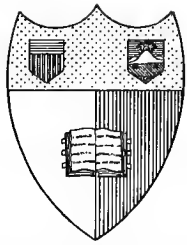

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ONE ACT PLAYS

By

ALICE BROWN

THE PRISONER
MY LOVE AND I
THE BLACK DROP
ROBIN HOOD'S BARN
CHILDREN OF EARTH
HOMESPUN AND GOLD
THE FLYING TEUTON
THE ROAD TO CASTALY
BROMLEY NEIGHBORHOOD
THE SECRET OF THE CLAN
THE WIND BETWEEN THE WORLDS

ONE ACT PLAYS

BY

ALICE BROWN

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1921

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THE HERO

Produced by the Stuart Walker Company,
May 27, 1918

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

[*In the order of their appearance*]

Fiula, a young girl.....MARGARET MOWER

Mark, her brother.....MORGAN FARLEY

Finn, her lover.....PAUL KELLY

Men of the Island

Hugh .....GEORGE GAUL

THE HERO

Time: An afternoon in summer of a year of the Great War.

Place: The interior of a fisherman's cottage on a little island somewhere off the northwest coast of Europe. A door, R, leads out of doors. A wide, not very high window, with diamond panes, is at the back, toward R. The window-seat below it is also a chest. On the left wall is a fireplace, and farther up stage a door leading to a bedroom. The furnishings are of the simplest, but the room has unique beauty from the mellowness of its walls and the vague loveliness of the afternoon light.

Fiula, a young girl, is by the table, C, embroidering a blue cloak with a golden thread. She is dressed in dull blue and her hair is gold. She gets up to look anxiously from the window, and then goes back to her work. The outer door opens and Mark comes in. He is young, slender, appealing. He carries a small branch of oak leaves. Fiula starts up, throws her work on the table and goes to meet him.

Fiula. Have you enlisted?

Mark. [*Tossing down his cap and gazing at her an*

instant before answering. He looks brightly exalted, and yet dazed.] Yes.

Fiula. [*Puts her arms impulsively about him and speaks excitedly.*] And you've brought me my oak leaves. [*Takes the branch from him.*]

Mark. Yes. What did you want of them?

Fiula. [*Excitedly.*] To make a crown. [*Hesitatingly.*] And Finn enlisted.

Mark. [*Unwillingly, avoiding her eyes.*] No.

[*Fiula throws down the branch, takes up her work and begins to fold it with quick, passionate motions, from time to time dashing the tears from her eyes. Mark goes to her and puts his hand on hers to stop her folding.*]

What are you doing? You fold that cloth as if you did it because Finn had not enlisted.

Fiula. [*Passionately.*] Do you know what this is?

Mark. Is it the same you've been sewing on early mornings and half the night?

Fiula. Yes.

Mark. You told me it was a secret.

Fiula. It was a secret, but if Finn has not enlisted, it's not a secret any more. I have no use for it, and I'll throw it over the cliff.

Mark. What has it to do with Finn?

Fiula. [*She disengages her hand, unfolds the cloak and holds it up before him. It is beautiful in its dusky blue and broad gold border.*] It was for him, because he is a singer and a maker of songs. And I thought he would come to tell me he had enlisted, and I was going to make him a crown of oak leaves and put this

cloak about him and call in the boys, and show them Finn in his glory, and tell them he would sing to them all night long before he went away. [*She folds the cloak rapidly and scornfully and thrusts it into the chest made by the window-seat. Then she covers her face and cries silently.*]

Mark. [*Going to her.*] Don't cry. It's true Finn hasn't enlisted, but he gave a good reason.

Fiula. No reason is a good reason for letting other men fight for you.

Mark. Finn is your lover. You must believe in him.

Fiula. You say that because you don't want my heart broken—not because you believe in his good reason.

Mark. [*Trying to convince himself as well as her.*] He was no worse than the others.

Fiula. Did none of them enlist?

Mark. No.

Fiula. Not one of the boys on this island?

Mark. No. And none of them had so good a reason as Finn.

Fiula. I know their reason. Cowards!

Mark. [*Earnestly.*] No, Fiula, you're too hard on them. They'd enlist if there was somebody to lead them.

Fiula. Why didn't you lead them?

Mark. Maybe I might if they didn't know me so well. You don't think much of the stone in the path you've stubbed over ever since you could walk.

Fiula. No. But you think something of that cliff

out there because it is great and terrible. Have the recruiting officers gone?

Mark. They go at high tide.

Fiula. [*Thoughtfully.*] Sunset, that will be. [*Turns to him and entreats him warmly.*] Go back to the boys. Talk to them. Tell them what we're fighting for.

Mark. They've heard it all. And they say it's only for England and they won't fight.

Fiula. Tell them it's not for England any more than for the whole world. Tell them it's for the right to live like free men and free women.

Mark. [*Depressed.*] No use, Fiula. The officers told them that, and they listened and then they went away and began to mend their nets and talk about a good haul tomorrow.

Fiula. Sing to them then. Sing one of the songs about the men that died to make this island free.

Mark. They know the island songs.

Fiula. Then sing one of the songs Finn made, about heroes coming home at sunset with the light on their shields and the girls meeting them with garlands. Call Finn to sing his songs, and they will all catch fire together and go down to the boat and give in their names and we shall be saved from shame.

[*There is the sound of a clear call from a pipe, a piquant phrase.*]

Mark. [*Arrested half way to the door, L.*] There he is, Fiula.

Fiula. [*Transfigured with relief.*] Finn!

[*Finn enters in haste, looking from one to the*

other, evidently not certain of his welcome. He is young, slender, sure of himself, and has a gay beauty of youth. His sense of privilege comes from the conviction that it is worth while to sing songs. Fiula speaks entreatingly, for she knows she has to persuade him to what he has failed to do.]

Finn!

Finn. [*Angrily.*] Mark was in a hurry to bring you the news.

Mark. [*Resenting his tone.*] I've answered a question. Is there any harm in that?

Fiula. [*Going to Mark and speaking eagerly.*] Get your horn. It's there by your bed. [*Pointing, L.*] Call the boys together. Tell them Finn has a new song. They're to meet him at the great oak and he will sing it to them.

[*Mark hurries out by the door, L.*]

Finn! [*Fiula turns to him with a caressing abandon.*]

Finn. [*Frowningly.*] The birds might be glad if they could travel as fast as the word out of a man's mouth.

Fiula. [*Repulsed, withdrawing from him.*] Mark wasn't to blame. I asked him.

Finn. You might have waited for me to tell it. You would have seen it as I do.

Fiula. [*Passionately.*] Make me do that, Finn. Make me see why you won't enlist.

Finn. [*Sulkily.*] They ask me to go out and kill men that want to live as much as I do.

Fiula. Finn! Finn! that's the way the others talk, the——

Finn. Say it. Say the word.

Fiula. No! no!

Finn. I will, then. Cowards. That's the word. You call me a coward.

Fiula. [*Drooping with shame.*] I don't call you that. Mark was right. I must believe in you. Tell me what to call you, Finn?

Finn. [*Proudly.*] I am a singer. I make songs. Do you suppose there are two men in all the millions of their army that can make the songs I make?

Fiula. [*Taking fire.*] No.

Finn. Do you know any other man like me, a man with songs running through his head all day long like a river with grass on its banks, a man with fingers to play them and a voice to sing? If I am killed my fingers will be stiff and my voice will be silent and the river of song will cease to flow and the grass on its banks will wither.

Fiula. Finn! [*Recovering herself.*] But the men you sing most about, they were killed. And we call them heroes and remember them forevermore.

Finn. [*Proudly.*] I am greater than all heroes because I sing about them and I make their swords flash brighter than ever they did on the field of battle and their war-cry sounds louder from my lips.

Fiula. Your eyes shine as they do when you sing. Now is your time, Finn, your great and wonderful time.

[*The sound of a horn.*]

Mark is calling the boys. Run to the great oak, and sing them a song of heroes and lead them down to the boat, singing, and they will all give in their names and you will give yours. And then come back to me and I will put on you the singer's robe and crown. [*She picks up the oak branch and begins hastily to plait a chaplet of leaves.*]

Finn. [*Muttering like a sulky boy.*] I have just sung to them.

Fiula. [*Still plaiting her wreath.*] What song did you sing?

Finn. It was a new song.

Fiula. Of heroes?

Finn. Of a hero.

Fiula. Was he a soldier?

Finn. Yes. An old soldier, with his deeds behind him. And again his country was at war. And they put the armies into his hands.

Fiula. The English armies?

Finn. Yes. And then they sent him on a mission to another country.

Fiula. [*Beginning to understand.*] To Russia!

Finn. Yes. And his ship was sunk by the enemy and he went down with her.

Fiula. Lord Kitchener!

Finn. Yes. And up to that, anybody could make the song. But after that, only I could make it. For I see what nobody else can see. He went down silent and strong, as he had lived. And all the drowned rose up in the sea to meet him, and they called him by name and crowned him with crowns and sang songs.

Fiula. [*In awe.*] Did you see all that, Finn?

Finn. Yes. I saw it, and I sang it because I only can see and sing.

Fiula. Did the boys like the song?

Finn. They cheered as the men under the sea cheered Lord Kitchener, and they carried me on their shoulders.

Fiula. Why did they like it, Finn?

Finn. Because it made their blood run fast and their feet long for the march and their fists strong to strike. And each man of them forgot it was Lord Kitchener I sang about. Each man thought the song was about himself. He was the hero. Do you see?

Fiula. Go back to them, Finn. Go back to the boys and make them feel they are heroes. And lead them down to give in their names, and give yours, my love—my love. For if you fail in that you fail me, too, and I cannot live. [*She holds up the completed crown before him and then lays it on the table.*]

Voices of Men without. Finn! Finn!

Fiula. The boys are tired of waiting. They have come for you. Go with them, Finn, and sing the song of heroes.

[*While Finn is hesitating toward the door it is opened and the Men flock in. They are young, strong, in fishermen's clothes and excited of mien.*]

Have you come for Finn?

A Man. Indeed and we have. We want every able-bodied man on the island.

A Man. [*To Fiula.*] But it's not for him to sing we've come. We were on our way to the great oak and we met the constable and he said Big Hugh'd broken out of jail.

A Man. They said he ran this way. So you shut your door and keep it hasped.

A Man. Have you seen him, maidie?

Fiula. [*Indifferently, still watching Finn.*] No.

A Man. Bolt your door. Come on, Finn. And to-night you shall sing us a rare song about the hunting of Big Hugh.

A Man. [*Pessimistically.*] I misdoubt whether he's not gone over the cliff. The blood-stain was that way.

Fiula. Did Big Hugh make the stain? Had they wounded him, do you think?

A Man. More likely he'd killed a child or a sheep or something and flung it over the cliff. They say he killed nine men at a blow and that's why he was in jail. And maybe he's killed the tenth.

A Man. It's not true he killed nine men.

A Man. He struck down a man that was preaching treason to all governments and that's not unlawful killing.

A Man. [*Doubtfully.*] But it's killing. And what if he was at large and turned on us?

Finn. Come on, boys. We'll hunt him down.

Fiula. You're very bold when the pack of you set upon one man. But when it comes to marching out to fight——

A Man. Oh, it's true, maidie, Big Hugh's got to be caught. For he's seven feet high and has six thumbs on each hand.

A Man. And he could do damage if he set about it —damage to property.

Fiula. The Huns are doing damage to the whole world.

A Man. [*Vacantly.*] So they are. But it's not likely they'll gèt here.

Finn. Come on, boys. We'll track him down and deliver him over to the constable and to-night I will sing you the song of Big Hugh.

[*They go out and one turns back to say to Fiula confidentially,* 'Tis true they'd have hanged him long ago, only his six thumbs are so strong it's easier to do it to-morrow than to-day. *He turns to go and Fiula calls to him:*]

Fiula. Where's Mark?

Man. He's down at the great oak blowing his horn for us to come and swear away our lives. Maybe when we've caught Big Hugh we'll take him down to the oak and show Mark there's something to do to keep the peace on this island. Begin at home, I say. Begin at home.

[*He goes. Fiula stands anxiously listening. Finn appears at the window and calls.*]

Finn. Fiula, bolt the door.

[*Fiula looks at him in a quick revulsion as he disappears.*]

Fiula. [*Scornfully.*] Bolt the door! [*She goes to the chest, takes out the singing robe and tries to tear it.*

But the fabric resists her and she sinks down on the chest, buries her face in the robe and cries silently.]

[*Hugh appears at the door, L. He is young and, though no bigger than the other men, their superior in sheer splendor of youth. He is pale and is breathless from haste. He has wrapped an old piece of sail cloth about him and is holding it tightly, with both hands, against his breast.*]

Hugh. Little girl! Let me come in.

[*Fiula rises and drops the cloak. He is surprised.*]

You're not a child.

Fiula. [*Quietly.*] No. I am a woman.

Hugh. It is a long time since I have seen a woman —like you. Though none of them are like you.

[*She stands looking at him gravely, and he asks gently:*]

May I shut the door? [*He crosses to the outer door which the Men have left open and shuts it.*]

Fiula. Why did you come that way?

Hugh. I stole this piece of sail cloth in your garden, and then I hid in the garden, and that was the door I saw. [*He sits and leans back, exhausted.*] Will you fasten it? [*Indicating the outer door.*]

[*Fiula fastens the door and returns to stand before him.*]

Fiula. Why do you want it fastened?

Hugh. The constable is after me. If they come to that door and find it bolted, I can get out through the garden before you open it to them.

Fiula. I shouldn't open it.

Hugh. Not if I tell you I have broken out of jail?

Fiula. No.

Hugh. Why not?

Fiula. Because one of the boys said you struck down a man preaching treason.

Hugh. Do you know who I am?

Fiula. Let me see your thumbs.

[*He smiles and stretches out his hands to her, but catches them back again to hold the cloth against his breast.*]

[*In surprise.*] Why, they're just like mine.

Hugh. You thought I had six thumbs.

[*She nods.*]

It's only a story they have about me.

Fiula. Are you seven feet tall?

Hugh. That's a story they have.

Fiula. Why do they make up stories about you?

Hugh. [*Quietly.*] Because they are afraid of my persuading them to take trouble, the trouble that leads some to life and some to death, and they pretend I am stronger than all of them put together so they will not be ashamed of their fear.

Fiula. Have they seen you?

Hugh. No. But their singer has sung about me.

Fiula. Finn? [*Proudly.*] Finn is going to enlist.

Hugh. Good. He's in luck.

Fiula. [*Doubtfully.*] At least I think he will. [*In sudden passion.*] I pray God he will.

Hugh. I know his songs. They are all about heroes. Of course he would enlist.

Fiula. [*In sudden terror.*] But the men are after you.

Hugh. Who?

Fiula. All the men on the island. They told me to fasten the door.

Hugh. But you weren't afraid.

Fiula. When men are afraid, girls have to be—different.

Hugh. Are they afraid?

Fiula. They were—afraid of going to war.

Hugh. That's why I got out of jail—to go to war.

Fiula. They'll take you and put you in again.

Hugh. That's why I tried to get to the boat the officers came on, and stow myself away.

Fiula. She sails at sunset. Hurry.

[*He rises, staggers and sinks back.*]

Hugh. I can't. I am hurt.

Fiula. [*Hurrying to him and offering her shoulder for him to lean against.*] What is it?

Hugh. I knocked down the guard and ran. And I ran over roofs and jumped. And a spiked railing caught me and I hung there till I worked myself free. But I shall never be—a soldier.

Fiula. [*Pulling the cloth aside and putting her hand on him.*] Blood.

Hugh. Take your hand away.

Fiula. I am not afraid of blood. I tell you women can't be afraid when men are—as they are. Stand up. Slowly. So.

[*He rises and leans on her.*]

Hugh. Yes. I must get out of here.

Fiula. Come into my brother's room. You shall lie down on his bed and I will bandage you.

[*They begin to walk slowly toward the door, L. He stops.*]

Hugh. Your brother may come in that way, as I did.

Fiula. I shall be there with you.

Hugh. Do other men come here?

Fiula. Yes, all the boys. But they'll come by that door. [*Pointing to the outer door.*]

Hugh. Does your lover come?

Fiula. How do you know I have a lover?

Hugh. By the look in your eyes. Is it Finn?

Fiula. Yes. [*Proudly.*] You've never seen Finn.

Hugh. I saw him just now. When I was hidden down below there. I heard him singing a song of a hero. Is it a true song?

Fiula. It is about Lord Kitchener. He was drowned.

Hugh. A singer like Finn could sing them a better song. He could sing how the hero came back.

Fiula. Are you a singer?

Hugh. I could sing once.

[*A call outside.*]

Fiula. They're coming. In here, quick. [*Indicating the door, L.*] I will lock myself in with you.

Hugh. No. What if you could hide me so they never got at me?

Fiula. I will hide you. From my brother even.

Hugh. What if you could stop up this hole in here? [*His hand on his wound.*] I might get away to the war and I might not.

Fiula. Don't speak. Move slowly. You are bleeding to death.

Hugh. That was what I wanted—to give my blood. And this is what the gods do. They give us our wish but they give it in their own way. They forbid me to go and fight, but they will let me sing to these boys and turn their hearts to going.

[*Cries without:* Fiula! Fiula!]

Fiula. No, no. You shall be saved. In spite of all the gods you shall be saved. Come.

Hugh. No, sweetheart. I shall stand here and sing.

Fiula. This cloak, then. The singing robe. [*She wraps it about him.*] The singer's crown. [*She crowns him with the chaplet of oak. As she does this she calls toward the door.*] Is that you, Finn? Mark, is it you?

Hugh. Unbolt the door.

[*Fiula unbolts the door and Finn enters. The Men behind him crowd up to the door. They are eager and excited.*]

Finn. The constable and his men are coming up the other side of the downs and we're going over this way to meet them. You've not seen him, Fiula? [*Seeing Hugh who stands majestic in his robe and crown.*] Who is this?

[*He steps in and the Men follow curiously.*]

Fiula. A stranger. He is a singer, Finn, like you.

A Man. Let us see his thumbs, I say. Let's see the thumbs of all strangers till Big Hugh is caught.

Hugh. [*Smilingly extending both hands.*] Look at them.

Finn. [*Going to him with outstretched hands.*]

Never mind his thumbs. Anyone could see he is a singer. [*To Hugh.*] Did you come from the mainland?

Hugh. Perhaps I came from the mainland and perhaps I came from under the sea.

Finn. [*Fascinated.*] Sing us the song of under the sea.

Hugh. Under the sea is a green, green world, as green as the greenest. And all the sailors that have died of drowning live there and smoke and tell yarns and sing songs. They are in a safe harbor. And to every man the harbor looks like the harbor he loved best when he was ashore. And to one it is the harbor of Plymouth and to one it is New York and to one it is Rio. But if any man hears there's a storm brewing over the good land he loved before he was drowned, he gets uneasy and he climbs up by the seaweed ropes he tried to clutch at when he went down, and the seaweed holds him, and he comes up and he sights the land, and if all's well he goes down again, contented. But there's one that's never stayed down——

Finn. [*Crying out in great excitement.*] Kitchener!

The Men. Kitchener! Kitchener!

Hugh. He's uneasy, do you see, because the devil's gnawing at Old England and he's come up. To walk the earth—to call the boys to fight—to fight beside them——

A Man. He's come back. Why, boys, don't you see?

A Man. He's here.

A Man. Lord Kitchener.

All. [*In great excitement.*] Kitchener! Kitchener!

[*They are pressing toward him, but Fiula steps in front of him and extends her arms.*]

Fiula. Keep off.

A Man. She's right. He's not as we are. He's been drowned and come to, as you might say.

A Man. 'Twould be dangerous to touch a spirit or to get too nigh.

A Man. [*Bending forward and speaking wistfully and curiously.*] Sir, be you a spirit?

A Man. 'Tis no earthly face he wears. See! it grows pale.

A Man. But 'tis a kind of bright paleness, as you might say.

Hugh. [*He has been upholding himself with difficulty and now he draws himself up for a great effort and speaks nobly.*] I sing you a song, the song of the hero. The hero vanishes. The earth smothers him or the sea drowns him. But he returns. When there is need of him, he comes. Do you think an Englishman could go down and lie there in the salt brine and forget England? Do you think an American could forget his country or a Frenchman forget France? No, my boys, Kitchener's not dead. He's alive.

Men. He's here. Hurrah! hurrah!

Hugh. [*Swaying a little, but chanting bravely. And now Fiula is beside him to give him her shoulder when he needs it.*] There shall be a song sung forever, so long as the Great War is sung. It is the song of the hero's return. And it shall be told how Lord

Kitchener came back to save England and the world. And the only way to save them is to call on men to fight.

Men. [*Beside themselves.*] Shall we fight, sir? Shall we fight?

[*A bell without.*]

Fiula. Sunset.

Mark. [*Runs in.*] The officers are on board, but they'll give us five minutes more.

A Man. Still, there's Big Hugh.

Mark. Big Hugh? Let Big Hugh go. It's our business to hunt the Hun. Come down and give your names.

Hugh. [*Pointing to Mark.*] Your leader. [*Pointing to Finn.*] Your singer. To teach you blows and great hurrahs.

Mark. [*To Fiula.*] Who is this?

Fiula. [*Proudly.*] A singer.

Finn. [*Dropping on his knee before Hugh.*] Master! I swear to you, master, I will sing clear and strike true.

[*The bell again.*]

A Man. Come, come. Sign on. Sign on.

A Man. Who'll be the first?

[*They make for the door.*]

Finn. [*Springing to his feet.*] No crowding. Mark!

[*Mark takes his place at their head. Finn puts his pipe to his lips and they march out, at a quick trot, Mark at their head and Finn bringing up the rear. There is a flooding sunset light.*

Fiula rushes to the door and closes it. She hurries back to Hugh.]

Fiula. Now I can take care of you and love you and save you.

Hugh. [*Wavering.*] No, sweetheart. I must go as I came. If they find it's only Big Hugh of the six thumbs the heart will die out of them. They'd desert. Or go like cattle, driven.

Fiula. But you—it's you that must be saved. Not all the world—but you. [*She puts her arms about him and he leans on her.*]

Hugh. The cliff out there. That's where I must go.

Fiula. [*In anguished apprehension for him.*] The cliff?

Hugh. The tide races in there twenty feet deep. I saw it this afternoon when I thought there might be caves to hide in. I can walk to the cliff. And over it.

Fiula. I shall go with you. Every step.

Hugh. No, sweetheart. Don't waste a fighting life. Your men will come back. You'll keep their hearts up. You'll tell them I vanished as I came.

Fiula. And then? When the war is over and you are not here, what shall I do then?

Hugh. [*Hesitatingly.*] You'll marry Finn?

Fiula. [*Passionately.*] Never, never.

Hugh. No. I see you an old woman. Alone. Then you'll come to me and we sha'n't be old.

[*A peal of bells.*]

What's that?

Fiula. They've enlisted and gone mad with pleasure because they're men again.

Hugh. [*Smiling.*] And because the hero can return. Is that a step? [*He listens.*]

Fiula. [*Listening.*] Mark's. [*Throwing her arms about him.*] I can't let you go alone.

Hugh. Every woman has to let her man go alone—at the last.

[*They kiss and he puts off the robe and crown and goes out, smiling back at her. Mark enters by the door, L.*]

Mark. Where is he? The boys are wild to get back to him.

Fiula. Have they given in their names?

Mark. Every one.

[*Fiula breaks into hysterical crying and laughter.*]

Mark. They swear it's Kitchener come back. [*Goes to her and takes her by the arm.*] Don't do that. You're as wild as they are. Who was he? Who was he, I say?

Fiula. [*Controlling herself.*] The greatest man you and I shall ever know.

Mark. Where is he?

Fiula. In a green world. And all the drowned in the sea are rising up to meet him, bringing garlands and singing songs.

CURTAIN

DOCTOR AUNTIE

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

[*In the order of their appearance*]

Branscombe, Hammond's Secretary

Mrs. Thomas Hammond

Thomas Hammond, an author

Doctor Auntie

DOCTOR AUNTIE

Time: the present.
Place: a pleasantly furnished sitting-room.

Branscombe is seated at a desk, opening letters, etc. He is young, handsome, and looks the typical decadent minor poet. Mrs. Hammond is seated by a little table sewing, rather clumsily, as if she did not do it by nature, but also with a pretty absorption. She is young and beautiful.

Branscombe. [*Turning to her.*] Letters opened, bills filed, circulars chucked. [*Rather scornfully.*] It's a great and noble work to be a private secretary.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Defensively.*] It's great to be the wife of an author big enough to need a secretary.

Branscombe. You say that to keep your courage up.

Mrs. Hammond. I say it because I think it.

Branscombe. You don't really think it. Any more than you really like to sit there hemming handkerchiefs.

Mrs. Hammond. They're table napkins.

Branscombe. Table napkins, then. Hemming table napkins to persuade yourself you like sober middle-aged pursuits because you've married a sober middle-aged man.

Mrs. Hammond. My husband is not middle aged.

Branscombe. He's forty-five. You're twenty-six.

Mrs. Hammond. I mean, he's not doddering and pottering and afraid of draughts.

Branscombe. [*Brutally.*] He's incurably lame.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Indignantly.*] Why do you remind me of that? How can you have the heart? When it was an accident, and he was lucky to escape with his life. Two motors in a crash in the dark!

Branscombe. He didn't escape with his powers of locomotion. [*Impulsively.*] Oh, forgive me. I'm so infernally unhappy.

Mrs. Hammond. Why should you make me unhappy, too? Why do you say things about my husband, things I ought not to hear? They are disloyal. They make me disloyal. I hate myself.

Branscombe. [*Fiercely.*] Do you want to know why I say them? [*Meaningly.*] Because I can't help it.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Pleadingly.*] You are in his confidence. You do his work. You take his money.

Branscombe. [*Recklessly.*] And adore his wife.

Mrs. Hammond. No! no! no!

Branscombe. I've said it at last. Now do you want to know why I can't bear the sound of his name? Because I'm jealous.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Throwing down her work.*] Oh, how base we are! And he there in the next room, trusting us——

Branscombe. [*Cynically.*] He isn't thinking anything about us. He's planning marginal notes for his essay on the Greek dramatists, and wondering if he can't get in a little more about Euripides. If he did think about us——

Mrs. Hammond. Well, if he did?

Branscombe. If he looked at his wife often enough to know she was unhappy because another man adored her——

Mrs. Hammond. [*Passionately.*] Oh, he *would* care!

Branscombe. Would he? If he had any blood in him, how would he show he cared? He'd give me my walking ticket.

Mrs. Hammond. You have never believed he cared for me. Never, from the first.

Branscombe. What do you mean by "the first"?

