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The Wheatville Candidates

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THE WHEATVILLE --- CANDIDATES

A Rural Political Play in Four Acts

BY

WARD MACAULEY

Author of "EXAMINATION DAY AT WOOD HILL
SCHOOL," "BACK TO THE COUNTRY STORE," etc



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The Wheatville Candidates

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no. 1.

The Wheatville Candidates

CAST OF CHARACTERS

HON. KENTWORTH HOWELL	<i>Who knows the ropes</i>
EZRA LITTLE	<i>A political novice</i>
FRANK LEE WRIGHT	<i>An editor</i>
C. A. PAGE	<i>Another</i>
JEREMY LAWSON	<i>Postmaster and philosopher</i>
HARRIET LAWSON	<i>The sharer of his fortunes</i>
EDITH LAWSON	<i>A cause of dissension</i>
KIB LAWSON	<i>A younger brother</i>
ZEKE JONES	<i>Half a deputy</i>
JED SMITH	<i>The other half</i>
MOLLY HEMPSTEAD	<i>A youthful enthusiast</i>
A. FRANK PRYOR	<i>An exemplar of practical politics</i>
MRS. JORKINS	<i>Who wants to vote</i>

Delegates, villagers, etc., as desired.

TIME OF PLAYING :—Two hours and a half.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Kentworth Howell, candidate for state senator from the Wheatfield district, expects an overwhelming victory. He also looks forward to an easy conquest of Edith, daughter of Postmaster Jeremy Lawson. To his surprise, Ezra Little, a young teacher and law student, who has been nominated against Howell for a joke, makes a strong campaign, both for the senatorship and the girl, and wins both.

ACT I.—In front of Wheatville post-office. The rival editors quarrel over "an amicable understanding." "You've been elected three times before, Kent. It'll be a cinch." Kent proposes to Edith. "Just meditate over it." Jeremy, "mighty ambitious for my Edith," favors Kent. Jed and

Zeke plan to share Widow Jorkins' insurance money. Ezra and Edith. "Is there any hope for a country school-teacher with a few dreams?" Wright notifies Ezra of his nomination. "Oh, they only put me up for a joke." Kent's friend laughs at "the school-teacher politician." Ezra surprises them. "Now I'm in the fight, I stay in."

ACT II.—Jeremy Lawson's house. Jeremy and Ezra. "Ain't ye resigned yet, Ezry?" Mr. Pryor shows Ezra some "practical politics." "I wouldn't touch your dirty schemes with a forty-foot pole." Edith asks Ezra not to urge an "eight-hour law." "Father says it will ruin the International Company. Our money's all in that." "Edith, if that bill is right I must vote for it." Jed Smith's queer parliamentary law. "I got the book right here." Kent and Edith. "I'm kind of sorry to beat the boy two ways at once." "Perhaps you won't."

ACT III.—Same scene as Act I. Jed is despondent. "We're licked, Kent." Molly hurrahs for Little, and Kent bribes her with candy. Ezra says he'll "win if he gets enough votes." Kent wants Edith's answer—"after the votes are counted." Jeremy thinks "politics is skittish as women." Ezra makes his speech. "A greenhorn can fight, and he has a vote." Kent's speech. "Leave it to me, and I'll take care of you." Ezra and Edith. "Remember, if I win!"

ACT IV. Same as Act I. Jed and Zeke. "We want to break up a partnership." Jeremy tears up the contracts. "Five dollars apiece, please." Mrs. Jorkins asks Jed and Zeke to her wedding. Jeremy announces the returns. Jed bets Molly a cake of soap—the loser to eat the soap. Kent's triumph proves premature. Ezra and Edith. "Have I won the prize that only you can give, Edith?" "You know you won it long ago."

SYNOPSIS

ACT I.—Street in Wheatville, before the post-office, afternoon in September.

ACT II.—Mr. Lawson's home, evening, one week later.

ACT III.—Same as Act I—evening. Three weeks later.

ACT IV.—Same as Act I. Election night.

COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

HOWELL. A self-assertive, somewhat bombastic rural politician; state senator for several terms. Should dress in very slightly pronounced manner. Should be played by a large man, made up to look forty to forty-five years old.

EZRA. A slender man of twenty-five, of modest, retiring nature, but of forceful character and kindly humor. Should be quietly dressed.

WRIGHT. } The editors. Both should be men along
PAGE. } toward middle age, fairly well dressed. Busi-
 } ness rivalry marks their relations.

LAWSON. Somewhat eccentric old man. Dressed rather carelessly. Sharp spoken and opinionative.

MRS. LAWSON. Typical matron of fifty years. Rural costume not over-emphasized. (May double with Mrs. Jorkins.)

EDITH. A very pretty girl of twenty. Must be becomingly dressed in simple style.

KIB. A mischievous boy of fourteen. Ordinary boy's costume, short trousers, etc.

ZEKE. } The comic rural young men. Both should wear
JED. } pronounced country clothes. One should be
 } stout and short, and the other tall and thin.

MOLLY. A lively, attractive, tomboy-like girl of fifteen, dressed attractively. Should be almost constantly in motion.

PRYOR. An unprepossessing type of politician. Florid style of personal appearance, loud tie, large diamond, etc.

MRS. JORKINS. Severely plain woman of about forty, dressed in plain style. (May double with Mrs. Lawson.)

Villagers and delegates should be dressed in the varying shades of country village style, but none should be portrayed farcically.

PROPERTIES

HOWELL. Act I. Money, suit-case, large card with words "Howell for Senator," tacks, hammer, envelopes. Act IV. Note-book and pencil.

EZRA. Act I. Small book. Act II. Papers. Act III. Manuscript. Act IV. Note-book and pencil.

PAGE. Act I. Note-book and pencil, and same in Act III.

WRIGHT. Act I. Paper. Act III. Package of sheets of paper, supposed to be printed circulars.

LAWSON. Act II. Newspaper, note-book, pencil. Act IV. Megaphone.

JED. Act II. Watch, book. Act III. Banner with words "Howell for Senator." Act IV. Folded paper, with writing and large seal, cake of soap.

ZEKE. Act IV. Folded paper, with writing and large seal.

KIB. Act III. Mouth-organ. Act IV. Several slips of paper.

EDITH. Act II. Plate and towel. Act III. Purse containing coin.

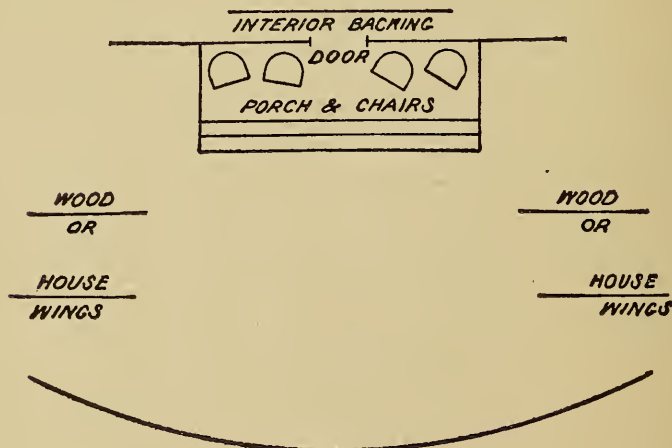
MOLLY. Act I. Letter, paper bag of chocolates, law book wrapped in paper. Act III. Box of candy.

MRS. JORKINS. Act I. Two letters, umbrella. Act IV. Letter.

MRS. LAWSON. Act II. Potatoes, bread, dishes, etc., for supper scene.

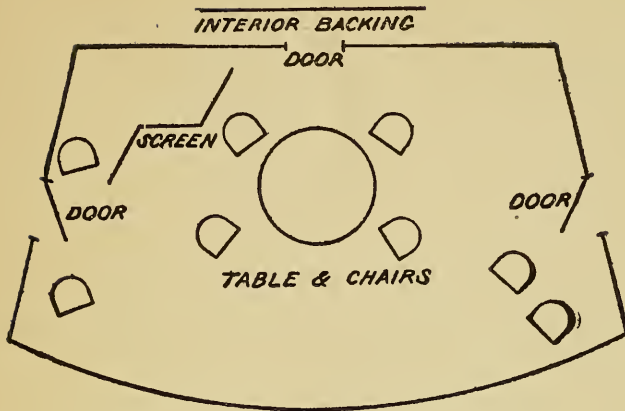
SCENE PLOTS

ACTS I, III, IV



SCENE.—Exterior of Lawson's grocery store and post-office. Store front, with steps or porch, and practicable door, c. Interior backing. Sign over door, "J. Lawson, Grocery, Post-Office, Etc." Chairs and boxes on steps or porch, and in corners. One large, strong box for speakers to stand on in Act III. Wood or house wings. Exterior of store may show signs, placards, etc.

ACT II



SCENE.—Interior of Jeremy Lawson's house. Entrances c., L., and R. Large round table, c., with four chairs. Chairs down R. and L. Screen, with chair behind it, up R. Other furnishings to make a comfortable village "sitting-room."

The Wheatville Candidates

ACT I

SCENE.—*Street in Wheatville. Afternoon of a September day. Up c. should be represented the exterior of the post-office with a practicable entrance c. In front of the post-office are chairs, boxes, etc. Sign over post-office "J. Lawson, Grocery, Post-Office, Etc." The town hall in which the convention is being held is supposed to be near by, L., and cheering and hand-clapping should be heard intermittently throughout the act. The entrances are R. (down road), L. (up road toward town hall), and C. (into post-office).*

(*As the curtain rises, FRANK LEE WRIGHT and C. A. PAGE walk rapidly toward each other from opposite sides of the stage. Seeing each other, each takes a wide sweep to keep as far from the other as possible. After they pass, they turn and shake fists at one another.*)

PAGE (*pausing*). Oh, I say, Wright——

WRIGHT (*loftily*). Sir, do you desire to converse with me?

PAGE. What's the use of our being on the outs? Why not come to an amicable understanding?

WRIGHT. That's what I say—an amicable understanding. I'm always strong for peace. Why, I believe in the disarmament of the nations. I——

PAGE. It's a fool idea. Nations—especially civilized nations—have got to build big navies and maintain big armies so as to make the other fellows behave, and I say that the bigger the army the more chance for peace, and anybody who contradicts that is a rattle-pated imbecile and——

WRIGHT. If I had no more sense than to believe such rubbish, I'd keep still and not betray my ignorance. The

smallest boy in school knows that a great world-wide peace movement is on —

PAGE. It's got to be an armed peace, I tell you.

WRIGHT. You're wrong.

PAGE. I'm right.

WRIGHT. I say you're wrong, and that settles it.

PAGE. You don't settle anything, not even your bills.

WRIGHT. I'll settle you —

PAGE (*belligerent attitude*). Come on.

WRIGHT. I'll settle you by the peaceful method of superior argument in my editorial column. You show your inferiority by desiring to descend to brute force.

PAGE. I can lick you, physically or mentally.

WRIGHT (*walking off R.*). Remember, sir, I shall chastise you severely in the pages of the Wheatville "Gazette."

PAGE (*as a parting shot*). I don't care. Nobody reads it.

(*Enter HON. KENTWORTH HOWELL, L.*)

HOWELL. Hello, Page, what are you two arguing about?

PAGE. Oh, Wright and I came to an amicable understanding again.

HOWELL. Don't bother about him. Any man who'd write the political folderol he does has something lacking. (*Shouts and applause are heard from the convention hall, L.*) They're making enough racket over there. I suppose they think they can nominate a man who can lick me.

PAGE. No, they don't figure on winning, I guess, but they've got to shout for their good old principles, as they call 'em.

HOWELL. Principles? What good are principles if you don't get elected? Say, Page, I missed you at our convention. I had to do some of the slickest wire-pulling you ever saw to get the nomination on the first ballot.

PAGE. I wish I could have come, but it was press day. Say, Kent (*jerking thumb toward convention hall, L., from which shouts and applause are being heard*), whom do you suppose they'll put up to run against you?

HOWELL. Some unwilling martyr, you may be sure. Why, Page, I don't care a bean, a little bit of an undersized, shrivelled-up bean who they nominate. Getting nominated doesn't admit a man to the pie counter unless he gets

the biggest bunch of ballots on election day—and there's only one man going to be elected state senator from this neck o' the woods in the present year o' grace, and he goes by the name of Kent Howell to folks that know him real well.

PAGE. You've been elected three times before, Kent. It'll be a cinch.

HOWELL. If I didn't enjoy campaigning, I'd feel perfectly safe in going off hunting till election.

PAGE. I wish I was as sure of my circulation.

HOWELL. You get all the government advertising in the county. That's enough for you.

(*Enter KIB LAWSON, L., excitedly.*)

KIB. Oh, Mr. Howell, I sneaked in at their old convention, and I heard a man get up and say you were no more fit to go to Turnersport than a scarecrow.

