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No. 357

CUPID IN KHAKE

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

BY

HILLIARD BOOTH

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CUPID IN KHAKI

CHARACTERS

SARAH STANTON.....*A Widow.*
JESSICA STANTON.....*Her Daughter.*
ELLEN WILLIAMS.....*Jessica's Friend.*
MAGGIE.....*A Maid.*
CLYDE MERRIMAN.....*A Captain.*
ROBERT TELFORD.....*An Aviator*
JOSEPH SMITH.....*A Private.*

SYNOPSIS

ACT I: Living-Room in the Stantons' Home.
ACT II: The Same.

PLACE: A Suburb of New York City.

TIME: The Present.

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CUPID IN KHAKI

NOTES ON CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES.

SARAH STANTON is an attractive woman of middle-age; worldly-minded and a strict parent. She wears an attractive house-frock.

JESSICA STANTON is a pretty girl of eighteen years, full of enthusiasm. She wears a becoming costume.

ELLEN WILLIAMS is a few years older than Jessica and also attractive. She wears the white uniform of a nurse, with red-cross on sleeve, and white cap.

MAGGIE is a stout Irish maid, dressed neatly in black with white cap and apron. A romantic nature.

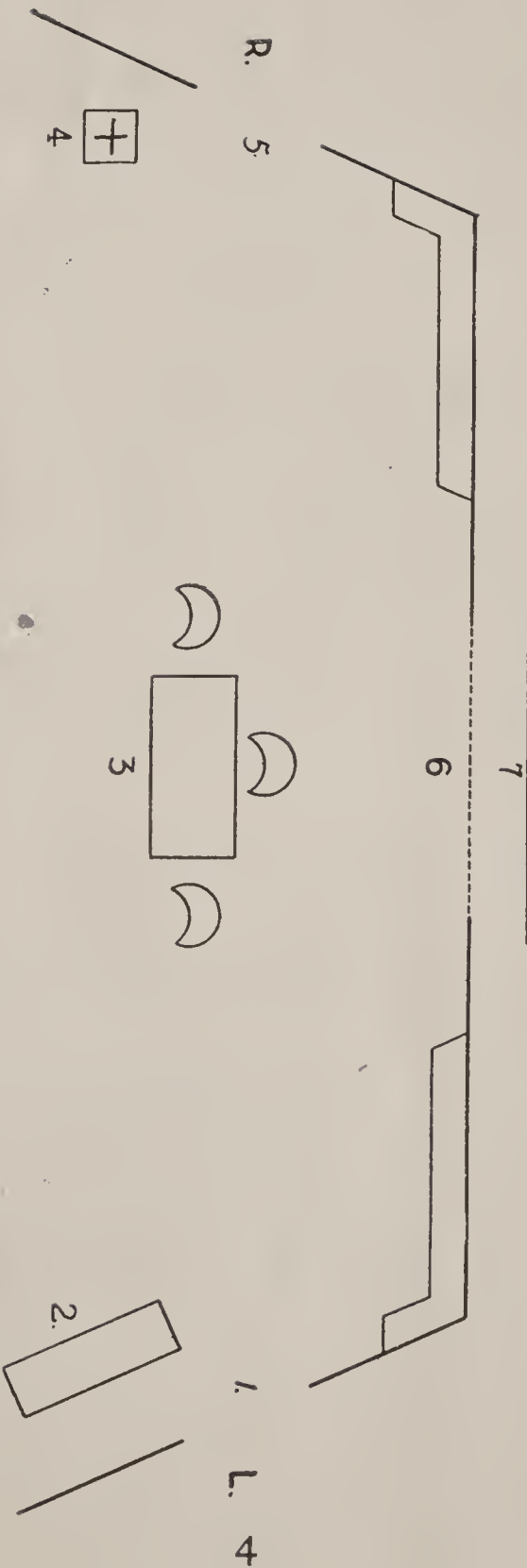
CLYDE MERRIMAN is a good looking man of twenty-five years. He wears the khaki uniform of a captain.

ROBERT TELFORD wears the khaki uniform of an army aviator; he is a wholesome-appearing fellow of Merriman's age.

JOSEPH SMITH is a burly man of thirty-five years, homely and with red hair. He is illiterate. He wears the wrinkled khaki uniform of a private.

CUPID IN KHAKI

SCENE - PLOT



- 1. HALL DOOR
- 2. COUCH
- 3. TABLE
- 4. STAND WITH PHONE
- 5. DOOR TO OTHER ROOMS
- 6. WINDOW
- 7. DROP OF GARDEN

CUPID IN KHAKI

ACT I

SCENE: *Living-room in Mrs. Stanton's home in a suburb of New York City. Door to hall, L. Door R. to other rooms. A window at rear, overlooking the garden. A center-table bears work-basket, knitting, a pile of sewing and several wrapped packages. A couch at L. front. A stand at R. front bears a telephone. Book-cases at rear. Rugs, pictures, etc. The effect is one of comfort and good taste. The time is morning. Full light.*

DISCOVERED: *Sarah Stanton standing back of the center-table, examining the packages. Maggie enters L. with two more packages. One is a photograph,—the wrapping torn. The other package suggests a book.*

SARAH. Another package, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Two of 'em, Mrs. Stanton, they just come by the mail. Both for Miss Jessica! (*She lays them on the table*)

SARAH. A table-full of birthday presents, and Jessica not down yet! (*Takes up the square package*) Ah, this is from Mr. Wormley! I felt sure Mr. Wormley would not forget Jessica's birthday! I wonder what it is? It feels like a book, but it may be a jewel-box! Um! (*Feels it, curious. Turns suddenly and sees Maggie peering over her shoul-*

der) Maggie, you must learn to restrain your curiosity! Curiosity is an unworthy trait! Um, I believe it is a jewel-box! (*She lays it down and takes up the photograph*) A photograph! (*She peers at it through the torn wrapping*) The photograph of a soldier! (*She rips off the wrapping, indignant*) Another of these boys in khaki! Jessica has entirely too many friends in khaki! I never saw this one before! Do you know who he is, Maggie?