Mrs. Hammond. [*Miserably.*] From the time you first——

Branscombe. Told you I loved you? Do you remember?

Mrs. Hammond. [*Pleadingly.*] You didn't say it. Not really. Not in those words.

Branscombe. No, but I said something, and you listened. It was the night I called you Sylvia.

Mrs. Hammond. You're not to call me by my name. I can't let you.

Branscombe. [*Dwelling on it meltingly.*] Sylvia! Why! [*rapidly*] was ever anything more typical of the difference between husbands and lovers! I call you Sylvia. He calls you [*with extreme scorn*] Billy!

Mrs. Hammond. [*Defensively.*] I love Billy. It's his chum name for me.

Branscombe. [*Reminiscently.*] I called you Sylvia. You didn't forbid me.

Mrs. Hammond. The night was so beautiful.

Branscombe. You were at your window, like Juliet,

I in the moonlight outside. The hem of your scarf came over the sill, and I kissed it.

Mrs. Hammond. The next day my husband had his accident.

Branscombe. You wouldn't speak to me or look at me till he got well.

Mrs. Hammond. I thought he was going to die.

Branscombe. Should you have cared?

Mrs. Hammond. [*With passionate decision.*] It would have killed me.

Branscombe. [*Musingly, watching her.*] You'd have idealized him then, I suppose. You'd have thought you lost a lover instead of a husband sated with possession. [*With sudden warmth.*] But if he had died, do you know what would have happened?

Mrs. Hammond. I tell you, I should have died with him.

Branscombe. You'd have been mine, mine, mine. And I should have taught you what love is.

Mrs. Hammond. When you talk like that it seems as if—we had murdered him.

Branscombe. [*Contemptuously.*] Oh, he's alive. Let him live. But the day will come when you and I——

Mrs. Hammond. No! no! no!

Branscombe. [*Rapidly.*] When you will be great enough and strong enough to let your heart speak, and to obey it. Then you will walk out of his house with me, and [*emphatically*] you will never return.

Mrs. Hammond. He's coming.

[*Enter Hammond, walking, with difficulty, on*

crutches. He is a virile middle-aged man with a whimsical look. Branscombe awaits him with an instant deference. Mrs. Hammond wistfully follows him about, getting him a chair and cushions.]

Hammond. Morning, Branscombe. Well, Billy, what's in the mail? Anything startling or incendiary?

[*Branscombe brings him a packet of opened letters and Hammond looks them over rapidly, talking meantime.*]

Mrs. Hammond. A letter from Aunt Kate.

Hammond. Say anything about coming?

Mrs. Hammond. No. It's about your accident. She's awfully upset because we didn't tell her at the time.

Hammond. [*Absently.*] Oh, she'd have left her foreign clinics and put for home. Can't allow ourselves to build molehills in the path of lady doctors. Branscombe, don't you think it's rather a swagger thing to be a lady doctor?

Branscombe. [*With meaning.*] I think it's a more glorious thing to be a strong man's one and only love.

Hammond. [*Raising his eyebrows whimsically.*] Now what a way you have of putting it. I never should have thought of saying just that in just that style.

Branscombe. [*Vaguely nettled.*] You may laugh at it, if you like.

Hammond. Laugh? I'd no more laugh at it than I'd laugh at—— [*Absently, still reading his letters.*] Oh, nothing, nothing at all. [*Shuffling his letters together*

and coming cheerfully awake.] But I think it's a splendid thing to be a lady doctor. It's a thing to fall back on when middle age sets in and you're not likely to start out being anybody's one and only love. Aunt Kate took it up when she was slightly advanced, but she's hung to it like a good un.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Hastily.*] Aunt Kate is only fifty.

Hammond. Five years older than I am. Oh, yes, that's old. [*Rises and walks with difficulty to the desk.*] It's old—old—old.

Branscombe. [*Following him deferentially.*] The rest of the mail is all in order, Mr. Hammond. Letters, personal and business. Proof.

Hammond. Proof! [*Looking over it.*] Let me see. About those marginal notes. I wonder if I couldn't give a little more space to this strophe from Euripides.

Branscombe. [*Meaningly, to Mrs. Hammond.*] Euripides!

Hammond. [*Absently.*] What?

Branscombe. I told Mrs. Hammond your mind was on Euripides.

Hammond. [*Making his way toward door.*] I jotted down something in the night.

Mrs. Hammond. Let me get it for you.

Hammond. No, no, Billy, no. I remember where it is. Besides, it's exercise. Limbers up the joints.

[*Exit.*]

Branscombe. He was awake last night, planning marginal notes. I was writing a song, to you. Listen.

[*Seats himself at the piano. Plays* Dvorak's Humoresque, Op. 101, No. 7. *Looks up at her as he plays.*] You know the music.

Mrs. Hammond. Dvorak's Humoresque?

Branscombe. Yes. But you don't know the words —yet. Nobody does but me. [*Sings.*]

Fairest rose that ever bloomed in all the gallant garden closes,
Lock thy heart to e'en the eye of day.
Wantoning, the bee may snatch the spoils of all thy sister roses.
Only thou shalt say him nay.

O cloistered sweetness!
O rare completeness!
I am thy pilgrim poor and old.
Yet I adore thee.
Yet I implore thee,
Open thou to me alone thy heart of gold.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Much moved.*] Did you write that?

Branscombe. Yes. For you. It is the child of our love.

Mrs. Hammond. Our love! You mustn't say that. You mustn't think it.

Branscombe. My love, then. Poor unmothered little waif!

[*Enter Hammond looking rather excited.*]

Hammond. What were you singing?

[*Branscombe hesitates, and Hammond continues.*]

Wasn't that Dvorak's Humoresque?

Branscombe. [*With an air of remembering. Ingenuously.*] Yes, oh, yes. I was trying to recall some words to it.

Hammond. What were the words?

Branscombe. [*While Mrs. Hammond glances at him quickly, as if startled, and curious to know what he will say.*] Nothing I could tell exactly. I rather improvised as I went along.

Mrs. Hammond. [*With an involuntary little sound of remonstrance.*] Oh!

Hammond. [*Still puzzled.*] The day before my accident, I wrote some words to that. I jotted 'em down. [*Goes to the desk and begins to look through a drawer.*] Where the devil are they?

Mrs. Hammond. [*Approaching him in quick interest.*] I didn't know you wrote songs.

Hammond. [*Absently, still searching.*] I don't, except when I'm down on my luck.

Mrs. Hammond. Are you down on your luck, Tom?

Hammond. [*Recalling himself, shutting the drawer with emphasis.*] Oh, yes, rather. The accident, you know. My lameness. That's enough to knock a man out.

[*She lays a hand impulsively on his arm. He smiles at her reassuringly, takes the hand and kisses it.*]

Kind little Billy! [*Drops the hand and resumes his*

business-like manner. Takes up some manuscript and indicates certain pages, to Branscombe.] Copy that out, will you? Pages four and six, the lines I've marked.

Branscombe. [*Hesitating.*] Do you need it at once, Mr. Hammond? Those morning glories down on the old wall. Mrs. Hammond wanted to see them.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Impulsively.*] I don't want to in the least.

Hammond. Surely, surely. Go by all means.

Branscombe. [*To Hammond.*] You said I was to take her. The runabout's at the door.

Mrs. Hammond. I truly don't want to.

Branscombe. They won't be open after ten.

Mrs. Hammond. [*To Hammond.*] I'd rather stay with you. I'll copy the two pages.

Hammond. [*Looks at her searchingly for a second. Then, cordially.*] Nonsense, Billy, run along. Besides, you can call at the post-office, on the way back, and see if there's more proof.

Branscombe. [*Meaningly.*] Mr. Hammond wants his proof. He wants it more than he wants—us.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Piqued.*] Very well.

[*Exeunt Branscombe and Mrs. Hammond. Hammond throws down his crutches, walks firmly and rapidly to window. Turns away with a groan. Honking of runabout as it starts.*]

Hammond. Same old story—Paolo and Francesca, and all the rest of them. Youth rides away and the graybeard husband watches 'em. But I needn't do that. By George, I won't. I won't watch. And I

won't soliloquize like a chap in a play. [*Seats himself. Grips the chair arms and seems to hold himself doggedly down. Listens. Seizes his crutches and stands, with their aid.*]

[*Enter Doctor Auntie, a woman of character and headlong spirits who would make an adorable chum. (Like Fannie Brough!) She rushes to him and awkwardly embraces him.*]

Dr. Auntie. Who was that in the runabout spinning down the drive?

Hammond. [*Leaning crutches against his chair and shaking her by the shoulders.*] Auntie! Oh, you old enchantress!

Dr. Auntie. Go along with you. Wasn't that Sylvia in the runabout?

Hammond. [*Soberly.*] Yes.

Dr. Auntie. Who's the man?

Hammond. Branscombe, my secretary.

Dr. Auntie. Secretary? Name Branscombe?

Hammond. Yes.

Dr. Auntie. Sure it's Branscombe?

Hammond. Why, yes. What should it be?

Dr. Auntie. Oh, nothing! Only I kind of thought it might be Lochinvar.

Hammond. See here. You've come home from your post mortems and all the rest of your ghastly orgies. But you needn't diagnose Billy, nor me, nor, incidentally, Branscombe. Do you hear?

Dr. Auntie. [*Nodding.*] Now, Tom, what is it about your legs?

Hammond. [*Resuming the crutches, as if she had reminded him.*] Why, I had an accident.

Dr. Auntie. Yes, yes, I know all about the accident. I wrote your surgeon. From what he says, I think——

Hammond. What do you think, you old Minerva's owl?

Dr. Auntie. [*Firmly.*] I think you've got hysterical joint.

Hammond. What's that?

Dr. Auntie. You could walk if you wanted to. You've cockered yourself till you don't dare.

Hammond. Auntie, see here.

Dr. Auntie. I'm seeing.

Hammond. If I let you in, will you swear you never'll tell?

Dr. Auntie. [*Solemnly.*] Cross my throat, cross my heart. [*Crossing them.*]

Hammond. Look here. [*Throws down the crutches and dances a few spirited steps.*]

Dr. Auntie. [*Seizing on the crutches.*] That's my Tommy boy. We'll throw these into the fire.

Hammond. [*Rescuing them and leaning them carefully against his chair.*] No! no! They're my weapons of war. Auntie, I'm going to tell you something.

Dr. Auntie. I guess you'd better.

Hammond. You'd smell it out anyway.

Dr. Auntie. I've got rather a keen proboscis.

Hammond. I'm up against it.

Dr. Auntie. Money?

Hammond. No.

Dr. Auntie. Sylvia?

Hammond. Yes.

Dr. Auntie. Too much private secretary?

Hammond. How did you know?

Dr. Auntie. Took his temperature when we passed.

Hammond. Did she know you?

Dr. Auntie. I think so. Think she told him to stop and he put on steam and whizzed by. If he's making trouble for you and Billy, he's a nasty fellow.

Hammond. You mustn't take it too seriously.

Dr. Auntie. I'm not serious at all. Ha! ha!

Hammond. Nor you mustn't laugh.

Dr. Auntie. I'm laughing to keep from crying. Want me to swear? Damn!

Hammond. [*Gravely.*] Thank you. Well, now, I'm a kind of a queer Dick.

Dr. Auntie. [*Nodding.*] Yes, you are, Tom.

Hammond. Nobody really knows me but you. Nobody ever did.

Dr. Auntie. Not Sylvia?

Hammond. [*Tenderly.*] Dear Billy! no.

Dr. Auntie. What makes you keep her out?

Hammond. Bless you, she isn't out. She's too far in.

Dr. Auntie. So I'm the one that's out.

Hammond. [*Good-humoredly.*] Oh, you don't count. We're chips of the same block. But Billy—— Why, I can't explain things to Billy. I can't *say* them to her. She's too much myself.

Dr. Auntie. Does she like this fellow?

Hammond. I'm afraid she does.

Dr. Auntie. What have you done about it?

Hammond. Built a fence round her—with my crutches.

Dr. Auntie. I don't get you. [*Going down on all fours and sniffing, dog-like, round the room.*] I've lost the scent.

Hammond. [*Laughingly pulling her up.*] This came on me as I was getting well—Billy's liking him, you know. I suppose they'd been alone more.

Dr. Auntie. [*Tenderly.*] Had the devil of a time, didn't you, old boy.

Hammond. Pretty bad. I'm fond of Billy.

Dr. Auntie. Guess you are. When you found it out, what then?

Hammond. Nothing. I couldn't let on.

Dr. Auntie. To her, you mean?

Hammond. To her. I couldn't let my Billy think I suspected her of side-tracking like that. She didn't suspect it herself.

Dr. Auntie. Sure she didn't?

Hammond. Of course I'm sure she didn't. Don't you go to casting aspersions on my Billy. We shall have to quarrel, if you do, if you *are* my triple-plated, double back-action pal of a medical aunt.

Dr. Auntie. Why didn't you discharge him?

Hammond. I didn't want to. If she *did* like him, I wanted her to have him, didn't I?

Dr. Auntie. For heaven's sake!

Hammond. Of course. I want Billy to be happy. That's the main thing. But I didn't dare do anything

in a hurry. So I kept on being lame, for I says to myself, "Billy never'll leave a lame man in the lurch. Never in the world."

Dr. Auntie. How long do you propose being lame?

Hammond. Till I'm sure.

Dr. Auntie. Sure she loves him?

Hammond. Don't use that word.

Dr. Auntie. Poor boy! Well, how long?

Hammond. Really, I suppose, till I've studied him a little more. If he's a good chap, if he's square——

Dr. Auntie. Then——

Hammond. Then something's going to be done.

Dr. Auntie. [*Anxiously.*] Don't you kill yourself, Tom.

Hammond. [*Laughing a little.*] Do you know, it's rather ridiculous, but I actually thought of that.

Dr. Auntie. Killing yourself?

Hammond. [*Unlocking drawer of a little cabinet and taking out revolver.*] See here.

Dr. Auntie. O you simpleton! You yellow journal extra! You're no nevvy of mine.

Hammond. [*Reflectively.*] It *is* cowardly, isn't it?

Dr. Auntie. Shameful. Disgrace, reporters, police —and Billy alone to face it.

Hammond. I thought of that. Billy wouldn't like it.

Dr. Auntie. Guess she wouldn't. Give me the gun.

Hammond. Oh, no. I'm not such a baby boy as that.

Dr. Auntie. Give me the gun, I say.

Hammond. [*Making as if to throw.*] Catch, then.

Dr. Auntie. [*Dodging.*] Mercy!

Hammond. It isn't loaded. When I got thinking of the thing at night, I drew the cartridges.

[*She fixes her hands, he tosses it, she catches and drops it in her bag.*]

Dr. Auntie. There! we've discarded suicide. Now, what's the game?

Hammond. [*Nonchalantly.*] Desertion.

Dr. Auntie. You desert Sylvia?

Hammond. Yes. She can get a divorce.

Dr. Auntie. [*Thoughtfully.*] She has her own money.

Hammond. Heaps of it. I could desert her all right.

Dr. Auntie. Does he know she has her own money?

Hammond. [*Carelessly.*] Oh, I daresay, He did all the business while I was knocked out.

Dr. Auntie. Hm! what kind of a fellow is he?

Hammond. I don't know. Honest, I don't.

Dr. Auntie. You don't like him.

Hammond. No. But then if he were Abraham Isaac and Jacob Saul and David and the apostles, I shouldn't like him now.

Dr. Auntie. I see. Jealous, aren't you, boy?

Hammond. Jealous as the devil.

Dr. Auntie. Sylvia doesn't know that?

Hammond. Why, no. Don't I tell you she's going to be allowed free swing? If she thought I wasn't indifferent to her going, do you suppose she'd go at

all? What I've got to do is to make up my mind whether he's a man of honor and she's likely to be safe.

Dr. Auntie. You talk as if you were buying her a saddle horse.

Hammond. That's a good idea. Branscombe's got to be kind, he's got to have a good mouth and an easy gait. Then I'll see her in her saddle and she can "ride, ride, forever"——

[*Chokes and stops, laughing at himself.*]

Dr. Auntie. You want to be riding with her yourself. [*Quoting rhetorically.*] "Ride, ride together, forever ride."

Hammond. [*Angrily.*] Of course I do. What did I marry her for if it wasn't to be together forever and a long day after?

Dr. Auntie. You're a romantic dog.

Hammond. Course I am. Why, see here. What have I done in the pesky middle of the night when I ought to be asleep but write sonnets, sonnets to Billy.

Dr. Auntie. Publish your sonnets. Dedicate 'em to her.

Hammond. No, I can't. There's a part of me that's got to be a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

Dr. Auntie. Shut up and sealed—even from Billy!

Hammond. Why, Billy—bless you!—I thought Billy was drinking out of the spring all the time. I thought she was bathing in the fountain. If she doesn't know she was—if she doesn't know the spring was there——

Dr. Auntie. You won't tell her? Oh, come, that's pride.

Hammond. Maybe. Anyway, that's how it is.

Dr. Auntie. But what's the fellow like?

Hammond. He's a handsome devil.

Dr. Auntie. I saw that. What else?

Hammond. I tell you I don't know. He's the type I hate—the boy poet, dressed for the part. Doesn't smoke a pipe. Doesn't drink, except Turkish coffee. Doesn't swear—except by the heathen gods. Talks poetical wash, that kind of thing—the kind you couldn't call a cab in or order beef and onions.

Dr. Auntie. [*Reflectively.*] No, you don't like him.

Hammond. But the fellow's young.

Dr. Auntie. Never mind that. He won't be always.

Hammond. True. But when he isn't I shall be—[*pointing downward.*] However, he's got certain things on his side. He's clever.

Dr. Auntie. With his tongue?

Hammond. Not altogether. He writes things. Wrote two bully stories while I was sick, and got 'em taken. Something I'd thought of myself. I'd made notes of 'em and never got any further.

Dr. Auntie. Seen the notes, hadn't he?

Hammond. Oh, I guess so. Might have. [*Reading her expression.*] What? Oh, come, you mustn't go so far as that. He wouldn't be that kind of a scoundrel. No, oh, no!

Dr. Auntie. [*Satirically.*] Rather interesting, these literary coincidences. Newspapers make a good deal of 'em. Seem to consider 'em rather important, on the whole.

Hammond. [*Warmly.*] You're off, there. It's

simply that Branscombe and I, lately, have got a way of thinking the same things. I suppose it's because we're both so infernally keyed up. Our minds aren't normal. He actually reads my thoughts. Why, I wrote a song——

Dr. Auntie. Love song? Song to Sylvia?

Hammond. [*Laughing shamefacedly.*] I *am* a blithering idiot, ain't I! Yes, it was a love song. Song to Billy. I set it to Dvorak's Humoresque. And what did I hear this morning but Branscombe singing something to that very music.

Dr. Auntie. Same words?

Hammond. Oh, no. Improvising. He's a clever dog.

Dr. Auntie. Poor Sylvia!

Hammond. Why "poor"?

Dr. Auntie. Poor little struggling creature in the trap! You're downright cruel to stand by and see her struggle.

Hammond. Stand by? Good God, Kate, what can I do but stand by? Trap? What's the trap? Who set it for her

Dr. Auntie. Nature. Her own heart crying out for the romance it doesn't get. Nature's set the trap, and Branscombe's baiting it.

Hammond. I don't think it. I'm willing to believe he's as innocent as she. If he wasn't, I'd kick him out.

Dr. Auntie. Give him the benefit of the doubt. Kick him anyway.

Hammond. Can't do that. She likes him. I've got to see her through.

Dr. Auntie. You never used to be poor-spirited. You haven't quite got back since your accident.

Hammond. Maybe. You'd laugh if you knew all the things I thought of while I was really lame.

Dr. Auntie. Tell me.

Hammond. I wished there were tests, as there used to be, to show her which was the better man.

Dr. Auntie. Armor, lance in rest, onset, and a lady's glove. Boo! [*Tilts at an imaginary opponent.*]

Hammond. Something of that sort. Then I used to sit here by the window and wish there was a fire in one of those houses over there, and she could see me break my crutches over my knee and climb up a gutter pipe and rescue somebody.

Dr. Auntie. Where was Branscombe going to be?

Hammond. Hiding under the sofa.

Dr. Auntie. I thought so. Would he hide under the sofa? Is he game?

Hammond. I don't know. To tell you the truth, Kate, I think not.

Dr. Auntie. That would settle it, wouldn't it?

Hammond. Yes. I couldn't trust my Billy to a coward.

Dr. Auntie. Why don't you test him?

Hammond. There aren't any tests nowadays. All the modern tests are so confounded slow. You have to give a man a year or two to break a bank or corner wheat.

Dr. Auntie. Who recommended him?

Hammond. I know his people slightly. Comes from Montreal.

Dr. Auntie. Been living there?

Hammond. Been in Vienna for the past three years. Studying. Piano. Hurt his wrist.

Dr. Auntie. Hm! Vienna. If I'd known about this when I was there, I bet I'd have trailed him.

Hammond. You might not have found anything.

Dr. Auntie. Should, too. Observe his get-up. Look at the cut of his jib. I bet you ten to one if I plumped a question at him now—say, "Where's the little Wienerin——"

Hammond. What's a Wienerin?

Dr. Auntie. A lady from Vienna. Don't you know the tongues?

Hammond. Oh!

Dr. Auntie. "Where's the little Wienerin you jilted?" he'd drop his teacup.

Hammond. Teacup?

Dr. Auntie. Or his pencil or his hairbrush or whatever he happened to be holding, and say, "Good God! how did you know that?"

[*Honk of motor.*]

Hammond. They're coming.

Dr. Auntie. [*Rapidly.*] Tom, I've had a raft of women patients.

Hammond. Good for you!

Dr. Auntie. I've been confided in a lot. And the sum of unhappiness—among married women—is increased fifty per cent by the assumption of your sex that because you've got a woman you've got her.

Hammond. Well, when you've got her, who *has* got her?

Dr. Auntie. Nature's got her. Nature that tells

her she was made to be wooed. And while she sits here hemming napkins, [*taking up napkin and shaking her head at it*] her soul is flying out of the window in search of something.

Hammond. Search of what?

Dr. Auntie. Romance.

Hammond. [*Taking napkin from her and looking at it.*] Billy was sewing this. [*Puts it to his lips shamefacedly and lays it down.*]

Dr. Auntie. When you fall in love with a woman, you begin by telling her a fairy story. When you've married her, you shut the book with a bang. She wants the second chapter and the third and so on till Doomsday.

Hammond. Oh, come, auntie, when we're in love, we're stark mad. It's a wonder folks don't put us into padded cells. After we're married, things get to be understood. If they don't, if you have to keep hauling your heart out like a timepiece, why, it's unwholesome.

Dr. Auntie. Keep the fairy book on the shelf and read a page or two now and then. Don't write sonnets and chuck 'em into a drawer. Read them to *her.*

Hammond. [*With nervous finality.*] I can't do that, Doctor. I can't.

Dr. Auntie. Can, too. Get 'em out, I tell you. Read 'em. Read 'em.

Hammond. I can't, I tell you. I can't. I can't.

[*Enter Mrs. Hammond and Branscombe.*]

Mrs. Hammond. [*Running to Doctor Auntie and warmly embracing her.*] O auntie, we're just enchanted!

Hammond. [*Quietly.*] Present Mr. Branscombe.

Mrs. Hammond. Pardon me! Doctor Cunningham, Mr. Branscombe.

Dr. Auntie. [*Stiffly, to Branscombe, eyeing him with a gimlet look.*] Pleased to meet you, Mr. Branscombe.

Mrs. Hammond. No, I can't believe you're here. [*To Hammond.*] Was she telling you to walk without your crutches?

Dr. Auntie. No, my dear. Those crutches are most important.

Mrs. Hammond. [*To Hammond.*] But you said, "I can't, I can't, I can't!"

Dr. Auntie. I wanted to hypnotise him.

Mrs. Hammond. To make him walk?

Dr. Auntie. Precisely. If he'd be hypnotised—well!

Mrs. Hammond. [*To Doctor Auntie.*] Oh, I knew when you got here there'd be something done. Don't wait a minute. [*To Hammond, earnestly.*] You will, won't you? You'll be hypnotised?

Dr. Auntie. [*Conclusively.*] He won't. He simply won't.

Hammond. [*Smiling at Doctor Auntie.*] What's your game, you sorceress?

Dr. Auntie. Hypnosis. That's my game. [*Confidentially to Branscombe.*] *I* think the man's afraid.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Indignantly.*] Tom's afraid of nothing.

Dr. Auntie. [*Still to Branscombe.*] He ought to see somebody else hypnotised. Then he'd yield to it. Like a lamb.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Eagerly.*] Do it to me, auntie. Tom's been sick. He hasn't got his nerve quite back. Do me first.

Hammond. [*To Doctor Auntie.*] You sha'n't.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Seating herself in a chair in front of Doctor Auntie, and looking charmingly wilful.*] She shall, too. Come on, auntie.

Hammond. [*Impetuously.*] Don't you do it, Billy. You'll tell things you didn't know you thought. [*To Doctor Auntie.*] I can't see what you're up to, you fiend of science, but you don't hypnotise Billy.

Dr. Auntie. [*Indulgently, to Branscombe.*] You see. He's afraid. Afraid for himself. Afraid for his wife. Now you, Mr. Branscombe, you're the sort of man that's never known the taste of fear.

Branscombe. [*Swaggering a little.*] I don't recall ever being in a funk.

Dr. Auntie. [*Admiringly.*] I can tell just what you are to look at you. Hardy, fearless type, daring almost to a fault——

*Branscom*be. [*Still swaggering, but feeling obliged to disclaim a little.*] Oh, I say! that's going a bit too far.

Dr. Auntie. Hypnotism would have no effect whatever on a man like you.

Branscombe. You're more or less right.

Dr. Auntie. [*With an increased and admiring interest.*] Let me prove my point. Get up, Sylvia. Let him sit down.

[*Branscombe takes the chair which Mrs. Hammond vacates.*]

Do me the favor, Mr. Branscombe. Sit there five minutes and let me prove I can diagnose temperament to a T. Hypnotise you! Well, I should say not. I should have no more effect on a man of your heroic mould [*Branscombe sits straighter and unconsciously poses*] than on the Lion of Lucerne. [*Laughs, as if indulgent of her whim.*] However, we'll do the regular things. You'll have to fix your eyes on something bright. This will do. [*Whips the pistol out of her bag and points it at him with a sudden dramatic flourish.*]

Branscombe. [*Starting back in alarm.*] Oh, I say!

Mrs. Hammond. [*Starting forward.*] Auntie!

Hammond. [*Laughing, but warningly.*] Come, old lady, you're going too far.

