading*). "Miss Marthy Higgins has accepted the position of principal at Maple Seminary." Thet means six hundred first year, and seven hundred the next fer Marthy.

AL. She allus wuz smart at mathematics.

EZRA. Sam Sanderson's got er new buggy.

AL. That's three days old.

EZRA (*suddenly dropping the paper*). I—I can't read no more, Almiry, I can't.

AL. (*looking up; surprised*). Why not, Ezra?

EZRA (*overcome*). Oh, 'cause, Almiry, I git er-thinkin'. I git er-thinkin' 'bout April. We ain't done right. We ain't done right by our boy, and I'm ter blame, Almiry. It's all my fault, and there warn't no excuse fer doin' it, either, just as Jonas said.

AL. There, there, Ezra. It was your temper. You're fiery, and so's Jasper, and so's April. Don't worry, it'll come out all right. It'll hev ter.

EZRA. But if Jasper don't come home to-night he'll lose April, 'cause she'll go—like she said she would—in the mornin', and you know when April makes up her mind —

AL. (*quietly*). Jasper will come.

EZRA. Yas, he'll come if he has ter walk every step of the way, and he'll put things to rights whar they ought ter be put, I reckon. I can't never fergive myself, Almiry, fer my part in it.

AL. You wuz a bit hasty, Ezra, at jumpin' at conclusions, but we can't hev our wits about us all the time. Didn't the greatest general thet ever wuz get caught nappin'?

EZRA. Yes, Almiry, thet's just what it wuz. I wuz caught nappin'. (*A timid knock at door C.*)

AL. Fer the land, who's that, and at this time er night?

(*Gets up.*) You set still, Ezra, and I'll go. (*Crosses to door C., throws it open, and MEL. enters in great distress and disorder.*) Well, above all things, Melissy Watkins!

MEL. Oh, Almiry, hev you seen him? Is he in here?

AL. Who?

MEL. The Judge.

EZRA (*rising; angrily*). Do yer think thet Judge Marley would come here after what he done and after I kicked him out?

AL. (*alarmed*). Ezra!

MEL. (*sitting down weakly and running on*). Oh, you don't know. Something's happened, something dreadful, ter the Judge. He—he went out after I got back from the Jarrocks' with Hiram Curtis, and I ain't seen him since, and I got so worried and so nervous that I couldn't stand it a minute longer, and come out ter find him. I seen your light when I wuz passin' and I thought—I thought he might be here.

EZRA (*coming down, facing MEL.; sharply*). What made yer think that, Melissy?

MEL. Wal—wal—it allus seems good ter drop in here.

EZRA. And you say that, after what you did ter me and mine?

MEL. (*rising; indignant*). I never did nothin'.

EZRA. What about April?

AL. (*touching his arm; gently*). Ezra?

MEL. I never did a thing. She went away of her own accord. It warn't my fault.

EZRA. But you told the Judge?

MEL. (*sitting; distressed*). Yes, and I wish I'd never done it. I ain't had one minute's peace fer doin' it. Nothin' but 'ternal torment from the Judge and the neighbors. I only did what I thought wuz my duty. I thought she wuz er-plannin' ter fall in love with Robert, the Judge's nephew, and I knew I'd get blamed fer it from the Judge, so I writ and he come home and things turned out unexpected.

EZRA. Yas, they did.

MEL. Of course I'm willin' ter take all my share of the blame. I thought I wuz doin' you folks some good or I never should hev done it. Anyway it does show how some good intentions are appreciated.

EZRA. Wal, Melissy, good intentions is all right in their place, but yer want ter be mighty pertickler about the kind of

folks and who they is before yer make the first move. I reckon as how yer did think yer wuz doin' us er good turn, but yer didn't go about it the right way, Melissy.

MEL. (*bursting into tears*). I just do declare I never can do anything right, and when I try so hard to be a comfort and a help to people, Miss Jones is allus pickin' on me at the Village Improvement meetin', and there's no tellin' what the others say and—and I did think you folks would understand me.

EZRA. Wal, Melissy, I'm goin' ter speak right out plain ter you. You allus wuz in my mind a meddler —

AL. (*gently*). Ezra!

EZRA. — A meddler, along with the rest of that Village Improvement crowd, but even if you was a meddler, Melissy, I allus thought that you had good qualities —

MEL. (*interrupting eagerly*). I have! Oh, I have!

EZRA. — That might make a mighty fine woman out of you. I'm glad yer came in here ter-night, Melissy, 'cause I've just been itchin' ter talk serious-like ter you, and tell yer what I think, ever since that mornin' in this very room when Martin Jasper come home and you dropped in ter tell us your opinion of April. Do yer remember it?

MEL. (*weeping*). Yes.

EZRA. Wal, yer wouldn't listen ter me, Melissy, you was bound ter have your say, and you had it, yer had it ter yer heart's content, and we were fools ter listen ter yer; and now you can just set thar and look around yer and see all the misery you've made.