HOWELL (*drily*). I wonder how he found it out.

KIB. I don't know, sir.

HOWELL. Now look here, youngster, here's a nickel. (*Hands coin.*) Go back, and when that speaker you mentioned concludes his peroration, you yell "Hurrah for Howell!" Peroration's the correct thing in that place, eh, Page?

(*PAGE carefully examines a much-thumbed pocket dictionary.*)

PAGE. I can't find it, but I guess it's c'rect, though I usually leave off the per.

HOWELL. Per must mean a couple, I guess.

HOWELL (*running L., excitedly*). Hurrah for Howell! Who'll be elected? Howell, Howell! Hurrah for Howell!

(*Exit, L.*)

PAGE. It's lucky he's under age, Kent. You can't be indicted for bribing a voter.

HOWELL. Trust me for that, Page. I wasn't born yesterday, nor last week, and I want to tell you confidentially that I'm pretty near next to the big chaps at Turnersport, and I wouldn't wonder if I'd be our next candidate for—(*looking cautiously around and putting finger to lips*) sh—governor.

PAGE. When you get there, Kent, I hope you'll remember those who stood by you.

HOWELL. See here, Page, understand me. Let this percolate into your think-case—percolate's the word, I guess. I'm a self-made man. What I am I did myself—you catch that?

PAGE. Oh, most assuredly, certainly, in fact, without a doubt; but (*timidly*) somebody had to vote for you.

HOWELL. Sure. Folks recognize merit when they see it. I produce the merit. Consequentially, I go to Turnersport term after term.

(*Noise and applause from convention hall heard.*)

(*Enter KIB, L., on the run, somewhat the worse for wear.*)

PAGE. Hello! What's wrong, youngster?

KIB (*tearfully*). I yelled "Hurrah for Howell" up there, and look what they did to me.

HOWELL. I don't seem to be exactly popular in that quarter, Page.

KIB (*shrewdly*). Did you say a quarter, Mr. Howell?

HOWELL (*good-naturedly handing money*). Sure, a quarter's none too much for what you've had done to you.

(*Exit KIB, R., whistling.*)

PAGE. I guess I'll look in at the convention. They can't keep a newspaper man out.

HOWELL. Keep me posted up to the minute, Page.

PAGE. I thought you didn't care whom they put up.

HOWELL. I just want to extend my sympathy to the victim and family, if any. Say, Page, of course this thing's a cinch, but just to make assurance doubly sure, I've fixed up a little scheme.

PAGE. It's a good one, I bet.

HOWELL. If I put it over, it's sure to be a good one. I'm going to help 'em choose a candidate—if things work out right. One of the delegates just happens to be a particular friend of mine, and if it should come to a deadlock or they can't find anybody, he's going to propose—well, who do you think he is going to propose?

PAGE. Somebody easy, of course.

HOWELL. Well, I thought Ezra Little'd about fit. Nice fellow, all right, but a greenhorn at politics.

PAGE. And a youngster! Say, I hope that scheme goes through. It will be soft. Well, I must be moving.

(Exit, L. HOWELL makes notes on the back of old envelopes, etc.)

(Enter EDITH LAWSON, R.)

HOWELL (*effusively*). My dear Miss Lawson, good-afternoon. Have a campaign card?

(*Opens a small suit-case and exhibits a large card.*)

HOWELL
FOR SENATOR

EDITH. I don't believe I have congratulated you on your nomination, have I?

(HOWELL tacks the card on the front of the post-office.)

HOWELL. A mere matter of form, Miss Lawson.

EDITH. Have you heard who is to run against you?

HOWELL. I don't care a bean—the smallest, measliest—excuse me, I meant to say that the choice of the opposition is of little interest to me.

EDITH. You expect to win, then?

HOWELL. Sure, same as usual. Sun shines when it isn't cloudy, doesn't it? Well, I can't see a cloud on my p'litical horizon just at this precise juncture, Miss Lawson.

EDITH. It must be interesting to be up at Turnersport, making the laws of your native land.

HOWELL. Making 'em and breaking 'em, eh? (*Laughs heartily.* EDITH looks up astonished.) Oh, I'm an exception, of course. And interesting? Well, it's got the most exciting novel I ever read beaten, I can tell you. Say, Miss Lawson, how'd you like to get a glimpse of it?

EDITH (*eagerly*). I'd love to. Father says he's going to take me up there some session.

HOWELL. I was thinking I might take you up, Miss Lawson.

EDITH (*demurely*). That would hardly be proper, would it, Mr. Senator?

HOWELL. I guess it'd be O. K., if I slipped a little shiny band on your finger before we went.

EDITH. Gracious, I believe the man is proposing!

HOWELL. Your conjecture is correct, Miss Lawson. In fact, you have hit the nail on the head, so to speak. I'm generally out 'n' out in politics, and I want you to know my platform on this love question. Every plank is Edith Lawson, and you can't beat it.

EDITH. But, Mr. Howell, I ——

HOWELL. Yes, I know how it is. You know your answer, but you want time to think it over. I remember once a crowd of reformers asked me how I was going to vote on a temperance bill. I couldn't tell 'em till I found out what the rest was going to do, so I told 'em to give me time to consider.

EDITH. I hardly ——

HOWELL. Not another word. I know just how you feel — kind o' flustered, like a man making his first speech, but just meditate over it, and when you get good and ready, let me know if I may count on your support—I mean let me have your answer, which will be favorable, I hope and trust.

EDITH. I must be going. Mrs. Jones is expecting me.

HOWELL. Of course you must. Don't blame you a bit. Good-bye, and don't forget what I told you—meditate. (*Exit EDITH, L. HOWELL gazes after her.*) As fine a girl as ever peeled a turnip. I guess my chances in that quarter are better than average. Yes, I guess I can concede my election. (*Enter PAGE, L., excitedly, almost out of breath.*) Bellows need repairing, Page?

PAGE. No, but say ——

HOWELL. What have they done?

PAGE. They've nominated Squire Perkins.

HOWELL (*almost falling from his box*). What!

PAGE. Yes, Squire Perkins on the third ballot. (*HOWELL looks up in agony.*) But the squire declined.

HOWELL (*reproachfully*). How could you do it, Page, how could you? Wounding so tender a flower as my heart! You know Perkins could get elected to anything since he gave the town that free library. What are they doing now?

PAGE. Well, they've nominated a half-dozen or so, and they've all refused it.

HOWELL (*pompously*). None of 'em wants to waste money getting beat. It ought to be about time that Ezra's name should be mentioned, eh?

PAGE. They've named Jim Foster, a farmer over in Beanport, and they're 'phoning to find if he'll run. Just now they're fixing up the platform. It does everything to you except apply the tar and feathers.

HOWELL. I'm glad they showed me that much Christian charity. Say, Page, I've got a few notes here for you to use in your head-lines. (*Glances at envelopes.*) "Kentworth Howell a Philanthropist."—"Howell Makes a Hit in Speech at Blueberry Junction."

PAGE (*writing in large note-book*). When do you speak at Blueberry Junction?

HOWELL. Next week, Thursday. (*Reads.*) "Howell a Great Orator, a Credit to the District."—"Howell a Sure Winner." By the way, Page, I wish you came out daily from now till election.

PAGE. The Wheatville "Press" has always appeared once a week, rain or shine, barring illness or death of proprietor, injury to the press or other catastrophe, and that makes yours truly work hard enough, thank you.

(*Enter JEREMY LAWSON, L.*)

HOWELL. Been up to the convention?

LAWSON. Yes, they threw me out. I moved they indorse the Hon. Kent Howell, and they insinuated I weren't a delegate and suggested that I remove my obnoxious presence forthwith.

PAGE. Do you think Foster'll run?

LAWSON. I know Foster, and he ain't clean crazy, and so I'm countin' he won't run. They're working on the platform now, and so far they've put worse things into it than you ever heard at a ladies' aid society.

HOWELL. Preserve us!

LAWSON. They're figuring on putting that fool eight-hour day proposition in.

HOWELL. You don't fancy that much? (*Laughs.*)

LAWSON. About as much as the Hon. Kent Howell.

HOWELL. I never b'lieved in interfering with business.

LAWSON. 'Specially when you've got your hard-earned savin's invested in stock o' the International Manufacturing Company —

HOWELL. Sh—just's well not to speak haphazard about private business, Jeremy.

LAWSON. A still tongue in a wise head, every time.

HOWELL. Say, Jeremy, the president of the International loaned me a fine new automobile to use in the campaign.

LAWSON. They must want you to win.

HOWELL. It'd be just as well, but o' course he knows I've got a cinch.

PAGE. I must be moving along. I've got a paper to get out.

HOWELL. Better send to the city for some three-inch letters for that head-line stuff. (*Exit PAGE, R.*) Say, Jeremy, I'm no hand to sit on the dock a half hour before getting into the water. I've got both my eyes on your daughter—have had for some time, and if I can get her to look at it sensibly, I'd be willing to take her along to Turnersport this winter.

LAWSON. I always was mighty ambitious for my Edith.

HOWELL. Of course you were. What father would not be? She is the apple of your eye, your one ewe lamb, your——

LAWSON. Abbreviate it, Kent. You aren't making a speech.

HOWELL (*laughing*). That's right, Jeremy. I want to ask you, man to man, do I get your support?

LAWSON. I'd like mighty well to have Edith in the swim, as they say.

HOWELL. Being state senator may not be as far up the ladder as I'll climb, either.

LAWSON (*loudly*). Now, if you was to be governor——

HOWELL. Sh——

LAWSON. If you was governor, mebbe Mrs. Lawson and me might spend a week at the executive mansion, and——

HOWELL (*doubtfully*). I suppose so.

LAWSON (*excitedly*). Guess I can visit my own daughter, can't I?

HOWELL. Why, certainly, I——

LAWSON (*not placated*). Even if she is the governor's wife.

HOWELL. We can arrange that all O. K.

LAWSON. Don't you forget I'm mighty ambitious for my Edith. She's turned down three Wheatville chaps already.

HOWELL. You're ambitious, and you're shrewd, Jeremy. The best you ever did was to divide the job of deputy between Jed and Zeke.

LAWSON. The government wouldn't allow a deputy to a

peanut office like this, but I can hire 'em cheaper than if they were regular hired men. They've got to pay for the dignity of holding a government position.

HOWELL. You've got an eye for business.

LAWSON. Yes, and I've got an eye for Edith.

HOWELL. I'll be back when the convention has had time to do its worst.

(*Exit, R.*)

(LAWSON turns toward the post-office door and enters as MOLLY HEMPSTEAD and EZRA LITTLE enter L. EZRA has a small book.)

MOLLY. What do they do at political conventions, Mr. Little?

EZRA. Now, that's a pretty hard question, Molly. I have heard sometimes that there were queer doings at them.

MOLLY (*persistent*). But what are they doing at this one?

EZRA. Their principal object is to find some one to run against Mr. Howell for state senator.

MOLLY. Oh, I wish you would, Mr. Little, and I wish you'd beat him —

EZRA. Me? Why, I'm a school-teacher, not a statesman.

MOLLY. I wish you'd do it, anyway.

EZRA. It isn't for me to do, you know. That would be the delegates' work. But why do you wish that I would run, Molly?

MOLLY. 'Cause I want you to beat him. He's after your girl, too.

EZRA. My girl?

MOLLY. Why, yes, Edith Lawson. He's buzzing around her like a bee 'round a hive.

EZRA. But Miss Lawson isn't my girl, Molly.

MOLLY. You'd like her to be, wouldn't you?

EZRA. Now, look here, Molly.

(MOLLY laughs. They start into the post-office and meet LAWSON at the door.)

LAWSON. Just a minute, Ezry.

EZRA. Certainly. Get my mail, too, will you, Molly?

(MOLLY enters the post-office and EZRA and LAWSON come up stage.)

LAWSON. Ezry, my daughter tells me you're coming up to the house to-morrow night. You were up a couple of weeks ago. Now I'm not objecting to friendly visits—not a bit, not a mite, providin' I'm sure they're not intended for anything else—catch the point? I'm ambitious for Edith. I expect her to shine in social circles some day, and I don't want her to settle down in Wheatville or any of that nonsense. Turnersport, Washington, the world, is the place for a girl like Edith.

EZRA (*quietly amused*). She can be in only one place at a time, Mr. Lawson.

LAWSON. Wheatville's not the place. Write that in your little book. If you want Edith, you'll have to be something bigger'n a school-teacher in Wheatville.

EZRA. Rome wasn't built in a day.

LAWSON. Edith can't wait for Rome to be built.

EZRA. Did it ever occur to you that somebody else besides you might be ambitious for Edith?

LAWSON. Well, let them that is show it. Ambitious is as ambitious does, accordin' to the old proverb.

EZRA. I thought it was handsome.