Dr. Auntie. [*To Branscombe.*] Look it in the mouth. If you move an inch it'll be into an ambulance. Understand?

Branscombe. [*In anguished apprehension.*] For God's sake, take that thing away.

Dr. Auntie. Answer my questions.

Mrs. Hammond. Auntie! auntie dear!

Dr. Auntie. [*Inexorably.*] Look it in the mouth.

Branscombe. Hammond, take it away from her, there's a good chap. A joke's a joke.

Hammond. Come, Doctor, let up. What's the odds if he is afraid. Any man's afraid of a gun, head on.

Branscombe. Sylvia!

Hammond. [*Struck by his using her name. In impulsive repetition.*] Sylvia?

Dr. Auntie. [*To Branscombe.*] Look it in the

mouth. You know the alternative. Eternity. Or else —Ambulance. Ether. Skull wired up. Skin sewed neatly, but scarred forever——

Mrs. Hammond. Auntie, you're crazy.

Dr. Auntie. [*To Branscombe.*] I've been living in Vienna.

Branscombe. Vienna!

Dr. Auntie. I am an avenger. I am on the trail. [*Solemnly.*] How about the little Wienerin?

Mrs. Hammond. What's a Wienerin?

Hammond. [*Easily.*] Lady from Vienna. Don't you know the tongues? Come off, Doctor. You're outside the ring.

Dr. Auntie. [*Not heeding him.*] How about the little Wienerin?

Branscombe. If it's her brother you got it from, he's a silly ass of a German fire-eater. They'd rather fight than eat.

Dr. Auntie. You'd better have fought that duel. As for the girl—[*shaking her head solemnly*] well, well, well!

Branscombe. All that rot about a broken heart—rot, I tell you, rot! She died of pneumonia. Hammond, I appeal to you. No man's going to sit with a revolver pointed at his head without getting groggy.

Dr. Auntie. [*Approaching a step and levelling it with a more rigid determination.*] Did you use the plots of my nephew's stories while he was laid up or after?

Branscombe. [*Cowering before the pistol. Sulkily.*] While he was laid up.

Dr. Auntie. When did you swipe the words of his song?

Branscombe. [*Desperately.*] Oh, damn it, I don't know. [*She approaches a step.*] This morning.

Dr. Auntie. [*To Hammond.*] Do you want to know anything more about him?

Hammond. [*In high excitement.*] No, by George!

Mrs. Hammond. Oh, what is it all about?

Dr. Auntie. [*Putting the pistol in her bag.*] Stand back, Sylvia. It's going to be a duel.

Hammond. [*To Branscombe.*] You've taken my work and sold it. You've taken my song and passed it off for yours.

Branscombe. [*Recovering his nerve.*] We may have chanced on the same ideas. It's a coincidence. More than a coincidence. There's something occult about it.

Hammond. [*Vigorously.*] Occult be—blest!

Branscombe. I can explain it. I was working on the song while you were ill, and probably my mind impressed itself on yours. Maybe I repeated the lines aloud.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Impulsively.*] While he was ill? You told me you wrote the song for me last night.

Hammond. [*Waking to indignation.*] You impudent cub! You take my work and pass it off on my wife——

Branscombe. I swear the song was mine.

Hammond. Then you're a liar. [*Throwing his crutches to the floor.*] Let the stuff go hang. Oh, I'm a lucky chap! Ha! ha! ha!

Mrs. Hammond. Tom! your crutches.

Dr. Auntie. [*Restraining her by a hand on her arm.*] He had 'em to build a fence, dear. He doesn't need the fence any more. There's a hedge grown up.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Bewildered.*] A hedge? Where?

Dr. Auntie. [*Tenderly.*] Don't you see it! Round you and Tom and your garden of Eden. [*Meaningly.*] The snake's outside.

Branscombe. [*Offering his hand to Hammond with a great assumption of frankness.*] You're right. We won't quarrel over a song.

Hammond. [*Walking rapidly up and down and talking deliriously.*] Take all the songs you want. Help yourself. Help yourself to my memoranda for stories. Write out the stories. Sell 'em. Buy cravats. Buy violet water. Is it violet they use now? I'm old-fashioned. Well, whatever they use—the beaux and poets. But you——

Mrs. Hammond. Tom, you mustn't walk like this.

Hammond. No, I'll walk faster. [*Doing it.*]

Dr. Auntie. [*To Mrs. Hammond.*] Stand back, I tell you. It's a duel. No place for womenfolks.

Hammond. [*To Branscombe, accumulating fury as he goes on.*] You ass, booby, cur, dandy, exquisite, fool, gaby, hoot-owl, idiot, jackass, knave, liar—[*stops for breath*] that's as far as I can go. Take the whole alphabet and make up names for yourself. Take the dictionary and find 'em. Last of all, take your leave.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Starting forward.*] Tom!

Dr. Auntie. [*Pulling her back.*] No! no! Tom, there's another round. Up and at it again.

Hammond. [*To Branscombe.*] Out of my house before I kick you out. I'll send your cheque within half an hour. Take it and leave the town, the country, and the world.

[*Exit Branscombe, in terror and amaze.*]

Oh, but I'm out of breath! [*Takes out his handkerchief and fans himself.*]

Mrs. Hammond. [*Running to him.*] Tom, what has he done?

Hammond. Auntie's opened the shutter and let me look into his precious insides. And they're a sight, I can tell you, a sight.

Mrs. Hammond. It wasn't true about his writing the song?

Hammond. No. It was a lie.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Shyly, to Hammond.*] Was the song written to me?

Dr. Auntie. [*Jubilantly.*] To you, Sylvia, a love song, a sonnet, a book of sonnets! Oh, these lover-poets and poet-lovers! Petrarch was nothing to him. Dante is out of sight.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Still shyly, to Hammond.*] Was the song written to me?

Hammond. [*Putting an arm about her.*] My dear, my only love, it was. But that's of no consequence. The only point is that Branscombe is a sneak. You're going to have something so much more bewildering than songs that you won't know yourself. You and I are going on a trip.

Mrs. Hammond. [*In bewilderment and pleasure.*] O Tom, truly?

Hammond. A wedding journey. We're going to

charter a whirl-wind and gallop to the aurora borealis, and come home by the North Star.

Mrs. Hammond. [*In remorse.*] Tom, I've got to tell you. I've been a dreadful wife.

Hammond. Awful, old lady. Dull, and tedious, and prosaic,—but now you're going to be romantic if I have to paint you in plaids and stripes.

Mrs. Hammond. [*As if in sudden discovery.*] Did you think *I* wasn't romantic?

Hammond. I knew you weren't.

Mrs. Hammond. Did you think I'd grown prosaic and it wasn't such fun as when we were first in love?

Hammond. [*Solemnly.*] I knew it. Listen to me, my Billy boy. Being in love is like reading a fairy tale. [*During this, he glances whimsically over Billy's head, which is on his shoulder, at Doctor Auntie.*] What do you say, Doctor?

Dr. Auntie. [*In high delight.*] Rascal! rascal! That's what I say.

Hammond. When you're married, you—you, you, Billy, I mean you—you shut the book with a bang.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Raising her head and speaking in illuminated surprise.*] Oh, but I didn't mean to, Tom.

Hammond. You did shut it, didn't she, auntie? Yes, you did. But—[*ruthlessly jamming her head down on his shoulder again and looking wickedly over it at Doctor Auntie*] we men are keen enough to know the tale isn't finished. So what you ought to do—you dull, unromantic womenfolk—is to take the book down, from time to time, and read a page.

Mrs. Hammond. [*Raising her head and looking at*

him in delight.] O Tom, I never knew! I never dreamed!

[*Hammond whirls her about in a waltz.*]

[*Stopping breathless.*] Auntie, tell him he mustn't try his legs like this.

Hammond. [*Singing and posturing and dancing to the air from* Patience.] I'll try my legs like this! I'll try my legs like that!

[*Offers Mrs. Hammond his arm with great gallantry, while Doctor Auntie puts her hands to her mouth, playing an imaginary horn, and toots like a cornet the beginning of the Lohengrin Wedding March. Hammond and Mrs. Hammond walk across stage as if to an altar and Doctor Auntie follows, tooting.*]

CURTAIN

THE CRIMSON LAKE

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

[*In the order of their appearance*]

Frank, proprietor of the Crimson Lake, an aggressively crude Bohemian restaurant

Gale, a newspaper man

Chappell, a middle-aged man of leisure

Bromley, a minor poet

De Montfort, an actor

Marvin, an old man from the country

Evans, a man about town

Kildare, a young Englishman

THE CRIMSON LAKE

Time: The present.

Scene: The dining-room of the Crimson Lake, a pathetically ultra resort of the ostentatiously Bohemian quarter of New York. It is cheaply but fantastically furnished. A long bare table, mahogany-stained, occupies the middle of the room. On each side of it, the entire length, is a bench of the same color. There are out-at-elbow chairs in different parts of the room, and a sofa draped in crimson. At the windows are flimsy crimson curtains. On the wall are portraits of the most extreme agitators of the day. Frank, an alert young fellow always breathlessly absorbed in his task, is laying the table with knives, forks and tin cups. He wears mussed outing shirt and trousers and a flaming red cravat flowing free.

Enter Gale and Chappell, keyed up by excitement. Gale is a keen-looking, well set up young newspaper man. Chappell is slightly older, ill adapted to affairs, the type of man who contrives to be a gentleman of a conventional type. On the remnant of inherited capital, he is rather Victorian, staunch to the traditions of a past he would have fitted admirably. He shows himself as more and more knocked out by the events of the hour.

Frank glances at them incidentally, nods and goes on with his work, whistling. Gale drops into a chair. Chappell, subsiding on the couch, puts his head in his hands.

Gale. [*Excitedly, to Frank.*] Stop that, Frank.

Frank. [*Innocently.*] Stop what?

Gale. Clattering those infernal mugs.

Chappell. [*Groans.*] It's enough to make a man swear. Stop it, can't you?

Frank. [*Serenely.*] Now, Mr. Chappell, you be reasonable. I gotta set my table, ain't I?

Gale. [*Savagely.*] You won't need all that lay-out, not this noon, any way.

Frank. You bet your life I will. Ain't the Independent Order of Ifsky-Ofsky-Shefsky-Owsky comin' here to lunch? You bet.

Gale. You can't have 'em, Frank, not to-day.

Frank. [*Earnestly, stopping his work.*] I gotta have 'em. I'm big business, I am. I'm the proprietor of the great original Crimson Lake restaurant, a hot-bed o' propaganda. You said that yourself, Mr. Gale, when you give me that write-up. Best story I ever read. [*Strikes attitude and recites, as if reading.*] "This eccentric restaurant is a hot-bed of propaganda. It is eclectic to a degree." [*Relaxing, to Gale.*] Say, boss, what's it mean? What's eclectic mean? All I know is, I'd serve Lenine on the half-shell, give me a chance. I'd keep soap-boxes to let and bombs by the gross. Whadda yer mean?

Gale. Shut up.

Frank. And you think you can come into this Sweet Home I've founded for the Won't-Works and turn off the power and order a sandwich apiece and sit and eat it all by your lonesome? Well, you can't. Why, there's much as thirteen gentlemen and ladies that want to be Jugoslavians and with the Jugoslavians stand, holding a convention within the next twenty minutes, in this room, mind you, this very room. Do I turn 'em away on your say so? Not on your life. I ain't in this for my health.

Chappell. [*Faintly.*] Brandy.

Frank. [*Stopping and staring at him with a cheerful laugh.*] Brandy! How about a poached penguin's egg or a jugged hare of the dog that bit you?

Gale. Cut it, Frank. We're not being funny. Don't you see he's all in. If you've got a nip of anything——

Frank. [*Cheerfully.*] Sure I have. Warranted to kill at forty paces. The hat rack out there's piped with it. But would I loose it on you gents? Not me. I know my friends. Nobody can get away with it except them as have known the rigors of a Russian winter.

Gale. Isn't there something ready for this crowd? Punch or something?

Frank. Sure. A good old olla podrilla made of everything in the house from red ink to kitchen bouquet. You wait a minute. I'll fix you up.

[*Exit.*]

Chappell. Gale, this is taking hold of me like the devil.

Gale. Buck up, old man.

[*Enter Bromley, greatly excited. He rushes to the window and stands looking out. He is a young man, hot-headed, impulsive, a minor poet alternately uplifted by his great mission and wallowing in gulfs of discouragement.*]

Bromley. [*Preoccupied, watching from the window.*] Frank said the room was taken. I didn't know 'twas you.

Gale. [*Without looking at him. Monotonously.*] The room is taken. [*Looking up.*] Oh, Bromley! What do you want?

Bromley. [*Savagely.*] Want? I want to look out of this window if you've no objection. Over at the hospital there. Chappell! Gale! This is the blackest day of my life.

Chappell. [*To Gale.*] Talk to him, can't you? Keep his mouth shut, at least.

Bromley. [*Beside himself.*] There's been an accident. Hélène was in it. She's hurt.

Gale. We saw it. Shut up.

[*Enter Frank with whiskey and siphon. Exit. Gale serves Chappell. They drink. Gale gets a cup from the table and is about to serve Bromley.*]

Gale. Say when.

Bromley. [*Turns from his excited watch at the window.*] What? No! no! If it were nepenthe——

Gale. Damn your nepenthe. And damn your subjunctive mood. And damn your blank verse.

Bromley. [*Breaking down.*] I know it, Gale. It's

rotten of me. Why can't I drop the old catch-words? Why can't I say something raw and—and *awful*—the way I feel? And Hélène in there——

Chappell. [*Violently.*] Let her name alone, can't you? What do you want to keep saying it over for, like a damned poll parrot?

Bromley. [*Babbling.*] They carried her in there, into the hospital, through that door. See. That very door I'm looking at now. [*Points from window.*] There was blood on her cheek, blood on her sleeve.

[*Chappell snarls.*]

Oh, I know! I know! That's my beastly hifalutin again. But there was blood. There was, I tell you. I saw it. [*Recalling himself.*] Oh, you were there, weren't you? I forgot. You left her when the ambulance came. I wouldn't leave her. I went with her to the hospital door.

Gale. [*Eagerly.*] Yes? yes? What d' they tell you?

Bromley. No—hope.

Chappell. I don't believe it. I won't. My father had a very terrible accident and he lived years—years.

Bromley. One of the doctors there—decent fellow he was—he saw how I felt. Said she—shouldn't suffer. Asked how she was hurt. How was she hurt?

Gale. You were there, weren't you?

Bromley. Yes.

Gale. How did it happen you were?

Bromley. I was coming down here for a bit of lunch, you know. Some fellows I knew were coming.

Gale. Then if you saw it——

Bromley. Oh, I didn't see—actually see. It was so quick. All over in a minute. [*Groans.*]

Chappell. [*To Gale.*] You tell him.

Gale. [*To Bromley.*] Sit down.

Bromley. No, no. I've got to watch the hospital.

Gale. What for?

Bromley. That window, the third from the door. I told the doctor, the chap I spoke about, I'd come over here. He said he'd telephone if—if anything happened——

Both. Yes! yes!

Bromley. I said, "There's no telephone at the Crimson Lake."

Gale. [*Savagely.*] No. That's the mediæval atmosphere these asses fall for.

Bromley. I gave him a book, a scarlet book——

Gale. What damned odds is it what color it was?

Bromley. [*Penitently.*] Yes, I know. There I go again. It doesn't make any odds. But it is scarlet—it's my Keats—and he'll put it in the window.

Chappell. If——

Bromley. [*Nods.*] Yes, if——

Gale. [*Roughly.*] Spit it out. If she dies. It's no harder for you to say than for her to do, is it? [*Hurries to window.*] No. It's not there.

Chappell. [*To Gale.*] You watch, too. I can't. And keep him quiet.

Bromley. What happened? Oh, I know what. But how?

Gale. [*Walking up and down and glancing from*

window at every turn.] Last night, after the play, we went to supper. With Hélène.

Bromley. She asked me. I couldn't go.

Gale. Kildare——

Bromley. Major Kildare, isn't he?

Gale. [*Bitterly.*] I believe so. V. C. All the rest of it. He said he'd driven from 116th Street to 10th Street in—how many minutes, Chappell?

Chappell. [*Shaking his head and speaking helplessly.*] Don't ask me. Everything's gone out of my head. Clean gone.

Gale. It's immaterial. One of the fellows laughed. Rather sneered, you know. Evans, I think.

Chappell. Yes, it was Evans. He did sneer. Very rude, unpardonably so. Doubt a gentleman's word. In my father's time, I don't know what it might have led to.

Bromley. Wouldn't take his word, Kildare's word? Oh, she'd resent that.

Chappell. She did resent it.

Gale. She was furious.

Bromley. [*Jealously.*] Nobody's to touch Kildare. Hands off, gentlemen.

Gale. Kildare went out. She offered to bet that at twelve noon to-day she could drive in her own trap over the same ground and do it in the same time, less five minutes. Was that it, Chappell? Five minutes?

Chappell. [*His head sunken on his breast, nodding.*] Five minutes. I think so, that is.

Gale. Kildare wasn't to be told.

Bromley. No. He'd forbid it. She'd love that. Eats out of his hand.

Gale. Chappell and I were to go in the car behind her. Evans, too. He was late. We went off without him. [*Pauses, overcome by recollection.*]

Bromley. [*Impatiently.*] Well! well!

Gale. We started.

Chappell. You're forgetting to look. Is it—there?

Bromley. [*Looking from window.*] No.

Gale. No, Chappell, old boy! no.

Bromley. Well?

Gale. We started. Just before we got to 23rd Street an old man tried to cross, mooning along—head in the air——

Chappell. From the country. Decidedly, I should say.

Gale. A car skidded. We saw it at the same instant, Hélène, Chappell and I. The old man never looked, never turned a hair. Hélène——

Chappell. [*In irrepressible nervousness.*] Cut it short, can't you?

Gale. She wheeled in between him and the car. She put herself deliberately in the way——

Chappell. [*With a sick distaste.*] That's enough.

Bromley. [*Putting his hands to his head.*] That's where I came up. But I don't understand it yet. I don't understand anything.

Gale. [*Loudly, his excitement getting into his voice.*] Don't you see? She threw herself in between the old man and the car. She took the force of the smash. There she was, a living barricade, horses kicking—my God!

Bromley. [*In a high voice of emotion.*] To save an old man! She saved him, did she?

Gale. The old man? [*Savagely.*] Damn him, what do I know about him? He took himself off, I suppose. She gave her life for him.

Chappell. [*Piteously.*] Don't say that, Gale. Don't say that. She'll live. She must live. She shall.

[*Enter De Montfort. He is an actor, rather majestic, dressed in the height of fashion, and true to an older type.*]

De Montfort. Heard what's happened?

Chappell. Who told you?

Bromley. A nurse! At the window!

Chappell. Is it the book?

Gale. The red book?

Bromley. No! no! By God, boys! the nurse is smiling. Could that mean—better?

Chappell. Open the window. Call.

Gale. [*At window.*] Too late.

Chappell. She'll live. Oh! pray God she lives! [*Sobs and turns away from them.*]

Gale. [*To De Montfort.*] How did you hear?

De Montfort. It's news, already. The theatre's got it. She won't play to-night, poor girl!

Bromley. She has played her last part.

De Montfort. No, she's playing it now.

Chappell. Oh, drop that, can't you?

Gale. [*To Bromley and De Montfort.*] He's done up, poor old man. Be easy with him.

Chappell. [*Fractiously, to De Montfort.*] What are you here for, any way?

De Montfort. [*Gently.*] I saw Gale at the win-

dow. I came up to ask if we oughtn't to send for Kildare.

Gale. Kildare? What can he do?

Bromley. [*Jealously.*] The rest of us can't do anything. What's Kildare.

De Montfort. She ought to see him.

Chappell. Damn him.

De Montfort. It's no use taking it that way. She's his. It's all right, too. He'll marry her.

Gale. How do you know?

De Montfort. Yesterday he was at rehearsal.

Bromley. He's always there.

De Montfort. I had a long wait. So did she. They were talking and I overheard. I can't tell you about it. You wouldn't want me to. She went over her life. She told him things none of us ever knew. She ran away from home, to earn money for her people. I can't go into that. Only, Kildare's the man.

Bromley. Damn him—again.

De Montfort. Oh, you needn't. His only fault is —he's won her.

[*Enter Frank, supporting Marvin, a frail old man, clean-shaven, with a fine shrewd face. He might be the locksmith or the clock repairer or the preacher in a country town. Frank's manner has entirely changed. He is serious, alert, helpful.*]

Gale. Don't bring anybody in here, Frank, there's a good chap.

Frank. [*Earnestly.*] There ain't another corner in the house. I know what's happened,—I saw her once

in Mrs. Tanqueray—but this old gentleman's sick. You can see for yourself. I bet you he's from New Hampshire, too, or State o' Maine. I'm State o' Maine myself. [*He supports Marvin to the sofa and signs Chappell to rise. Chappell does so and Frank disposes Marvin comfortably and puts a pillow under his head.*]

Marvin. [*Faintly.*] Don't anybody disturb themselves. I've got a poor miserable kind of a heart, that's all. [*Smiling ruefully.*] Once in about so often it—strikes.

De Montfort. [*To the others.*] He's quite done up.

Chappell. [*To Gale.*] Keep your eye on the window.

Frank. [*Slipping a hand under Marvin's head, lifting it adroitly, and putting the glass to his lips.*] That's the stuff. Take a swallow. One more. There you are. Now lie back and think it over. [*Deftly disposes his head on the pillow and stands watching him.*]

Marvin. [*Whimsically.*] This is what we git, we Reubens, comin' to the city. Don't know how to cross the road 'thout gittin' run over.

Gale. [*Turns quickly and looks at him.*] It's the old man. Good God!

Chappell. Oh! hush up.

Marvin. What d' you say, sir?

[*Frank is going.*]

De Montfort. Hold on, Frank. [*He scribbles on a card, talking as he does so.*] "Major Kildare.

Come." I've signed her name—see? Hélène. Send that man of yours with it. I'll put down three addresses. He's to try them in that order. He's to find Major Kildare,—find him, you understand, and bring him here.

Frank. Right-o. [*Takes card, exit in haste.*]

Marvin. [*Weakly, to Gale.*] I don't rightly know who you be, sir. You've got the advantage o' me.

Gale. [*Harshly.*] Didn't you try to cross Broadway, twenty minutes ago.

Marvin. I certain did.

Gale. There was an accident.

Marvin. Yes, sir, right where I was crossin'. Was there anybody hurt?

Bromley. Hurt! Heavenly powers!

Gale. Didn't you see?

Marvin. I see there was a big crowd. It gethered so quick you might ha' thought it sprung up out o' the ground. I stood there watchin' it an' I begun to feel dizzy, an' I stubbed along 'most anywheres, an' then I got so beat out with all the folks I turned off into a side street. An' I see this sign out here an' set down on the steps. An' the man come out an' took hold o' me an' brought me in.

[*Enter Evans, slightly drunk, and laughing.*]

Evans. Ha! ha! ha! Know what's happened. Hélène! Ha! ha! ha! Little Hélène.

Gale. Shut up, Evans.

Chappell. Silence, man. [*Losing control of himself.*] Hold your tongue.

Evans. Hold my tongue? No, I won't hold my tongue. Little Hélène has come to grief. [*Drunkenly. Confidentially.*] She made a bet. That's what she did. Made a bet. Kildare, you understand. He's Sir Oracle. When he opes his lips, let no dog bark. Major Kildare, superman, my successor——

[*Gale and Chappell rush at him.*]

Chappell. You—fellow.

Gale. You hound!

Bromley. Oh, remember where she is! I feel as if she could hear us, every word we say—— [*Relapses into grief.*]

Gale. [*To Chappell.*] Hands off. He's drunk.

Evans. Hands off. That's the ticket. Hands off.

[*They leave him and stand apart looking at him distastefully.*]

[*With the persistency of the boozy.*] She was driving, you know, Hélène was driving——

Chappell. Don't speak her name again.

Evans. I've as good right to her name as—[*laughing*] as she has to mine. That's good—as she has to mine. Kildare may be a superman, but I go him one better.

[*Gale and Chappell start toward him. Bromley steps between.*]

Bromley. Not while she's dying.

Evans. Right, Bromley. You're a gentleman. You give a man a chance. Dying? Little Hélène, the pride of the Drama League, dying? No! no! she's only broken her proud little back, that's all.

Chappell. God! I can't stand this.

Gale. Get out, Evans, if you know what's good for you. Go while the going's good.

[*Gale and Chappell drag him toward the door, he resisting.*]

Marvin. [*Rising feebly.*] Hold on there! You're two against one. [*He tries to loose Chappell's hold.*]

Gale. [*To Marvin.*] Stand from under or you'll get hurt.

Marvin. No, sirree, sir! I don't stand from under. I'm in my seventy-sixth year, but I don't see two pitchin' into one without j'inin' in, in the interests o' fair play.

Bromley. The nurse! She's looking over here.

[*They turn, Marvin with his hand on Evans's shoulder.*]

Gale. Signalling?

Bromley. No. False alarm. She's gone.

Marvin. Look here, folks, you let me speak. I'm nothin' but an old hayseed. You could sell me a gold brick or make me hold up both hands whilst you turn my pockets inside out. But I'm no fool. I know what you're scufflin' over. It's a woman.

Evans. Right you are. Hélène!

Marvin. Now who do you think I come up here to see? A woman.

Evans. [*Boisterously.*] Good boy. *Cherchez la femme.*

Marvin. [*Quietly.*] Don't you git too fresh, young sir. You're slued, and I'm goin' to talk to you till your liquor wears off a mite. Now from suthin' you've said

anybody'd come to the conclusion the woman you're talkin' about ain't no better'n she should be. Never you mind that. Give her a chance. Treat her right an' mebbe she'll run straight. You don't know.

Evans. Brethren, you will find my text——

Marvin. [*Steadily.*] Not too fresh, remember. Now I'm goin' to tell you a little mite about the woman I've come up here to see. If you want to drive bad thoughts out of a man's mind, why, you jest put good thoughts in. Nothin' like it. I'm goin' so fur as to show you the face of a good woman. [*Takes a case from his pocket, opens it and shows them a photograph.*] Don't that face preach to you? That's my granddaughter.

Gale. [*Glancing absently at the picture, then, in a rush of excitement, seizing it and turning it to the others.*] Look!

Bromley. [*Glancing at it from his place by the window.*] Hélène! Gale, Chappell, don't you see? It's Hélène.

Gale. [*Excitedly, to Marvin.*] Where do you live.

Marvin. [*Smiling at their excitement as if pleased with himself for thinking of the expedient.*] I live all soul alone in the lonesomest place you ever set your eyes on, top of a New Hampshire rise they call Ellen's Hill.