MEL. (*sobbing*). I do. Oh, I do.

EZRA. Tattle is mighty cheap, Melissy, but it makes an awful lot of trouble sometimes. We've suffered, Almiry and me, fer we wuz carried away against our judgment. I separated our boy from the best gal that ever was, and—and it wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been fer you.

MEL. (*tearfully*). What can I do?

EZRA. Wal, you better go home and git ter sleep and wake up different in the mornin'.

MEL. (*rising quickly*). I will! I just will!

AL. You better come inter the kitchen before you go, Melissy, and git a hot cup of tea.

MEL. (*delighted*). Almiry! (*Quietly and gratefully*.) I'm goin' ter accept, Almiry. Your tea, somehow, never has a bitter taste.

(AL. embraces MEL., and they exeunt, L. 2 E. EZRA stands looking after them an instant and then.)

EZRA. Wal, it does beat all natur' how women folks does understand one another. (*Door C. is flung open and JASPER enters. He is greatly worked up. EZRA turns.*) My boy! Jasper! (*Advances to him.*) I knew you'd come. I knew it. (*As JASPER pushes him one side and paces the room.*) What is it?

JASPER (*speaking with difficulty*). I—I want that pearl-handled pistol of yours.

EZRA. What fer?

JASPER (*with a cry*). I'm going to kill him!

EZRA (*startled*). Who?

JASPER. Judge Marley!

EZRA. No, you're not.

JASPER. Yes, I am.

(*They stand facing each other an instant, looking each other full in the eyes, JASPER greatly worked up, panting with emotion, EZRA calm but firm. After an instant, JASPER goes up stage, unable to control his emotion.*)

EZRA (*brokenly*). My boy! My boy! Don't do anything rash. Don't go ter doin' somethin' that you're goin' ter regret all your life. Remember, it ain't only now, it's the future you have got ter face. Don't tell me you want ter commit an act like that!

JASPER (*coming down*). Father, that man came between me and the girl I loved. He has made an accusation which no honest man would stand. I love April, and it isn't true. I've found out all about Judge Marley. I've traced his movements almost to the very day he was born. He's a reformed adventurer. (*With a disdainful laugh.*) Reformed? Ha! but he goes back to his old tricks. He ruined April's mother, disgraced her father, and when she came into his path sought to get rid of her by slander. Father, that man has no right to live and I'm going to kill him!

EZRA. Are you mad?

JASPER. Mad? Yes! Mad for revenge. Where's that pistol?

EZRA (*struggling with him*). Jasper, listen.

JASPER (*business*). No, father, it's no use. I know what you'll say; besides, we've had it out and I caught him fair

and square, and this time he shan't escape. He shan't escape.

EZRA. And I say he shall!

JASPER (*with a cry*). Father!

EZRA (*seizing him firmly*). Look here, Jasper Bromley, you listen ter me a moment. What can you gain by committing murder?

JASPER. It isn't murder, it's justice—justice for my wife.

EZRA. Have you asked her consent?

JASPER. Why should I ask her?

EZRA. Wal, ain't she the one that's consarned the most? Do yer think she would want yer ter stain yer hands with blood and bring ruin onter yer father and mother and the whole of us, just 'cause you was bound you'd do somethin' that would seem ter fix things right and even things up er bit? No! That ain't the way ter look at life, Jasper boy! I know you're hot-tempered and excited, and have been wronged by a varmint; but it ain't accordin' ter Scriptor to punish the varmint that way.

(*JASPER has sunk into a chair and has broken down.*)

JASPER. Father, I can't listen! I ought not to listen! I know you're right; but when I left that house I swore I'd kill him.

EZRA. Yas, I believe yer did, Jasper. I do believe yer did. It's just like you. It's like my spirit. Oh, I've done er good many rash things in my day, Jasper, when I was just as hot and rash and as unreasonable as you be now; and I've regretted 'em just as quick as I git cooled off, like you will this—this wretched business. No—no, my boy, don't do anythin' till you've let it set ter cool er bit, and by that time you can see what's wantin'.

JASPER (*overcome*). Father!

EZRA (*standing over him, patting him gently on the shoulder*). Thar—thar. I know how you feel, boy. It does hurt, but you'll git over it er heap quicker than if there was powder mixed up in it. (*The door back opens and APRIL enters and closes the door. EZRA turns around, but JASPER stares dazed before him. The two men are down* L. C. *EZRA, as she comes down.*) April!

APRIL (*coming down*). You—you won't let him do it?

EZRA. Then you knew?

APRIL. No, I guessed.

EZRA. No!

APRIL (*relieved*). I ran all the way to try and stop him.

EZRA. 'Thar ain't no need. He won't do it.

APRIL. I'm so glad. There's been so much trouble on my account, I couldn't stand it if I was the cause of that.

EZRA. You ain't got no hard feelin's agin me, April?

APRIL (*quietly*). No.

EZRA. And—and you come back?

APRIL (*simply*). Yes.