LAWSON. Same thing, anyway. The point is this, if you're after Edith, you've got to bring along something worth having.

EZRA (*smiling*). I guess if Edith should care for me—mind you I'm not saying she does—wouldn't she be willing to give me a year or two to get started?

LAWSON. Mebbe. For me, I'm strong for those that have got there. Intentions is good, but the train does run off the track occasionally. You ought to break into politics, Ezra. That's the way to get along. Why don't you go to the convention and look things over?

EZRA. I'd like to, but I promised old Tom Moran I'd bring a book up for him to read. Now that he's laid up he's pretty lonesome. And then I must get back home to study.

LAWSON. I shouldn't think you'd need much studyin' to teach them youngsters their three R's.

EZRA. Maybe I might have to study something else—who knows?

LAWSON. Cor'spondence course, I'll bet.

(MOLLY comes out with a letter, which she is reading, and a bag of chocolates. Under her arm she has a large package, resembling a book. She encounters LAWSON entering the post-office.)

MOLLY. Have a chocolate, Mr. Lawson? Oh, isn't that too bad? Not one left. Here's your mail, Mr. Little.

(LAWSON enters post-office. EZRA unwraps package and produces a large law-book.)

EZRA. I'm glad to get this. I'm about ready for it.

MOLLY. What's the name of it?

EZRA. This is a copy of Remington on Equity.

(MOLLY sticks up her nose.)

MOLLY. Oh, I'd rather read something by Rose Carey or Mary L. Holmes. Their stories are lovely, don't you think so?

EZRA. I must confess a certain degree of ignorance regarding those classic works.

MOLLY. I'll lend you some. They're grand!

(Enter WRIGHT, L., hurriedly.)

WRIGHT. You're just the man I want to see, Ezra. I hear you've made a special study of factories, industrial conditions and the like of that.

EZRA. I've read a bit along those lines, and last vacation I studied the factories first hand.

WRIGHT. And you wrote an article for the "World Magazine"——

EZRA. Yes——

WRIGHT (*interrupting*). And I read it. Now, we're trying to figure out a plank on that subject. The platform's all done but that. Come over and take a look at it, won't you?

EZRA. If I can be of any service, I'll come. Molly, can you take this book over to Mr. Moran, and tell him I'll come down after supper?

MOLLY. Of course I will.

(Takes small book and exits R.)

WRIGHT (*taking EZRA'S arm as they exeunt L.*). We've got a platform that'll make the Hon. Kent Howell sit up and take notice, believe me.

(*Exeunt, L.*)

(*Enter ZEKE JONES and JED SMITH, noisily, from the post-office.*)

JED. Seems mighty good to be off dooty.

ZEKE. I got a higher dooty that calls me right now. I want to ask you a special favor.

JED. Strange, by hop. I was a-going to ask you to do something for me.

ZEKE (*impressively*). When the committee meets to-night I want you to vote for me for chairman.

JED. By hop, just what I was a-going to ask you to do.

ZEKE. I ast you first.

JED. But I was a-goin' to ask you.

ZEKE. I'd be the best man. I can make a better speech.

JED. I know, but I'm handsomer—more imposin' like.

ZEKE. You are pretty fair to middlin' for looks, Jed, but looks ain't what count in politics. Mebbe when women vote, the handsomest man'll win. Come on. There's a good fellow. Vote for me for chairman.

JED. I will on one condition.

ZEKE. Sure, anything you like.

JED. You agree to the condition?

ZEKE. My word's good, ain't it?

JED. The condition is that you withdraw in my favor.

ZEKE. Oh, I can't do that, Jed.

JED. You agreed to the condition. Ain't you a man o' your word?

ZEKE (*sharply*). Any one insinyate to the contrary?

JED. If you don't do what you said what kin a feller think?

ZEKE. Did I specifically state I'd withdraw?

JED. I'd affirm it on a stack of sandwiches——

ZEKE. Then I'll do it, if Kent's satisfied.

JED (*eagerly*). Sure. He ast me.

ZEKE. He ast me, too. Say, Jed, politics is a funny game, ain't it?

JED. Yep, but which way?

ZEKE. Everybody is awful pleasant before 'lection and so turrible forgitful afterward.

JED. Howell borrowed five dollars from old Clawbuck two years ago, and when old Clawbuck ast him for it he said he thought it was a campaign contribution. Haw—haw—haw!

ZEKE. Well, ain't old Clawbuck what you'd call well to do?

JED. He's hard to do.

ZEKE. Say, Jed, I'm thinkin' o' runnin' for office m'self.

JED (*open-mouthed*). You don't say?

ZEKE. I do say, and don't you conterdict me. I'm studyin' law nights now, and one o' these days I'm goin' to run for persecutin' attorney or circuit judge.

JED. I'll help you get it, Zeke, and you can appoint me your deppity. For me, I'm never looking for nothin'. I let the office seek the man.

ZEKE. Like you did about this chairman business, hay?

JED (*dignified*). I felt the call of duty, Ezekiel. Would you have me falter when my country needs me?

ZEKE. Oh, go on. Stop ringing in Kent's campaign thunder.

JED. I wrote it for him.

ZEKE. Yes, you did.

JED. I did, too. I read it in volume sixteen of "World's Greatest Or'tory" b'fore the publishers took 'em away.

ZEKE. Took 'em away?

JED. Yep; they offered 'em on ten days' free trial, and I thought I could read 'em through in them ten days—there's only twenty books—but I only got to volume sixteen and not clean through that. The publishers kicked like hop—said the pages was cut. I writ 'em back pretty sassy, you bet your life, and said, "O' course they was; d'ye expect me to peek down between 'em?" (*Enter MRS. JORKINS, R. She carries folded umbrella.*) My dear Mrs. Jorkins.

ZEKE. My dear Mrs. Jorkins.

ZEKE. } What can I do for you?
JED. }

(*Each takes her by the arm. She moves away from them.*)

MRS. J. (*hurriedly*). Nothing, thanks. I'll just slip in for my mail.

JED. I'm awful glad that you're fixed so comfortable like.

MRS. J. (*half weeping*). Yes, dear James, he was so thoughtful—always a good provider, and the insurance money'll keep body and soul together a while, I guess.

ZEKE. That policy was quite an amount, wasn't it, Mrs. Jorkins?

MRS. J. I guess everybody knows it was two thousand dollars, since the "Gazette" printed it all out.

JED. You can't believe everything you read in the papers. (*Exit Mrs. J. into post-office.*) I'd like to win that 'ere woman, Zeke.

ZEKE. So'd I.

JED. I'd feel mighty bad if I should lose her.

ZEKE. So'd I.

JED. I tell you, I could use a little of that 'ere two thousand dollars insurance money.

ZEKE. Same here, Jed. I tell you what let's do. We'll enter a comb'nation. Whichever wins'll divvy up; that suit you?

JED. You mean the feller that gets the widow divides up the cash?

ZEKE. Prezackly.

JED. Guess I'd rather be sure of a thousand than a chance on two. I'll go you, Ezekiel Jones.

ZEKE. I'll draw it up legal to-night, and we'll both sign it.

JED. Fix it up so's it'll be binding.

ZEKE. You leave it to me.

(*Enter EDITH, R.*)

EDITH. Well, what is the deputy doing?

JED. We've had a nice quiet little caucus, and we unanimously and with one accord chose me for chairman of the Wheatville committee. I perdict on that account we carry this burg by one hundred majority.

(*Struts. Mrs. J. comes from the post-office with two letters.*)

ZEKE }
JED } (to EDITH). Excuse me.

(*They rush over to Mrs. J.*)

ZEKE. Let me carry your umberell.

JED. Oh, let me carry your letter.

MRS. J. Don't be foolish.

JED. Kinder hard not to be foolish sometimes; eh, Zeke?

ZEKE. Right you are, Jedediah.

MRS. J. Good-afternoon.

(*She bows to EDITH, and exits, R. JED and ZEKE go into the post-office, crestfallen. EDITH walks toward L. and encounters EZRA entering L.*)

EDITH. Good-afternoon, Mr. Little.

EZRA. It used to be Ezra.

EDITH. Ezra, then. Have you just been at the convention?

EZRA. Yes. Wright asked me to look over the wording of the labor plank in their platform.

EDITH (*surprised*). Why, I always thought you belonged to our party.

EZRA. I'm afraid my views are more like those of our friends over yonder. (*Indicates hall.*)

EDITH. You must have made quite a study of the subject?

EZRA. It's been kind of a hobby of mine. I spent my vacation last year going through some factories up at Turnersport, and I worked in one for a month—to get a real idea of how it goes.

EDITH. First thing you know, they'll want you to run for something.

EZRA. Oh, I guess not. A thing like that doesn't come unless a fellow goes after it. Edith, you know I intended to come up to your house to-morrow night —

EDITH. I remember.

EZRA. Your father spoke as though he didn't exactly like it.

EDITH. Never mind father, Ezra. I'll expect you to-morrow night.

EZRA. Edith, you know what I spoke to you about at the graduation exercises —

EDITH. Let's see, what was it you said that night?

EZRA (*disappointed*). You don't remember?

EDITH. Why, of course not.

EZRA. Maybe I'll say it again to-morrow night. But your father is mighty ambitious for his Edith, he says, and

perhaps there isn't much hope for a country school-teacher with a few dreams ——

EDITH. Sometimes dreams have come true.

(Interruption occasioned by loud commotion as convention delegates and others pour upon stage, L., shouting and gesticulating.)

WRIGHT. Hon. Ezra Little, our historic party in convention assembled has placed you in nomination for the high office of state senator.

EZRA *(astonished)*. Nominated me? Are you in earnest?

WRIGHT. Couldn't be more serious, Ezra, if I tried.

EZRA. It's a big surprise to me, I can tell you.

WRIGHT *(confidentially, to EZRA)*. Tell 'em you'll run.

EZRA. Oh, they only put me up for a joke.

WRIGHT. Joke nothing. The platform committee said you were just the man. Here's the whole platform. I guess you'll find it solid enough to stand on.

(He hands the paper to EZRA, who is reading it intently, C., while the villagers crowd around him, some laughing and shouting, while the delegates are applauding. JED, ZEKE and LAWSON have come out to see the excitement. PAGE enters R.)

ZEKE. Ha, ha! The school-teacher politician.

JED. Nominated Ezry, eh? Whilliger bing, we win before we start. *(Goes down L.)*

DELEGATE. Better wait till the votes are counted. Anyway, I'm glad somebody was put up. I'll be home late to supper as it is.

EZRA *(to WRIGHT)*. I'm glad you scratched that clause out. *(Points.)*

WRIGHT. Oh, that rip-roaring roast of Kent? I told them you'd never stand for that.

(LAWSON goes to PAGE, down R.)

EZRA. You're right, Frank. Kent's a decent chap, and I don't believe in that sort of tactics.

DELEGATES *(up L. and R.)*. Hurrah! Speech!

JED. A speech from the schoolmaster!

DELEGATES. Keep still, can't you?

EZRA (*on steps of porch, c.*). I'm no speechmaker, fellows, but I want to say this. Now I'm in the fight I stay in. I hope you put me up to win. I will look for the support of every one of you delegates.

DELEGATE. Hurrah!

PAGE (*aside to LAWSON*). Pretty soft, this.

EZRA. Now, Howell may be the better equipped statesman —

PAGE (*opening a huge note-book*). Big head-lines in the Wheatville "Press" for that testimonial.

EZRA. Yes, friends, I consider Howell a clean, honest man, and if that clause hadn't come out of your platform, you'd have to reconvene and choose another candidate. But on matters of policy opinions differ. I believe in the principles of this platform. (*Holds up paper. Applause.*) I shall try to carry our views to every corner of our district, and I shall expect all of you to get to work and help us win.

(*Applause. He steps down and talks to EDITH, up c.*)

JED }
ZEKE } (*down l.*). Not me.

PAGE. Anyway, I've got it in his own words, "Howell the Better Statesman," and not another word of his speech gets into the Wheatville "Press."

LAWSON. It's lucky for Howell he's got such an easy opponent, because he's after Edith, and 'nless he gets elected he can't have a fond father's blessing.

ZEKE (*crossing r.*). It ain't so easy as I wish. Folks around Wheatville think a hull lot of Ezra Little, and I tell you he's apt to pull off something unexpected.

LAWSON. Oh, back to the pond with the rest of the croakers.

ZEKE (*stubborn*). I wish they'd nominated some old chap that was going instead of coming.

(EZRA and EDITH come down c.)

EDITH (*to EZRA*). Your law study ought to help now, Ezra.

EZRA. Yes, but it takes a little more than a smattering of law to serve the people well.

(*Enter HOWELL, r.*)

PAGE (*aside to HOWELL*). They've nominated Little.

HOWELL (*gleefully*). It went through all right, then?