De Montfort. [*Excitedly, to the others.*] That's straight. She told him so—Kildare.

Evans. [*Sobered.*] Well, I'm damned.

Chappell. [*To Marvin.*] So that's your granddaughter?

Marvin. [*Pleased and important.*] That's my girl.

[*Gale looks enquiringly at the others. They nod.*]

Gale. [*To Marvin.*] Tell us about her.

[*They separate and stand looking at him with intent and awestruck interest. He sits.*]

Marvin. Well, you see, 'twas this way. Helen—her name's Helen—she was left with her grandmother an' me. We brought her up. Now you mustn't think the worse o' me, but I'm one o' them fellers that can't earn a livin', not if I was to be shot for it. Why? 'Cause I'm crazy, off my nut, they say nowadays, don't they? Some folks are like that, an' you couldn't any more make 'em over than you can change the time o' sunrise an' set. With one it's a fiddle. With another it'll be some pesky invention, makin' a wheel turn faster or the like o' that. Well, with me 'twas the stars.

Bromley. Stars? The heavenly bodies, sir?

Marvin. [*Nodding at him.*] Stars. Funny, ain't it, no book-learnin', no nothin', but stayin' out nights, my eyes fixed on the heavens, an' daytimes figurin' out calculations that was all made before I was born, an' figurin' wrong at that. Well, we lived pretty nigh the wind, I can tell ye, an' Helen grew up to be a mite over seventeen, an' she says: "Grandsir, I'm goin' to New York an' be an actress an' buy you a telescope an' grandma a black silk." That's what she said, the little tyke. Fact.

De Montfort. She went?

Marvin. Not right off. I forbid it. I told her what kind o' folks these actors be——

De Montfort. [*Nettled.*] Explain yourself, sir. [*Recollecting himself.*] I beg your pardon.

Marvin. I told her she'd have to be a nice good school-teacher or a bookkeeper or the like o' that. I said I'd ruther see her dead than actin' a part on the stage.

Chappell. [*To Bromley.*] The window.

Bromley. Yes! yes!

Evans. [*To Marvin.*] Go on. Go on.

Marvin. [*Smiling proudly in recollection.*] Well, she run away, the little tyke. That's what she done. She run away. We pretty near died o' worryin'. In a week she wrote. She was companion to a lady. So she's been ever since. It's a terrible rich woman she's companion to, an' I guess, if all was known, she kind of adopted our little girl. There never'd ha' been so much money in it if she hadn't.

Evans. [*Moved.*] You got your telescope, didn't you?

Marvin. You don't have to be much of a guesser to guess that. Yes, I had my telescope right off, an' now the automobiles have got to stoppin' down at the foot of Ellen's Hill an' the folks git out an' come traipsin' up to see the old hermit an' hear him run on about the stars. Fact. I wrote to Helen about it an' she wrote back I wa'n't ever to name her name to 'em nor show her picture even. Her right hand don't know nothin' to speak of about what her left hand's doin' for old grandsir hermit, I can tell ye that.

Evans. [*Retrospectively.*] Yes. You had your telescope

Marvin. An' mother had her silk dress. She was buried in it, poor mother.

Evans. Mr. Marvin——

Marvin. [*Surprised.*] That's my name. How'd you know it?

Evans. [*Confused.*] You must have mentioned it. If you see your granddaughter again——

Marvin. If I see her! I'm goin' to see her. That's what I'm up here for.

Evans. If she tells you—whatever she tells you about that first money—the way she earned it, do you see? Remember she did it for you.

Marvin. Don't I know that? She had a hard time, too, the first of it. Mother see that in her letters. "The child's havin' some kind of a hard row," she'd say. "She sounds worried to me, that's how she sounds—worried."

Evans. Worried. Yes, that was it, worried.

De Montfort. [*Aside to Evans.*] I overheard her confession to Kildare. When she was poor, she said, some brute helped her out and—she paid, poor girl. She withheld his name. But now's your chance. [*Aloud.*] Evans, you spoke ill of a lady. Have you reconsidered?

Evans. I have—reconsidered.

De Montfort. You apologize?

Evans. I apologize.

Marvin. [*Cordially.*] There! that's fine. Ye done fine. Tell the truth an' shame the devil. [*Earnestly, to Evans.*] An' if you done what you hadn't ought to, you hunt her up an' make it right, if you can. Women

don't have none too easy time in this world, even if they have got the vote. [*He picks up his hat from the chair-back where Frank has hung it and seems collecting himself, getting into shape for leaving.*] Well, folks, I guess I'll be gittin' along towards where I was goin'. Good day.

Gale. Wait. [*Looks at the others.*] He mustn't—he doesn't know——

De Montfort. [*To Marvin, kindly.*] Where are you bound for?

Marvin. I'm goin' to the bank where Helen has her letters sent to her. Kind of a long way round, but the lady she works for seems to have a feelin' ag'inst anybody Helen likes. Don't want letters comin' to the house. Kinder foolish, ain't it? But takes all sorts o' folks to make a world.

Gale. [*To the others.*] Something's got to be done. [*To Marvin.*] You send your letters to a bank. What bank?

Marvin. [*Shrewdly.*] Now what you want to know that for? I told ye you could sell me a gold brick, but I dunno 's I want to meet ye half way.

Gale. [*Embarrassed.*] We could take you round there—[*to the others*] pass the time somehow till we know—— [*With a gesture to the window. They assent.*]

Marvin. [*With his new shrewdness.*] The bank is —where 'tis. Leastways I hope 'tis. I dunno's I be on the way to it. I guess I got kinder turned round when I brought up here.

Gale. [*Losing control of himself.*] What the devil

are you here for any way? If letters embarrass her, wouldn't your coming embarrass her ten times more? Here! I'll send for a taxi and take you to the train, and you go home to your telescope. And we'll see you have—news. What? [*To the others. They assent, relieved.*]

Marvin. No, sirree, sir. This ain't any common occasion, I can tell ye. What do you s'pose she wrote me? Got the letter this mornin' early. She's goin' to be married. An' before it comes off, there's somethin' she's got to tell me same's she told him. An' I've got to forgive her same's he has. Forgive her! Gentlemen, what would you done if you'd got a letter like that? Jest what I done. I put it in my pocket an' started for the cars. An' I've got to go to the bank an' see where she is. Where he is, too, an' tell him he'd better give over talkin' about forgivin' a girl like her an' put his mind on realizin' what he's got.

Evans. [*Impulsively.*] He ought to know. Kildare, I mean.

Gale. We've sent for him.

Evans. To come here?

[*The others look at one another.*]

Gale. [*To Chappell.*] We ought to have told Frank to send him to the hospital.

Chappell. That would let Frank in for telling him. It's up to us.

Evans. [*Jealousy getting the better of him.*] And, by God, why should he go in there and act as if he'd a right——

Gale. [*At the window.*] There he is. [*Puts up window and calls.*] Kildare! Kildare!

Evans. [*In a rage.*] You're going to tell him, are you? Well, so am I. I'll tell him. And I'd like damned well to and see how he takes it.

[*Strides to the door. Gale and Chappell hold him. Marvin falls back on the sofa.*]

Marvin. [*Faintly.*] Boys! boys! don't carry on so. Don't! don't!

[*Bromley gives him brandy. Enter Kildare, bewildered.*]

Kildare. What's the row?

Chappell. [*To Gale.*] You.

[*Gale shakes his head.*]

Kildare. [*Very stiff, apparently angry but keeping it under, and displaying the card.*] This name—the name of a lady—is not in the lady's hand.

Evans. I'll tell him.

[*Gale and Chappell rush him, get him outside the door and stand holding it.*]

Gale. [*To De Montfort.*] You tell him. Quick.

Kildare. [*Impatiently.*] Can't somebody speak?

Chappell. [*Pushes Gale away from the door, looks out, closes door.*] Gone. [*Goes to Marvin.*] Tell him the lady is in the hospital over there. She is hurt.

Marvin. [*Faintly, to Kildare.*] They want me to break it to you. She's—hurt.

Kildare. [*Startled, looking dazedly at the card.*] Hurt? Hélène?

Gale. [*Pointing.*] Over there.

[*Kildare starts toward the door, still bewildered.*]

Bromley. [*Calling out.*] Stop! the book.

Kildare. Where is she?

Gale. [*Rushing to the window.*] The book. In the window. She is dead.

Chappell. [*Putting his face in his hands.*] Dead.

De Montfort. [*As if to himself.*] "She should have died hereafter."

Marvin. [*Rising with difficulty, smiling on Kildare who lingers bewildered at the door.*] Why, there she is. There's Helen. Right side o' you, sir. Oh, how sweet an' pretty she does look! Now she's stretchin' out her arms—to me. Yes, I'm comin', dear. Helen! Helen!

[*Dies.*]

CURTAIN

MILLY DEAR

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

[*In the order of their appearance*]

Street, an artist

Milly, his wife

Felton, a doctor

Grace Rule

MILLY DEAR

Time: The present.

Place: A charmingly furnished sitting-room. Doors C. and L.

Street, a man of about forty, handsome, imperious looking, is pacing nervously up and down.

Street. [*Calling.*] Milly, dear!

Milly. [*Without.*] Coming.

[*Enter Milly, L, a young and lovely woman with the mothering look, the deft and capable manner of one who makes herself responsible for other people's comfort. She wears a close motor hat and carries Street's fur coat and her own and his hat.*]

Street. [*Taking the furs from her and dropping them on the settle.*] Why do you do all this lifting and tugging? Isn't there a maid in the house?

Milly. [*Laughing.*] You'd rather have me bring your coat. You know you would.

Street. Got the rugs ready?

Milly. Down in the hall.

Street. Milly, dear!

Milly. Yes.

Street. [*Hesitating.*] Mind if you don't go?

Milly. [*With a cheerful composure.*] Not a bit. I've heaps of things on hand.

Street. You see I might have lunch at the club. If I felt like it, that is.

Milly. [*Encouragingly.*] Splendid.

Street. Of course you could take a turn and send the car back for me. [*With sudden resolution.*] No, I rather like to think it's waiting. Then I can leave any minute.

Milly. Yes. That's wise. [*Helps him on with his coat.*]

Street. Pah! smells of camphor.

Milly. Dearest, no! It's been in the cedar closet.

Street. [*With decision.*] Smells of camphor. I believe I'm all in.

Milly. Suppose you painted too long?

Street. Half an hour.

Milly. That's right. Doctor's orders.

Street. I'm too fagged to go.

Milly. Doctor's orders. Every day. [*Soothingly.*] You like the car.

Street. [*Fretfully.*] How's a man suffering from nervous breakdown to know what he likes?

Milly. Joe said——

Street. Don't you quote Joe to me.

Milly. [*Deprecatingly.*] Well, seeing he's the doctor!

Street. [*With decision.*] He's the doctor, and we're own cousins—and he takes no stock whatever in my case.

Milly. [*Warmly.*] Indeed he does. Didn't he put a long name to it?

Street. [*Musingly.*] Neurasthenia. It's pulled me down like the deuce.

Milly. [*Soothingly.*] I know. But you're out of the woods. Joe says you're far enough out to spur yourself a bit. [*Hesitatingly.*] He even says you'd be the better for a shock.

Street. Much he knows. Joe'll get fired if he don't look out. He's too damned unsympathetic.

Milly. He's been a tower of strength anyway. [*Impulsively.*] Do you know what I think? I believe he knows how splendid you've been about—you know——

Street. Oh, cut that, Milly. Cut it.

Milly. I will say it. I believe Joe sees how incredibly generous you've been to him. Why, it's generous to keep his acquaintaince at all, considering what you know. And never to hint it. Actually to be just the same. Yes, I believe he knows the kind of thing you've done and he's trying to pay you back.

Street. [*Hesitatingly.*] Milly, dear!

Milly. Yes.

Street. You know what day it is.

Milly. Yes. The ninth of March.

Street. You know what I've got to expect.

Milly. The letter. This'll be the sixth year.

Street. It hasn't come yet?

Milly. [*Hesitating.*] Yes, it has come. I thought I'd wait till you'd had your drive. Then I'd give it to you.

Street. [*Emphatically.*] Don't give it to me.

Milly. Not——

Street. Just don't give it to me.

Milly. What shall I do?

Street. Burn it.

Milly. Without reading?

Street. Yes.

Milly. [*Thoughtfully.*] Well, maybe she deserves it.

Street. It's the sixth year. It's been unpleasant enough, and, by George! I'm not going to be hounded and blackmailed. I'm a sick man.

[*She puts her hand caressingly on his arm.*]

[*He turns to go. Turns back.*] Milly, dear!

Milly. Yes.

Street. Order me a sweetbread for dinner. I may not touch the roast.

Milly. All right.

Street. [*Uneasily.*] I may be out till dark. You'll burn the letter?

Milly. [*Tenderly.*] Yes.

Street. [*Turning again to go.*] Milly, dear!

Milly. Yes.

Street. [*Opening his arms. She runs to them.*] Good-by. Bear hug. You're a darling thing. Darling. [*Kisses her.*] There! And you're a capital housekeeper and a capital nurse, and you're my Milly, aren't you?

Milly. Rather. Poke along now. You don't want to stand round with that heavy coat on.

Street. [*Immediately solicitous for himself.*] That's dead right. I *am* warm. Next thing it'll be a chill.

Milly. No! no! it won't. Good-by! Good-by! [*She smilingly urges him to the door, C. and, business-like yet humorous, hurries him out.*]

[*Exit Street.*]

[*She goes to telephone.*] Main 1766. Brigham's? Will you send me a set of sweetbreads? Mrs. J. E. Street. Are they quite fresh? Be very sure, won't you? Mr. Street is so particular. He's not well, you know. It means a great deal to him.

[*Enter Maid, C. ushering in Felton.*]

Maid. Doctor Felton.

[*Exit Maid, L.*]

[*To Doctor.*] Hullo Joe. [*At telephone.*] And half a dozen grape fruit as good as the last. It means a great deal to Mr. Street. He's not well, you know. Thank you. Sweetbreads. One set. Yes. [*Hangs up and turns smiling to Felton.*]

Felton. How is he?

Milly. About the same.

Felton. How's he think he is?

Milly. No better.

Felton. You'll have to build a fire under him.

[*She takes off her hat and puts it on her coat. They sit.*]

Milly. I told him you said he ought to spur himself.

Felton. That's like hauling him to his feet and coaxing him to use the clubs. Give him a biff, make him defend himself in earnest. Besides, there's a lot to be said on your account. He's lying back on you, full weight.

Milly. Naturally. He's sick. [*Rings.*]

Felton. He's not sick enough for that.

[*Enter Maid, L.*]

Milly. Tell cook to put the sweetbreads in cold water.

Maid. Yes, Mrs. Street.

[*Exit Maid, L. Milly goes to fireplace and lifts off a stick.*]

Felton. What do you want to do? Here, let me. [*Rises to help.*]

Milly. Take off those big sticks. I want to burn a letter. It's too warm to start up a real fire.

Felton. [*Lifting off the sticks and looking up at her as he talks.*] The fact is, Jim's not so far gone as he thinks he is. I met him just now sitting up like a little man and taking notice.

Milly. That's the nature of the disease. You said so. Up one minute and down the next.

Felton. Ah, but Jim's got to the point where he's up when it amuses him and down if he can get a rise out of you.

Milly. [*Ready to resent it.*] A rise?

Felton. Sympathy. Jim's turning into punk.

Milly. What a horrid word!

Felton. Dry rot.

Milly. What a *horrid* word!

Felton. Dry rot is a scientific fact. Remember that little office I built down at Sky Point?

Milly. You wouldn't let me go in. I forget why.

Felton. You'd have gone through the floor. I did. I'd made the foundation too tight. Dry rot. [*With the air of pointing his moral.*] Mind you, it looked all right on the surface. The rot was underneath.

Milly. [*Indifferently.*] You could put in a new floor.

Felton. No. The builders said it wouldn't pay.

Said the rot had gone up under the wainscoting. Said I should have to build again.

Milly. [*Whimsically.*] I suppose that's a parable. Marriage is like building. Only you don't build an office. You build a palace, pillar upon pillar. Towers, too!

Felton. What about the foundation?

Milly. Love. Everlasting rock.

Felton. Jim's turning into punk. He's rotting out your building.

Milly. The foundations can't be rotted. They're rock, I tell you. Love, and trust, too. If Jim stops building for a while—because he's sick, mind you—and gets tired and irritable and wants waiting on—why, it's because he's sick.

Felton. I wish you'd go into his case a little more radically. For his sake, you know.

Milly. [*Reflectively.*] For Jim's sake. Yes.

Felton. We mustn't *let* him rot. Oh, he's begun to. It had to be. First place, he's a born charmer.

Milly. Oh, yes, Jim's a charmer.

Felton. He's always been surrounded by adoring women.

Milly. His mother adored him.

Felton. So did three aunts and—well, he's been sufficiently tended and nurtured. [*Reflectively.*] But the rot's begun and this breakdown is the sign of it.

Milly. [*Defensively.*] Men break from overwork.

Felton. [*Sceptically.*] How'd he overwork?

Milly. Isn't he an artist? Hasn't he painted——

Felton. He's painted magnificently. But always

with money behind him and a crowd of buyers cackling at the door. It can't be money at the bottom of this?

Milly. [*Confidently.*] Oh, no. We live quite within our income. I had my little pile, too, you know. [*Gaily, opening desk and displaying cheque book.*] My cheque book. Nice big balance.

Felton. Good. But Jim's rotting, and there's a cause. Now the fire's all right. You can burn your letter. [*Rises and stands, hands in pockets, waiting.*]

[*Milly opens her desk and takes out a letter. Goes back to fireplace and stands. Speaks on sudden impulse.*]

Milly. Perhaps you'd say I'm making a good deal of fuss about burning a letter.

Felton. [*Good-naturedly.*] Well, I did think you might have touched a match to it and let me put my foot on it before it caught the rug.

Milly. It's a particular letter, you see. It's rather a ceremony to burn it.

Felton. So?

Milly. But the letter's set me thinking. It makes me want to say things.

Felton. [*Quietly.*] Say 'em, Milly.

Milly. It's as if the letter were alive and had a voice and the voice spoke and told me to say things—to you.

Felton. You couldn't say anything I shouldn't want to hear.

Milly. [*Ruefully.*] You've just said some things I didn't want to hear. About Jim. I've taken them from you because you're the doctor. But I know and you ought to know you're the last man to say them.

Felton. [*Surprised.*] Why am I?

Milly. Because he's treated you as he has—with such incredible forbearance.

Felton. I don't follow you.

Milly. The very thought of this letter on the heels of your ripping Jim up the back—[*chokes a little and gets the better of it*] well, it's too much for me.

Felton. [*Quietly.*] What is the letter?

Milly. Do you know what day this is?

Felton. [*Bewildered.*] Eighth? Ninth?

Milly. The ninth of March. It's an anniversary.

Felton. Not your wedding?

Milly. No. But to-day, the ninth of March, that dreadful woman sends Jim a letter.

Felton. [*In involuntary betrayal.*] Grace Rule?

Milly. You knew it, then.

Felton. Never in the world. I knew she——

Milly. Blackmailed him?

Felton. She sends him a letter? You don't mean every year?

Milly. Every March. This will be the sixth.

Felton. What a ghastly habit!

Milly. Isn't it? She began the week before we were married. That letter was addressed to me.

Felton. Remember what was in it?

Milly. Every word. "Tell Jim Street that Elsie, his baby daughter, will be two years old on the ninth of March. Tell him he will hear from me on her birthday every year until death do us part."

Felton. What did you do?

Milly. Gave Jim the letter—of course.

Felton. What did he do?

Milly. Told me the whole story—of course. We've never had secrets from each other.

Felton. Just what was the story?

Milly. [*With indignant warmth.*] Do you want me to assume you don't know?

Felton. I don't know quite—from Jim's standpoint.

Milly. Isn't he splendid? Never to have said a word.

Felton. What is his standpoint?

Milly. [*Coldly, watching him.*] He knew the woman. She'd been a model. She got into bad ways and had this child, and when she found Jim was to be married, she said the child was his. Blackmail.

Felton. Was Jim disturbed?

Milly. At the letter?

Felton. Yes.

Milly. Naturally. Wouldn't any man have been?

Felton. Didn't disturb you, I suppose.

Milly. Why, yes, it did, at first. Really what disturbed me was to think any woman that knew Jim would play him such a nasty trick. Or that any man—any old friend—would let him shoulder a thing like that.

Felton. In what sense was he shouldering it?

Milly. The letters. The insolence of them. And I fully believe he sent her money because the other man hadn't so much as he—not so much money and a harder heart.

Felton. You say the first letter was addressed to you. How about the following ones?

Milly. They were addressed to him.

Felton. What was in 'em?

Milly. I never knew.

Felton. He didn't tell you?

Milly. No. Why should he?

Felton. You didn't ask him?

Milly. No. Of course I didn't.

Felton. You little miracle! Do you think he expects one to-day?

Milly. This is the letter.

Felton. It's not been opened.

Milly. No. I'm to burn it.

Felton. Not before he sees it?

Milly. He told me to.

Felton. Not without reading it?

Milly. Yes.

Felton. [*In irrepressible indignation.*] Now if that isn't like him. He's afraid of the letter. So he goes off and leaves you to burn it. Unread! How the devil does a man dare not to read a letter like that? She may be in trouble.

Milly. [*Warmly.*] O Joe, you like her still.

Felton. [*Hotly.*] Like her! Of course I like Grace Rule. She was a warm-hearted impulsive girl, ready to trust and dead sure to be deceived.

Milly. O Joe!

Felton. [*Absorbed in his portraiture.*] Clever, strong sense of humor——

Milly. [*Stiffly.*] That hardly appears in her blackmailing Jim.

Felton. Oh, I don't know. If you're a woman of

that sort and you meet a destroyer and get wrecked, you're not the same woman afterward, that's all. And if you've not much to think of—but a poor little baby girl without a father—why, you turn savage. You want to get a knife into somebody—for the sake of the baby girl.

Milly. [*Leading him on.*] Clever, was she? What else?

Felton. [*Absorbed in his portrait.*] Just. Quite a terrible sense of justice.

Milly. [*With momentary revolt.*] Justice! was it justice that let her blackmail Jim?

Felton. [*Retreating, realizing he has gone too far.*] Strong qualities make big temptations. A man wronged her. She had to take it out of men.

Milly. You say a man had wronged her.

Felton. Why, yes. She was perfectly square in telling you that.

Milly. Thank you, Joe. If you hadn't stood up to it I don't know what I should have done.

Felton. [*Warily.*] I haven't mentioned names.

Milly. You needn't. Now, Joe, what do you think that man ought to do? Oughtn't he to fulfil his obligations to that woman?

Felton. Undoubtedly. His money obligations, at least. That might be all he'd left himself free to do.

Milly. Shouldn't we all love him like fury for doing it?

Felton. That's putting it rather strong, but I think his friends would be pretty sure to stand by.

Milly. [*Enthusiastically.*] I'll tell you how I

should feel. I should want to say to him: "I've thought very hardly of you. But since you're not going to be a coward any more, and not going to be a hypocrite—why, I respect you. I think you're splendid."

Felton. [*Quietly.*] Good.

Milly. And, mind you, I'd be his friend. Not a half and half friend as I've been for the last six years.

Felton. [*Still quietly and cautiously.*] You're giving me a good deal of a surprise. Who told you his name?

Milly. [*Hesitating.*] Well——

Felton. [*Quietly insisting.*] Jim tell you?

Milly. Perhaps not in so many words. He gave me a hint.

Felton. [*Emotion beginning.*] He gave you a hint, did he? By God! Mind telling me the man's name?

Milly. [*Imploringly.*] O Joe, don't be cowardly with me.

Felton. Cowardly? You think—you think *that?*

Milly. [*Half crying.*] I shouldn't have said all this, but it's the ninth of March and the thought of this letter——

Felton. [*In a rage, but controlling himself.*] The letter Jim Street's run away from.

Milly. [*In quick indignant rebuttal.*] And why not? A sick man—saddled with another man's responsibility. It isn't Jim's letter. It's the other man's.

Felton. [*Gently.*] You think the other man ought to open the letter.

Milly. Yes.

Felton. You think *I* ought?

Milly. Yes.

Felton. Give it here. Shall I? [*She gives it to him. He looks at the superscription.*] "James E. Street, Esq." No, I think we won't open Jim's letter. We don't know just what we'll do with it, but we won't open it.

Milly. Very well. Give it to me and I'll burn it.

Felton. No, I think I won't do that either. I'll give the letter to Jim, and let him open it. You assume I have a right to read it. If Jim has a right to the envelope and I to the letter we'll read it together. [*Puts it in his pocket.*]

Milly. But I want to save him from having anything to do with it.

Felton. Jim's equal to that amount of bother. Besides, he's likely to have rather more of a shock before the day is over.

Milly. [*In alarm.*] You've been harping on that. A shock! You've arranged one for him?

Felton. No. I haven't arranged it.

Milly. Don't put me off.

Felton. Grace Rule is in town.

Milly. You've seen her?

Felton. In a taxi. Driving fast. Just after I met Jim. That's why I came on here.

Milly. [*Breathlessly.*] You see. The letter again. She's here to get an answer.

Felton. Answers don't have to be called for. She's here to see Jim.

Milly. She mustn't. He's not strong enough.

[*Watches his face a moment.*] Well? Don't you say so?

Felton. I shouldn't be inclined to let him off.

Milly. Oh, that shock you're always prescribing! [*Passionately.*] How can you allow the medical side of you to get the better of your heart?

Felton. It won't hurt him to see her. But you must promise to keep out of the way.

Milly. Why?

Felton. She'd say things.

Milly. Precisely. That's what she's coming for.

Felton. They'll hurt you.

Milly. They'll make me furious. To think of Jim's getting the brunt of them instead of—[*with a meaning pause*] the other man. [*Breaks out impulsively.*] O Joe, dear old Joe! you've been so good to us this winter. You're so splendid I want you to be the best ever. Stay here and see her yourself.

Felton. [*Quietly.*] Yes, I'll see her, if it'll do any good.

Milly. [*Urgently.*] Don't let me think you're a coward any more. Face the music. Meet her. Do the square, big thing.

[*Enter Maid, C.*]

Maid. Miss Grace Rule.

Milly. [*In triumphing haste.*] Send her up.

[*Exit Maid, C.*]

[*To Doctor, with an exquisite gentleness.*] Shall we see her together? Just for a minute. To show I'm with you. Then I'll go.

Felton. [*In quick alarm.*] Of course I'll see her.