MAGGIE. No'm; he ain't never been here, I'm sure of that! But ain't he handsome! (*She clasps her hands*)

SARAH. Handsome! Anything in khaki looks handsome to a sentimental female! Jessica shall never receive *this* present, at any rate! (*She throws the photograph into a waste-basket by table*)

MAGGIE. (*Hands raised in horror*) Oh, Mrs. Stanton, ma'm!

SARAH. Not a word to Jessica! I shou'd like to consign Clyde Merriman to the waste-basket, too! Mr. Wormley is Jessica's future!

MAGGIE. It must be just grand to keep company with a soldier-man!

SARAH. You've caught the khaki-fever! Remember my orders,—if Captain Clyde Merriman calls here to-day,—Miss Jessica is not at home! And don't mention the photograph of this other man in khaki to Miss Jessica: the man had nerve to send her his picture! I am *sure* this present from Mr. Wormley is a jewel-box! I'll call Jessica at once. Jessica! (*She goes out R.* MAGGIE *looks after her, then leans over cautiously and pulls the photograph from the waste-basket*)

MAGGIE. Ye'll never be burnt up in the stove,—not while Maggie Ryan has a place for ye on her bureau! (*She heaves a deep sigh as she looks at the picture.* SARAH'S *voice sounds off-stage*)

SARAH. Hurry along, Jessica!
(MAGGIE starts, looks around for a place to conceal the photograph, and hides it rear in the book-case as SARAH enters R., followed in by JESSICA. They cross to table. MAGGIE pretends to dust the book-case.)

JESSICA. What a lot of presents! How exciting!
(She looks over the packages quickly) It's just like getting married!

SARAH. Here is the package you are looking for, Jessica. (She picks up the square package and hands it to JESSICA) That will do, Maggie; you may go.

MAGGIE. Yes'm. (She starts L., and turns back, on tip-toe, to get the photograph. SARAH sees her)

SARAH. That's all, Maggie!

MAGGIE. Yes'm. (Looks toward the book-case and exits L., with a sigh)

JESSICA. This is from Mr. Wormley! (She drops it, and hunts again)

SARAH. It is,—and you are looking for a present from——?

JESSICA. From Clyde!

SARAH. Since when have you called Captain Merriman, Clyde?

JESSICA. Since I promised to marry him.

SARAH. Since you—! Jessica!

JESSICA. Yes,—last night. There was something bumpy in his breast-pocket, and it hurt my head so that I——

SARAH. (Interrupts) Your head? What was your head doing on his breast-pocket?

JESSICA. Resting comfortably, thank you. When I asked him what the bumpy thing was, he took it out of his pocket and I saw it was a ring, a beautiful solitaire,—an engagement ring! And he put it on my finger and—and—that's how we became en-

gaged. Oh, Mother, Clyde is just the nicest thing in khaki I ever saw. Of course I told him I couldn't marry him without your consent, but you will consent, won't you?

SARAH. Consent to your marriage with a whippersnap of a soldier when a man of wealth and position is paying you attention? Hardly. Mr. Worm'ey is the man I hope to see your husband!

JESSICA. Old Wormley's rich, but if you don't consent to my marriage with Clyde, I shall die an old maid!

SARAH. We shall see! You are not wearing your *engagement* ring!

JESSICA. It was too large. Clyde took it back to have it altered. I thought it would be here. (*She searches among the packages*)

SARAH. I forbid you to receive that ring; I forbid you to see Captain Merriman again!

JESSICA. You mean that?

SARAH. I do!

JESSICA. Careful, Mother, you may drive me to do something rash!

SARAH. I hope to make you marry Mr. Wormley!

JESSICA. Oh, I shall never do anything so rash as that!

SARAH. Open his present, perhaps *he* has sent you a ring also!

JESSICA *shrugs, takes up the square package, cuts the string and unwraps a small album bound in red leather. She reads from the title-page.*)

JESSICA. "Love's Lyrics." (*She drops the book to the table with a laugh*)

SARAH. I will admit I am disappointed; but the *sentiment* of his selection is most praiseworthy!

JESSICA. Mother,—why don't you like Clyde?

SARAH. Captain Merriman is without prospects; I refuse to discuss the matter!

(ELLEN WILLIAMS is heard speaking off-stage.)

ELLEN. Don't bother, Maggie,—I'll go right in. (ELLEN enters L. She carries a potted-plant covered with tissue-paper, which she gives to JESSICA) Many happy returns of the day, Jessica,—and here's a little present.

JESSICA. How sweet of you, Ellen!

ELLEN. Just look at my new uniform! (Twirls around) Isn't it grand? Careful, don't muss it. Is my cap on straight? Isn't it cute? I've completed my first-aid-to-the-injured lessons. I'm just dying for someone to practise on. Isn't someone here hurt?

SARAH. The gardener cut his finger this morning.

ELLEN. The gardener! Oh, Mrs. Stanton, he isn't even a soldier, and my services are for commissioned officers only!

JESSICA. (Removes wrapping from plant) A potato-plant! (She holds up a potato-plant in a fancy pot) Ellen, this is too much of you!

ELLEN. I knew you'd appreciate it. I wanted to give you something really worth while, Jessica. (Takes up knitting from table) Shan't we begin work?

SARAH. By all means. Look at these pajamas I've made. (Puts hand on pile of folded goods on table) A dozen pair!