PAGE. No, they tell me Wright proposed him.

HOWELL. It's all the same, anyway. (*Aloud.*) Let me congratulate you, Mr. Little. Now, let's have a clean campaign—no mud-throwing, and no excuses. Here's my hand on it.

(*Enter MOLLY, R. She rushes up to EZRA.*)

MOLLY. Oh, I hope you win. Isn't it glorious? I'll use every bit of influence I have.

(*EDITH goes to LAWSON, R.*)

EZRA. And that will count, I'm sure, Molly.

WRIGHT (*coming down to EZRA*). I'm mighty glad you're showing this spirit, Ezra. You act as though you expect to win. That's right, too. But let me tell you that you have a fight on your hands.

EZRA (*looking at EDITH*). Yes, I have two fights on my hands. (*Softly; aside.*) And I think I'd rather win the other!

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*Living-room of MR. LAWSON'S house. Evening.*
Exits at L., R. and C. Screen up R.

(*Curtain discovers LAWSON and MRS. HARRIET LAWSON, EDITH and KIB eating supper at round table, C.*)

LAWSON. As I was a-sayin'—

MRS. L. Have some more potatoes, Jeremy?

LAWSON. You women beat me! You talk as though men only wanted to stuff themselves. I'm interested in affairs of state, and as I was a-mentioning—but fill up my plate while I'm a-waitin'.

MRS. L. Did you say one potato or two?

LAWSON. Three. Now, as I was about to remark, when we go aviatin' up to the executive mansion, had I ought to wear a dress-suit, or hadn't I ought to?

EDITH. I should think you wear what the others do at the reception.

LAWSON. Reception? What reception? Who said anything about a reception? A wedding reception is the only one I'm going to. I was speaking about when I'm a guest of honor, and stay over night at the executive mansion.

EDITH. Father, I wish you'd stop talking like that.

LAWSON. Stop talking like that? Well, I guess not. It's pleasant, and I'd rather talk about pleasant things than gossip like you women.

KIB. (*counting his buttons*). Ezra—Kent—Ezra—Kent—

LAWSON. Stop that nonsense, boy; this is a serious matter.

EDITH. Let's not talk about it.

LAWSON. Four and four's always eight—but you women—I never could figure you out. Give me another potato, Harriet.

KIB. If I was her, I'd take—

LAWSON. Never mind, young man.

KIB. All right, I never will.

MRS. L. Don't be impudent to your father, Kib.

KIB. If he won't, I won't.

LAWSON. Another potato, Harriet.

KIB. I'll bet you have a row up here to-night, Edith.

EDITH. I don't understand you, Kib.

KIB (*mocking*). She don't understand me. And Mr. Howell and the school-teacher both coming here to-night. Oh, it's love that makes the world go round—buzz —

(*Imitates a circular saw by moving hand in a circle and making a buzzing sound.*)

LAWSON. Stop that nonsense, young man.

KIB. Love ain't nonsense, is it, Edith?

EDITH. How shall I know?

KIB. You ought to know, with two fellers to tell you.

LAWSON. Silence, young man. This ain't a fit subject for levity.

MRS. L. Anybody want anything more?

LAWSON. I might take another potato. (*Supper concluded, all draw back chairs and rise. EDITH and MRS. L. exeunt C., with dishes. KIB rushes out R., whistling. LAWSON, loudly.*) I'm going to read a while, Edith, but I suppose you will root me out when Ezra comes up. (*EDITH comes to door C. She is wiping a plate.*) He hadn't ought to be coming, anyway, when you're pract'cally engaged to the man he's running against.

EDITH (*firmly*). I am not engaged to Mr. Howell, father.

LAWSON. Well, the rest o' your family's willing, and you ought to do what the majority want.

EDITH. I'll think about it.

LAWSON. You women beat me. Another thing. Your Ezra's running on a platform that's got an eight-hour plank in it and a lot of other pesteriferous nonsense. If that goes through, I might as well burn up all my International stock.

EDITH. Don't call him my Ezra. And I don't believe he'll say much about it, even if it's in the platform.

(*A knock is heard, L. LAWSON answers.*)

(*Enter EZRA, L. Greetings at door.*)

LAWSON. Ain't ye resigned yet, Ezry?

EZRA. Resigned?

LAWSON. Yes, from running against Howell.

EZRA. No—I haven't—yet.

LAWSON. Better take my advice 'n' do it. When I see a brick falling, I usually yell for folks to get from under it. Kent's having the biggest meetings y' ever heard of. They're over to Jupp's Corners to-night. They had a corker up to Bannerville last night. The chairman compared Kent to Washington, Naypoleon, Alexander the Great, Julius Cæsar, Ginerall Grant, Patrick Henry——

EZRA. It won't be any disgrace, then, if he beats me. Besides, I don't claim to be the better man.

LAWSON. You don't claim to be the better man!

EZRA. Certainly not. When I run a race, I don't boast that I can beat the other fellow. I just run as fast as I can, and let the results speak for themselves.

LAWSON. You'll get all tuckered out in this political race. You're not in training.

EZRA. Oh, I'm training now, and I'll soon be down to weight.

LAWSON. Another thing, Ezry. I'm afraid you're kind o' neglectin' your school. As a former member of the board, I can't allow that.

EZRA. The board accepted my resignation last night.

LAWSON. That ain't no way to do—leaving 'em in the lurch in the middle of the term.

EZRA (*quietly*). A substitute—probably more capable than I am—will take my classes to-morrow.

LAWSON. Humph! Ef you two'll excuse me, I'll read my N' York paper a while.

(*Exit, R.*)

EDITH. How is your campaign progressing, Ezra?

EZRA. I start speechmaking to-morrow. I'll be on the stump, as they call it, from now till election. This will be my last chance to come up here for a while.

EDITH. I'm glad you came. (*They take seats down L.*)

EZRA. This thing coming so unexpectedly has made me a lot of work. The wee sma' hours find me hard at it, I can tell you. This is my first let-up since the convention.

EDITH. But, then, you are used to public speaking.

EZRA. I'm used to passing out diplomas, with complimentary references to the attainments of my scholars, but at stump speaking I'm surely a greenhorn. That's what they say—and I've heard that I'm to be beaten. Perhaps it will be a case of unlucky in politics—lucky in love.

EDITH. You might beat Mr. Howell yet.

EZRA. In love?

EDITH (*embarrassed*). Why, of course not. In politics.

EZRA. If I should win, I'm afraid Kent's popularity with your father would suffer a sad decline.

EDITH. You know he is mighty ambitious for his Edith.

EZRA. So I've heard.

EDITH. What is your speech like, Ezra?

EZRA. Would you like to look over my notes?

(EDITH *looks up eagerly as if to respond affirmatively, when a knock is heard L.*)

EDITH (*going to door L.*). I wonder who that can be?

EZRA (*aside*). Another admirer, I'll bet a fig.

(*Enter A. FRANK PRYOR, L.*)

PRYOR. Mr. Ezra Little, ain't it? They told me you was here. I want to have a nice little, quiet little confidential chat with you. That is, if the lady don't mind. (*Leers.*) It's something special, or I wouldn't butt in like this.

EDITH. Certainly. I'll very gladly excuse Mr. Little.

EZRA. You mean we'll excuse you.

EDITH. Either way you like.

(*Exit EDITH, R. EZRA opens door for her and remains right of table. PRYOR peers cautiously around the room, goes to both doors and listens intently.*)

PRYOR. I don't hear nothing, so I guess they can't hear nothing. (*Comes to left of table.*)

EZRA. I shouldn't think you'd say anything you're ashamed of.

PRYOR. Huh?

EZRA. Didn't you hear me?

PRYOR. Yes, but my business ain't his business, seeing he's on the other fellow's committee. Lookee here, Little, you're running for office. Natur'lly, you want to get elected. From what I hear you've got as much show as I have of being the Czar of Russia, the way you're going at it.

EZRA. This is my first political experience, Mr. — I don't think you mentioned your name?

PRYOR. My name is Pryor, sir, A. Frank Pryor, of

Turnersport. Now I came over here special, 'cause it'll be election soon, and what's done for you's got to be done now—at once, so to speak.

EZRA (*dryly*). That's very kind, I'm sure.

PRYOR. Huh? Kind? I ain't in this thing for my health.

EZRA. No! I've heard politics isn't a very healthy occupation.

PRYOR. It ain't—not for some people. And I'm here to give you a tip. First thing, be mighty careful what you say to a certain young lady.

EZRA. Sir!

PRYOR. She might repeat to papa ——

EZRA (*pounding the table*). That's enough; not another word along that line.

PRYOR. No offense—not at all—but women is women, and I could cite examples from history where women wormed state secrets out of men. I'm a profound student of history, I am.

EZRA. I guess we can end this interview right now.

PRYOR. Huh, don't get huffy. Never pays. I did once, and my doctor's bill was pretty heavy. I've got a scheme. Your opponent has got a nice new automobile. Now, my dear Ezra—I hope you don't mind my calling you Ezra—I know just a little bit about how our friend came to have the possession of that 'ere vehicle. And it ain't any too much to his credit, either, and ——

EZRA. That's sufficient, Mr. Pryor of Turnersport. I wouldn't touch your dirty scheme with a forty-foot pole. I'd rather not get a half-dozen votes in the entire district than to win by abusing Howell. I want to win—more than you can understand—but if I've got to be mean and low and tricky to win, I want to go down to defeat with my colors flying.

PRYOR. You'll go down all right, but I don't know about the colors flying. Honor's all right when it don't affect the pocketbook. A feller that's against being tricky ought to keep out of politics. Well, I'm going along—can't make any money here. But you watch Kent Howell pulverize you ——

EZRA. We'll see.

(*Exit PRYOR, L.*)

(Enter EDITH, R.)

EDITH. I'm glad he's gone. Who is he, anyway?

EZRA. I never saw him before. His name is Pryor, and he wanted to initiate me into practical politics.

EDITH. And did he?

EZRA. I learned some things I didn't know before.

EDITH. You'll be a politician yet, Ezra.

EZRA. I hope not according to our visitor's definition.

(Enter LAWSON, R., and without being seen he sits in chair behind screen, with his newspaper. He has a note-book also.)

EDITH. Shall we look over your notes now?

EZRA. Do you really want me to make a good speech?

EDITH. Why, of course I do.

EZRA. But if I should learn how to make a good speech, I might win, and then —

EDITH. What then? (LAWSON frowns.)

EZRA. Then I might ask a certain young lady a question. May I?

EDITH. Certainly you may ask!

EZRA. But what will the answer be?

EDITH. How can I tell till I know what the question is?

EZRA. Remember, I'm going to ask it.

EDITH. Shall we look at your notes?

(They sit, down L. EZRA takes some papers from his pocket and LAWSON prepares to write in his book.)

EZRA (*smiling*). I read in a little green book that I got from Philadelphia that I must be a natural, graceful speaker; but while it's good advice, it's hard to follow. You can't be natural artificially. Then it said to develop a magnetic personality, but it didn't give the formula. Now, isn't that too bad?

EDITH. I'm afraid a book wouldn't help much when you get up in front of a couple of hundred people. (*Smiles.*)

EZRA. No. Events wouldn't wait for me to consult page 249 to find out what to do when interrupted. Now, in my speeches, Edith, I shall always call attention to the fact that this is a representative government, and that we ought to choose a senator according to what he stands for.

Then I will state my views and ask those who believe in them to vote for me.

(LAWSON *writes feverishly.*)

EDITH. I don't see how any one can object to that.

EZRA. Of course, you know, I've done more studying along the lines of industrial conditions than anything else. Somehow, the problem of getting mankind's work done without enslaving men always appealed to me.

EDITH. But, of course, it's more or less foreigners that work in factories, isn't it?

EZRA. Possibly—but men, nevertheless. I'm mighty glad our party put in that plank about the eight-hour day and about more rigid inspection of factories. (LAWSON *shakes his fist and writes rapidly.*) And if I don't come within four miles of being elected state senator, I may do a little something to waken the people of this district. I'll let you in on a secret. That one plank in the platform made me say yes.

EDITH. But, Ezra, don't you know that to put in the eight-hour day is going to work hardship on lots of good people?

EZRA. Whom do you mean?

EDITH. Why, people who have money invested. You wouldn't want to harm them, would you?

EZRA. No, and I don't think the eight-hour day will hurt them.

EDITH. But, Ezra, would you still say so much about it in your speeches if you knew it would hurt me?

EZRA (*tenderly*). Hurt you?

EDITH. Yes. Father says the eight-hour law will ruin the International Company. Our money's all in that.

EZRA. But it won't, Edith —

EDITH. It might, though. Hadn't you better think twice before you stand up for it?

EZRA. Think twice? I've thought four times, Edith. I've got to stick to my principles. You couldn't respect me if I didn't.