Not here though. I'll run down and take her with me. [*Hurrying to the door, C.*]

Milly. [*Intercepting him.*] No. Just to please me, no! Don't hustle her off. See her here. Just as if we liked her—all of us—liked her and believed in her.

Felton. [*Listening.*] She's coming. Go, Milly, for God's sake. [*Bursting out.*] Don't you see I can't have you here?

Milly. All right. But call me when you can. Good luck to you, old Joe.

[*Exit Milly, L. Felton closes the door after her and draws a breath of relief.*]

[*Enter Grace Rule and Maid, C. Exit Maid, L.*]

[*Grace Rule is a thin, somewhat elegant woman, dressed in black. Her face is scored with faint marks of bitterness and scorn.*]

Grace. Why, it's you.

Felton. [*Advancing and shaking hands.*] How are you, Grace?

Grace. Badly off.

Felton. No! [*In a kindly, persuasive tone.*] What you here for, Grace?

Grace. [*In sudden passion.*] To see him. His little girl is dead.

Felton. [*Sympathetically.*] That's a big blow. When?

Grace. [*Self-contained now.*] Before Christmas.

Felton. Hard luck.

Grace. [*With a defensive coldness.*] It's better for her. She wouldn't have had any name or any—anything.

Felton. You haven't married?

Grace. No. I couldn't.

Felton. [*Rallying her a little.*] Don't tell me a woman like you couldn't marry.

Grace. [*Cynically.*] Not with a little girl unaccounted for. Well, I could. But I was afraid. I'm more afraid of men than I am of the devil. I'd have risked it for myself, but not for her.

Felton. [*Gently.*] Come now, you're rested. My car's here. I'll take you wherever you say.

Grace. [*Obstinately.*] No. I'm going to see him. [*In sudden thought.*] Where's his wife?

Felton. [*Warningly.*] You wouldn't make trouble for her.

Grace. [*Bitterly.*] Wouldn't I?

Felton. [*Remindingly.*] You weren't that kind of a girl.

Grace. I gave her a chance. I wrote to her. And still she married him.

Felton. She never understood.

Grace. [*Scornfully.*] Then she can't read English. I put it plain enough.

Felton. Not to make her believe it.

Grace. She didn't believe me?

Felton. No.

Grace. She thought I'd—I'd *lie*—like that?

Felton. [*Sadly.*] She was told so.

Grace. He told her?

Felton. Yes.

Grace. Where is she?

Felton. You wouldn't pull down her house about her ears?

Grace. [*With a pitying gentleness.*] You love her, don't you?

Felton. [*Simply.*] Always have, Grace. He talked better than I did. So he got her. [*Whimsically.*] I've learned to talk since. If I'd had a chance—— [*Breaks off, annoyed at himself.*]

Grace. I can get you a chance. I can introduce her to J. E. Street, Esquire.

Felton. And pull down her house? Come. Let's be off. Where are you staying?

Grace. Boarding house down by the wharves.

Felton. Come.

Grace. No, I tell you. I'm going to see Jim Street.

Felton. You won't see him. He's gone for the day.

Grace. Oh, I know. He left the house just as I got to it twenty minutes ago. He didn't see me. I followed him in a taxi. And when I found where he was, I telephoned him his wife wanted him. [*Indifferently.*] He'll be here presently.

Felton. Telephoned him? D'he know who you were?

Grace. No. He began to ask questions and I rung off.

Felton. You can't see him here, you know. You can't.

Grace. Why can't I?

Felton. There's his wife. She's actually there in that room.

Grace. Oh, I'll see her, too.

Felton. You're wild. You can't see her. You've got to come away from here if I drag you by main force and put you in a cab.

Grace. See here, Joe Felton. I gave him fair warning. I wrote him a letter. I said to him, "I've got to see you to-day. I'll be at Main 1657 till eleven o'clock, waiting for a message. I'll meet you anywhere you say." And I got no message. So I came round here. And I saw him running away.

Felton. [*Taking the letter from his pocket.*] That the letter?

Grace. Yes.

Felton. It's not been opened. Don't blame him for that.

Grace. If he'd taken the pains to remember this is the day I always write him, and if he'd opened his letter, he'd have found he could have met me wherever he said. And he could have listened to me and done what I asked of him—or refused to do it. But he didn't. He ran away. And I've come to find him. [*Curiously.*] His wife's in the next room, is she? She ran away, too.

Felton. Grace, if you'll come with me now I'll take you anywhere. Then I'll put your case to Jim. You shall see him before the day is over. I give you my word.

[*Enter Street, C., in haste.*]

Street. Where's Milly?

Felton. Hush up. In there. [*Pointing to door.*]

Grace. Hullo, Jim. Came, didn't you?

Street. [*To Felton.*] What's wrong with Milly? They telephoned——

Felton. [*Trying to steady him.*] Nothing whatever is the matter, except that Milly is in there, and

Grace and I have been talking, and [*with emphasis*] Milly and Grace have not seen each other—yet.

Street. [*To Grace.*] You're here, are you?

Grace. Jim, I want some money.

Jim. You'll have it next quarter day.

Grace. I want more than that, Jim. [*With a hushed anguish.*] Your little girl's dead.

Street. [*In terror for fear of Milly's hearing.*] Well, I can't help that, can I?

Grace. [*Screaming.*] You devil!

Felton. Come, Grace. I'm going to take you along with me, you know.

Grace. [*Desperately.*] Jim, I've got a bunch here in my breast. It's got to be operated on. And Elsie's sickness and all—I've no money.

Felton. [*Tenderly to Grace.*] I'm a doctor. Don't you know I am? I'm the one to see you through.

Grace. [*Putting her hand on her breast. With pathos.*] It's malignant.

Felton. Poor girl! Come along now. Come.

Street. [*In a panic.*] Yes, go along with him. I'll send you something. For God's sake, Joe, get her out of here. Milly'll be in any instant.

Grace. [*Laughing hysterically.*] Oh, that's where your mind is, is it? Not a dead child or a woman with a cancer in her breast, but [*her voice rising hysterically*] Milly! Milly! Milly!

[*Enter Milly, L., in concern.*]

Milly. Jim? [*She goes to Grace and puts a hand on her shoulder as she stands shaking with rage and anguish.*] Don't cry.

Street. [*To Felton.*] Get her away.

Felton. [*To Grace.*] Hush. [*To Milly.*] Milly, she's tired and sick. She's got to go into hospital.

Grace. It's my breast. They're going to have my breast cut off. And it's where his cheek has laid. And his child's.

Milly. [*In a rush of sympathy.*] O Joe, be good to her. I know you will. [*To Grace.*] I'll be with you, too, if you'll let me.

Grace. [*Wonderingly.*] She's sorry for me.

Milly. Of course I'm sorry for you. As soon as people are sick we love them, no matter whether they like us or not.

Grace. You needn't have hated me. My baby's dead.

Milly. I never hated you. I only knew you were wicked to my husband.

Grace. Wicked to him? I wicked to Jim Street?

Felton. [*Remindingly.*] Car's waiting, Grace.

Grace. [*Looking at him and remembering.*] Oh! I—see. Yes, I was wicked, was I? I'm ready, Joe. [*To Street.*] Good-by.

Street. [*Losing control of himself. To Felton.*] Get her away from here.

Milly. [*Gently.*] She's sick, Jim.

Grace. [*To Street.*] Good-by.

[*Exeunt Felton and Grace, C.*]

Milly. How wretched she must be.

Street. [*In relief.*] I don't know anything about that. She's gone. That's all I'm concerned with.

Milly. [*Musing.*] She looks as if she'd suffered

everything. No! if I'd known how she looked I never could have hated her.

Street. D'you order the sweetbreads?

Milly. [*Not heeding.*] It's been wonderful. Joe and I were talking about her. He'd told me the whole story——

Street. [*Sharply.*] Told you the story?

Milly. Yes. And so simply, so plainly, I knew it was something I just couldn't judge. And then she came.

Street. [*In a cold scorn and anger.*] She came, did she? He'd planned it.

Milly. No, dear, no. He happened to be here.

Street. He had it planned. He's carrying out his damned medical theory of shocks. Wasn't there any sort of a shock for a man but to set a woman and her bastard on him?

Milly. [*Shocked.*] Don't. The child is dead.

[*Enter Felton, C., in worried haste.*]

Felton. I've sent her along in the car. All right, Milly? [*To Street.*] Want a little pill?

Street. Yes. I want you to get out.

Felton. No. Not in hot blood.

Street. I've stood it long enough. Family doctor. Family friend. Undermining me with my wife——

Felton. Easy.

Milly. O Jim, you make me ashamed.

Street. And now you plan a little dramatic surprise for me, and you tell my wife I've had a child by that woman there. Well, I tell you to go to the devil. My wife loves me. She's mine, body and soul. She's so

much mine she can stand the truth and we'll both laugh at it. And I did have a child by Grace Rule, and the child's dead and out of the way, and Grace Rule can blackmail me till she's dead herself. And my wife is my wife.

Felton. [*Significantly.*] I haven't given you away.

Street. That's a lie.

Felton. There's a lie somewhere. We won't go into that.

Milly. [*Breathlessly, to Street.*] You didn't lie, Jim. Tell me you didn't lie.

Street. [*Firmly, as if it had got to be fought out on that line.*] Wouldn't you have had me lie? Lie for you? Rather than lose you, Milly?

Milly. But to let me think such things—of her, that poor woman! Of Joe, your old chum, Joe! [*Stops aghast.*]

Street. I did the only thing there was to do. The only possible thing. If I hadn't thrown you off the scent, could you have seen those letters coming year after year and not suspected me?

Milly. [*Quietly.*] I shouldn't have suspected you.

Street. [*Eagerly.*] What harm has it done? I've sent her money. That's all I could do. I'd have shot myself rather than marry her. And I've kept your mind easy. You didn't love Joe. You loved me.

Milly. [*Slowly.*] I begin to think the worst harm wasn't done then, those years ago, but now, to-day. You've turned Grace Rule out of your house.

Felton. She's going to be all right, Milly. I'll fix her up.

Milly. [*To Street.*] You were glad the child was dead. Your child.

Street. Milly, Milly, dear, everything that's happened since I saw you first has been because I loved you.

Milly. [*Pins on her hat. Puts on her coat.*] You've got your shock, haven't you, Jim? Poor Jim! And we didn't arrange it for you. You arranged it for yourself. Where's my cheque book? Didn't I have it out just now? [*Goes to desk and finds it. Slips it in pocket of her coat. Tenderly.*] Poor Jim! That's what did you up, wasn't it? You worried over it till it broke your nerve. That shows there's something in you yet, beside dry rot. [*Makes her way to door, C.*]

Street. [*In terror.*] Where are you going?

Felton. [*Reminding her.*] Milly, you're not going.

Milly. [*In a perfectly commonplace tone. To Felton.*] I shall have to make my plans. But I'll let you know.

Street. [*Beside himself.*] Milly! Milly, dear! Why, I'm your husband.

Milly. That's it. You don't seem that any more. You're a stranger. I'm afraid to think of you.

Street. Give me a minute. Let me talk to you.

Milly. I can't, Jim. Truly I can't. I'm sorry.

[*Exit C., while the two men stand staring after her. They turn slowly to each other and*

CURTAIN

THE WEB

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

[*In the order of their appearance*]

Conway, a preacher

Small, his valet

Mrs. Wellfleet, a young woman

Mrs. Gregg, her mother

Wellfleet, her husband

THE WEB

Time: the present.
Place: a shabbily furnished sitting-room.

Small is stirring cocoa over some sort of heater. He looks the smooth and pleasing scamp.

Conway enters from the next room and throws himself down in an armchair by the table. He is of a melancholy and emotional type. He leans his head for a moment on his hand, and then sniffs the air.

Conway. Small, you've been smoking.

Small. [*Apologetically.*] No, sir. That is, sir, a whiff or two.

Conway. You swore off.

Small. Yes, sir. Same time as my conversion.

Conway. Then if you smoke, you backslide.

Small. [*Contritely.*] Yes, sir. [*With sudden candor.*] I was dopy, sir. The air in the Tabernacle was beyond words, sir, beyond words.

Conway. Never mind. You have entered the straight way. Don't be looking over the fence.

Small. No, sir. [*Humorously.*] That's good, sir, "looking over the fence." Funny things we see over the fence. [*Sobering, as it becomes apparent that the*

reflection doesn't suit, and speaking sympathetically.] You're tired, sir.

Conway. It was a warm meeting.

Small. Red hot, sir.

Conway. [*Musingly and raptly.*] The Spirit descended upon us.

Small. [*Flippantly.*] Like a dove.

Conway. [*Sharply.*] Small, that's an unfortunate way of speaking. You indulge in it too often.

Small. Maybe I do, sir. Your way's best, sir. You're sharper'n me, sir. You never let up for a second. [*Pours cocoa from the saucepan into a cup and brings it to table.*] Cocoa, sir. Sugar, sir? [*Insinuatingly.*] Don't want a little nip of whiskey, sir? You're ruining your insides with all this swash.

[*Conway shakes his head and abstractedly sips the cocoa.*]

[*Piously.*] A first-class meeting to-night. A, Number One.

Conway. Yes. They were much moved.

Small. Yes, sir! oh, yes! They were dotty to a man.

[*Doorbell rings without.*]

Conway. [*In alarm.*] What's that?

Small. [*Soothingly.*] Only the bell, sir.

Conway. Whoever it is——

Small. I see, sir. Turn 'em away. You're too damned tired. Beg pardon, sir. You're on your knees, sir. That's what I'll tell 'em. [*Going.*] On your knees.

Conway. Stop! Don't say that. It isn't true.

Small. [*Firmly.*] Beg pardon, sir, that's what I always say. He's on his knees, I say. The reverend gentleman is on his knees.

Conway. Never say it again.

Small. [*Cheerfully, half out of the doorway.*] No, sir, of course not, sir.

[*Exit Small.*]

Conway. [*Listens a moment. Then, dreamily.*] They touched me as those in the throng touched the garments of the Master. [*Looking upward.*] Oh, for what Thou hast given me, the gift of leading souls, I thank Thee.

[*Enter Small.*]

[*Quickly.*] Who was it?

Small. Newspaper man. One that was here this morning. [*Reassuringly.*] Don't lose your grip, sir.

Conway. What did you tell him?

Small. Nothin' doin'!

Conway. [*Uneasily.*] You're sure he was here this morning? Twice in one day. Does it strike you there's anything peculiar in that?

Small. [*Busies himself about the room, looking over laundry lying in chair, etc.*] Same old story, that's all.

Conway. Merely an interview? He said that, did he? nothing more?

Small. He'd got some dope about your preaching —uplift, you know, sir, all that. But it don't go back far enough. Early life—that's what he's shy on.

Conway. [*Excitedly and with suspicion.*] What did you say?

Small. Said we couldn't think of it. You was too modest. Hurt your feelings.

Conway. [*Persistently.*] How did the fellow put it? Tell me exactly.

Small. [*Carelessly.*] Wanted something about previous life. Said there was no material before your beginning to preach.

Conway. You didn't attempt telling him?

Small. Bless me, sir, I didn't know. That is, in any detail. [*Insinuatingly.*] Wish you felt like opening up a little, sir, you and me here alone. Seems as if we'd feel freer, somehow.

Conway. [*Violently.*] Who set you on to say that?

Small. [*Soothingly.*] Come now, sir, you're fagged out. That's all's the matter with you.

Conway. [*Controlling himself, but still trembling.*] When those fellows come here and ask for interviews, don't have any words with them. Turn them away.

[*Doorbell rings without, alternating with sound of knocking.*]

What's that?

Small. Only the bell, sir. Why, you're as nervous as a colt.

[*Exit Small. Conway goes to the door and listens. Presently he returns to the table and stands in agitation facing the door. Enter Small. He is serious and impressed.*]

It's a lady, sir.

Conway. Tell her, No.

Small. She won't go, sir. She's followed me up the stairs. She says, sir—— [*Hesitates.*]

Conway. [*Impatiently.*] Well?

Small. [*Lowering his voice and speaking as if moved in spite of himself.*] "For the love of Christ."

Conway. Show her in.

[*Small opens the door. Enter Mrs. Wellfleet. Exit Small.*]

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Hurrying to Conway.*] I was at the meeting. I couldn't stay away. I live near the Tabernacle, and I heard them crying and blessing God.

Conway. [*Gently.*] The Spirit moved you.

Mrs. Wellfleet. It was like a great sound going up to heaven.

Conway. Were you there through the service?

Mrs. Wellfleet. No, only at the close. You were giving the benediction.

Conway. Did you find peace?

Mrs. Wellfleet. There is no peace for me to-night.

Conway. You are under conviction of sin—[*wonderingly*] a child like you.

Mrs. Wellfleet. I couldn't speak to you before the crowd, so I followed you. [*Pointing to the window.*] People are out there, waiting. It's so every night, one of them said. They wait and are disappointed. But you are on your knees, praying for them, and the prayers are answered.

Conway. [*Sharing her ecstasy.*] God be praised!

Mrs. Wellfleet. I pushed through the crowd. I rang, and then I beat on your door. I had to see you.

Conway. [*Gently.*] You have seen me. Now go in peace.

Mrs. Wellfleet. Not till you have told me what to do.

Conway. [*Evidently surrendering himself earnestly to the interview.*] You are in trouble. What is it?

Mrs. Wellfleet. If I tell you, will it be safe?

Conway. I am a minister of God.

Mrs. Wellfleet. You won't tell? Promise me.

Conway. I promise. Trust me.

Mrs. Wellfleet. I do trust you. [*In horror at what she is saying.*] My husband is a thief.

Conway. [*Starting and controlling himself.*] That's a cruel word.

Mrs. Wellfleet. Oh, so I tell him. But he says that's the word. [*Impressively.*] He has taken money and lost it.

Conway. [*Violently.*] Why do you bring this thing to me?

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*In childlike surprise.*] I'm confessing to you.

Conway. Go on. Tell me the whole.

Mrs. Wellfleet. He has not been found out. In less than an hour he leaves the country.

Conway. [*Agitatedly.*] That's not my affair, is it? Is it my affair?

Mrs. Wellfleet. You are a minister. That's why I'm here.

Conway. Go on.

Mrs. Wellfleet. It's all arranged, where he is to go. I am to know, my mother and I. I am to join him—— [*With sudden apprehension.*] I mustn't tell you that.

Conway. Don't tell me anything.

Mrs. Wellfleet. No. This is enough. But he mustn't go.

Conway. You want him to stay and face it?

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Breaking down.*] I want him here with me. If he goes away like that, I shall—die.

Conway. Have you asked him to stay?

Mrs. Wellfleet. I've begged him to.

Conway. But there's the penalty.

Mrs. Wellfleet. Oh, there needn't be any penalty. If we only had a little time the money could be found. It's easy enough to get money.

Conway. Is it, child? It's harder than to get righteousness.

Mrs. Wellfleet. Oh, it isn't so difficult. My husband hadn't such a big salary—not in the beginning—but when I asked for money he always got it for me.

Conway. I see.

Mrs. Wellfleet. Will you make him stay with me?

Conway. You begged him to stay and he refused you.

Mrs. Wellfleet. Yes.

Conway. If he still refuses, you'll go with him?

Mrs. Wellfleet. How can I? There's little Anne.

Conway. A child?

Mrs. Wellfleet. Our little girl. If he runs away from things and we go with him, we shall have to keep hiding and getting away from people. Do you think I'd care? But I can't bring my baby up that way.

Conway. You put the child before your husband.

Mrs. Wellfleet. She's my baby. I've got to think of her.

Conway. If you knew what it is for a man to be a fugitive, alone!

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Eagerly.*] Do you tell me to go with him? I wish you would.

Conway. Haven't you father or mother?

Mrs. Wellfleet. I've no father. My mother is with my husband now.

Conway. Have you asked her what to do?

Mrs. Wellfleet. Yes.

Conway. [*Eagerly.*] What does she say? What do women say when they are asked things like that?

Mrs. Wellfleet. She wouldn't say anything. She sat and looked like marble. I said to her, "It would be easy—but there's the child."

Conway. What did she say?

Mrs. Wellfleet. "The child," she said. "The child."

Conway. So you came here.

Mrs. Wellfleet. I told her I was coming. At first she wouldn't hear of it. Then she said, "Go to him. Don't leave him till he tells you what to do."

Conway. How should I know more than she?

Mrs. Wellfleet. You are a minister.

Conway. A priest of God. [*With sudden firmness.*] Send your husband here to me.

Mrs. Wellfleet. He wouldn't come. He'd say you'd give him up.

Conway. I've pledged you my word. Tell him that.

Mrs. Wellfleet. He doesn't believe in religion. The first time I went to the Tabernacle, he laughed.

Conway. [*Searchingly.*] Does he laugh at you?

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Shyly.*] He's very fond of me.

Conway. Work on that fondness. Bring him here.

[*Doorbell rings without. Conway starts and listens a moment.*]

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Doubtfully.*] I'll try.

Conway. Where do you live?

Mrs. Wellfleet. Nineteen Jewry Street.

Conway. [*Rapidly.*] It's only a step. If you're not back here with him in twenty minutes, I'll come to you.

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Overjoyed.*] You're going to save us.

Conway. God must save us all.

[*Enter Small.*]

Small. A lady, sir.

Conway. I can't see her.

Small. So I told her. She sends this card.

Conway. [*Reading the card.*] "Come home. Your husband has been asking for you." [*To Mrs. Wellfleet.*] This is for you.

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Taking card.*] It's from my mother. I must go. Oh, you'll save us! If we're not here in twenty minutes, you'll come to us?

Conway. In twenty minutes.

[*Enter Mrs. Gregg.*]

[*At sight of her cries out.*] Ah!

Small. Now, ma'am, didn't I tell you——

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Going forward to her. To Conway.*] This is my mother.

[*Exit Small.*]

Mrs. Gregg. [*To Mrs. Wellfleet.*] He's got his desk cleared and papers burned. He's asked for you. I didn't dare tell him you weren't in the house.

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Rapidly to Conway, passing him.*] In twenty minutes. I will be back. I'll bring him with me.

[*Exit Mrs. Wellfleet.*]

Mrs. Gregg. So you know me?

Conway. Know my own wife! Who is that girl?

Mrs. Gregg. Our daughter, yours and mine. Haven't you thought of her?

Conway. Thought of her? All these twenty years. But I've thought of her as the baby she was. [*In sudden realization.*] Annie, she's in trouble. The child's in trouble. We must go to her.

Mrs. Gregg. Wait. We must consider what to say.

Conway. Tell me about her husband—the details.

Mrs. Gregg. I don't know them really. He has embezzled. They're trust funds. He was with Stark and Cummings.

Conway. [*Thunderstruck.*] My old firm?

Mrs. Gregg. [*Nods.*] Your firm. It's like fate, isn't it, the past all over again? [*Hurriedly.*] What did you advise her?

Conway. I put her off.

Mrs. Gregg. If you get them here together, what are you going to say?

Conway. I don't know.

Mrs. Gregg. She's brought you her trouble. You've got to deal with it.

Conway. As a priest?

Mrs. Gregg. As her father.

Conway. [*In anguish.*] No! no! The priest that turned from the old life to the new.

Mrs. Gregg. The father, I tell you, the poor child's father.

Conway. The father that committed the same crime and ran from his punishment.

Mrs. Gregg. Where have you been all these dreadful years?

Conway. In South America. In the mines, at first.

Mrs. Gregg. What brought you back?

Conway. I was converted. God said to me, "Go back and save souls in the place where you sinned."

Mrs. Gregg. Have you made money?

Conway. I did make money, but I never kept it.

Mrs. Gregg. No. Some of it you sent to me.

Conway. Then it reached you?

Mrs. Gregg. It was wise to send it through mother. I'd moved and taken another name.

Conway. You used the money?

Mrs. Gregg. [*Violently.*] Never.

Conway. Why not?

Mrs. Gregg. [*With difficulty.*] I thought it might be——

Conway. You thought it was ill-gotten. What did you do with it?

Mrs. Gregg. Gave it to the church. [*In amazed recollection.*] Why, it started the fund to build the Tabernacle where you preach.

Conway. What did you live on?

Mrs. Gregg. I am a music teacher.

Conway. I've been working off my debt. Besides, I sent money to the creditors.

Mrs. Gregg. I never knew that.

Conway. Through the firm.

Mrs. Gregg. Stark and Cummings?

Conway. Yes. Conscience money.

Mrs. Gregg. Thank God you're not rich. That I could not have borne.

Conway. [*Indicating the room.*] Does this look like it?

Mrs. Gregg. [*Doubtfully.*] You have a man servant.

Conway. He came with me from the mines. I saved him.

Mrs. Gregg. Saved his life?

Conway. His soul. He is devoted to me. [*With an air of breaking down in confession.*] I can't live alone. It's got on my nerves.

Mrs. Gregg. [*With a moved eagerness.*] Have you been lonely?

Conway. We won't talk of that. [*Looks at watch.*] She's not coming.

Mrs. Gregg. It isn't twenty minutes.

Conway. No, no. It isn't ten. But I'm on fire. We must go to them.

Mrs. Gregg. What can you say?

Conway. We must think together.

Mrs. Gregg. What have our twenty years taught us? Come back over them and see.

Conway. [*Bitterly.*] To torture ourselves?

Mrs. Gregg. [*Passionately.*] No, to feel at home once more.

Conway. [*As if he dragged the words out.*] Twenty years ago, you and I were young.

Mrs. Gregg. [*Withdrawn into recollection.*] There was the baby.

Conway. The woman that has just gone out of here.

Mrs. Gregg. You came home to me that night—[*breaking*] O Stephen, we can't let ourselves do this.

Conway. [*With growing steadiness.*] I came home and told you I had been—unfortunate.

Mrs. Gregg. Unfortunate? Is that the word?

Conway. [*Tightening his hold on fact.*] I told you I had used money and lost it. I told you I was a fugitive and where to meet me when I was safe. What did you say?

Mrs. Gregg. [*Miserably, but firmly.*] I said, if you would stay and take your punishment, I would stand by you. But I wouldn't let my daughter live with a man that had shirked his penalty, see him grow smug and prosperous——

Conway. [*Breaking in.*] Have I grown smug and prosperous?

Mrs. Gregg. [*Melting into sympathy.*] No. You have worn yourself to a shadow.

Conway. That's my confession. Now, out of my sin and cowardice, what have I got to help another man?

Mrs. Gregg. Out of my sin and cowardice, what have I got to help another woman?

Conway. You weren't a coward. You were wild with courage.

Mrs. Gregg. Wild with despair. That was when you were with me. What did I do when you were gone?

Conway. What did you do?

Mrs. Gregg. Lived a coward's life, to shield the child.

Conway. Well, she's repaid you. She's good and beautiful.

Mrs. Gregg. Yes, but is she brave?