JESSICA. I am cutting scraps for pillows. (She sits L. of table, takes basket of scraps and cuts. ELLEN sits R. of table and knits. SARAH sits back of table and folds the last pair of pajamas, holding them up as she does so)

ELLEN. I hope the man who gets this sweater is good-looking.

SARAH. I hope the boy who gets these pajamas appreciates fine sewing! I've put a world of work on them.

JESSICA. I thought you were a man-hater, Ellen!

ELLEN. I am! I don't know what love means, and I don't want to know.

SARAH. (*Picks up newspaper from table as her eyes fall on headlines*) Ah, two more spies arrested, and someone in this vicinity is suspected! I wonder if the butcher—he spoke with a German accent—um! (*She reads. JESSICA absently reaches over and takes the top pajama-coat from the pile instead of her scraps. She begins to cut it up. SARAH exclaims suddenly*) Listen to this! As if we didn't have war societies enough already! (*Reads*) "A new society has been formed by girls and young spinsters, the object of which is to furnish wives for maimed sailors and soldiers on their return from war. It is realized that a wounded warrior has difficulty in winning a sympathetic wife, and the members of this society have patriotically pledged themselves to marry disabled defenders of their country's honor!"

ELLEN. There's true heroism for you!

SARAH. I call it indecent!

JESSICA. I call it noble! Somebody has to look after the maimed soldiers,—why not form a society to systematize the work? The girls who belong to that society are true-hearted and self-sacrificing women!

ELLEN. I'll bet they're unattractive old maids in search of husbands.

JESSICA. (*Rises, indignant*) They're nothing of the sort!

SARAH. (*Rises with a cry of protest*) Jessica! You've cut up my pajamas!

JESSICA. (*Holds up the half-destroyed pajama-coat*) So I have!

(*Bell off-stage. SARAH snatches the coat from JESSICA, and looks quickly L.*)

SARAH. It's Captain Merriman!

JESSICA. Yes,—it's Clyde!

SARAH. I'll see that Maggie does her duty! (*She exits L.*)

JESSICA. (*As they look off L.*) He's gone! Ellen, we're engaged, and Mother won't even let me see him!

(*CLYDE MERRIMAN enters cautiously R.*)

MERRIMAN. Jessica!

JESSICA. (*As they turn and see him*) Clyde! (*She runs to meet him*) How did you get in?

MERRIMAN. By the back door! Maggie put me wise. What's the matter?

JESSICA. Mother won't listen to our engagement. She wants me to marry Mr. Wormley because he's a banker and rich! Sh! I hear her!

ELLEN. I'll keep watch in the hall. When you hear me whistle three times,—fly!

MERRIMAN. You're a brick, Miss Williams!

ELLEN. First-aid-to-the-injured! (*She laughs and exits L.*)

JESSICA. Clyde, I've thought of a way to outwit Mother!

MERRIMAN. So have I. Here's the ring. (*He takes a diamond ring from his pocket and slips it on JESSICA'S finger*) All we have to do is to get a marriage-license, round up Bob Telford and Miss Williams as witnesses, go before a minister,—and Mother can say what she likes!

JESSICA. I can't run away with you, Clyde. And who is Bob Telford?

MERRIMAN. He's my chum, he's going to be our best man, he's an aviator and a woman-hater. I sent you his photograph yesterday; didn't you get it? It showed him in unifom.

JESSICA. Never saw it. No, it isn't here. It must have miscarried.

MERRIMAN. Good old Bob,—you'll like him when you meet him. Well, what's *your* plan?

JESSICA. There's a new society, formed by girls for the purpose of marrying maimed sailors and soldiers on their return from war. Isn't it noble of them?

MERRIMAN. Good Lord! Haven't the sailors and soldiers anything to say about it?

JESSICA. *I* have joined that society!

MERRIMAN. *You?* (*Half rises from his chair*)

JESSICA. I wanted to encourage the work, and I thought I should be safely married to you before I was needed as a maimed wife,—I mean the wife of a maimed man.

MERRIMAN. You pledged yourself to marry a maimed soldier?

JESSICA. Yes,—isn't it lucky?

MERRIMAN. *Lucky?*

JESSICA. All you have to do is to lose a leg, don't you see? Then I will marry you and we'll be happy for life. I've pledged myself to marry a maimed soldier, so nothing Mother can say will make any difference.

MERRIMAN. Which—which leg must I lose?

JESSICA. Either leg, or an arm will do.

MERRIMAN. Why not my head?

JESSICA. Now you're making fun of me!

MERRIMAN. I've lost my head over you already, that's why I'm a little dazed. Suppose I'm *not* wounded? Lots of the boys *don't* get hit, you know!

JESSICA. Now don't borrow trouble, Clyde!

MERRIMAN. Trouble? Of course I shall feel all cut up if I come through this war without a scratch, but frankly, I don't like this one-arm-love idea! I need both arms for the best expression of my feelings! (*He draws JESSICA to the couch, L. front. As he does so, three whistles sound off-stage*)

JESSICA. Ellen's signal! It's Mother!

(MERRIMAN *slides off the couch backwards and hides behind it. JESSICA crosses to the table. SARAH enters L., her hat on.*)

SARAH. I'm going to run over to see Mr. Wormley's sister, Jessica. Shall I thank Mr. Wormley for the book of poems?

JESSICA. Yes. Tell him I shall read it—every line—with Captain Merriman.

SARAH. Captain Merriman is in no position to read poetry! (*She exits L.*)

(MERRIMAN *comes out from behind the couch as JESSICA laughs.*)

MERRIMAN. She never said a truer word. Now I'm off! I'm on special duty. There's a spy in the neighborhood and I'm hot on his trail.