EDITH. But, Ezra, couldn't you gloss over that one plank and talk about the others?

EZRA. You mustn't ask it, Edith. I simply must make my influence count for that bill if I am elected —

EDITH (*coldly*). Of course, if you care more for a lot of people you don't know — (Rises and goes R.)

EZRA. Is that fair?

EDITH. Of course, it's fair. Father's got a dozen families in Wheatville to invest in International, and think what they'll say if they don't get dividends —

EZRA. I've simply got to back up that plank. Edith, in the end you'll see that I'm doing right.

EDITH. Then you mean that even if it ruins my father and his friends, you will urge that bill?

EZRA. Yes! (*Starts toward her.*) Edith!

EDITH (*stopping him with a gesture*). Answer me!

EZRA. Edith, if that bill is right, I must vote for it—no matter whom it hurts.

EDITH (*scornfully*). Oh, I see—the path of duty, and all that.

EZRA. Don't, Edith. You don't know how much you hurt me.

EDITH. It may help you to know how other people feel when they are hurt.

EZRA. Is that all you can say to me, Edith?

EDITH. Yes.

EZRA. Well, I'm sorry—sorry. (*Abruptly.*) Good-night.

EDITH (*coldly*). Good-night.

(*Exit EZRA, L.*)

(LAWSON comes from behind the screen, R.)

LAWSON. There, I heard every word.

EDITH. Why, father!

LAWSON (*triumphantly*). Well, you see what kind of a fellow he is. I wouldn't have much to say to a fellow that wouldn't do a little thing like that for me.

EDITH. But, father, do you think he really liked to make me angry at him?

LAWSON. No, I suppose not.

EDITH. Then don't you think he's pretty sincere if he's willing to have this happen rather than give up his principles?

LAWSON. Yes, but the boy's wrong.

EDITH. I think he is wrong, but he isn't weak, anyway.

LAWSON. I hope this'll end everything between you.

EDITH. There never has been anything between us, father.

LAWSON. It's been pretty clus, I can tell you; and you remember; I'm mighty ambitious for you, Edith.

EDITH. Father, are you sure that if the eight-hour bill goes through, that we will lose our money? (*Goes down R.*)

LAWSON. I don't want to take any chances. I know what I've got now and, says I, leave well enough alone. But—pshaw! Kent'll lick Ezra so bad that his voice won't ever be raised in the senate halls on that subject nor on any other, s'fur as that goes.

(*Loud knocks are heard. Enter JED, ZEKE and HOWELL, L., all happy and triumphant.*)

ZEKE. Well, it was a whirlwind.

JED. A reg'lar cyclone. Took 'em up by the roots.

HOWELL. I'm not much to brag, but they said no such or'tory had been heard at Jupp's Corners for a long time. Every time I came to a stop, they'd shake the building with stamping and yelling. They gave me three cheers before I left.

LAWSON. You got back quick.

HOWELL (*proudly*). You bet. In my new car, I burnt up the road, I can tell you.

EDITH. Did you buy yourself an automobile, Mr. Howell?

HOWELL. No, a personal friend of mine lent it to me.

LAWSON (*grumbling*). I expected to get shaved before you got here, but I was detained.

EDITH. Why, father, you had the whole house to yourself.

LAWSON (*confused*). Yes, but I had some plans to think over. Generally, though, I shave in installments, here a little and there a little, as I get the chance.

HOWELL. Jeremy, let's get started. I want to see you a moment before the meeting comes to order. May we be excused?

EDITH. Certainly.

LAWSON. I guess I can go to any part of my own house—or I'll know the reason why.

(*Exeunt LAWSON and HOWELL, C. JED and ZEKE sit L.*)

ZEKE. Gee, I'm sleepy. I'm usually in bed by nine and

up at four in the morning. Only break my rule in case of politics, weddings or funerals, or something ekally serious.

JED (*looking at large watch*). You won't get to bed by nine to-night, Zeke.

ZEKE. No, that's a great sacrifice I make for my country. J'ever hear of a sleeping sentinel in the army? I never do any traitorous acts like that. Be a Benedict Arnold or 'n Aaron Burr—not I.

JED. Calm down, Zeke. What are you doing, rehearsing?

ZEKE (*apologetic*). Excuse me, Miss Lawson. I forgot myself. You'll overlook it, won't you? I'll be more careful in futur.

EDITH. Why, there's nothing to forgive, Zeke. I thought it was clever.

(ZEKE *jumps around delightedly*.)

ZEKE. Whirligig blossom! D' you hear that? You can't keep a good man down.

JED. I'll have to buy you an etiquette book, Zeke Jones.

ZEKE (*threatening*). D' you mean to insinyate that my manners —

EDITH. Now, Zeke —

ZEKE (*humbly*). Excuse me, Miss Lawson, excuse me. And as for you, sir, I'll see you later.

JED. Y' can't make it too much later to suit Jedediah Smith, E. P.

EDITH. E. P.?

JED. Yep—expert politician.

EDITH. I hear you're an expert, too, Zeke. (*Smiles*.)

ZEKE. I ain't one o' these conceited fellers that thinks he's the whole show and somethin' added, but there are folks that do say that I am one of the best inside workers in the state.

EDITH. You will be running for office yourself some day.

ZEKE (*to JED*). You've been telling on me. I told you not to say a word, and you go yellin' all over creation —

JED. I never said nothing.

EDITH. Zeke, you forget yourself.

ZEKE (*humbly*). I beg pardon, Miss Lawson. I hope you'll overlook it and I'll try not to let it occur again.

EDITH. I guess I can forgive you once more.

ZEKE. You got to forgive me seventy times seven.

(*Reënter* LAWSON and HOWELL, c.)

JED. Have you two got your fences fixed up?

EDITH. Why, our fences are all right.

HOWELL (*laughing*). And so are mine, Miss Edith. At least, I hope so. Pretty good repair, eh, Jeremy?

(*Pounds* LAWSON *on the back*.)

LAWSON (*irritably*). How many times have I told you not to pound me like that?

HOWELL (*jovially*). How shall I pound you, Mr. Lawson?

LAWSON. I'm black and blue from my friends greeting me. It's a relic of barbarism, and if I had my way——

HOWELL (*aside and confidentially*). You'd get 'em into the family, so you could punish them as they deserve.

LAWSON. Mebbe I would, and mebbe I wouldn't. I'm mighty ambitious for my Edith.

HOWELL. And so'm I.

(EDITH *exits quietly*, R.)

ZEKE (*loudly*). Mr. Chairman.

JED (*dignified*). Mr. Jones.

ZEKE. I move we come to order.

JED. I second the motion—all in favor, say aye. (JED and ZEKE shout "aye" loudly.) Contrary, if any—it is carried.

HOWELL (*blandly*). But Mr. Chairman, I appeal. The presiding officer cannot second a motion.

JED (*bluntly*). Why not?

HOWELL. It's contrary to parliamentary law.

JED. It is, eh? Well, I got the book right here. (*Takes book from pocket, turns leaves and puts thumb into mouth alternately*.) There you be, and I hope you're satisfied.

HOWELL. But that's written in ink.

JED (*triumphantly*). To be certainly. Thomas' Rules o' Order, with revisions by Jed Smith, or every man his own parliamentary law, see? You're overruled. Meeting please come to order.

ZEKE. Yes, let's come to order, Kent.

HOWELL. Call me my surname. During campaigns, I'm the honorable Kentworth Howell.

ZEKE. Don't hardly see how you expect to win, if you're honorable.

HOWELL (*to* LAWSON). Did you read the Wheatville "Press" yet?

LAWSON. 'Course I read it. What about it?

HOWELL. Notice those head-lines about my big success over at Blueberry Junction?

LAWSON. Couldn't help seein' 'em if you tried. What of it?

HOWELL. Another fool break of Page's. Upset his calendar. I don't speak there until next Thursday.

LAWSON. Ezra's speechmaking begins to-morrow.

HOWELL. So he's going to talk about industrial conditions, eh?

LAWSON. That's what I get from what he said. Of course, it was all accidental like, but I jest made notes of what I couldn't help hearing.

HOWELL. That's good. Forewarned is forearmed, or as the old saying has it—All's fair in love and politics.

LAWSON. It ought to be easy sailing for you with Edith, now. She and Ezra had a tiff because he won't stop talking eight-hour day, even if it reduces our dividends——

HOWELL. My, my—I hate to think how we'll wallop that boy!

LAWSON. He'll get over it. (*Enter* EDITH, R.) Let's have our meeting out in the kitchen, where we can smoke.

JED. You lead the way.

HOWELL. I'll join you in a moment, boys. (*Exeunt* JED, ZEKE *and* LAWSON, C.) I'm mighty glad to see you again, Edith. My, but we made a hit over to Jupp's to-night. The crowd shouted itself hoarse. I hear Ezra was here to-night. He ought to be busy speechmaking—not that it will do him any good.

EDITH. He starts out to-morrow.

HOWELL. I hear he's a crank on labor matters, eight-hour day, safety appliances, sanitary conditions and all that rubbish. Why, Edith, these reformers'd ruin business if they had their way.

EDITH (*coldly*). That's what father says.

HOWELL. By the way, have you thought over that little proposition o' mine lately?

EDITH. Well, I, that is——

HOWELL. Not another word, but I hope you will medi-

tate seriously. Ordinarily, I'm no hand to make a census of my bantams before the returns are in, but this time I can't see a bit of rough weather ahead.

EDITH. Don't you think you might underestimate Ezra?

HOWELL (*laughing*). Underestimate him? Why, Edith, if I had been choosing my own opponent, I would have said let Ezra Little be the man.

EDITH. He may surprise you. He has ideas, and he's got the courage to stick up for them, too.

HOWELL. Well, I'm not afraid. I'm only hoping that I can be as sure that you'll give the correct answer to that little proposition as I am that I'll beat him.

EDITH (*warmly*). It seems to me you are very confident —

HOWELL. Sure. It's too bad to beat the boy two ways — (*Takes her hand.*)

EDITH (*pulling hand away, and speaking with spirit*). Perhaps you won't—beat him!

HOWELL (*astonished*). Edith!

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE.—*Same as Act I. Three weeks later. Early evening of the day before election.*

(*Curtain discovers JED and ZEKE.*)

JED. It's all over now. Every chance has went.

ZEKE. Yep, we ain't got a show. I don't see's there's any use countin' the votes.

JED. We got to drink the bitter dregs o' defeat.

ZEKE. Just as sure as your ma used to make you take m'lasses and sulphur.

JED. And it tastes even worse.

(*Enter HOWELL, R.*)

HOWELL. What is this, boys, a funeral?

JED. 'Tain't our funeral, Kent Howell.

HOWELL. You don't mean to say you think it's mine?

ZEKE. We're licked, Kent, licked as sure as Clawbuck's butter's oleomargarine. Just to-day, I met four different chaps who've been for you strong every time, and now they've flopped to Little.

HOWELL (*laughing, confidently*). Four votes won't lick me, Zeke. Don't quit. I hate a quitter. Why, this race isn't exciting enough to be interesting.

JED. Ezra's getting votes, Kent Howell, votes I thought I had sewed up tight in my hip pocket.

HOWELL. How's he getting them?

JED. By his labor talk and by letting folks know how he's going to vote, that's how he gets 'em.

HOWELL. Cheer up, boys. I give you my word of honor I'm going to be elected, and that ought to be enough for any man. Now, hustle up and get these banners ready, and cheer for me when I put it all over him in the speechmaking. Liven things up. Make it seem all Howell.

JED. We'll all howl, all right.

(*Enter PAGE, R.*)

PAGE (*to* JED). You're just the man I'm looking for, being chairman of the local committee. What predictions do you make? I'm printing a special bulletin for distribution to-morrow.

JED. We perdict that the Hon. Kentworth Howell will carry Wheatville by sixty-one majority.

PAGE. I hear Moses Trueman's too sick to vote to-morrow.

HOWELL. I'll get him in my car.

PAGE. Too sick—they can't move him.

HOWELL. There's some of my healthy constituents you can't move.

JED. If Trueman's sick, make that majority sixty.

HOWELL. I hope, Page, that you've got some real live stuff in that bulletin and no more breaks like that Blueberry Junction affair.

PAGE (*sulkily*). I guess what I say about Little won't do him any good, and it's too late for him to deny it.

HOWELL. Don't tell me. Then if he says anything, I don't know anything about it.

PAGE. Well, I've got to get my bulletin ready.

JED. And we've got to fix up our parade.

(*Exeunt* JED and ZEKE, L., and PAGE, R.)

(*Enter* MOLLY, R.)

MOLLY. Zip, boom, bah! Hurrah for Ezra Little! Who's all right? Ezra Little.

HOWELL. Go ahead. Don't mind me.