Conway. Isn't she?

Mrs. Gregg. I don't know. To-night may tell us. If she's not brave, it's my fault.

Conway. Because you shielded her?

Mrs. Gregg. I've kept her a child. Suppose in the beginning I had told her the truth—why her father left us—wouldn't she meet this night with a stouter heart?

Conway. God knows. [*Looking at his watch.*] Shall we give her another minute?

Mrs. Gregg. [*Impatiently.*] Oh, but what shall we say? What shall we say?

Conway. She's not easily guided.

Mrs. Gregg. She'll be guided by you. She's heard you at the Tabernacle.

Conway. [*Doubtingly.*] You haven't heard me preach?

Mrs. Gregg. Every night.

Conway. [*Unaffectedly curious.*] What made you?

Mrs. Gregg. [*Passionately.*] Was there anything in the world I wanted more than to hear your voice?

Conway. Annie, you care about me. There's something of it left.

Mrs. Gregg. Do I care about my hand? It's a part of me, isn't it?

Conway. Am I like that? Your hand, your right hand?

Mrs. Gregg. My hand may be maimed and useless to me, but it's my hand.

Conway. You don't believe in me.

Mrs. Gregg. I don't know you yet.

Conway. You don't see I've changed. I'm not the man that left you.

Mrs. Gregg. You're a braver man. You're insanely brave. I knew you. Won't others know you, too?

Conway. I think of that, day and night. I never get up before those hundreds in the Tabernacle without expecting some voice among them to call out, "Stephen Bond."

Mrs. Gregg. It was wrong to come.

Conway. [*Rapidly.*] It was right. I see why now. God sent me so that my daughter could hear me and believe in me and come to me for help.

Mrs. Gregg. [*With quiet conviction.*] You can't really help her, Stephen.

Conway. Why can't I?

Mrs. Gregg. Doesn't your Bible tell you there are no grapes of thorns? You can't lead men into the straight way unless you are walking there yourself. You're not in that road yet. You're only looking over the fence.

Conway. [*Struck by the simile.*] Looking over the fence! [*Recovering confidence.*] But I am leading men. You heard me in the Tabernacle. You saw the crowd at my gate.

Mrs. Gregg. I don't know how it is, Stephen, but I know we are all part of one great web. You can't spoil the least thread in it without weakening the whole. And the web isn't strong again until that thread's mended.

Conway. [*Listening.*] She's coming.

Mrs. Gregg. There are two. He's coming with her.

Conway. [*With fire.*] You will see me sweep him off his feet by the power of the Word. I will prevail.

Mrs. Gregg. Will you let him go or make him stay?

Conway. [*With sudden illumination.*] He shall stay.

Mrs. Gregg. Commanded by the man that ran.

Conway. He shall do what I would do if it was to be done again.

Mrs. Gregg. You would give yourself up?

Conway. [*Desperately.*] I wish to God I had given myself up. But my chance is over.

Mrs. Gregg. The web isn't mended.

Conway. God can mend it.

Mrs. Gregg. God Himself can't do our work for us.

[*Enter Mrs. Wellfleet and Harrison Wellfleet.*]

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Eagerly.*] My husband.

Conway. [*Meeting him with dignified cordiality.*] You are a brave man to come.

Wellfleet. Not at all, Mr. Conway. It interests me exceedingly.

Conway. [*Insisting gently.*] Brave to trust me. That's what I mean.

Wellfleet. Trust you not to give me up? Bless you, man, you couldn't.

Conway. [*A little surprised, but controlling himself.*] True. I'd pledged my word.

Wellfleet. You couldn't, couldn't, couldn't. You're in the same box.

Mrs. Gregg. [*Starting forward.*] Harry!

Wellfleet. [*Calmly to his wife and Mrs. Gregg.*] The man's a crook.

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Explaining.*] You don't understand, Harry. This is the travelling preacher, the revivalist from the Tabernacle.

Wellfleet. [*Drily.*] Exactly. You'd given me away to him—oh, it's all right, dear, all right—but did you suppose I came here to exchange holy platitudes? [*Harshly.*] I came to convince him he'd have to respect your confidence.

Conway. I do respect it.

Wellfleet. You mighty well have to, or you'll find your own foot in the trap.

Conway. [*Responding irrepressibly.*] What do you know?

Wellfleet. Conway's not your name. You're Stephen Bond.

Conway. [*To Mrs. Gregg.*] You've told him.

Mrs. Gregg. No, Stephen, no! Never in the world.

Wellfleet. [*To Mrs. Gregg.*] You know him, too?

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*To Mrs. Gregg.*] You call him Stephen?

Conway. [*To Wellfleet whom he has been regarding searchingly.*] I saw you once two years ago.

Wellfleet. You've hit it. *Continuez.*

Conway. You were the prospector that wanted a guide from the Del Plaza mine to the Dominique.

Wellfleet. I was.

Conway. I was sent to guide you.

Wellfleet. I was to mail letters at Diego. You took occasion to send a packet by me to Stark and Cummings.

Conway. You tampered with it.

Wellfleet. Not at all. I had doubts about the cor-

rectness of the address on one of my letters, asked for it at the little hole in the ground they called a post-office and they gave it to me with the whole batch, yours among them.

Conway. Stark and Cummings had sent you out there?

Wellfleet. Exactly. Business of the firm.

Mrs. Gregg. What did his packet mean to you?

Wellfleet. It wasn't the first I'd seen in the same hand. I knew what was inside—a fat remittance labelled, in the most delightfully old-fashioned way—conscience money.

Conway. The money had come to you—in the office?

Wellfleet. Precisely. I'd been in difficulty, your conscience money came to me, and I'd absorbed it.

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Wonderingly.*] I don't know you when you talk like that.

Wellfleet. I'm talking business. Business isn't pretty.

Mrs. Wellfleet. Did I ever know you?

Wellfleet. Maybe, before I wanted to live soft. Before I found the short cut to Easy Street. This fellow showed it to me.

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*With growing wonder.*] A man sent conscience money to your firm?

Wellfleet. This man.

Mrs. Wellfleet. Conscience money! That means, to pay back other money. You took that money.

Wellfleet. My dear child, I had a kind of lien on it. My father was one of the parties this Dicky defrauded.

Conway. [*Wondering.*] Does it go back so far as that? Is crime born out of other crime?

Wellfleet. Don't take it hard. You've escaped. I'm going to.

Conway. Have I influenced you? If I hadn't escaped, should you be here to-night?

Wellfleet. In all probability. My dear fellow, it's temperament. We're more or less alike. You're a romantic devil. Ordinary things didn't satisfy you. You didn't love money. You wanted it because it's spectacular.

Conway. So we're not to call it sin? Romance! Is that the word?

Wellfleet. Romance, dear fellow. You and I ought to have been freebooters. We can't be. It's the fault of our century. The only way for a man to ease off his spirits is juggling with money—money—money.

Conway. [*In religious ecstasy.*] Yes, there is a way. The way to the arena where the beasts are waiting, the way of saints and martyrs.

Wellfleet. [*Bowing low.*] After you, Gaston.

Conway. After me? Come then. [*Rings.*] I shall confess. To-night.

[*Enter Small.*]

Small, are the people waiting outside?

Small. No, sir, oh, no. [*Looking reproachfully at the others.*] It's getting late, sir.

Conway. [*To Small.*] Then you must be the people. I'm not the man you think me.

Small. Oh, sir, don't say that. [*Aside to him.*] Not till we're alone. You're too rash, sir, too impulsive.

Conway. I am a common thief.

Small. [*Soothingly.*] Yes, sir, I knew it, but we're not alone. [*Raising his voice.*] You're tired, sir.

Conway. Don't you hear me? I am a criminal, confessing.

Small. [*With sudden interest.*] Confessing? Damned if I don't believe it. What's brought you round?

Conway. Is that all you can say?

Small. [*Easily.*] Bless you, sir, I knew you from the first. I thought you were in the Gospel Shop for a big haul, and when you got to it, I'd come in for a rake-off.

Conway. [*Dazed.*] But you were converted, Small. You got religion.

Small. [*Cheerfully.*] Same brand as yours, sir. Many's the time I've laughed to see the Reubens over there in the Tabernacle. I says to myself, "When he gets round to it, he'll sell 'em a gold brick."

Conway. Is thievery branded on my face?

Small. Bless you, sir, you've got an excellent face, sir, for the trade. Direct glance, pleasant voice, great personal magnetism. Easy enough to believe in you, sir.

Conway. You didn't believe in me.

Small. Oh, I'm an old hand. I know the signs. You were always looking over your shoulder, sir. There, you're doing it now.

Conway. You despised me.

Small. Don't think it, sir. Though I never liked

the way you talked. Bible talk in the home ain't hardly natural. Don't worry your head about squealing, sir. You won't do it.

Conway. You speak like the Tempter.

Small. [*Persuasively.*] You see, sir, you've got along pretty well so far, made some money—fooled it away, maybe. Still, you've got a good many years before you yet. Now if the other gentleman's going to absent himself for a spell, why, here's a little partnership all ready for us, him and you and me.

Wellfleet. You are a magnificent promoter.

Small. [*To Conway.*] You see, sir, it ain't as if you'd do any particular good, confessing. What you did's past and gone and the more you kick round in the mud, the more you'll get it on the ladies' dresses and no good to nobody.

Conway. It's bound to be that, whichever way we turn—suffering and shame for them.

Mrs. Gregg. Annie, speak to him. Speak to your father.

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Dazed.*] I haven't any father.

Mrs. Gregg. I tell you he is your father, and he needs your love, every bit you can give him.

Mrs. Wellfleet. My father is dead. You told me so.

Conway. He has been dead in trespasses and sin.

Small. Cut that. Talk United States.

Wellfleet. Your splendor of a valet is right. If we use the language of the Tabernacle, we sha'n't get out of the Tabernacle, so to speak. And really now we're on the high road.

Conway. You don't believe in me, not one of you. Not one!

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Running to him.*] O father, I do. I believe in you.

Conway. [*Holding out his arms.*] Come, child.

Wellfleet. [*Stopping her by a hand on her arm.*] Are you her father?

Conway. Yes.

Wellfleet. Poor women. Poor mother. Poor daughter. [*Sternly to Mrs. Gregg.*] You said your husband was dead. You lied to me. What for?

Mrs. Gregg. [*Desperately.*] I lied for the same reason that she [*pointing to Mrs. Wellfleet*] in her time will lie for her baby at home.

Wellfleet. [*Struck by the words.*] Her baby at home. The chain lengthens. [*To Small, giving him coin.*] Toss up for me.

Mrs. Wellfleet. What are you doing?

Wellfleet. Heads, I stay. Tails, I go. Two out of three.

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Taking the coin from Small and throwing it across the room.*] That to see whether you're to stay or go?

Wellfleet. Precisely. I'm not pious, like my father-in-law. I'm not so much of a sport as my mother-in-law. This is my form of appeal.

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Excitedly, and including them all as she talks.*] No! no! no! we must choose to be good. We must choose.

Wellfleet. [*Gently.*] My child, you don't in the least understand. Remember, I'm done for financially. It means jail.

Mrs. Wellfleet. Oh, if we could all go together. But you must go, and we must bear it.

Mrs. Gregg. Don't you see why she's the only one of us to see clearly and speak plainly? She's pure in heart.

Mrs. Wellfleet. Oh, I'll tell you why I'm sure. It was his preaching, the minister in the Tabernacle— [*struck with wonder*] why, that's my father, and he's done wrong himself! Oh, but he knows the way, and he showed it to us all.

Conway. [*Overcome with joy, to Mrs. Gregg.*] The web! My threads were broken, but God made me keep on weaving, and here [*putting his hand on Mrs. Wellfleet's shoulder*], here the pattern's beautiful. And now I'm going back to mend my threads.

Wellfleet. Actually going to do it, old man?

Conway. Yes.

Wellfleet. Going to give yourself up now nobody cares whether you do or don't?

Conway. Yes.

Wellfleet. Going to turn the famous Conway into the infamous Bond?

Conway. Yes.

Wellfleet. They'll say you were a hypocrite.

Conway. God help me.

Wellfleet. You'll damn the souls you saved.

Conway. God help them.

Wellfleet. [*After a moment's thought, while they all watch him.*] I'm with you.

[*His wife throws her arms about him joyously.*]

[*Bitterly.*] But we're not going to bear the brunt of this. Do you know who is?

Conway. [*Indicating the women.*] They are.

Mrs. Gregg. [*Taking his hand.*] That's the mercy of it. It's the only way we could bear it at all. [*To her daughter.*] You know that.

Mrs. Wellfleet. [*Exaltedly.*] Yes! we're one family.

Conway. [*Quietly, to Wellfleet.*] Stay here to-night. In the morning——

Wellfleet. [*Quietly.*] In the morning——

[*They shake hands.*]

Small. [*Bursting out impulsively.*] Oh, religion can't be so rotten after all, not if it makes you a dead game sport. I'm glad I've got it, damned glad. [*Shaking Conway's hand.*] Much obliged. Thank you, sir. Now I'm going to cook you all a bite.

Conway. We'll break bread together. It will be our Sacrament.

CURTAIN

THE LOVING CUP

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

[*In the order of their appearance*]

Mrs. Timmins

Rosie

Jane

Miss Gill

Mrs. Peck

Mrs. Haynes

Miss Pride

Miss Nettie Snow

Dr. Brentwood

Hen Batchelder

"Samwel" Peck

John C. Timmins

Andrew

Cynthia

Other Men and Women of the neighborhood

THE LOVING CUP

Time: A late afternoon in July.

Place: An open sward with neighboring trees, used for a picnic ground. A long picnic table of rough boards on trestles, C.

The women, all save Cynthia and Miss Snow, enter the picnic ground. They are talking and laughing, carrying baskets and round wooden boxes with bails (known of old as butter-boxes) containing the supper. Rosie and Jane are laden with festoons of maple leaves. Mrs. Peck carries a pail in each hand (for water from the spring). Miss Gill has a large spy-glass depending from her neck by a strap. She carries a basket, but from time to time sets it down and directs the glass wildly in search of birds. The others have accepted her hobby. When she announces a discovery, they nod pleasantly without looking. Miss Pride carries a nipping looking basket covered with a snowy napkin, and as she walks studies desperately from a sheet of paper.

Mrs. Timmins. [*A large blonde woman exuding kindness from every pore.*] Who's got the tablecloths?

A Woman. Here they be.

Mrs. Timmins. [*To Rosie and Jane.*] You girls think you've made maple trimmin' enough?

Rosie. [*A "sweet pretty" and natural girl.*] Slews of it.

Jane. [*A thin, dark, clever girl who loves to use her tongue and her inquisitive mind. Shrewdly.*] Slews! That's Hen Batchelder's word.

Rosie. [*Conscious and laughing.*] Hen Batchelder ain't got no paytent on words.

Jane. He's got a paytent on *you.*

[*They all laugh, and Rosie cuffs Jane prettily. The Women spread the table-cloths, solicitously making them match. Rosie and Jane pin the maple leaf festoons on the table-cloths in garlands. The Women stack up the baskets and boxes, set out glasses, bring lemons for lemonade and are bustling and busy.*]

Mrs. Timmins. [*To a neighbor.*] D'you bring some o' your nice gold an' silver cake?

Neighbor. No, I brought sponge.

Another Woman. [*Laughing.*] So'd I bring sponge.

Another Woman. So'd I.

Mrs. Timmins. [*Laughing unctuously and so making her words void of offense.*] Well, if I didn't know better'n to bring sponge-cake to a picnic, I'd give up beat. Men-folks have to be starved out 'fore they touch that.

Another Woman. I know it. Ain't it queer? Give men-folks a rich heavy cake that's fell an' raisins sunk to the bottom, an' they think they're made.

Rosie. [*In impulsive betrayal.*] Hen Batchelder

says if he had his way he'd feed sponge-cake to the pigs.

Mrs. Timmins. John C. says it's no better'n sawdust. Says you can have your sponge-cake for all him if he can set down to hot doughnuts an' cheese. I brought crullers—Aunt Nancy's receipt.

Miss Gill. [*A thin, bird-like person, wandering vaguely about and looking through her glass into the trees.*] Seems if that was an indigo buntin'. Don't you think that's an indigo buntin', girls?

Jane. [*Eagerly.*] When's the men-folks comin'?

A Woman. Soon's they've raked up.

Another Woman. Goin' to bring their fiddles, ain't they?

Another Woman. Yes, but they ain't goin' to change their clo'es. Elbridge says, "If you want us boys to se' down an' eat sweet trade in July, you've got to take us as we be."

Mrs. Timmins. Certain. 'Tis a kind of a queer time for a picnic, middle o' the busiest month. But I says to John C., "If the ladies of this town have made up their minds to present their old doctor with a silver cup on his seventy-fifth birthday, an' his birthday comes in July, what you goin' to do?"

Another Woman. That's right. What you goin' to do?

Mrs. Peck. [*An Amazon of great physical strength and known over the county as the master of her house.*] Samwel says to me, "You women have got up this rinktum an' you can carry it out yourselves. You've chipped in an' bought the cup, an' you can present it. I'm goin' to git in my hay." But I says

to him, "Samwel Peck, you'd ought to be ashamed. Here's Doctor that's stood by us all, fifty year an' over, every trouble we've had, an' the old picnic place ain't a quarter of a mile from your door, an' if you ain't there I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll come after ye."

A Woman. Wha'd he say?

Mrs. Peck. Said he'd come. What'd ye s'pose he'd say?

[*They all laugh.*]

Jane. [*Stopping work and talking in an eager, high-voiced haste.*] What do you think Rosie says? She says her father's told Doctor we're goin' to give him the silver cup, an' now it's all out, an' Rosie's mother feels so about it she ain't comin' at all. An' her father feels so, he ain't neither.

Mrs. Timmins. Now if that ain't a shame. [*To Rosie.*] I wisht I'd known it, an' known your mother'd took it so hard, I'd told her to come along an' make the best on't, an' bring your father, too.

Mrs. Haynes. [*A shrewd little woman who has accumulated axioms.*] Accidents happen in the best o' families, Gramma Hart used to say.

Rosie. [*Impetuously, and laughing a little, to cover her mortification.*] Mother give it to him good. She says his tongue's hung in the middle an' wags both ways.

Mrs. Timmins. [*Sympathetically.*] How was it, Rosie? He didn't go an' let it out a-purpose, I'll warrant ye.

Rosie. [*Earnestly, justifying "father".*] Why, father'd been down to Mill Village, buyin' standin' grass, an' when he come back, he an' mother together,

they met Doctor an' father hollered out to him, "Well, Doc, how'd you like your silver mug?" Mother tried to hush him up, but he only said, "What you pinchin' me for?" She says she was so tried she could ha' pushed him out the wagon.

Mrs. Peck. [*Ominously.*] I guess 'f 't had 'a' been Samwel he wouldn't ha' heard the last on't.

Another Woman. What'd Doctor say?

Rosie. Why, mother says Doctor didn't take no notice. Didn't seem to hear.

Miss Pride. [*Tall, angular, spectacled, severe of dress, devoted to correct deportment and speech. Solemnly, looking up from her manuscript.*] You can't tell what Doctor hears. He hears what is desirable and no more.

Another Woman. No, you can't tell what Doctor hears.

Another Woman. No, I guess you can't.

[*They all shake their heads and nod in solemn confirmation.*]

Jane. [*Again with her air of shrewd interest in news.*] D'you know Cynthy May's comin' to the picnic? She's goin' to be late. Said she'd got to be, but *I* think it's because she feels so bad, an' she thinks we'll find it out. But she's comin'.

Mrs. Timmins. [*In warm defense.*] Well, I dunno why she shouldn't come to the picnic, the poor lamb! She give her part to the presentation cup, an' Doctor sets by her as if she was his own.

Jane. [*Knowingly.*] Yes, but she an' Andrew don't speak. An' he's her own husband, too.

A Woman. That's true enough. Still——

Jane. Seems awful queer if she comes without Andrew. An' if he comes too! That'll be queerer.

Mrs. Timmins. [*Reprovingly.*] Now you hear to me, Janie. Don't you take up habits of idle talk. If Cynthy an' Andrew don't speak, it's their business. 'Tain't ourn.

Mrs. Peck. [*Nodding portentously.*] If anybody'd hit anybody over the head, Melissy Timmins, you'd say mebbe there was good cause.

Mrs. Timmins. Well, mebbe there would be. There 'most always is. An' when it comes to Cynthy an' Andrew an' their fallin' out, there must be cause, if we but knew the rights on't.

Jane. [*Eagerly.*] Why, we do know. Rosie's father was there when it happened, an' he told Uncle Seth an' Uncle Seth told Hiram True——

Rosie. [*Indignantly.*] Now, Janie, you stop. If father spoke of it, he hadn't ought to, an' so mother told him, an' he said he wisht he never'd opened his head.

Mrs. Timmins. That's right, Rosie. We don't want to hear no tales.

Miss Gill. [*Rushing across the scene.*] There's a downy woodpecker! See 'f you don't think that's a downy woodpecker.

Mrs. Timmins. So all I say is, we keep our spoons out o' Cynthy's an' Andrew's dish. There ain't an individual thing that ain't made wuss by turnin' on't over 'n' over.

Mrs. Peck. [*Emphatically.*] So I say. What's

everybody's business is nobody's, an' likely to run into the ground.

Mrs. Haynes. What ye don't tell ye can't be hung for. So Gramma Hart used to say.

Mrs. Timmins. Doctor himself says this neighborhood's freer'n any he ever see from backbitin' an' scandal.

Jane. Why, this ain't backbitin'. It's just tellin' how 'twas. That day Rosie's father went in to Andrew's. [*Unconsciously the Women gather breathlessly round and listen.*] 'Twas to talk about the new piazza Andrew's goin' to build.

Rosie. [*As if contributing unwillingly.*] Father's goin' to haul the lumber.

Jane. An' they were talkin' over how much lumber 'twould take an' Andrew asked Cynthy whether she wanted the piazza roof to go all the way or part open platform, an' Cynthy couldn't tell.

Mrs. Timmins. Course she couldn't. Dear lamb! She's so gentle, she's afraid to death to speak, for fear 'twon't be what somebody else wants.

Jane. [*With relish.*] An' Andrew had one o' his odd spells come on, an' he says, "Cynthy, you've got to tell. I don't speak another word to you till you do."

A Woman. What'd Cynthy say?

Another Woman. Yes, what'd she say?

Another Woman. Hurry up, Jane. Cynthy may be here any minute.

Mrs. Timmins. [*Unwillingly.*] Well, if we've gone so fur as this—what'd Cynthy say?

Jane. Why, Rosie's father says she turned white as a sheet an' went right into the kitchen an' se' down.

A Woman. [*Nodding knowingly.*] It's the fust odd spell he's had sence they're married. That's truth an' fact.

Rosie. Mother says she'll warrant Andrew'd no sooner said it than he thought 'twas the worst day's work he ever done.

A Woman. [*Nodding.*] But now he's said it, he won't go back on it. Andrew's as set as Rock Dunder.

Another Woman. Poor Cynthy!

Mrs. Timmins. Poor lamb!

Another Woman. Well, there ain't nothin' to be done.

Another Woman. Didn't Andrew say nothin' after he told her he wouldn't speak?

Jane. Why, Rosie's father says Andrew turned white as the driven snow an' looked as if he'd drop through the earth. An' he says, "My God! I wisht I never'd seen this day." [*With relish.*] "My God!" that's what he says. "My God! I wisht I never'd seen this day."

A Woman. When Cynthy heard that, why didn't she laugh it off?

Another Woman. Mebbe she didn't ketch it, back there in the kitchen so.

Another Woman. Cynthy ain't one to laugh things off.

Mrs. Timmins. [*Nodding.*] They go too deep.

Mrs. Peck. [*Violently.*] Rosie, why didn't your father tell him he's a born fool, good wife as he's got

an' only a year married, to kick over his dough dish like that?

Rosie. Mother asked him, an' father said he wa'n't one to meddle nor make.

Mrs. Timmins. [*Withdrawing from the circle, which then dissolves.*] Well, I guess the rest of us better not, neither.

A Woman. [*Adjusting a maple festoon.*] There! ain't the table ready?

Another Woman. [*To Mrs. Timmins.*] You goin' to take out the victuals now?

Mrs. Timmins. Why, no, seems if they'd be better on't where they be, till the men-folks come an' we've presented the cup.

Mrs. Haynes. [*Laughing.*] That's so. Remember what Gramma Hart used to say:

"To emmets an' flies
Sweet trade is a prize."

Mrs. Timmins. Soon's Nettie Snow comes with that cup——

Another Woman. Where under the sun *is* Nettie Snow? She must know the cup's got to be here 'fore Doctor comes.

Jane. [*Eagerly.*] Why, you know when Miss Snow went to Boston to get the cup, she said she made it in the way o' business too, an' clipped round an' looked at the fashions, an' she says our skirts are all too full an' too long an' she set up half the night last night to cut hers off an' take it in.

A Woman. [*Admiringly.*] If Nettie Snow ain't a born dressmaker there never was one. If she didn't keep on the clean jump, I dunno where we'd all be.

Another Woman. Look as if we'd come out o' the ark, I guess.

Rosie. There she is! There she is!

[*Enter Miss Nettie Snow, slender, sanguine, and quite willing to accept middle age, save that she feels obliged to keep her clothes up to date. She has a tense, needle-like expression contrasting oddly with her furbelows, her challis dress made in a caricature of fashion. In this ardent devotion to her profession she wears flighty ragtags and floating veils. They all surround her and begin chorusing,* "You got the cup?" "Where's the cup?" "Is't in that bag?"]

Miss Snow. [*Pleased with the importance of her mission.*] Now, you let me get my breath.

[*Rosie and Jane take hands in excitement and dance round her.*]

Rosie. Get a move on.

Jane. [*"Catching on" to Rosie's authority.*] Huh! that's what Hen Batchelder says.

Rosie. I don't care 'f he does. Get a move on! Get a move on!

Miss Snow. [*Deliberately opening her bag and enjoying to the full the importance of her mission.*] I can't move no faster'n I can.

A Woman. Is't a plain cup?

Another Woman. Ain't it got chasin' on it?

Another Woman. Has't got Doctor's initials?

Miss Snow. [*Apologetically.*] Well, no, 'tain't got his initials on't, nor the inscription, neither. 'Twas goin' to take a week to do 'em, an' I says, "Thursday's the day, an' Thursday we've got to have it, an' can't you do no better'n that?'

Mrs. Peck. [*Disgustedly.*] How long would it take 'em to cut "M. L. B. from the Ladies of Ginseng Pond"? Anybody'd think 'twas the whole alphabet from *a* to *zed.*

Mrs. Timmins. [*Anxiously.*] You beseeched 'em to do it, Nettie, now didn't you? You done all anybody could, I'll warrant. What'd they say?