JESSICA. Mother read about it in the newspaper.

MERRIMAN. A code book's been stolen from headquarters. If I find the spy and he puts up fight,—we may be married to-day!

JESSICA. You mean——?

MERRIMAN. He may wound me,—yes!

JESSICA. Lovely! But a flesh-wound will be enough, Clyde!

MERRIMAN. All right, I'll tell the spy just to pink me!

(ELLEN WILLIAMS *enters* L.)

ELLEN. Your Mother's gone out, Jessica.

JESSICA. Everything's all right, Ellen. Clyde's off on a dangerous duty and may be wounded. If he's wounded, I'll marry him—for I've pledged myself to marry a wounded soldier. Yes, I joined the society for finding wives for wounded sailors and soldiers.

ELLEN. Jessica! What will your Mother say?

JESSICA. She can't say a thing,—that's the beauty of it! I'm pledged! And Ellen, dear, I entered *your* name as a member of the society.:

ELLEN. What?

JESSICA. I knew you weren't engaged, and that you never *would* marry except from a sense of duty. Think how noble you will feel as the wife of a crippled defender of your country's honor!

ELLEN. See that my name is crossed from the list of membership at once! I'm not eligible for the society! I'm—I'm—I'm already engaged!

JESSICA. I don't believe it! You said not ten minutes ago that you were a man hater and that you didn't know what love meant!

ELLEN. That—that was ten minutes ago! I've—I've been engaged for months. My engagement is a deep secret.

JESSICA. What's the name of your fiancé?

ELLEN. I don't remember—I mean it's none of your affair! I refuse to join your society for crippled marriages! I'm already engaged!

JESSICA. You'll have to prove it! I won't believe it until I see the picture at least, of the man you are to marry! Come, Clyde, I'll let you out of the front door.

MERRIMAN. Invite the man you love to tea, Miss Williams, then shoot him up and marry him. It's easy! (*He kisses his right arm*) Good-bye,

right arm, do your bit! (*He puts his right arm about JESSICA*)

JESSICA. Clyde! (*JESSICA and CLYDE exit L. As ELLEN looks off after them, MAGGIE enters R., and tip-toes up to the book-case; she takes the photograph from its place of concealment, looks at it and sighs. She puts it to her lips and kisses it. ELLEN turns and sees her do so*)

ELLEN. Maggie!

MAGGIE. Lor, ma'm, how you startled me! (*Puts the picture behind her back*)

ELLEN. You were kissing the photograph of a man! Who is he?

MAGGIE. He's—he's—he's my cousin, ma'm; he—he—he was killed in the battle of the submarines. Don't say anything to Mrs. Stanton about it, will you now, ma'm.

ELLEN. Let me see the picture and I won't. (*MAGGIE hands her the photograph*) Your cousin was quite a presentable man! A handsome man!

MAGGIE. He was the pride of the clan, ma'm! Such lovely eyes he had, and such a winning way. And now he's dead! (*Handkerchief to eyes*)

ELLEN. You were going to marry him?

MAGGIE. Yes'm; we'd plighted our troth—but that's all over!

ELLEN. Maggie, this photograph appeals to me. I am very much in need of a photograph just now. This one seems safe and sound. Will a dollar induce you to part with it? (*Takes a bill from reticule*)

MAGGIE. Oh, ma'm, a cousin's only a cousin, especially when he's killed, but a dollar's always a dollar! It's a bargain, ma'm.

ELLEN. Good! (*She hands MAGGIE the dollar*)

MAGGIE. It's Mrs. Stanton come back! Don't tell her where you got the picture, ma'm!

ELLEN. Never fear. And don't you tell, Maggie!

MAGGIE. Cross my heart to die,—never!
(MAGGIE exits R. as SARAH enters L., followed in by JESSICA)

SARAH. Ellen,—Jessica tells me you are engaged! Who is the lucky man?

JESSICA. If you *have* a secret, Ellen, it's safe with us! Who's the man?

ELLEN. Here's his picture! (*She speaks in a mournful tone as she hands the photograph to JESSICA, and JESSICA and SARAH look at it*) He's fighting somewhere in France,—God knows where! He was wounded in the battle of the submari—in the battle of the Somme. He was decorated with the Victoria Cross and the medal of the Legion of Honor. Still he fights on, for liberty and for me! You have forced me to confess a secret I never meant you to know, for my love for him is so great that I can't bear to talk of it. Don't ask me his name—I can't tell you! (*She takes the picture from JESSICA and presses it to her lips*)

JESSICA. He's wonderful, Ellen! How you must have suffered all this time!

SARAH. I've seen his picture, before, somewhere!

ELLEN. It was in all the papers when he won the Victoria Cross. Perhaps now, Jessica, you will remove my name from the membership of the society for the marriage of maimed sailors and soldiers!

JESSICA. Of course, I will, dear! Mother, I am a full-fledged member of the Society! I have pledged myself to marry a wounded soldier.

SARAH. Jessica! (*She sinks to a chair*) What of Clyde Merriman?

JESSICA. He is on his way to get wounded now!

SARAH. *What?* (*Rises. ROBERT TELFORD looks in at the window, rear*)

TELFORD. Hello! Is Clyde Merriman here? I missed him at the barracks.

(The three turn and see him.)

SARAH. Ellen,—It's the original of the photograph!

JESSICA. *(To TELFORD)* She's here! Come in by the front door! *(ELLEN sinks to a chair, panic-struck, as TELFORD withdraws from window and JESSICA runs out L.)*

SARAH. Your lover has returned from France!

ELLEN. Ye Gods! *(She laughs hysterically, handkerchief to face. SARAH turns L. MAGGIE enters R. ELLEN seizes MAGGIE by the arm)*

ELLEN. You said your cousin was dead! He's alive, he's here!