EZRA (*holding out his arms and embracing APRIL*). Oh, April, you don't know how we've missed you—Almiry and me. You don't know how we've wanted yer ter come back all these weeks. But now you've come back ter stay, to be with us always, to be our daughter and to make us all happy as long as we live.

APRIL (*softly*). As long as we live. (*A knock on door c.*)

JASPER (*rising*). Who's that?

APRIL (*releasing herself from EZRA'S embrace and going to him*). Jasper, it's Judge Marley.

JASPER (*with a cry*). Judge Marley!

APRIL. He promised me to bring some papers, which belong to me, here.

JASPER. Let him come in.

APRIL. Let me see him—alone.

JASPER (*with a cry*). April?

APRIL. Please. It is my right.

EZRA. Yas, Jasper, it's her right. Come.

(*He goes L. 2 E., and JASPER reluctantly follows. After JASPER'S exit an instant and then APRIL says.*)

APRIL. Come in.

(*Door c. opens and JUDGE staggers into the room. He is a nervous wreck and is completely "gone." He carries a bundle of papers which he places on table L. C., as he sinks down into chair beside it.*)

JUDGE. You—you won't let him do it, April? You won't let him kill me?

APRIL. No.

JUDGE. I can't die now. I'm too much of a coward. I want to live to make restitution.

APRIL (*bitterly*). What can you do?

JUDGE. Right the wrong I've done you.

APRIL. How can you do that?

JUDGE. By giving you back all I took from you. I haven't touched a cent of it, April. It's all there. I never thought I should see you again; but in spite of that I couldn't touch the bonds or the mortgages.

APRIL. And you think that by giving me back my property it will right the wrong you have done me?

JUDGE. Why not?

APRIL. But what of my name, my husband's name? What will the village believe? What will your sister Melissy think?

JUDGE. Melissy—Melissy is a fool, and so am I, April. I thought when I came home and found you here face to face with me that I could easily get rid of you by—by making up that yarn I told Ezra Bromley; but I didn't reckon on your being married, and when I came in that day it—it was too late to back out. I took my chances and played my hand high.

APRIL. And tried to ruin me.

JUDGE. You can call it that. It was either you or me.

APRIL. And as usual the weaker of the two—the woman—must suffer, and did suffer. And now what are you going to do?

JUDGE. There's your property.

APRIL. That isn't enough.

JUDGE. I haven't anything more to give, April. I'm ruined.

APRIL. I don't care. You ruined me.

JUDGE. No, I didn't.

APRIL. But you planned to, and by your own confession. You've failed, Judge Marley, and now you'll accept my terms.

JUDGE. What are they, April? What are they?

APRIL. That you confess to your guests at your party to-morrow what you have done.

JUDGE (*with horror*). Oh, I couldn't do that, April. I couldn't do that. Oh, April, have mercy.

APRIL. Mercy! You ask for mercy? What mercy had you for me? What pity?

JUDGE (*covering his face with his hands and moaning*). Oh, April, I can't do it. I can't do it. Don't ask that. Don't ask that. I can't tell them. I can't tell them.

APRIL. No, you can't tell them, your friends, your dear friends, who have set you upon a pedestal to worship as a demigod. You can't tell them what you are, what you've been, and what you always will be, a hypocrite, a thief, a wolf in sheep's clothing. And you a Christian. Christian!

JUDGE. Don't make me do that, April. Don't make me do that. Anything but that.

APRIL. I have saved you from my husband.

JUDGE. Yes, yes, I know.

APRIL. And now you want me to save you from your friends?

JUDGE. I can't tell them, April. (*An instant and then.*)

APRIL. Will you write them a statement which I may publish, if necessary, explaining your absence from the village indefinitely?

JUDGE (*eagerly*). Yes, yes, I'll go away, April. I'll go to-night. It is better so. I'll do it. I'm done for.

APRIL. No, you're not, Judge Marley. The world is wide, and there is surely a place for you somewhere to begin anew and live honestly. I'm too happy to care where you go, so long as you go.

JUDGE. I'll go, April, and I'll never come back. (*Rises quickly.*) I'll go and write the letter now. [*Exit, c.*]

(*APRIL stands c., speechless with emotion, and then after an instant she says bitterly.*)

APRIL. And the woman pays every time. With man against man it is an even match, and likewise the woman against the woman; but the woman against the man must fail—it's the law of God, that the woman be willing to suffer.

(*An instant and EZRA enters L. 2 E.*)

EZRA. You don't mean ter say you let him go, April?

APRIL (*quietly*). Yes, it 'is better so.

EZRA. Wal, I'm blowed if I kin understand woman's natur' anyhow. (*He goes to fire which has died down and pokes it.* APRIL takes up the bundle of papers from table.) Oh, April, Jasper was callin' fer yer.

APRIL. I'll go to him.

EZRA (*embracing her*). Good-night, April, we'll all be happy in the mornin'. As fer me, I'm goin' ter have another chance ter say, "Bless yer, my children." (*Tableau.*)

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