Miss Snow. [*With wrinkled brow, accounting for herself.*] Why, they says, "You present it, an' then you fetch it back an' we'll mark it, free o' cost."

A Woman. (*Doubtfully.*) Seems if it ought to been marked.

Mrs. Peck. Seems if anybody could ha' pitched right into 'em an' forced 'em to mark it, whether or no.

A Woman. [*Lugubriously.*] Well, it's too late now.

Miss Snow. [*Driven beyond endurance.*] Now you look here, Susan Peck. I done the best I could, an' if you ain't satisfied——

Mrs. Timmins. [*Soothingly.*] Course you did, Nettie, course you did. Couldn't nobody ha' done more. [*Miss Snow takes out the cup and displays it anxiously. They cluster about and pass it from hand to hand and admire.*] Ain't that a beauty!

Another Woman. Handsomest piece o' silver I ever set my eyes on.

Another Woman. Three handles, too! If that ain't the latest thing, I dunno what is.

Miss Gill. [*Rushing across, waving her hands triumphantly.*] I've seen a finch! I've seen a finch!

Rosie. [*Excitedly, looking off.*] Doctor's comin'! Doctor's comin'!

Several Women. [*Interrogatively.*] He ain't!

Mrs. Timmins. Mercy! an' here's his cup right out in plain sight.

A Woman. Hide it away som'er's.

Another Woman. We can't present it till the menfolks come.

Rosie. Hen Batchelder says——

[*Her voice is drowned by their cackling,* "Here! hide it!" "Under here!" "No, under here!" *Mrs. Timmins sets the cup on the table, snatches a napkin from her basket and throws it over the cup.*]

Miss Snow. [*Agitatedly to Miss Pride.*] Clarissy, you got your speech ready?

Miss Pride. [*Rising and coming forward, her head held very stiff and her hands shaking in stage fright.*] I hardly know. I feel very peculiar. My knees are weak.

Mrs. Timmins. [*Comfortingly.*] Why don't ye jest try it over? Let Rosie hold the paper an' see how't goes.

Miss Pride. [*Agitatedly.*] How near is he?

Jane. [*Excitedly.*] Down by the willers. Tyin' his horse. Give me the paper, Miss Pride. Give it here! quick!

Miss Pride. [*Yielding her the paper and making a solemn bow.*] Doctor Brentwood, we the undesigned, the ladies of Ginseng Pond——

Jane. Undersigned, not undesigned.

Miss Pride. [*Indignantly.*] I *said* undesigned.

Jane. Un-*der*-signed, not undesigned.

Miss Pride. I *said*——

Mrs. Timmins. There, there! Don't squabble. What's one word, more or less? Go ahead, Clarissy.

Miss Pride. [*With a caustic glance at Jane.*] In view of the fact that it is your birthday, and being desirous of signifying——

Rosie. [*Jumping up and down in irrepressible excitement.*] Go ahead! he's 'most here.

Miss Pride. [*Clapping her hand to her heart and sinking to a convenient pail turned upside down.*] I—I—— The words escape me.

Mrs. Timmins. [*Excitedly.*] Why, it's all that about how he's stood by us an' kep' us well an' strong an' brought our child'en into the world an' kep' them well an' strong. I can't tell it as you did, Clarissy, in them elegant long words, but that's the gist on't.

Jane. Here he is.

Several Women. Here he is.

[*Enter Doctor Brentwood.*]

All. [*In a delighted chorus.*] Hullo, Doctor! How de do, Doctor! How de do!

Mrs. Timmins. Well, now you've come, Doctor, the picnic's begun.

Doctor. [*Beaming and shaking hands.*] How's everybody? Rosie, you don't need any iron nor garden

flowers. Got pinies in your cheeks. Janie, how's that little sharp tongue? I'm going to snip off the end of it so's to keep it blunt.

[*Rosie hangs on his arm and Jane puts out her tongue a little to him in gay defiance. Miss Pride withdraws and cons her paper desperately at side.*]

Miss Gill. [*Entering and approaching him with a solemn rapture on her countenance.*] Doctor, I've seen three new birds this day. I don't know their names no more'n the dead.

Doctor. Good for you. Maybe they haven't got any. Name 'em for me.

Mrs. Timmins. We thought we wouldn't take out the victuals till the men-folks come.

A Woman. But now you've come——

Doctor. No, no. I can't eat. Haven't the appetite. Fact is, I came early to catch you women alone. I want to consult you.

All. [*In broken chorus.*] What is it, Doctor? Anybody sick?

Doctor. Yes, I've got two very sick patients, and it'll take all you women-folks to help me pull 'em through. Help me?

Mrs. Timmins. Certain we will. Who is it, Doctor?

A Woman. 'Tain't anybody in the neighborhood?

Another Woman. No, we should ha' heard.

Doctor. It's Cynthia May.

All. Cynthy?

Miss Snow. Why, nothin's the matter with Cynthy.

Jane. I see her this mornin', makin' tarts, makin' 'em for the picnic.

Doctor. Andrew, too. He's worse than Cynthia is.

Mrs. Peck. Andrew's all right. He went by with the rake an' he looked strong as an ox.

Doctor. Cynthia and Andrew are pretty badly off. *I* can't help 'em unless you pitch in and give me a lift.

Mrs. Peck. Andrew ain't had an accident in the field?

Mrs. Timmins. I guess if anything could break Cynthy up 'twould be that.

Doctor. [*Impressively.*] Cynthia and Andrew don't speak.

All. [*In relief.*] That all? Oh, we knew that.

Doctor. All? Don't you call it anything for a man to sit down at the table and eat the food his wife has cooked and not speak to her? Don't you call it anything for her not to dare to speak to him?

Mrs. Timmins. Well, that's jest the way Andrew *is*.

A Woman. That's jest his way.

Doctor. Well, it's a mighty poor way.

Mrs. Peck. So 'tis, Doctor, so 'tis, 'n' if 'twas Samwel, I'd break him of it, or I'd break his neck.

Doctor. So you would, Susan Peck, so you would. But Cynthia can't. Cynthia wasn't made like you. She can't lift a barrel of flour and carry it from the store to the wagon. She's a little delicate thing, and we've got to lend a hand.

Mrs. Timmins. So I say. But how we goin' to?

Doctor. Do you know what day this is?

All. [*Looking at one another guiltily and speaking confusedly.*] Why, yes, Doctor. Yes. Guess we do.

Doctor. It's an anniversary.

All. Yes! yes!

Doctor. It's Cynthia's and Andrew's wedding day.

All. [*Disappointedly.*] Oh! yes! Why, yes, so 'tis.

Doctor. They were married a year ago. It touched me to have them choose that day, because Cynthia remembered it had something to do with me. You know you girls trimmed the meeting-house all up with flowers, and Cynthia came over to me an hour before the wedding, her hands full of syringa. "Doctor," says she, "it's your birthday. I sha'n't ever forget that. Every time this day comes round, I shall say, 'It's Doctor's birthday and my wedding day.'"

[*Rosie begins crying softly, and Jane fiercely dashes at her own eyes with the back of her hand, as if she hated her own tears.*]

Miss Snow. [*Sentimentally, but screwing her face into a knot, as if she didn't recognize the feel of tears.*] Poor Cynthy! Little lovin' thing!

Mrs. Timmins. Dear lamb!

Mrs. Peck. [*Vigorously striding up and down.*] Andrew May'd ought to be trounced, an' I'd like nothin' better'n to do it.

Doctor. [*Wisely.*] Can't trounce folks into being kind.

Mrs. Haynes. [*Shrewdly.*] You can ketch more flies with molasses than you can with vinegar, Gramma Hart used to say.

Jane. There's the men-folks comin'.

Rosie. [*Chokingly.*] Yes, that's Hen Batchelder's laugh.

Doctor. Now, you good women, what are you going to do for Cynthia? We haven't more than two minutes to decide it in.

Mrs. Timmins. I guess anything we *could* do for her'd be done pretty quick.

Doctor. There's just one thing.

All. What is it?

Doctor. Will you do it?

All. Course we will.

Doctor. Do it and not be sorry afterwards?

All. Yes! yes! yes!

Doctor. [*Working them up more and more.*] I've heard women can't hold their tongues.

All. You see 'f we can't.

Doctor. If I should give you a good big surprise, could you take it without hollering?

All. Try it. Try it, Doctor. You just try.

Mrs. Peck. Does the men-folks know?

Doctor. It'll be more of a surprise to them than it is to you.

[*They nod, well pleased.*]

Mrs. Peck. Then you keep an eye on 'em, an' if we don't take it better'n they do, we'll give up beat.

Jane and Rosie. [*Who have been watching on the outskirts.*] Here's the men.

[*Enter the "Men-folks" in clean white shirts and dark trousers. Three carry fiddles and a bass viol. Hen Batchelder gives an embarrassed*

laugh as greeting to Rosie, met by an embarrassed one from her. He hangs about her during the rest of the scene, picking a nosegay for her and presenting it clumsily. Mrs. Peck meets "Samwel," a small, timid man, looks him over, turns him round and dusts him off generally.]

The Women. Hullo!

The Men. Hullo, yerself!

Mrs. Timmins. [*To John C.*] If you ain't been an' dressed up, every one o' ye!

John C. [*Jovially.*] Didn't think we were goin' to picnic with the ladies 'thout puttin' on a clean shirt, did ye?

Doctor. How are you, boys? Andrew, what's the matter with your hand?

Andrew. [*A handsome young farmer who has inherited "oddity" and has not yet licked himself into shape. Gloomily.*] That ain't nothin'. I ripped a hole in it, sharpenin' the machine.

Doctor. [*Insisting on examining it.*] I don't call that done up very shipshape. I thought Cynthia could put on a bandage. I'm ashamed of her.

Andrew. Tied it up myself.

Doctor. More fool you. You couldn't get at it back-handed. Here, give me a hold. [*Arranges the bandage.*]

Andrew. [*Looking round anxiously.*] Where's——

Jane. Where's what?

Doctor. [*Cheerfully.*] "Where's Cynthia?" he means. Where *is* Cynthia, girls?

Jane. There she is.

[*Enter Cynthia, a gentle looking and beautiful young woman, carrying a basket.*]

All. [*But Andrew.*] Hullo, Cynthy!

Cynthia. [*Seeing the Doctor at work on Andrew's hand, setting down her basket and running forward with a little cry.*] Oh!

Doctor. All right, Cynthia, all serene. Cut his hand, that's all, nice clean cut. Didn't tell you for fear you'd fret.

Cynthia. [*Wistfully, bending over the hand.*] You sure?

Doctor. Sure he's O. K.? Yes, I am. There, Andrew. [*Finishing the bandaging. Now beaming at them all.*] Well, girls, what we going to do first?

Mrs. Timmins. [*Looking about her inquiringly.*] Well, I say——

A Woman. [*Confirmingly.*] So do I.

All the Women. Yes, yes.

John C. Sha'n't we fellers go to the spring an' make the lemonade?

Mrs. Timmins. No, we're goin' to have somethin' else fust.

John C. Somethin' else? Oh! thought ye'd have that after supper.

Hen Batchelder. [*Hoarse with shyness.*] Le's have Virginny Reel 'fore supper, anyways. After I've et my fill o' cake I'm too logy to go up an' down centre.

Rosie. [*Wild with gayety.*] 'Fore supper an' after, too.

Hen. [*Admiringly, as if everything she said*

amazed him by its splendor.] You ain't been rakin' hay.

Mrs. Timmins. [*Embarrassed and much excited.*] Well, now, folks—ladies an' gentlemen, I mean—somethin's goin' to take place. Le's form ourselves in a kind of a circle, so's't we can hear, an' Miss Pride will deliver the address. Clarissy Pride!

[*Miss Pride comes agitatedly forward, hand on her heart. She despairingly thrusts the paper at Rosie, takes an attitude and clears her throat.*]

Doctor. [*Taking C.*] Yes, there's going to be an address, and your old Doctor's here to deliver it.

Mrs. Timmins. [*Wildly.*] Doctor, you wait half a minute. Only you wait. Miss Pride's got a few words to say.

Doctor. [*With a bow to Miss Pride.*] Miss Pride'll excuse me. [*She retreats relieved at escaping her task.*] I know what a tip-top address she's got ready, if she wrote it herself, and when I've said my say I want to read it and have her give it to me to keep. [*Miss Pride bows, in gratified acquiescence.*] My speech won't be correct like Miss Pride's. It won't be elegant. But I've got to make it. Dear folks, I'm seventy-five years old to-day. I can't believe it. But I know you believe it, for you've set out to make a kind of a celebration of it. Not one of you here is as old as I am. So not one of you's had time to learn as many things as I have. I've been thinking pretty seriously over the things I've learned, and I've come to the conclusion there's just one thing a man wants

to have to remember when he comes to seventy-five. He wants to think over all the people he's made happy, and he wants to remember he hasn't hurt anybody or given 'em pain. I can't think that last. I've given lots of pain—carelessness, selfishness, hasty speech—well, I can't bear to think of it.

Women. No, no, Doctor.

Men. 'Tain't so.

Doctor. If I had my life to live over again, I'd live it differently. I'd be kinder, that's what I'd do, just kinder. I might not get more book learning or more money. But I'd just be kind. And what I want the rest of you to do that haven't got so near balancing up your accounts is to look out for the happiness of them that live with you. Begin right there. Make your wives happy. Lug water for 'em and lay the fire, and tell 'em they're just as pretty as they were when they walked out brides. I won't preach to the women. They know what to do, know it better than I do, and they live up to it.

Men. That's right.

[*Some of the women are crying softly.*]

Hen. [*Fervently.*] You bet yer life.

Doctor. Last birthday of mine, I wasn't thinking about myself very much. I was thinking about Cynthia here, and Andrew. That was the day they were married. Cynthia was as pretty as a young angel in her white dress and syringas all over her, and Andrew looked like just what he was—a man strong enough to stand between her and all the winds that blow.

Andrew. [*Groaning.*] O my Lord!

Cynthia. O Doctor! Doctor!

Mrs. Timmins. There, Doctor, you've made her cry, the lamb.

Doctor. So when the sun came up this morning, I didn't say to myself, "This is my birthday." I said, "This is the anniversary of Cynthia's wedding day." You know how it is. As we grow old, we think of the young. The best happiness we've got left is seeing them happy.

All. That's so. Never spoke a truer word.

Doctor. I said to myself, "Cynthia and Andrew are the youngest couple here. We'll do something to keep their wedding day." [*With quick, brisk change of manner.*] Nettie Snow, you've got a silver cup laid away somewhere among the lunch baskets and water pails. You bring it out and give it here.

[*Miss Snow, hardly knowing what to do, glancing at the other women for instruction and yet obliged to obey Doctor, takes the cup from under the napkin. Miss Pride, as if recalled to her duties, seizes it from her, and standing with it before the Doctor begins wildly.*]

Miss Pride. Doctor Brentwood, we, the undesigned——

Jane. [*Irrepressibly.*] Undersigned.

Miss Pride. [*Oblivious of her.*] We, the ladies of Ginseng Pond, in view of the fact that—that—we've got this cup [*losing all control of herself*]—It's silver, Doctor, solid, an' it's got three handles an' they'll mark it free o' charge.

Doctor. [*Courteously accepting the cup.*] I thank you, Miss Pride. [*Turning it round and admiring it.*]

My! I don't believe there's an oil man or a steel man or a copper man that's got a handsomer cup than this. Andrew and Cynthia, step out and take hands. [*Cynthia timidly offers her hand, but Andrew, bewildered, stares at the Doctor.*] Why, you've forgot. This way, same as you did it a year ago, when Cynthia swore to love [*puts Cynthia's hand in Andrew's*], honor and obey—and kept her word—and Andrew swore he'd love and cherish. Cynthia and Andrew, this cup was meant for me, an old man whose day's work is almost done. [*To men and women.*] If I could tell what it was to me to know you people thought enough of me to get up such a thing, I should be crying here—like Cynthia. But I want to pass the cup along while I'm alive to have the fun of it. I want it to stand on Cynthia's and Andrew's table, and remind 'em an old man loved 'em—and you all love 'em—and they love each other.

Women. [*Tumultuously.*] But, Doctor! Doctor, you know!

Doctor. [*Warningly.*] Look out! Remember our consultation. Remember what we said.

Mrs. Timmins. [*Getting hold of herself.*] I for one say it's all right.

Mrs. Peck. It's your cup, Doctor, an' if that's what you feel to do with it——

Several Women. It's all right, I say.

Mrs. Timmins. More'n right. It's what Doctor wants.

[*The Doctor, smiling on them, is holding out the cup to Cynthia and Andrew, who stand dazed.*]

Doctor. Here, children, take it, one of you.

Andrew. [*Roughly, in great emotion.*] Cynthy deserves it. I don't. You know I don't.

Cynthia. No, no, Andrew! Don't you say such a thing.

Doctor. Ladies and gentlemen, I understand this cup is presented, not to Cynthia, but to Andrew and Cynthia together, because Andrew and Cynthia are one.

All. Andrew an' Cynthy! Andrew an' Cynthy!

Hen. [*Hoarsely as the shouting dies.*] That's the ticket!

[*Is appalled at his own voice in the silence and claps his hand over his mouth.*]

Doctor. [*Holding up the cup and regarding it tenderly.*] It's what they call a loving cup. It's passed round from hand to hand when folks are living in peace and harmony. It is hereby presented to Cynthia and Andrew, and Thanksgiving and Christmas we'll drop in on 'em and pass the cup round. And the day'll come when you'll pass it, and your children'll pass it, and say, "Remember old Doctor that wanted us all to live in peace."

Mrs. Timmins. [*In high excitement.*] Girls, what do you say?

Women. Hurrah for Doctor!

Men and Women. Hurrah! Hurrah!

Doctor. [*Remindingly.*] Hurrah for Cynthia and Andrew!

All. Hurrah! Hurrah!

Andrew. [*Accepting the cup awkwardly with both hands and passing it solemnly to Cynthia.*] Cynthy, if

there's any place over to our house for a cup such as this, it's because you're what you be—the best woman God ever made.

All. [*Confusedly, in love with cheering.*] Hurrah for Andrew! Hurrah for Cynthy! Hurrah for Doctor!

[*Cynthia has hastily pulled a wreath of cinnamon roses from her basket, lays it on centre of table and sets the cup in it.*]

Mrs. Timmins. Ain't that a cunnin' wreath? D'you make it, Cynthy?

Cynthia. [*Laughing and crying.*] I made it this mornin' to put round this.

[*Takes from her basket a half loaf of cake and sets it on the table beside the cup.*]

Hen. [*Greedily.*] Fruit cake, by gum!

Cynthia. It's a piece of our weddin' cake, an' I thought we'd have a crumb all round, an' when you tasted yours, Andrew, you'd remember—you'd remember——

[*Breaks into sobbing.*]

Andrew. [*Putting his arms about her.*] Don't you cry, Cynthy! O lovey, don't you cry!

Hen. [*Jumping up and down.*] Virginny Reel! Virginny Reel!

Rosie. Janie, Hen's askin' you to dance.

[*Hen seizes Rosie's hands and kisses her boldly. They go laughing and scuffling to their places. Mrs. Timmins gives her husband a kindly reminding push toward Jane, and he advances, makes Jane a clumsy bow and offers his hand.*

They take their places. Miss Gill views the scene for a moment, puts her hand to her ear as if she heard a bird note, directs her glass to the trees, but as a man approaches her throws the glass wildly aside and accepts him. Miss Snow, finding trouble with her narrow skirt, accepts another. Miss Pride stands aloof, apparently superior to the diversion, but when a man offers his hand she joyously accepts. The Doctor takes Mrs. Timmins. Andrew takes Cynthia.]

Jane. [*Calling sharply.*] Cynthy 'n' Andrew! Look at Cynthy 'n' Andrew! Married folks can't dance together.

Andrew. [*Stopping and speaking boldly, his face alight with happiness.*] Can't they? We'll see whether they can't dance together, an' eat together, an' talk together, an' laugh together—an' live an' die together.

Virginia Reel.

CURTAIN

JOINT OWNERS IN SPAIN

Produced by
Maurice Browne at the Little Theatre, Chicago,
February 11, 1913.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

[*In the order of their appearance.*]

Mrs. Mitchell.....GENEVIEVE GRIFFIN

Mrs. Fullerton.....FLORENCE RECKITT

Miss Dyer.....ALICE GERSTENBERG

Mrs. Blair.....ELLEN VAN VOLKENBURG

JOINT OWNERS IN SPAIN

Time: The early afternoon of a winter day.

Place: A large comfortable chamber in the Home. It has two little beds, two chairs, two washstands, etc., so arranged that, when the room is figuratively divided, each part will be complete for occupancy. The door to hall is in Miss Dyer's part, the closet in Mrs. Blair's. On a chair by one window is a dinner tray filled with dishes from a past meal.

Miss Dyer sits by a window, rocking and sighing, and ready at any excuse to dribble into silent tears. She is meagre, lachrymose, always injured and looking for trouble. Mrs. Fullerton, very delicate, old and shaky, and more than ever "faded in her wits" because dazed by impending change, stands near the door, an old-fashioned bonnet in one hand and a small basket in the other. Mrs. Mitchell, a kindly, prosperous and energetic lady, stands near, holding the door open and hastening Mrs. Fullerton's departure.

Mrs. Mitchell. Come, Mrs. Fullerton, come, come.

Mrs. Fullerton. [*Quavering.*] Have I got all my things? It's a terrible piece o' work to move from one

room to another. I'd 'most as lieves take a journey by stage.

Miss Dyer. [*Trembling and injured.*] If anybody's goin' to move, I say it an' I'd say it with the last breath I had to draw, it ought to be me. Here she's had her dinner brought up to her on a waiter, an' now she's flauntin' off into a room where the sun lays the year round, an' here I be in this room I ain't left a night sence I moved in.

Mrs. Fullerton. [*Dazed, and turning round and round in her efforts to accomplish her departure.*] Have I got my apurns?

Mrs. Mitchell. Yes. I packed them myself.

Mrs. Fullerton. Have I got my bunnit?

Mrs. Mitchell. Yes. Here 't is in your hand.

Mrs. Fullerton. Have I got my flannel nightgownd?

Mrs. Mitchell. [*Encouragingly.*] Yes. I took that over my arm. You'll find it hanging on the bed-post. Come, I want you to get all settled before dark.

Mrs. Fullerton. Have I got my extry petticoat?

Mrs. Mitchell. [*Turning her about and gently propelling her to the door.*] Everything, Mrs. Fullerton, every single thing. Hurry up, now. The matron's right there by the door of your new room. She'll help you settle and get acquainted with your roommate. [*Exit Mrs. Fullerton.*] Now, Miss Dyer, I want a little talk with you.

Miss Dyer. [*Tearfully.*] Oh, what a world this is! There's some that's born to sow an' some that's born to reap. Here be I that never's had so much as you could put on a three-cent piece, an' there's Lizy

Jane Fullerton marched off to a room where the sun lays all day long an' nobody knows who'll be packed in here along o' me.

Mrs. Mitchell. Miss Dyer, I'm going to speak very plainly to you. I've been looking into things, and I find your case is about the worst one in the Home.

Miss Dyer. So 't is, an' I'd swear to it before judge an' jury. I ain't a well woman, an' I ain't been this twenty year.

Mrs. Mitchell. [*Firmly.*] I don't mean your health. I mean your disposition.

Miss Dyer. [*Lifting her trembling hands in amazed protest.*] My soul an' body! My disposition! When I've bore everything but death an' ain't so much as asked "why do ye so?"

Mrs. Mitchell. [*Firmly.*] We have moved Mrs. Fullerton to another room because you've worn her out.

Miss Dyer. My land alive! An' day after day I ain't spoke to her from sunrise to set.

Mrs. Mitchell. That's it. She's a poor half-sick old woman, and you've complained and cried and moped until she's scared out of her wits. She can't sleep at night.

Miss Dyer. [*Solemnly.*] Never's such a thing said to me afore,—never sence I drawed the breath o' life.

Mrs. Mitchell. No, everybody's taken it for granted you were cantankerous and they'd got to bear with you. Every roommate you've had you've worn out in the same way. Now, it's time something was done about it.

Miss Dyer. Oh, I wisht I'd ha' died in my cradle long o' father 'n' mother!

Mrs. Mitchell. There are just two of you in the Home that are impossible to live with—you and Mrs. Blair.

Miss Dyer. [*Rousing for a brief flash in the pan—but always injured.*] When it comes to Mirandy Blair, I'll say my say if I'm hung for 't. There ain't man, woman nor child in this county but what knows Mirandy Blair. You couldn't git along with her not if you was the serap'im round the Throne. An' we ain't no more alike than chalk's like cheese.

Mrs. Mitchell. No, you're different. But one's as bad as the other, and since you entered the Home, not one other woman has been able to room with either of you and stay over a month.

Miss Dyer. To think I should ha' lived to see this day.

Mrs. Mitchell. We've given you each the best-natured roommates we could find and it hasn't worked. Now you've proved, both of you, that you can't live with the saints of the earth, and we're going to put you into this room together and let you fight it out. Mrs. Blair, is that you? Come in. Miss Dyer, this is your new roommate.

[*Enter Mrs. Blair, bearing boxes and parcels in her capable hands. She is black-eyed, robust, "high-spirited" and overbearing. Mrs. Mitchell relieves her of a few of her parcels and puts them in the closet. The bandbox she sets in a corner.*]

Mrs. Blair. [*In wild dudgeon.*] If I'd ha' thought I'd ha' come to this, I'd ha' died in my tracks afore I'd left my comfortable home down in Tiverton Holler. Story-'n'-a-half house, good sullar, an' woods nigh-by full o' sarsaparilla an' goldthread an' pine. I've moved more times in this God-forsaken place than a Methodist preacher, fust one room an' then another; an' bad is the best. 'T was poor pickin's afore, but this is the crowner. This beats all.