MAGGIE. Holy St. Patrick!

(JESSICA runs in L., followed by ROBERT TELFORD.)

JESSICA. Ellen—it's Lieutenant Telford! He told me his name. Lieutenant, here is your fiancée!

TELFORD. My *who?*

SARAH. Ellen Williams, the girl you are engaged to marry!

JESSICA. She's so happy at your return she can't speak! Ellen, dear, control yourself,—it's your lover! Why didn't you tell me he was Clyde's chum!

TELFORD. There's some mistake.

SARAH. Don't try to keep your engagement a secret any longer!

JESSICA. Ellen was just kissing your photograph!

(During this, MAGGIE tip-toes L., back of the others, with long strides, seeking safety in flight. She exits L. ELLEN turns and faces TELFORD bravely, meeting him center.)

ELLEN. I *did* tell them I was engaged to you,—
but—but——

TELFORD. They're right! We mustn't keep our engagement a secret any longer! You're the prettiest thing I ever laid eyes on! Ellen! (*He takes her hands and starts to kiss her.*)

ELLEN. (*Presses herself quickly*) Oh how dare you!

TELFORD. We're engaged, aren't we?

ELLEN. What do you mean?

TELFORD. I mean I'm going to marry you!

(*Telephone rings. SARAH crosses R., front and takes up the receiver.*)

SARAH. Hello. Yes, Miss Jessica Stanton is here. This is the Society to furnish wives for maimed sailors and soldiers? You've just sent up a soldier to marry Miss Stanton? His name is Joe Smith? He ought to be here?

(*JESSICA gives a scream. The others startled.*)

JESSICA. Tell them I can't marry him!

SARAH. (*Receiver to ear*) They say there's no one else to marry him, they say you've pledged yourself to marry a maimed soldier!

(*MAGGIE runs in L., excited.*)

MAGGIE. There's a soldier here named Smith, he says he's come to marry Miss Jessica!

(*JOSEPH SMITH enters L., a patch over one eye, his left arm in a sling and a bandage on his leg.*)

SMITH. Where's me honey-darlin'? Which one of ye is Jessy?

(MAGGIE *points to* JESSICA *as* JESSICA *faces* SMITH, *horrified, and motions him back.*)

SMITH. Sweetheart! (*He advances to* JESSICA. JESSICA *faints.* SMITH *catches her, holding her limp form on his right arm.* TELFORD *turns to* ELLEN, *who flouts him.* MAGGIE *throws her hands in holy horror.* SARAH *gibbers into the telephone*)

Curtain.

ACT II.

SCENE: *The same. Ten minutes later.* JOSEPH SMITH *is discovered seated at the telephone, R., front, talking into the instrument.*

SMITH. Well, give me the boss, then; I want to talk with the girl at the head of your society for tying-up us poor soldiers with females that ain't affinities. Is this the boss? Well, listen here, kid. I'm all for the matrimonial knot and ready to sniff the orange-blossoms, but there's nothing doing with this Jessy! She ain't my style. Nothing in the canary line for mine! Gimme a dame with class. There's another girl here that just suits me to a T. Switch me over to her, will ye? (*ELLEN WILLIAMS enters R., pauses, listening*) Her name is Maggie. Some style about Maggie! She can have me as soon as ye say so! Not on your list? Oh, I've got to marry Jessy, have I? Hold on,—wait till I tell ye what I think of your matrimonial trap for helpless soldier-lads! (*Clicks hook*) She's rung off! (*Hangs up receiver and rises*) It's Maggie for mine!

ELLEN. (*Crosses center*) Maggie is engaged to marry her cousin, Lieutenant Robert Telford!

SMITH. She is, is she? Where is this Telford fellow?

ELLEN. He left as soon as Mrs. Stanton carried your fiancée to bed! Poor Jessica!

SMITH. He left, did he? There'll be nothing left of him when his leave of absence is up!

ELLEN. Aren't you worried about Miss Stanton?

SMITH. I am that! I'm worried for fear she'll get up again! Bed is the best place for her! Let her stay there! Engaged to his cousin Maggie, is he? I'll see about that! (*Calls*) Miss Maggie! (*SMITH exits R. ROBERT TELFORD enters L. ELLEN starts, and crosses quickly to the door, R.*)

TELFORD. Don't run away,—please don't! I've been watching my chance to see you alone. (*He crosses R. of the center-table*)

ELLEN. You've humiliated me enough as it is. One step nearer and I shall leave the room.

TELFORD. Did you really kiss my photograph?

ELLEN. Now you are ridiculing me! This ends it! Good-bye! (*She turns to leave the room*)

TELFORD. Wait! You wear a nurse's uniform. It isn't the girl in you I appeal to, it's the nurse! I'm wounded.

ELLEN. Wounded? (*Telford nods*) Where?

(*TELFORD puts his hand behind him and dips his finger into a bottle of red ink on the table. He holds up his red and dripping finger.*)

TELFORD. Look!

ELLEN. Oh, you poor thing! (*She runs to him and places a chair for him*) You must be weak from loss of blood. Sit down. I'll bind it, bandage it! How it must pain you! How brave you are! Don't move, I'll have it fixed in a jiffy! (*TELFORD*

seats himself with a happy smile. ELLEN takes a bandage from the work-basket on table, unrolls three or four yards of it and winds it about TELFORD'S finger as she sits beside him and they talk)

ELLEN. There'—how's that?

TELFORD. Divine!

ELLEN. I apologize for saying I was engaged to you, Lieutenant Teford.

TELFORD. Please don't!

ELLEN. But I thought you were dead, and I knew you were going to marry your cousin Maggie.

TELFORD. How you must love me! Who is my cousin Maggie?