MOLLY. But yesterday and Howell's name would rule the world—and to-morrow none so poor to do him reverence. Hurrah for Ezra Little!

HOWELL. What do you know about it, you little minx?

MOLLY. Oh, nothing. Zip, boom, bah! Hurrah for Little! We go marching to Turnersport.

HOWELL. Now, there's a good girl. Shout for me, and I'll give you a pound box of candy.

MOLLY. Guess I won't shout for you. Hurrah for Little! If you don't get me a two-pound box, I'll tell folks you tried to bribe me, and then how many votes'll you get?

HOWELL. Just to show I'm good-natured I'll buy you a box, anyway.

(*Enter* MRS. JORKINS, L.)

MRS. J. I beg pardon, but I just wanted to ask if you believed in letting the women vote.

HOWELL. Would you vote for me?

MRS. J. I certainly would.

HOWELL. Then I say by all means let you vote.

MRS. J. Thank you so much.

HOWELL. Don't mention it.

MRS. J. But I must. I must tell all the ladies. Thank you so much, dear Mr. Howell.

(*Exeunt* MRS. J., L., MOLLY and HOWELL, C., *into post-office.*)

MOLLY (*at the door*). Hurrah for Little!

(*Enter* EZRA and WRIGHT, L.)

EZRA. I thought I heard some one calling me.

WRIGHT. Just some of the populace venting a bit of their enthusiasm. My dear Ezra, I really think we are going to elect you. Your campaign has taken the practical politicians off their feet.

EZRA. I've only told them what I really believe.

WRIGHT. And that's just what they've been waiting for. I knew I could pick a winner, and I did that time certain sure.

EZRA. It means a lot to me to win.

(*Enter* PAGE, R., *hurriedly.*)

PAGE. I've been looking all over for you, Little. Got any figures to give out?

EZRA. Figures?

PAGE. Yes, regarding your majority.

EZRA. If there is one. No, I'm not claiming anything. As like as not Kent'll win out.

PAGE (*delighted*). Shall I print that?

EZRA (*smiling*). You might say that I'll win if I get the most votes.

PAGE. If! A big if, I say. I'd be a millionaire if I had enough money. Good-night.

EZRA. Good-night, Page. Don't be late for the speeches.

PAGE. I'll be here to get you down in black and white.

(Exit PAGE, R.)

WRIGHT. No need to bother with him. I don't consider him decent enough to associate with. We don't speak, you notice.

EZRA. I always thought him a first-rate chap.

WRIGHT. Even after he called you a political meddler?

EZRA. I guess he was half right.

WRIGHT. I'm all right, so I'm the better man. Now, Ezra, all we've got to do is to get these circulars distributed, and you've put on the finishing touches to a whirlwind campaign.

(Unwraps a package and hands EZRA a circular.)

EZRA (*reading*). "Howell rides in automobile owned by the International Manufacturing Company. Let the voter ask himself, Who owns Howell?" Frank, we mustn't pass out such a circular as that.

WRIGHT. Why not?

EZRA. Because it's not our way of doing. Kent and I said we'd have a clean campaign and no mud-throwing, and I'm not going to get elected by making nasty insinuations.

WRIGHT. Why, you just said you wanted to win—wanted to win bad.

EZRA. Did I? I meant to say I wanted to win fairly—not by springing eleventh-hour roorbacks.

WRIGHT. Roorbacks?

EZRA. Yes; that's what they call them, isn't it?

WRIGHT. You're certainly getting onto the technical points. Ha, ha, ha! Well, I'll see you later.

EZRA. Come back here, Frank. Better let me have that package. I don't want any accidents to happen.

(WRIGHT *reluctantly hands EZRA the package and exits at L.*
EZRA *carefully rewraps the package.*)

(Enter MOLLY, C., with box of candy.)

MOLLY. Do I interrupt? Zip, boom, bah! Hurrah for Ezra Little!

EZRA. I enjoy being interrupted by such sentiments, Molly.

MOLLY. Have some candy? Mr. Howell bought me a two-pound box.

EZRA. I shouldn't think you'd be so enthusiastic for me, then.

MOLLY. As though I'd give up my principles for candy. You do me a base injustice.

EZRA. I'm glad I have such a devoted little adherent.

MOLLY. Yes, I am a Little adherent. I'll be back for the speech, you bet. I must give ma at least one piece of candy before I eat it all.

EZRA. Be sure to be on time. I may need help.

(Exit MOLLY, R. EZRA takes a manuscript from his pocket and examines it carefully. He keeps the package carefully under his arm.)

(Enter EDITH, R.)

EDITH (*diffidently*). Good-evening, Mr. Little.

EZRA. Not Ezra?

EDITH. Ezra, then. Is that your speech?

EZRA. Oh, it's a few notes that cover what I have used in the campaign. I spoke at four places last night: Gasport, Latimer Junction, Sawtucket and Beanville. I reached Beanville at eleven o'clock, and there were just ten men there, and every one fast asleep. I made a big hit with the ten.

EDITH. What did you do?

EZRA. I let them sleep.

EDITH. And you've been talking eight-hour day and factory inspection?

EZRA (*gravely*). Yes. I've made it my chief point.

EDITH (*looking at him and then away*). You know how I feel about it.

EZRA. Edith, isn't it anything to you that I'm doing my duty as I see it?

EDITH. I hope you won't emphasize those things to-night —

EZRA. Edith —

(Enter KIB, R.)

KIB. Hi, I caught you. Say, sis, I thought you were mad at Mr. Little —

EDITH. Hush, Kib.

KIB. You can't make me hush. I thought it was all fixed —

EDITH. Never mind anything more or I'll tell Mr. Little about your girl.

KIB (*abashed*). Oh, sis, you wouldn't do that.

EDITH. I will, if you aren't good.

KIB. Oh, I'll be good. Let me borrow a nickel.

EDITH (*handing one from her purse*). When will you pay me back?

KIB (*rushing into post-office*). Oh, when I get to be a man.

EZRA. Small brothers are big bothers, I've heard.

EDITH. Oh, Kib doesn't annoy me in the least.

EZRA. If you'll excuse me, Edith, I'll get rid of this package before time for the speeches.

EDITH (*quietly*). Certainly, and remember what I said —

EZRA. I can't do that.

EDITH. Not when I—especially—ask it?

EZRA. Not even when you ask it, Edith.

EDITH. Very well. Good-bye.

EZRA. Good-bye.

(*Exit R. EDITH walks L.*)

(*Enter HOWELL, C.*)

HOWELL. Howdy, Miss Edith? I haven't seen you in a long time. Y' see I've been speaking at four meetings a night, and that doesn't leave much time for courting.

EDITH. I presume you have been busy. I hardly thought you considered so strenuous a campaign necessary.

HOWELL. You seemed to think so last time I saw you.

EDITH. Did I?

HOWELL. Don't you remember? Said he would surprise me, et cetera, but I'm just about calculating on squelching him to-night for good and all, and after the votes are counted to-morrow I am going to ask you for your answer on that special little proposition of mine.

EDITH. Mr. Howell, I can —

HOWELL. Not another word. After the votes are counted, the conquering hero will come to claim his lady love—rather a pretty figure, eh? I must be going now; but remember—after the votes are counted.

(*Exit HOWELL, L.*)

(Enter LAWSON, C.)

LAWSON. Hello, Edith. Talkin' to Howell, eh? That's right.

EDITH. Father, I wish you'd stop meddling in my affairs.

LAWSON. Your affairs? It's my affairs, I guess. Your affairs—when it's me that's going visitin' up at the executive mansion when you're the governor's wife. It's me that's ambitious for you. Your affairs! Bah!

EDITH. So you think Mr. Howell will surely win?

LAWSON. A lot of people are getting fooled by this eight-hour buncombe, and Ezry may make it close for Kent. Politics is skittish as women.

(Enter JED and ZEKE, L., bearing aloft a banner inscribed "Howell for Senator." KIB enters C., and follows them, playing a patriotic tune on a mouth-organ. All three march around the stage several times and are joined by villagers, who enter L. and R. At the conclusion of the third trip they all gather around him and shout.)

ALL. Hurrah for Howell! Howl for Howell! We all howl for Howell!

(Enter MOLLY, R.)

MOLLY. Back again. Hurrah for Little! Zip, boom, bah, Ezra, Ezra, Ezra Little!

JED (*pompously*). Come on, boys. Drown her out. (*All shout.*) Howell, Howell, Howell for senator!

MOLLY. Little, Little, Little, Senator Little!

ZEKE. I hear Kent's going to win easy. He has so little opposition.

MOLLY. Little, but enough to beat him.

JED (*waving his arms*). Come on, boys. Hurrah for H-o-w-e-l-l—Howell! (*During the above all the characters and villagers have entered from L., R. and C. After JED's lines, HOWELL enters L., and EZRA, R., and both are heartily applauded. The villagers should be evenly divided in their sympathies. Shouts of "Hurrah for Little," and "Hurrah for Howell," are heard from all sides.*) The first citizen of Wheatville, hon'r'ble Kentworth Howell—hurray!

(WRIGHT brings a box down L., and mounts it.)

WRIGHT. Fellow citizens, I am proud to take the first step in opening this meeting. I am glad to rise before you as the exponent of our principles, gladder still to introduce one who needs no introduction, that rising young statesman whose glowing words have made the welkin ring from one end of this district to the other—aye, and to the uttermost parts of the state, the next senator from this district, Honorable Ezra Little.

(*Dismounts. Loud applause by EZRA'S sympathizers, MOLLY'S voice being prominent. EZRA mounts the box and bows profusely.*)

EZRA. Fellow citizens, I'm glad to speak before you to-night. You ought to know what is involved in a vote before you cast it. They tell me Mr. Howell is a better man. I am not here to claim otherwise. I only want to call your attention to the fact that this is a representative government, and that your senator votes in your place. How will he vote? That is the question you must ask yourselves. For three weeks, I have done my best to let you know how I stand.

EZRA'S ADHERENTS. Hurrah for Senator Little!

EZRA. I have concealed nothing from you. My views have been an open book for all to read. Do you believe that operators in our great factories should have greater protection to life and limb?

JED. There ain't a factory in Wheatville.

EZRA. Of course there isn't, my friend. Your observation does you credit, but I would not misjudge you, fellow citizens of Wheatville, so greatly as to dare say that your interest extends only to the borders of this village, that you are not broad enough and that your hearts are not big enough to go over to the great cities of our state and feel their needs! (*Great applause.*) They need help—those men who give their brain and brawn in the great manufactories, and I know them, for I have worked side by side with them. They ought not to be asked to work undue hours, and their surroundings ought to be as pleasant and as safe as we can make them. Their lives should never be endangered for sake of a dividend. This state—or any other state—can ill afford to place the dollar above the man.

(*Thunderous applause.*)

MOLLY. Zip, boom, bah! Hurrah for Senator Little!

EZRA. I stand squarely on our platform in this regard, and if I am elected, I pledge you that I will do all within my power for the eight-hour day, for a closer inspection of factories, and the improvement of sanitary and safety conditions. They say I'm a greenhorn, that I was nominated for a joke. Maybe. I don't know the ins and outs of practical politics, but a greenhorn can fight, and a greenhorn can have enthusiasm, and even a first-termer has a vote. The question is—will he vote right? (*Enthusiastic applause.*) I can speak but briefly on the other points in my platform. I favor the enlargement of the state's powers in food inspection. I favor the investigation of the land office. I am first, last and always in favor of civil service reform. A dollar's worth of work for a dollar of the state's money. If you believe in things like these, you ought to vote for me—yes, you must vote for me, unless my opponent—admittedly a skilful statesman—also pledges himself to his utmost in their behalf. Has he done so? Will he do so now?

EZRA'S ADHERENTS. Hurrah! Zip, boom, bah! Little for senator!

EZRA. Friends, I can say no more. You know what I stand for. I want to represent you in Turnersport. I want to vote for measures that will help in the onward march of progress. If you trust me, I shall strive hard to prove worthy.

(EZRA bows amid a storm of applause.)

MOLLY (*leading the applause*). Zip, boom, bah! Hurrah for Senator Little! But why didn't he call Mr. Howell any bad names?

LAWSON (*to JED*). Ezra's surely been doing a lot of rehearsing. Kent had better do his best and add a little.

(PAGE mounts the box.)

PAGE. Friends and fellow citizens: I am about to introduce to you the biggest man in Wheatville, the one big bright star in her firmament, the man whose very name is a pride and joy to every one of us from the weest toddler to the oldest inhabitant trembling down life's farthest slope. We are proud of Kentworth Howell, and being your state senator is only one step up the ladder of fame for him. The Honorable Kentworth Howell.