ELLEN. Your fiancée!

TELFORD. You are my only fiancée, past, present and future! I've dodged love and bullets all my life, but when a man's hit, he's hit! I've escaped the bullets so far, but you've taught me what love is.

ELLEN. But Maggie! *She* kissed your photograph! In fact, I got the photograph from her!

TELFORD. Maggie—she's no cousin of mine—must have stolen the picture! She's welcome to—the photograph! Why won't *you* take the original? I'm an aviator, and a friend of Clyde Merriman. He'll vouch for me. I spend most of my time up in air. I'm there now. Don't bring me to earth, will you?

ELLEN. That would be cruel, especially when you're wounded! (*She finishes binding the finger*)

TELFORD. (*As they both rise*) Ellen, then you—you——?

ELLEN. Well, I *did* kiss your photograph!

(*As TELFORD starts toward her JESSICA enters R.*)

JESSICA. Has Private Smith gone? Ellen, Ellen, what shall I do? Where's Clyde Merriman?

ELLEN. Do? Think how noble it is to marry a crippled defender of your country's honor!

JESSICA. Don't! I wish I'd never heard of that old society! If only Clyde were here!

TELFORD. I'll find him for you, Miss Stanton!

JESSICA. Oh, thank you! To think that you and Ellen have been engaged all this time! It's wonderful!

TELFORD. Wonderful? It's a miracle! Congratulate me! (*Holds out his hand. JESSICA shakes it*)

ELLEN. Careful of his finger! It's wounded!

JESSICA. Oh! What have I done? (*The bandage comes off TELFORD'S finger as JESSICA shakes hands with him*) Why, that isn't blood! That's red ink!

ELLEN. Red ink? You don't need a nurse, Lieutenant Telford, what you need is a blotter!

TELFORD. I'll—I'll find Clyde, I'll come right back! (*He exits quickly L., confused. JESSICA looks R., in alarm*)

JESSICA. It's Joe Smith coming back! Save me, Ellen!

ELLEN. It isn't Smith,—it's Captain Merriman!

JESSICA. Clyde?

(CLYDE MERRIMAN enters R., on crutches, a bloody bandage around his head. The two girls regard him with startled amazement.)

CLYDE. Victory! I'm wounded, Jessica! Call in the minister!

JESSICA. Oh, Clyde, what's happened, who blew you to pieces? (*To ELLEN*) Call back the Lieutenant,—tell him Clyde is here!

ELLEN. Yes, yes; don't let Captain Merriman go, Jessica! What a glorious chance to practice my first-aid-to-the-injured! (*ELLEN exits L. JESSICA leads CLYDE center*)

JESSICA. Are your wounds serious?

CLYDE. Serious enough to get married on!

JESSICA. Did you find the spy?

CLYDE. Suspicion points to—guess who! Mr. Wormley!

JESSICA. How lovely!

CLYDE. His house is being searched while he's out. They hadn't found the missing code-book when I left. Ring up the minister, Jessica!

JESSICA. It's too late! You weren't wounded soon enough! I've got to marry another man! The Society for the marriage of maimed sailors and soldiers sent up a wounded soldier for me to marry, Clyde! There's no escape! I've pledged myself!

CLYDE. Another man? Where is he? (*He throws down his crutches and tears the bandage from his head*)

JESSICA. Why, you aren't wounded at all! You were trying to trick me into marriage!

MERRIMAN. Where's the man who thinks he's going to be your husband?

JESSICA. It isn't *his* fault that he has to marry me!

MERRIMAN. Well, even the Society for misfit marriages can't make you marry a dead one! Bring him on! Where is he?

JESSICA. I don't know where he is! I'll warn him! (*She runs out R.*)

MERRIMAN. Warn him? (*ROBERT TELFORD enters L. MERRIMAN sees him*) Bob! You here?

TELFORD. Yes,—I'm engaged to marry the prettiest girl ever!

MERRIMAN. (*Angry*) So it's you, is it? *You're* the man who thinks he's going to marry her! You, my friend, try to steal my girl!

TELFORD. *Your* girl? She's going to marry me!

MERRIMAN. Get out of this house!

TELFORD. Not much! (*They grapple center, fighting. TELFORD speaks as they separate for a moment*) Marry Ellen, will you?

MERRIMAN. Ellen? I'm going to marry *Jessica!*

TELFORD. Ellen Williams is *my* girl!

MERRIMAN. Why didn't you explain? (*Holds his foot up in his hand*)

TELFORD. You didn't give me a chance to explain! Have I hurt your foot?

MERRIMAN. Yes, bully for you! You stepped on it! I'm really wounded! Ring the wedding-bells! (*He sits on couch L. front, laughing*)

TELFORD. (*Center, serious*) I don't see anything funny in it!

(JOSEPH SMITH *enters* R.)

SMITH. Which one of ye is the Telford lad?

TELFORD. I am Lieutenant Telford!

SMITH. Marry your cousin Maggie, will ye? Not if I know it! (*He starts angrily toward TELFORD, who puts up his fists*)

TELFORD. Next! No, I can't fight a one-armed man!

(SMITH *knocks* TELFORD *into* a chair *with* one sweep of his arm.)

SMITH. I see that ye can't! Get up quick, till I knock ye down again! Your cousin Maggie has no use for ye!

TELFORD. (*Rises*) I haven't any cousin Maggie!

SMITH. She's your *fiancy* girl!

TELFORD. I am engaged to Miss Ellen Williams! *You*, I believe are the future husband of Miss Jessica Stanton!

MERRIMAN. (*Springs to his feet*) What? *You're* the wreck they're trying to palm off on Jessica? (*He limps angrily toward* SMITH. TELFORD *crosses* R. *with* a laugh)

SMITH. (*To MERRIMAN*) What's that to ye?

MERRIMAN. You'll know darned quick! Defend yourself!

TELFORD. A one-armed man against a one-legged man,—it's a fair fight! Go to it!

MERRIMAN. Leave the house never to return and I'll spare you!

SMITH. I'm here under orders, and I never quit under duty yet! (*As they are about to fight, MAGGIE runs in R., and down between them*)

MAGGIE. Holy St. Patrick! (*To MERRIMAN*) Would ye hurt my Joe? (*She flings both arms about SMITH'S neck*)

TELFORD and MERRIMAN. *Your Joe?*

(*SARAH STANTON looks in the window rear.*)

SARAH. Jessica! (*TELFORD and MERRIMAN see SARAH, and startled, throw up their hands. TELFORD exits quickly R., and MERRIMAN, at the same time, exits quickly L. SARAH calls*) Captain Merriman! Wait! (*She withdraws from the window*)

SMITH. Do ye mean that, Maggie? Am I your Joe? Ye don't love your cousin?

MAGGIE. He's no kin of mine, Private Smith, nor the man that I could marry either. But you've gone and got engaged to Miss Jessica!

SMITH. I have, worse luck! D'you think she'll hold me to it?

MAGGIE. A fine lad like ye? She'll march ye to the altar with a six-shooter, I'm thinkin'. There's not a doubt of it!

SMITH. (*Trembles*) Maggie, darlin', is there no way ye can save me?

MAGGIE. What'd ye do now, if ye got saved from her matrimonial snares?

SMITH. Can ye ask? (*Takes her hand*) I'd say "Miss Maggie, I've got a whole heart, will ye

take it for life and me a'ong with it?" (MAGGIE turns away with a *simper*, and *sighs*) And what'd ye say, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Id say—I'd say—"Ye've taken me by sudden surprise, Private Smith, but ye'll need no six-shooter to lead me to the altar."

SMITH. Maggie, darlin'! (*He starts to embrace her. MAGGIE draws away*)

MAGGIE. But ye're *not* saved from the matrimonial snares you're tangled up in, Private Smith, and it looks like Miss Jessica'd win ye!

SMITH. Suppose I cut and run?

MAGGIE. I'll marry nary slacker nor deserter! Pst! I've got the scheme!

SMITH. Out with your nefarious idea!

MAGGIE. Wait here! If me scheme's as nefarious as ye think it is, it'll save us both! Wait here till I see if it works!

SMITH. Suppose Jessy tries to marry me before ye get back? What'll I tell her?

MAGGIE. Teil her nothin'! Pretend ye're going to obey orders and marry her! If ye let on there's anything doing, she'll spoil my scheme, and ye'll *have* to marry her! Stand hard and fast! Pretend ye're going to do your duty! I'll return in time to save ye!

SMITH. (*Trembles*) Suppose ye *don't* return in time, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Leave all to me! (*She exits L. SARAH enters R.*)

SARAH. Prviate Smith,—I believe *Smith* is the name?

SMITH. Correct, ma'm.

SARAH. By an unfortunate train of circumstances it appears that you consider yourself engaged to marry my daughter, Miss Jessica. I need not say that such a union is preposterous!

SMITH. That's right, you needn't say it, ma'm.

SARAH. I believe you are going to listen to reason. I have other plans for my daughter. She is destined, in fact, to be the wife of a rich banker, Mr. Wormley. Jessica considers herself pledged to you, but if you make it clear to her that it is *not* your intention to marry her, I will—er—reimburse you for your lost time. (*She opens her reticule*)

SMITH. Ye mean ye'd *pay* me to give your daughter the mitten? (*SARAH nods*) If ye'd tried to bribe me a half hour ago, I'd have listened to ye gladly, but ye're too late! It might spoil the scheme! I mean I'm under orders, ma'm, I'm ready to do my duty. I'm not the man to be bought by a bribe, not me! I'll marry Jessy, ma'm,—only tell her there's no rush!

SARAH. You will attempt to force my daughter to marry you? We shall see! (*She calls*) Jessica!

SMITH. (*Alarmed, looks around, goes up to window*) Don't—don't—don't hurry her, ma'm!

SARAH. (*R. and calls*) Jessica, where are you?

SMITH. Maggie, Maggie, come quick or it'll be too late!

(*JESSICA enters R. SMITH jumps through the window rear as he sees her and disappears from sight. CLYDE MERRIMAN enters L.*)

SARAH. Jessica, tell this soldier exactly what you think of him!

JESSICA. I think you're the only man I'll ever marry!

SARAH. You want to marry *Smith*? (*Turns*) Captain Merriman!

JESSICA. Clyde! You're limping!

MERRIMAN. A real wound this time! Mrs. Stanton, I want to marry your daughter.

SARAH. My daughter is as good as engaged to Mr. Wormley!

MERRIMAN. Mr. Wormley is under suspicion as a spy.

SARAH. A spy! I don't believe it! A sentimental man is never a traitor. Only this morning he sent Jessica a book of poems, "Love's Lyrics." (*She takes the book from the table.* ROBERT TELFORD enters R., followed in by ELLEN WILLIAMS)

TELFORD. We've got the goods on Wormley! We haven't found the missing code book, but he mailed it late last evening.

ELLEN. Yes,—it was bound in red morocco!

TELFORD. What's that book you have in your hands, Mrs. Stanton?

SARAH. This? A book of poems.

TELFORD. Let me see it, please. (*Takes it*)
Where did you get this?

SARAH. Mr. Wormley sent it.

TELFORD. I thought so!

SARAH. It's "Love's Lyrics."

TELFORD. It's the missing code-book!