(*Dismounts.* HOWELL *receives an ovation from his supporters as he mounts the box.*)

HOWELL (*bowing to all sides*). Friends, how good it is to be home! Home, after all these weeks of ceaseless journeyings over my beloved district. Home! Man's brightest hopes, his most tender thoughts are bound up in those four letters. Home! To be surrounded by those who love and trust you. Friends, I can ask no more.

MOLLY. Guess we'll leave you there, then.

PAGE (*angrily*). Keep still, you. Give our candidate a show.

(MOLLY *subsides.*)

HOWELL. Nothing personally would delight me more than to remain among you as long as my course shall run, but I feel and must obey the call of duty. It is for your sake, dear friends, that I go to Turnersport, for your sake and for my country's weal. (*Applause, and blowing of horn by JED.*) Regarding what Mr. Little has said about voting on certain questions, how can I tell how I will stand till I get up there and see what the situation is? You leave it to me and I'll take good care of you—always have in the past. I point with pride to my official record. It's an open book for all to read. But I view with alarm the possibility of untried statesmen—if such they can be called—holding in their hands the destiny of this great commonwealth! (*Great applause.*) This is a serious problem, friends, this being a self-governing nation. Men of honesty and experience—experience especially—ought to be in the seats of the mighty. I b'lieve that now, as in Lincoln's time, our country faces a mighty crisis. Will you put the guns of defense into unproven hands? No, a thousand times no! Keep the ship of state manned by a crew whose ability has stood the test. This country's going on to greater and greater things. "He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat." Safe, safe as a babe in its mother's arms is the destiny of this nation in the hands of our great party. When you go to the polls be true to yourself! Shakespeare says to thine own self be true, and you won't be false to anybody else, or words to that effect. Be true! Flinch not, and as I see your faces I can read the verdict. "I can read the righteous verdict by the dim and flaring lamps," and the oppo-

sition's foolish doctrine—in this district at least—goes down to well-deserved defeat.

(*Thundering applause as HOWELL bows and dismounts.*)

LAWSON. The greatest speech I've heard since I read one of Dan'l Webster's.

ZEKE (*triumphantly*). I guess that was a poor speech—not to-day! It reminded me of gimme liberty or gimme death.

JED. I won a prize once recitin' that. I said it like this (*very fast*), "Is life so dear or peace so sweet ——"

ZEKE. 'Nough! I'll listen to that some time when I'm asleep.

(*The adherents of each candidate crowd around congratulating him.*)

HOWELL (*preparing to leave*). Good-bye, Ezra. I hope there won't be any hard feelings when the votes are counted.

EZRA (*quietly*). I hope not.

EDITH. That was a good speech, Ezra.

EZRA. I'm only sorry that you couldn't approve of all of it.

MOLLY. Zip, boom, bah! Hurrah for Senator Little!

(*The villagers file out L. and R. HOWELL and PAGE exeunt together, R., surrounded by admirers.*)

LAWSON. Going to work any more to-night, boys?

ZEKE. Guess 'not. I can't stand these late hours—it's nine o'clock.

(*JED and ZEKE exeunt R., and LAWSON enters post-office.*)

EZRA. Everybody seems to have gone home, all of a sudden.

EDITH. I think I'll wait for father.

EZRA. I just happen to have an errand up your way. Edith, I'm sorry I've had to say things in my speeches that may have hurt you.

EDITH. Of course, you have a right to say whatever you like ——

EZRA. If I had agreed to leave the eight-hour day alone when you asked me that night, you couldn't have respected me. Now, honest, could you? (*She turns aside, and does not answer.* EZRA, *earnestly.*) Could you, Edith?

EDITH (*speaking very low*). No.

EZRA. Edith, I'm going to say again what I said at the graduation exercises. If I win to-morrow I'm going to ask a question of you.

(LAWSON *comes to the door of the post-office.*)

LAWSON. Well, what do you think of that?

EDITH. Oh, there's father. Good-night.

EZRA. Good-night. Remember, if I win —

(*Exit, R.*)

EDITH. Father, are you sure the eight-hour bill and the factory inspection will injure the International Company?

LAWSON. Well, I've been a-lookin' into it a little, and it seems some states have got it, and the factories haven't nailed up the front doors yet. But, anyway, Kent'll win in this district easy.

EDITH. Oh, I'm so glad!

LAWSON (*chuckling*). Glad Kent'll win?

EDITH. No, that Ezra's bill isn't going to hurt us.

(*Goes up c.*)

LAWSON (*looking after her*). Well, what do you think of that? (*Shakes head.*) These women is queerer'n politics. They beat me! (*Goes up c.*)

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE.—*Same as Act I. Evening of election day.*

(*As curtain rises EDITH enters at R. JED appears at post-office door.*)

JED. You're just the girl we want to see, Miss Edith. Will you watch the office while we transact some business where these checker players can't hear us?

EDITH. I should think they'd be so interested they wouldn't hear you.

JED. We dursn't run no chances. Come on, and help a fellow out.

EDITH. I'm glad to do it for you, Jed.

(*Enters post-office, c.*)

(*Enter LAWSON and ZEKE, C. JED, LAWSON and ZEKE come down c.*)

JED. Now we've got you one side, we got a little business to transact, we has.

LAWSON. What do you want—a raise? 'Cause if you do, you'll have to apply to the gover'ment.

JED. No, it ain't a raise—not exackly.

ZEKE. It's more serious than a raise.

JED. We got a business matter, we has. We want a partnership dissolved, we do.

ZEKE. You can get it done, can't you? You're a not'ry public, ain't you?

LAWSON. I'm too blamed public to suit me.

JED (*dignified*). We're here on solemn business, Jeremy, and you as an officer of the law are duty bound to help us out.

LAWSON. As an officer of the law, I must do my duty—if I get my fee.

JED. We want to break up a partnership, Jeremy.

LAWSON. I never see your names together on a sign-board.

JED. No, this business ain't exackly one that you put up any signs about, eh, Zeke?

ZEKE. No, but I guess all the signs are in favor o' me.

LAWSON (*looking cautiously around*). I hope it ain't anything crooked, boys.

ZEKE. Not exackly what you'd call crooked, Jerry.

LAWSON. Jeremy, sir, not Jerry nor Jeremiah. Now what about this dissolving business?

(*In pantomime, JED and ZEKE each indicates that the other should proceed.*)

ZEKE. Jeremy, it's like this. Jed and me was business rivals, but we decided to pool our interests and form a trust, eh, Jedediah?

JED. Right you are, Ezekiel.

ZEKE. You see, both of us is kind o' courtin' Widow Jorkins, we be, and we got to kind o' thinking how much we'd lose if we didn't get her, so we said we'd go partners, and share 'n' share alike.

LAWSON. Share 'n' share what alike?

ZEKE. Why, Jimmy Jorkins' two thousand dollars insurance money, o' course. You see, we're both head over heels in love with the widow, and we thought the loser'd feel bad enough without suffering financially.

LAWSON. A most equitable arrangement! Why do you want to dissolve it?

ZEKE. Well, Jeremy, I, for one, think I've got the lady to see the matter in the right light.

JED. Same here, Jeremy.

ZEKE. Besides, if the lady should prove unaccommodating in money matters, how could the winner meet his obligations?

JED. Right you are, Ezekiel.

LAWSON. Have you got a contract?

JED. We each got one. We both signed 'em.

LAWSON. D' you have any witnesses?

ZEKE (*shrieking*). Witnesses? Whirligig blossom! D' you suppose we wanted everybody in Christendom, includin' the widow, to know about this here little arrangement?

LAWSON (*officially solemn*). No one witnessed the deed.

JED. There ain't any deed done yet.

LAWSON (*scathingly*). I mean the paper, idget. Give

me the contracts. (*Each produces a long paper from an inner pocket. LAWSON looks them over earnestly. Reads.*)
 "Know all men by these presents —"

JED. I wanted that left out, but Zeke said it didn't mean nothin'. 'Twas just to make it c'rect legally.

LAWSON (*reading*). "Forasmuch as the party of the first part, one Ezekiel Jones, and the party of the second part, one Jedediah Smith, are both, each and severally in pursuit of one object, namely, the hand and affections of the party of the third part, one Martha Jorkins known as Widow Jorkins, and whereas and inasmuch as included with the aforesaid hand and affections of said Martha Jorkins there is the sum of two thousand dollars insurance money left by the late lamented Jimmy Jorkins, we do hereby each and severally, earnestly agree and covet with each other —"
 Covet? (*Looks up.*) Don't you mean covenant?

JED. I guess we done both. Zeke drew up that there paper, anyway.

LAWSON (*severely*). Don't you know it's against the commandments to covet your neighbor's wife?

JED. But she ain't our wife—not yet.

LAWSON (*reading*). — "earnestly agree and covet with each other that whichsoever shall be successful in getting the aforesaid lady's hand and affections—with what is included therewith—shall pay unto the other the sum of one-half the amount of the aforesaid insurance money. Mutually agreed upon and signed this day, July 7, Anno Dominoes, 19—. Zeke Jones, Jed Smith."

LAWSON (*solemnly*). Jed Smith and Zeke Jones, respectfully signers o' this here doc'ment, you solemnly affirm that you wish it annulled, eh?

JED. We want it done away with.

LAWSON. The fee'll be five dollars each.

ZEKE. } Oh, Jeremy!

JED. }

LAWSON (*firmly*). Five dollars apiece, please, or the contract stands.

ZEKE. } You'll have to take it out on pay day.

JED. }

LAWSON. If I do you'll 'most owe me money, but I'll do it. You agree to dissolve this partnership, do you?

JED. } We do.

ZEKE. }

(LAWSON *takes the contracts firmly between his fingers and tears them into very small bits.*)

LAWSON. Be ye dissolved, by authority of the United States, per Jeremy Lawson, whose commission expires July 11, 19—.

JED (*with a sigh of relief*). Let's get back to the office.

ZEKE. Folks'll be looking for returns soon, I guess.

(*Exeunt JED and ZEKE, C.*)

(*Enter EDITH, C., and walks toward R. She meets EZRA entering R.*)

EZRA. You're just the one I'm looking for, Edith.

EDITH. I should think you'd be looking for the man who counts the votes.

EZRA. We'll hear from him soon now. I suppose your father will announce the returns as usual.

EDITH. I wouldn't want to be the man to try to prevent him.

EZRA. If I should win, I'm afraid he wouldn't like the complexion of the returns.

EDITH. I'm afraid not.

EZRA (*half joking*). But we will?

EDITH. We?

EZRA. Yes, won't we?

EDITH (*tossing head*). Isn't that taking a good deal for granted?

EZRA. Edith, you know that I love you. Ever since I came to Wheatville, I have been trying to place myself so that I could ask you to let me take care of you, always. I'd be willing to work for you —

EDITH (*looking away*). An eight-hour day?

EZRA. Twenty-four, if necessary. Edith, when this nomination came to me, I saw its two possibilities—to do something for what I believe to be in line of progress, and to win the chance to ask you the one question—now that the opportunity is in the balance, don't you hope that I get it?

EDITH. I — (*Hesitates.*)

EZRA (*earnestly*). Edith, don't you?

EDITH. Yes, I suppose I do.

EZRA (*delighted*). Edith!

(LAWSON *comes to the post-office door and scowls.*)

EDITH (*unconcerned*). When will the returns begin, father?

LAWSON (*gruffly*). I start in at eight, whether there's returns or not. It's a foregone conclusion anyway.

(*Scowls and turns into post-office.*)

EZRA (*looking at watch*). We've twenty minutes, Edith. Let's walk down as far as the school.

EDITH. To take a last look?

EZRA. In that case, parting will be a sweet sorrow.

(*Exeunt EZRA and EDITH, R.*)

LAWSON (*entering with JED*). D' you ever see the nerve? Wait till he's licked. I'll send him hustling.

JED. Jus' what I'd do. Stay with a winner. That's my sentiments. (*Hurriedly, as he sees MRS. J. enter L.*) Excuse me. (*Runs forward and takes her by the arm.*) My dear Mrs. Jorkins, how might you be?

MRS. J. I might be dead o' the quinsy, but I'm not. I never felt better.

JED. And you never looked better. Seems to me you're getting —

(*Enter ZEKE, C., on the run. He takes MRS. J.'s other arm.*)

ZEKE. My dear Mrs. Jorkins, how fine you are looking!

LAWSON. You men are as bad as women!

(*Exit, C.*)

MRS. J. (*to ZEKE*). Oh, do you really think so?

ZEKE. Cross my heart.

JED. Cross mine double.

ZEKE. It seems a terrible long time since I saw you.

JED. It seems twice that long to me.

MRS. J. I'm glad I found you two boys alone. Seein' you've been so particularly nice to me, I guess I ought to let you know first. Maybe you don't remember Abner Lew-bury, d' you? Well, anyway, him and me was sweethearts once, and had a misunderstanding, and each of us took up with somebody else. Well, each of us having been afflicted by the loss of the better half, we decided to do what we expected to do in the first place. I got his letter to-day, an' I'm answering it now. (*Holds out letter.*)

ZEKE } (*astounded*). So you're to be married?
 JED }

MRS. J. Yes, and I want you boys at the weddin'. You've been just like two sons to me. You'll come, won't you?