SARAH. (*As the others start*) Impossible!

(*The telephone rings. ELLEN answers it.*)

ELLEN. Hello! Mr. Wormley arrested? Jailed!
(SARAH *sinks to chair with a cry.* JESSICA *goes to her.* TELFORD *takes the phone quickly from ELLEN who also goes to SARAH.* TELFORD *speaks into the phone*) You've got the right man! The code-book's here! He mailed it to Mrs. Stanton. . . . Put Mrs. Stanton under arrest? Good! (*Hangs up receiver*) You're under arrest as Mr. Wormley's accomplice, Mrs. Stanton!

SARAH. (*Rises, clutches the girls*) Ellen! Jessica! Captain Merriman!

TELFORD. I am sorry, but the stolen code-book was found in your possession. I am obliged to escort you to the lock-up! Will you come quietly?

SARAH. Captain Merriman, I appeal to you! Will you see me suffer this indignity? Allow me to endure this disgrace?

MERRIMAN. You have my deep sympathy, Mrs. Stanton, but really, I don't see how I can interfere!

SARAH. I am innocent!

MERRIMAN. You are Mr. Wormley's friend; you looked upon him as a son-in-law!

TELFOD. Now then, Mrs. Stanton!

SARAH. Jessica! Ellen!

ELLEN. (*Crosses to TELFOD*) Don't take her into custody! She's really innocent! Mr. Wormley must have mailed the book here as a means of getting rid of it. He must have known he was watched.

JESSICA. (*Crosses L., to MERRIMAN*) Yes, don't you see, Clyde? He put that false title on the book, knowing I'd never read it!

ELLEN. (*To TELFOD*) You'll let Mrs. Stanton go?

TELFOD. (*Shakes head*) I can't do it.

JESSICA. (*To MERRIMAN*) You'll make Lieutenant Telford release Mother?

MERRIMAN. (*Shakes head*) It's out of the question!

ELLEN. (*To TELFOD*) Not even for *my* sake? I'll answer for her appearance when she's wanted. (*TELFOD folds his arms and shakes his head. ELLEN puts her hand on his arm, pleadingly*) Robert! (*TELFOD smiles, wavers. ELLEN speaks tenderly*) Bob!

TELFOD. (*Unfolds his arms and turns to her*) Ellen!

ELLEN. You'll let Mrs. Stanton go?

TELFOD. On one condition! That you'll marry me before I return to duty.

ELLEN. When do you return to duty?

TELFORD. To-morrow!

ELLEN. Oh!

SARAH. Ellen, for my sake, sacrifice yourself! Marry him to-night!

ELLEN. No, not for your sake, Mrs. Stanton! But I will—for Bob's sake!

TELFORD. Ellen! (*He takes her in his arms*)

MERRIMAN. I can't permit Mrs. Stanton's release!

(*They turn to him quickly.*)

JESSICA. Clyde, you'll break my heart if you make Mother go to jail! Release her, *please!* (MERRIMAN *folds his arms and shakes his head*) After all, the book was sent to *me!* Take *me* in Mother's place!

MERRIMAN. (*Smiles, unfolds his arms*) I will on one condition! That your Mother will let me take you for life!

SARAH. Marry her?

MERRIMAN. Yes,—at the same time Bob marries Ellen!

SARAH. This is taking an unfair advantage of me!

MERRIMAN. All's fair in love and war; this is both! Either your daughter will accompany me to the altar or you will accompany me to the lock-up!

SARAH. Jessica has had a lucky escape from Mr. Wormley! Perhaps, after all, a man who has his country's welfare at heart is the man to look after my daughter's welfare. In a choice between the altar and the lock-up, Captain Merriman, I select the lesser of the two evils,—the altar!

MERRIMAN. Jessica! (*He starts to kiss her.* JOSEPH SMITH *enters R., and raises a protesting hand*)

SMITH. Hands off! Jessy is booked to marry me! She's pledged herself!

MERRIMAN. You are going to hold her to her pledge?

SMITH. I'm no slacker! I stand ready to do me duty! If I don't, I'll spoil the nefarious scheme! I'm here to obey orders!

SARAH. You won't *force* my daughter to marry you?

SMITH. I stand hard and fast!

JESSICA. I refuse to marry you!

SMITH. (*Stolid*) I'll do me duty like a man!

TELFORD. Listen to reason!

SMITH. I listened to Maggie; she said to stand by me duty! Me duty is to marry Jessy!

ELLEN. Miss Stanton is to be married this evening to Captain Merriman!

SMITH. That's neither here nor there! I'll do me duty!

MERRIMAN. I p'lace *you* under arrest, Smith, for impudence and insubordination!

(SMITH *starts*. MAGGIE *enters* L., *with a white veil pinned to her head and a large red ribbon fastened to her waist. She comes down quickly.*)

MAGGIE. Joe! Has she married ye yet?

SMITH. Maggie! Praise be to Heaven! Ye're in the nick of time!

SARAH. Maggie, what does this mean?

MAGGIE. It means that I'm a full-fledged member of the society to marry off maimed sailors and soldiers! I went down and joined the order! (*Points to red ribbon*) Tis the badge of membership!

JESSICA. But the veil?

MAGGIE. Try your best to forgive me, Miss Jessica, for I had your name scratched off the book where it was written opposite the name of Joseph Smith, and had me own name written there instead!

SMITH. Maggie, ye're pledged to marry me?

MAGGIE. I am! 'Tis a noble work the women are doing!

MERRIMAN. *God bless the women! (He takes JESSICA in his arms as SMITH embraces MAGGIE, and TELFORD kisses ELLEN. SARAH, at center, takes up a pair of the pajamas, shakes it out and re-folds it as she busies herself with her work)*

Curtain.



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