JED } (*sheepishly*). We'll be there (*eagerly*) and kiss
 ZEKE } the bride.

(*Exit MRS. J. into post-office.*)

JED (*mournfully*). Good-bye, Jimmy Jorkins' two thousand.

ZEKE (*also mournfully*). I wish we could 'a' got that Lewbury chap to go partners with us.

(*Enter HOWELL, L.*)

HOWELL. Hello, boys, how're you feeling? We've fought a good fight, and I guess we've won.

JED. I bet when the votes are counted you'll see the Wheatville committee made a good showing.

HOWELL. It doesn't start that way, Jed. I've been watching 'em count, and I figure that I'll be lucky to carry the town by twenty-five. Still, many a mickle makes a muckle.

(*Enter LAWSON, C.*)

LAWSON. In five minutes I start this show if there isn't a township heard from. Be prepared to fill in, Kent.

JED. I guess I'd better drum up a crowd.

ZEKE. That's my program.

(*Exeunt JED and ZEKE, L.*)

LAWSON. Now, Kent, I hope everything turns out O. K., because you know I'm mighty ambitious for my Edith.

(*Villagers begin to assemble from L. and R.; PAGE, KIB and WRIGHT included. MRS. J. enters C.*)

HOWELL. I never was defeated yet.

LAWSON. Mebbe the pitcher might go to the well once too often.

HOWELL. Even if I do, I won't come home broke.

(*Enter MOLLY, R.*)

MOLLY. Zip, boom, bah! Hurrah for Senator Little!
(Some of the villagers join her while others shout "Hurrah for Howell!")

(Enter JED and ZEKE, L.)

LAWSON. Time to start. Hey, you Kib. You go inside there, and as fast as any returns come in, you rush 'em out to me. And Zeke, if you don't get news fast enough, I'll report you to the gover'ment. *(Mounts box and announces through a megaphone.)* Ladies and gentlemen—and politicians—we are about to commence a time-honored institution here in Wheatville—receivin' and announcin' election returns. As usual, I'll take charge.

(Exit ZEKE, C.)

(Enter EDITH and EZRA, R. The villagers cheer EZRA and also HOWELL.)

HOWELL *(to LAWSON)*. What are they doin' together?
(Points to EZRA and EDITH.)

LAWSON. Blessed if I know, but it ain't a good sign.
(KIB hands a slip to LAWSON.)

LAWSON *(announcing)*. Howell carries Chicory township by twenty-four votes.

(Loud applause.)

HOWELL *(to JED)*. It's not near up to two years ago.
(Before each announcement KIB hands LAWSON a slip of paper. LAWSON announces through the megaphone. EZRA and HOWELL have note-books, keeping count as the vote is announced.)

LAWSON. Sugaway Center gives six majority for Little.
(Applause.)

HOWELL *(to JED)*. If I lose, she's my Jonah.

JED. By hop, I hope you win, but politics is as uncertain as collar buttons.

EDITH *(to EZRA)*. Six is something, anyway.

EZRA. Is it something to you? Then you want me to win, eight-hour day and all.

EDITH. Now, Ezra.

EZRA. Say you do.

EDITH. I've told you so twice.

LAWSON. Fenn Creek gives a majority of eleven for Howell.

(*Applause.*)

HOWELL (*to MOLLY*). How do you like that, little Miss Smarty?

MOLLY. Wait till the next. Most people aren't ignorant like the Fenn Creek folks. Hurrah for Senator Little!

JED. I'll make a small-sized bet with any man here that Kent Howell wins.

MOLLY. What do you want to bet?

JED. I'll bet a kiss. If you win I'll give you one. If I win, you give me one.

MOLLY. I wouldn't bet that way except with a handsome man.

JED. Well, that's where I come in.

MOLLY. No, that's where you're away out.

JED. I tell you what I'll do; the loser'll have to eat a cake of soap.

MOLLY. A whole cake?

JED. A reg'lar-sized cake of Smith's Beauty Soap.

MOLLY. Who'll pay for the soap?

LAWSON. Oh, I'll donate the soap.

MOLLY. All right, I'll bet you.

LAWSON. Here, they're coming.—Gasport, twenty for Little; Beanville, sixteen for Howell; School Corners, seven for Little; Circusburg, nineteen for Howell.

(*HOWELL and EZRA make notes rapidly.*)

HOWELL (*to JED*). We've got a lead, but not near what we had two years ago.

JED. I hope we win. Smith's Beauty Soap is only good outside.

EZRA (*turning to MOLLY*). I hope we win, if only so that you won't need to eat that soap.

MOLLY. There's another reason why you want to win. Oh, I know. Zip, boom, bah! and I hope you get her, too.

EZRA. Thanks, Molly, but get whom?

MOLLY. Yes, that's her. Sh! she'll hear you.

EZRA. Her? What her?

MOLLY. As if you didn't know. Hurrah for Senator Little!

HOWELL (*to his adherents who have crowded around him to get his figures*). I hope it's all right, boys. We're not doing like we did two years ago—not by a big plum.

LAWSON. Blueberry Junction, thirty-three for Little.

(HOWELL *falls back upon a box exhausted, and fans himself with his hat.*)

HOWELL. Just think of that! The place I made such a hit, according to the Wheatville "Press."

JED. You can't believe nothing you read in the newspapers.

(EZRA'S *sympathizers, led by MOLLY, shout triumphantly.*)

HOWELL. I never thought much o' blueberries, anyway.

LAWSON (*to JED*). Politics is gettin' as uncertain as women. (*Loudly.*) Here's a whole county. Musgash gives a majority for Little, one hundred and twenty-two. (*Demonstration.*) This is more like it. Complete returns from Sterling County give Howell a majority of one hundred and forty-eight. (*Great shouting.*) Wheatville goes for Little by ten majority.

(*Tremendous applause, led by MOLLY.*)

HOWELL. A man's foes shall be they of his own household. (*Figures intently. To LAWSON.*) I guess we win, but it's uncomfortably close—as close as ever was old Claw-buck in his palmiest days.

LAWSON. How does she stand?

HOWELL. We're thirty-seven to the good, and there's only a few more townships to hear from. I guess we're safe.

LAWSON. You'd better be, 'cause I'm mighty ambitious for my Edith.

EZRA (*turning to EDITH*). Kent seems to have a lead so far. It's close, though, and we'll hope till the last vote's counted.

EDITH (*softly and confidentially*). Close your eyes, and we'll hope just as hard as we can.

LAWSON. Pentonville, twenty-two for Little. Burk's Hill, nineteen for Howell.

JED. About time we heard from Jupp's, eh?

HOWELL. Oh, I've got Jupp's nailed down. He won't get a dozen votes up there. (*Consults book.*) There are only four more townships to hear from, including Jupp's.

LAWSON. Glenville, seventeen for Howell. Courtsburg, eight for Little.

HOWELL. Looking better all the time, Jeremy. Forty-three to the good, and only two more to hear from.

MOLLY. Was there a soul dismayed? Not one of us. Zip, boom, bah!

KIB. Who's going to win? I want to yell for somebody.

LAWSON. You 'tend to your returns, young man.

PAGE. I guess I can get out an extra—"Howell Wins!"

WRIGHT. We don't concede a thing, sir, not a thing.

PAGE. Sir, I desire no further conversation with men of your type.

WRIGHT. Type, sir? An execrable pun. I shall make note of it in the "Gazette."

LAWSON. Jupp's Corners, twenty-six for Little.

HOWELL. Bring on the restoratives, boys. And I was so good to those people up there, and they said I was like Lincoln! How could they? How could they?

EZRA. That makes it pretty close, doesn't it?

JED. Close—not a bit. I always liked a tight fit—wear shoes that pinch me, and all that. We're seventeen to the good, we be, and only one place to hear from.

(Goes into post-office, and returns with soap in hand.)

HOWELL. It looks good, boys, it looks good. It was like being drawn through a keyhole, but I guess we get through.

LAWSON. Lemon Haven gives Howell a majority of twenty votes.

JED. It's all over now! It's all over now! Whoopee diddle de boom de dah! I've rehearsed four weeks on that yell, I have.

(Demonstration and cries of "speech" by the HOWELL admirers. JED makes a comic circuit of the stage, waving

his hat. HOWELL *is immensely pleased.* EDITH *and EZRA serious.* MOLLY *very glum.*)

EZRA (*offering his hand*). You seem to be the winner, Mr. Howell. Let me congratulate you. Next to myself, I'd rather have you win than any man I know.

HOWELL. We run a close race, Ezry, and I must say, for an amateur, you've done mighty well.

(*Takes EZRA'S hand.*)

JED (*excitedly*). Eat the soap. Eat the soap.

(*Hands MOLLY soap.*)

MOLLY. Are those figures official?

JED. Why, to be certainly. I say so, and I'm half a deppity to a postmaster and not'ry public.

KIB (*pointing alternately to EZRA and HOWELL*). My mother—no, father—told me to take this one.

(*Indicates HOWELL.*)

(*Exit, c.*)

HOWELL (*confidentially to LAWSON*). Now the little girl'll come around all right. I guess everything is ironed out satisfactory.

LAWSON. I hope so, but women are more uncertain than sweet potatoes.

KIB (*excitedly*). Say, dad, come in here, quick. Zeke wants you.

(*LAWSON and HOWELL hastily enter the post-office. The others, some of whom had started to disperse, crowd around the door to learn the cause of the excitement. EDITH and EZRA remain down R.*)

EZRA. It looks as though I've lost.

EDITH. It does look as though we've lost, Ezra.

(*The crowd make room for LAWSON and HOWELL, and gather around the box as LAWSON mounts it.*)

LAWSON. It seems there was an error in tab'lation or something up in Sterling County. Anyway, we've got a message that says Howell carried it by forty-eight instead of one hundred and forty-eight. (*Cries of "You don't say?"*)

"Then Kent didn't win, eh?" Shouts by MOLLY and EZRA'S adherents, and disgust shown by HOWELL'S admirers.) Zeke made 'em repeat the message, but they won't say anything different. Figure it up, Kent, and see how you come out.

HOWELL. Figure what up? That licks me, and no figuring'll change it.

(The crowd is highly excited. EZRA and EDITH, down R., are talking happily and confidentially.)

LAWSON. Remember, Kent, I'm mighty ambitious for my Edith.

HOWELL. That's all right. I'm a cork on the ocean of life. You can't keep me under.

(The crowd calls loudly for EZRA.)

EDITH. They want a speech, Ezra.

EZRA (*mounting the box*). Friends, I can only say thank you, and that I'll do my best. That must be enough to-night. Thank you again.

(He bows, amid a storm of applause, after which the villagers begin to file out. HOWELL shakes his hand just as LAWSON comes up. HOWELL then turns to exit R.)

LAWSON. Well, my boy, I didn't think you had it in you, but I guess you've won your fight.

(MOLLY, L., holds up cake of soap and is forcing it upon the protesting JED. The villagers halt to see the fun, while the conversation below takes place down stage.)

EZRA. Yes, but have I won the other fight?

LAWSON. What other fight?

EZRA. The fight for your consent to a little arrangement Edith and I have decided upon.

LAWSON. So she's decided, eh?

(Looks over to EDITH, who is talking to MRS. J., R.)

EZRA. I'm going to ask her right now.

LAWSON. Well, I guess there ain't anything for me to say except to the victor belong the spoils.

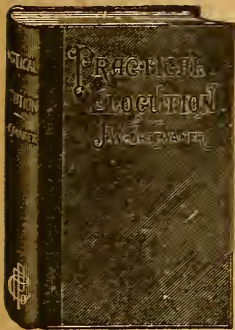
EZRA (*crossing to EDITH*). I was after two prizes, Edith. How about the one that only you can give? Have I won that?

EDITH. You know you won that long ago, Ezra.

(As the curtain goes down, the reluctant JED, down L., is seen to make an antic and an extremely wry face over his first bite of soap. The triumphant MOLLY is standing over him, and the villagers are laughing.)

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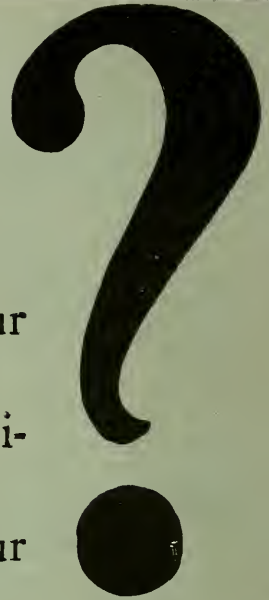
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