Mrs. Mitchell. I'll leave you to get settled. [*Exit.*]

[*Miss Dyer is knitting with trembling hands, pausing now and then ostentatiously to wipe the tears.*]

Mrs. Blair. [*She has been darting about the room twitching things into place and always regarding the tray with hostility and scorn, and Miss Dyer now comes into her range of vision.*] What under the sun be you carryin' on like that for, snuffin' an' sithin' an' droppin' them crocodile tears? You ain't lost nobody, have ye, sence I moved in here? [*Miss Dyer in despair lays aside her knitting and begins to rock ever faster and faster with the air of one who must keep a tight grip on herself. Mrs. Blair's voice rises higher and higher.*] I dunno what you've got to complain of no more'n the rest of us. Look at that dress you've got on—a good thick thibet, an' mine's a cheap sleazy alpaca they palmed off on me when they see my eyesight wa'n't o' the best. An' you settin' right there in the sun gittin' he't through, an' over here by the door it's as cold as a barn. My land! if it don't make me hoppin' to see anybody with no more sperit than a wet rag. If ye've

lost anybody by death, why don't ye say so? An' if it's a mad fit, speak out an' say *that.*

Miss Dyer. [*Hitching her chair away from the window into the corner, in front of the bandbox, and speaking in the high tremulous voice of one nearly overcome by tears.*] I'm sure I'm the last to keep the sun off'n anybody. I never was one to take more'n belonged to me, an' I don't care who says it, I never shall be. An' I'd hold to that if 't was the last word I had to speak.

Mrs. Blair. My land! Talk about my tongue! Vinegar's nothin' to cold molasses 'f you've got to plough through it. [*In her darting excursions about the room, twitching a rug here or a tidy there, she glances from the window and stands transfixed. Cries out in great excitement.*] My soul! There's one o' them photograph fellers come to take the house. An' there's Jane Black an' Nancy Potter an' half a dozen more all lined up there waitin' to be took. [*Rushes to the window and throws it up. Stridently.*] Here! you keep right where you be. I'm goin' to be took. [*She rushes to the closet and begins throwing out boxes, clothes, shoes, etc., behind her, while Miss Dyer, regarding the open window, gets a shawl and muffles herself in it. Mrs. Blair calls piercingly.*] Where's my bandbox? Where'd Mis' Mitchell put my bandbox? My soul! where's my bunnit an' my veil? [*She darts across the room, seems about to attack the muffled Miss Dyer, but seizes the chair-back instead and shakes it while Miss Dyer cowers.*] Where's my green bandbox? Anybody that's hid my green bandbox ought to be

b'iled in ile. Hangin's too good for 'em, but let me git my eye on 'em an' they shall swing for 't. Yes, they shall, higher'n Gilroy's kite.

Miss Dyer. [*Dropping the shawl to put both hands to her ears.*] I ain't deef.

Mrs. Blair. Deef? I don't care whether you're deef or dumb—nor whether you're number'n a beetle. Isr'el in Egypt! you might grind some folks in a mortar an' you couldn't open their lips. [*Sees the bandbox in the corner behind Miss Dyer's chair. Pounces on it.*] My soul! if you wa'n't there settin' on it an' wouldn't speak. [*Arrays herself in an ancient poke-bonnet and figured veil; throws the veil hastily back and rushes to the window. Calls.*] You wait till I git my shawl. [*In blank despair.*] He's gone. While I was findin' my bunnit he kep' right on, an' now the pictur's took an' I ain't in it.

Miss Dyer. [*Plaintively, to her corner.*] I dunno what to say nor what not to. If I speak I'm to blame, an' 't is wuss if I keep still.

Mrs. Blair. [*Still wearing her bonnet, pacing up and down, looking wrathfully before her and speaking with bitterness.*] 'Twas the same man that come last summer, an' he said he wanted another view when the leaves was off. An' that time I was laid up with my stiff ankle, an' to-day my bunnit was hid an' I lost it ag'in.

Miss Dyer. [*Rocking and moaning.*] Dear me! Dear me, suz!

Mrs. Blair. [*Transfixing her with a look.*] An' I should like to know whose fault it was.

Miss Dyer. There couldn't nobody charge me with it, an' that I'd say if 't was the last minute I had to live.

Mrs. Blair. If them that owns the winders an' sets by 'em so't you couldn't pry 'em out with a crowbar, had spoke up an' said, "Mis' Blair, there's the photograph man. Don't you want to be took?" it wouldn't ha' been too late. If anybody hadn't hitched their chair round so's't they hid my bandbox, it wouldn't ha' been too late. An' I ain't had my likeness took sence I was twenty years old an' went to Sudleigh fair in my changeable *visite* an' leghorn hat, an' Jonathan wore the brocaded weskit he stood up in the next week a Thursday. It's enough to make a minister swear.

Miss Dyer. Oh, my land o' love! Whatever be I comin' to!

Mrs. Blair. [*Turning her attention to the tray.*] I s'pose there's no need o' my settin' down. The quality can keep their dinner trays piled up over every chair in the room.

Miss Dyer. [*Snuffling.*] That waiter wa'n't brought in here by my will nor my behoof, an' that's the truest word I ever spoke.

Mrs. Blair. It's all in the day's work. Some folks are waited on; some ain't. Some has their victuals brought to 'em an' pushed under their noses, an' some has to go to the table. When they're there, they can take it or leave it. For my part I shouldn't think a waiter'd be enough. I should think you'd ha' had an extension table rolled in an' a snow-drop cloth.

Miss Dyer. [*Tremulously.*] Anybody can move

that waiter that's a mind to. I would myself if I had the stren'th; but I ain't got it. I ain't a well woman an' I ain't been this twenty year. An' I never knew the wust, for the wust hadn't come.

Mrs. Blair. [*Explosively.*] Humph! [*Puts her arms akimbo and looks about the room. Bitterly.*] To think of all the wood I've burnt up in my air-tight an' my kitchen stove an' thought nothin' of it! To think of all the wood there is now growin' an' rottin' from Dan to Beersheba an' I can't lay my fingers on it!

Miss Dyer. I dunno what ye want of wood. This place's hot enough to fry in.

Mrs. Blair. Ye don't know what I want on't? Well, I'll tell ye. I want some two-inch boards to nail up a partition in the middle o' this room. I don't want no more'n my own, but I want it mine.

Miss Dyer. [*Drearily.*] You wouldn't have no gre't of an outlay for boards. 'T wouldn't have to be knee-high to keep me out.

Mrs. Blair. [*Suddenly arrested and then as if electrified by a sudden thought.*] What d'you say?

Miss Dyer. [*With no interest.*] Ye wouldn't have to build more'n a shingle's thickness to keep me out. I never was no hand to go where I ain't wanted; an' if I ever was, I guess I'm cured on't now.

Mrs. Blair. [*With the air of pouncing.*] Last week they said you was markin' out a tumbler quilt. You must ha' had a piece o' chalk. Where is it?

Miss Dyer. [*Drawing forth a piece of chalk from the workbag hanging on her chair; quavering.*] Here

't is. I hope you won't do nothin' out o' the way with it. I should hate to git into trouble here.

Mrs. Blair. [*Seizing it, diving to the bottom of her baggy pocket and, drawing forth a ball of twine, chalking a length of it and forcing one end of it on the bewildered Miss Dyer.*] You git up here. Take that end.

Miss Dyer. [*Obeying, bewildered.*] Don't ye tole me into nothin'. I ain't that kind.

Mrs. Blair. You step there to the middle square o' that winder an' hold your end o' the string down on the floor. I'll snap it.

Miss Dyer. [*Taking the string laxly and sidling to the door, opening it and calling.*] Mis' Mitchell!

Mrs. Blair. [*Ruthlessly jerking her away and shutting the door.*] You step in here an' do as I tell ye. There's the spot. You stan' right here.

Miss Dyer. [*Wailing.*] O Mis' Blair, you're as crazy as a loon an' here I be shet up in this room with ye, an' Mis' Mitchell ain't within hearin', an' I wisht my troubles was over an' I was under the sod.

Mrs. Blair. [*Pushing her into place, snatching the end of string from her, putting it on the floor, lifting Miss Dyer's foot with one hand and setting it emphatically on the string.*] Stan' there an' stan' still. Don't you ease up now. [*She twitches a bedstead round and hitches the cord about the leg so that it makes a straight line dividing the room in two, talking absorbedly while she works.*] Wonderful are the ways o' Providence an' past findin' out. Here be we yoked up together, an' the yoke is lifted an' we're goin' to lay

down in separate stalls. [*Snaps the cord. Triumphantly.*] Step off on't, will ye? You gimme the chalk an' I'll go over it an' make it so's't anybody can see it in the dead o' night.

[*Miss Dyer gingerly passes her the chalk. Mrs. Blair snatches it, kneels and chalks vigorously along the line, while Miss Dyer, hovering in a corner and softly lamenting, apprehensively watches her.*]

Miss Dyer. O Mis' Blair, I dunno what you're doin' no more'n the dead, an' if I found out mebbe I should be scairter 'n I be now. You stop, Mis' Blair. Don't you go to markin' up the floor. Seems terrible mis*chiev*ous to go to markin' up floors.

[*Mrs. Blair, entangled in her skirt, staggers to her feet.*]

Mrs. Blair. [*Triumphantly.*] There! Now here's two rooms. Here's the partition. See?

Miss Dyer. [*Struggling with the idea.*] 'T ain't nothin' but a mark.

Mrs. Blair. That chalk mark's the partition. You can have the mornin' sun, for I'd jest as soon live by a taller candle in a place that's my own. Gimme the chalk. [*Miss Dyer interestedly passes it.*] I'll chalk a lane into the cluzzet so's't we can both keep a right o' way. Now I'm to home an' so be you. Don't you dast to speak a word to me unless you come an' knock here on my headboard——

Miss Dyer. [*A little bewildered.*] What be I goin' to knock for?

Mrs. Blair. That headboard's my front door. If I

want to run into your house, I'll knock on yourn. Well, if I ain't glad to be alone. I've hung my harp on a willer long enough. [*She pulls out a little table in her "house" and begins to unpack treasures from her ancient carpet-bag and range them there. Meanwhile she sings, either* Coronation *or the* Doxology, *in a strenuous voice. Miss Dyer, more timidly, glancing at her from time to time to see if she is playing right, takes her knitting and settles quite cozily by the window. She evidently wishes to test the theory, gets up and knocks timidly on the headboard. Mrs. Blair, cordially.*] That you, Miss Dyer? Come right in.

Miss Dyer. [*Evidently feeling her way.*] No, I didn't come to stop.

Mrs. Blair. I s'pose you were goin' by an' see me at the winder. I'm proper busy. I was jest gittin' round to measurin' off my settin'-room. Seems to me it needs new paper.

Miss Dyer. Why, this paper ain't been on—— [*Catches herself up, stops and chuckles.*] I've had it in mind myself to paper, but I ain't fixed on the pattern yit.

Mrs. Blair. [*Triumphantly.*] What should you say to a kind of a straw color all lit up with tulips?

Miss Dyer. Ain't that kinder gay?

Mrs. Blair. [*Recklessly.*] Gay? Well, ye want it gay. I don't see why folks have got to live in a hearse because they're goin' to ride in one. What if we be gittin' on in years? We ain't underground yit, be we?

Miss Dyer. [*Doubtfully.*] No. I s'pose we ain't.

Mrs. Blair. I see a nine-penny paper once all covered over with green brakes.

Miss Dyer. Well, if ever!

Mrs. Blair. But whether I paper or whether I don't, I've got some thoughts of a magenta sofy.

Miss Dyer. Well, you *are* tasty.

[*Mrs. Mitchell's voice at the opening door calling,* Mrs. Blair! Miss Dyer! *Miss Dyer, fluttered and not seeing how it is to come out, darts "home."*]

Mrs. Mitchell. [*Entering and speaking with professional kindliness.*] Well, here you are, all snug and cozy.

Miss Dyer. [*Drawing forward a chair.*] I'm pleased to see ye. Set right down.

Mrs. Mitchell. [*Seating herself and addressing Mrs. Blair who, oblivious of her presence, stands in her own part rubbing chalk marks from her dress.*] Got settled, Mrs. Blair? [*No answer. A little louder.*] Mrs. Blair, you getting settled? [*No answer. Softly, to Miss Dyer.*] Isn't she feeling well?

Miss Dyer. It's a real pretty day, ain't it? If 't was summer time I should say there'd be a sea turn. Kind of a weather breeder, too.

Mrs. Mitchell. [*Anxiously observing Mrs. Blair.*] Mrs. Blair, I'm going to bring you over some cashmere for a dress. [*Mrs. Blair, in rapture, is about to speak, but remembers her part and subsides in anguish. Mrs. Mitchell, perplexed and anxious, rises and steps over the dividing line.*] Mrs. Blair——

Mrs. Blair. [*Turning upon her in surprised wel-*

come.] Well, if 't ain't Mis' Mitchell! I can't say I didn't expect ye, for I see ye goin' into Miss Dyer's not more'n a minute back. Seems to me you make short calls. Now set ri' down here where you can see out.

Mrs. Mitchell. [*Dazed, but seating herself.*] I do hope you and Miss Dyer are going to enjoy your room.

Mrs. Blair. [*Innocently.*] I expect to be as gay as a cricket. I like to keep to myself, but a good neighbor's a terrible nice thing to have.

Mrs. Mitchell. [*Turning to include Miss Dyer.*] I'm sure Miss Dyer means to be very neighborly. [*No answer.*] The sleigh is coming round for me in a minute. I wonder if you'd both like to go out for half an hour?

Mrs. Blair. [*Ruthlessly.*] Law! I'd go anywhere to get out o' here. I dunno when I've set behind a horse. I guess the last time was the day I rid up here for good, an' then I didn't feel much int'rest in outdoor.

Mrs. Mitchell. Miss Dyer, what do you say to a little spin?

[*Miss Dyer's hands twitch at their knitting. She seems about to cry and looks appealingly at Mrs. Blair.*]

Mrs. Blair. Mis' Mitchell, I may be queer in my notions, but when folks take to hollerin' out o' my winders, it makes me as nervous as a witch. If you want to speak to Miss Dyer, you come along here arter me—don't ye hit the partition now!—right out o' my

door an' into hern. Here! I'll knock. Miss Dyer, be you to home?

Miss Dyer. [*Coming forward, fluttered and radiant.*] Yes, I guess I be, an' all alone, too. I see you go by the winder an' I was in hopes you'd call.

Mrs. Mitchell. [*Staring at them for a minute and then, as the truth comes to her, putting her hands to her eyes.*] You poor souls! Have you divided this room? Do you hate living together as much as that? Oh, you poor souls!

[*Miss Dyer fingers her apron and looks at the floor. Mrs. Blair turns away and speaks brusquely over her shoulder.*]

Mrs. Blair. Law! 't ain't nothin' to make such a handle of. Folks don't want to be under each other's noses all the time. I dunno's anybody could stan' it unless 't was an emmet. They seem to git along swarmin' round together.

Mrs. Mitchell. [*Emphatically.*] If there's ever a chance for this Home to be divided into single rooms——

Mrs. Blair. [*Glancing from the window; excitedly.*] There's your horse an' sleigh. You git on your things an' we'll git ourn. [*Goes "home." Exit Mrs. Mitchell. Mrs. Blair knocks hastily at Miss Dyer's headboard.*] Here, Miss Dyer, you come right in through my settin'-room an' git your things. [*Miss Dyer plungingly complies, and Mrs. Blair begins to put on her cloak.*] You stay right here an' put 'em on so's to be near the cluzzet. You sure you'll be

warm enough? You take my blanket shawl. [*Presses it on her.*] I've got an extry one.

Miss Dyer. [*Flutteringly arraying herself, while in their delighted haste they get in each other's way.*] Oh, Mis' Blair! ain't this the crowner!

Mrs. Blair. [*With the agility of youth drawing on a pair of heavy "stocking feet" over her shoes.*] You got on a flannin' petticoat?

Miss Dyer. [*Beaming.*] Yes, upper 'n' under. Oh, Mis' Blair!

Mrs. Mitchell. [*From the door.*] Ready? Can I help you?

Mrs. Blair. We're all ready.

Miss Dyer. I guess we be! [*They start for the door, fall against each other, stop and realize they've forgotten to "play." Miss Dyer saves the situation.*] Here, Mis' Blair, you come right through my house, an' save a step. My! ain't this grand!

[*Mrs. Blair sees the point. Exeunt gaily.*]

CURTAIN

THE SUGAR HOUSE

Produced by the Washington Square Players at the Comedy Theatre, New York, Oct. 2, 1916.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

[*In the order of their appearance.*]

Sue Berry.....GWLADYS WYNNE

Mary Masters, Dan's wife.....MARJORIE VONNEGUT

Dan Masters.....ARTHUR HOHL

Mrs. Berry, Sue's grandmother.....MIRIAM KIPER

Bill Blaine.....ERSKINE SANFORD

Alvin Greene.....ROBERT STRANGE

Christopher Wills.....SPALDING HALL

THE SUGAR HOUSE

Time: The early evening of a winter day.

Place: A sugar-house in a New England wood. One window. One door. The house, which may have the look of a log cabin, has been turned into a rough living-room. The sap pans or kettles have been taken out, the fireplace has been opened up. There are two chairs, a bed, a bench, a washstand, a mirror, and a rag carpet on the earth floor.

Sue, before the mirror, is putting the last touches to her hair and evidently listening expectantly. She is a blonde young woman of an extreme prettiness and a willing and constant challenge of sex. She is dressed in a "stylish" if too ornate fashion. A knock. She gives a little cry and listens.

Sue. [*Calling cautiously.*] Is that you?

[*She opens the door a crack, to peer round the edge, and Mary enters. She is a beautiful, rather worn young woman of an eager, loving type, and a firm, fine grain of heroic character. She is dressed in blue calico and has thrown a red shawl over her head. Sue recoils, in extreme amazement.*]

Mary Masters?

Mary. [*Closing the door and facing her.*] Yes, it's Mary Masters. You thought 't was Mary Masters' husband, but it ain't.

Sue. [*Recovering herself, and speaking with a false cheerfulness.*] What's brought you up here?

Mary. I've come to ask one question.

Sue. [*Brightly.*] That's easy. What is it?

Mary. I've come to ask what you're here in the woods for, this winter night, in my husband's sugar house.

Sue. [*As if in adequate reasoning.*] I been visitin' Gramma Berry. So I come up here. I never see a sugar house.

Mary. [*Looking about her. Scornfully.*] You never see such a one as this, I warrant. Nor nobody else. Sap kettles taken out. Fireplace opened up. Andirons. Rag carpet on the floor. Two chairs. Two! You won't need no more. An' now my husband's harnessed up ag'in an' gone to the store to lay in victuals for you.

Sue. Course! I've hired the sugar house.

Mary. What you goin' to pay him in? What's the wages o' sin?

Sue. [*With the air of discovering a new reason.*] I'm just campin'. See?

Mary. You'll have to camp somewheres, now your grammother's turned you out.

Sue. [*Airily.*] Gramma ain't responsible. She ain't fairly got over her sickness yet.

Mary. Yesterday she turned you out. You come up here, an' he come with you. You mean to stay

here, an' he means you shall. An' if you ain't struck dead, he'll stay here with you.

Sue. That's perfectly ridiculous. How'd you get such a thing into your head?

Mary. [*Solemnly.*] He told me.

Sue. [*Startled into earnest.*] Dan told you?

Mary. My husband—Dan.

Sue. [*In sheer surprise.*] What made him?

Mary. You ain't turned him into a liar—yet. This very night he come an' stood before me, an' he was as white as a cloth. "Mary," says he, "I can't live with you no more."

Sue. [*Curiously.*] What'd you say?

Mary. I says: "Be you goin' to live with somebody else?"

Sue. D'he tell you?

Mary. "Yes," says he, "I be."

Sue. Well, after that, what is there to say?

Mary. I knew 't was comin'. I'd got my answer ready. But I couldn't speak. My heart choked me an' 't was all black before my eyes. [*Recovering herself.*] There's this about it: I'm his wife.

Sue. That don't cut any ice.

Mary. D'he say that to you?

Sue. [*Raising her eyebrows. Equivocally.*] Oh!

Mary. No, he wouldn't. He ain't so mean. Anyway, if he don't love me, he did two months ago.

Sue. Let him tell it.

Mary. He's a good man, my husband is.

Sue. Oh, course he's good, some ways. All of 'em are.

Mary. But if he's goin' to leave his home an' keep a doxey hid up here, he won't be a good man. He won't be a respected man. He'll be hated an' despised.

Sue. Who'll despise him?

Mary. The neighbors.

Sue. Well, I sha'n't despise him.

Mary. Yes, you will. An' you'll despise yourself. An' after a spell, when he sees what he's lost, he'll despise you.

Sue. I s'pose you despise me now.

Mary. If I wa'n't face to face with you, I'd have to say I did—an' hate you. But now I see you—Why, you poor creatur', you ain't worth hatin'.

Sue. [*In a fascinated curiosity.*] What's the matter o' me?

Mary. Look at your hands. How white they are!

Sue. [*Regarding them with satisfaction.*] I save 'em all I can.

Mary. [*Stretching out her hands.*] Look at mine, hard as horn where I've slaved for him.

Sue. I don't see's there's anything so terrible in keepin' your hands nice.

Mary. There's somethin' terrible in keepin' your body fine an' smooth to tempt a man. I know you. [*In sudden rage.*] Strumpet!

Sue. [*Suddenly angry.*] Come, you be civil or get out o' here.

Mary. Out o' my husband's house? [*In a pathetic earnest.*] But I wa'n't civil. No, I wa'n't. Do you know why?

Sue. I s'pose you can't be, you're so jealous.

Mary. [*Speaking solemnly.*] That's it. Jealous. Wild with grief—grief—grief.

Sue. [*Warningly.*] Any minute he'll be here.

Mary. Then he'll find us here together.

Sue. [*Nervously.*] Now we ain't goin' to have any kind of a to-do an' everybody all worked up. [*Decisively.*] I'm here for keeps.

Mary. [*As if in wonder.*] Yes. He brought you here. You've bewitched him. He's bewitched.

Sue. [*In irrepressible vanity.*] If anybody likes anybody, how's anybody goin' to help it? That's what I'd be pleased to know.

Mary. The minute you put your eyes on him you see what he was—honest as the day, warm-blooded, an' that soft streak in him that makes him fiddle the tears into anybody's eyes.

Sue. [*Flippantly.*] He ain't fiddled to me nor whistled neither. He just moved me up here in his team.

Mary. You don't know what you're doin'.

Sue. [*With an air of amused knowingness.*] Oh, I guess you can't tell me much.

Mary. It ain't me alone you're hurtin'. If it was, maybe I could bear it. [*Solemnly.*] It's more than me.

Sue. You make me tired.

Mary. [*In sudden rage.*] There'd ought to be laws for women like you. You hadn't ought to be allowed to range over the country, bewitchin' folks an' killin' other folks. Why, it's like murder. You're murderin' them that can't fight for themselves.

Sue. [*Amused.*] Want to get me shut up? Want to run me out o' town?

Mary. [*Solemnly.*] There was a woman rode out o' this very town a hundred years ago. She bewitched an honest man, an' the men o' this town stripped her stark naked an' tarred an' feathered her an' rid her on a rail.

Sue. Folks ain't so fresh now. The idea! [*Laughing.*] So you think Dan's bewitched.

Mary. Last night he didn't come to bed. He staid in the kitchen an' tramped up an' down, up an' down. To-night he's comin' here, an' you've got your yeller hair puffed up—my God!

Sue. [*Scornfully.*] You're crazy. Gramma's only ugly, but you've got bats. Dan's a right to let his sugar house, an' I've a right to hire it, an' that's all there is to it. See?

Mary. It ain't all there's goin' to be to it, if I'm alive.

Sue. [*Flippantly.*] Goin' to kill yourself?

Mary. [*Wildly, advancing on her.*] No. If anybody's goin' to die, it won't be me.

Sue. [*Backing and calling out sharply.*] Don't you touch me.

Mary. [*Halting.*] I'm afraid—of myself. When I think what you've done, an' how we stan' here alone, I'm afraid of what a woman in my place might do.

Sue. [*Listening.*] Hark!

Mary. Dan's comin'. There's his bells.

Sue. Yes, he's comin'. [*At once gaining courage and breaking out in a shrewish and vulgar rage.*] Now you get out o' here. You quit this house. It's mine.

You've got no more right to worm yourself in here than I've got in your house down there.

Mary. I'm his wife. If—if he had a child I should be [*with ineffable tenderness*] its mother.

Sue. [*Contemptuously.*] Child! I've known women to play that game before to get a rise out of a man.

Mary. [*Suddenly confused, putting her hand to her head.*] I can't see him here. I can't! I can't! I'm afraid.

Sue. You better be afraid.

Mary. Not of you. But I'm afraid to see him look at you, afraid to hear him speak to you. It might craze me. It might kill me as I feel now. [*Exalted.*] An' I can't die yet.

Sue. [*Peering from the window.*] He's drove round the back to leave the horse. [*Opens the door.*] Quick.

[*Exit Mary. Sue watches her an instant from the door. Then she runs to the window and peers, hands at the sides of her face. Nods, satisfied yet still anxious, and listens.*]

[*Enter Dan, with packages and a heavy basket. He is a handsome, impulsive, soft yet strong-natured young man, with a poetry streak and a gypsy streak intermingled. Sue shuts the door. He piles everything on the table, flings off his cap, strides to her and holds out his arms. She stands listening.*]

Dan. Well?

Sue. D'you see her?

Dan. Who?

Sue. D'you see anybody?

Dan. [*Advancing as she retreats.*] No. Who's been here?

Sue. [*Hesitating.*] Nobody. I thought I heard a step.

Dan. [*Laughing tenderly.*] Look here! you can't live in the woods an' be scairt of an owl, as the sayin' is.

Sue. No, not in the day-time. [*Recovering herself and speaking fervidly.*] An' night-times you'll be here.

Dan. Yes. Nothin'll touch ye where I be. Beauty! [*He advances and she glances at the window and retreats.*] What's the matter?

Sue. Nothin'.

Dan. Somebody been here?

Sue. No.

Dan. Some man's been here.

Sue. No. Don't any man know I'm here. What you keep harpin' on men for?

Dan. [*Moodily.*] Your grandmother raised hell in me that night she told me to watch out. [*In a jealous agony, watching her.*] She said there was another man. She said it to your face.

Sue. If a man looks at me Gramma wants me to go an' hide.

Dan. She said it, an' you laughed. Tell me who it was. I won't blame ye. I've got ye, an' if he lays a finger on ye, I'll shake him as a dog shakes a rat. Tell me his name.

Sue. [*Playing him.*] Gramma'd told you if you'd teased.

Dan. D'you think I'd spy on ye?

Sue. If there was a man, why didn't she tell you who 't was?

Dan. She told why. She said 't was one o' my neighbors, an' if I knew there'd be murder done.

Sue. [*Deliberately fascinating him.*] Want I should tell you?

Dan. [*Beside himself.*] Tell me—in God's name.

Sue. [*Provocatively.*] Mr.—Nobody! Not a single fellow has seen me alone since I come to Gramma's six weeks ago.

Dan. Is it true, my beauty? Is that true?

Sue. Swear to God.

Dan. D'you know this is the third night since I kissed you outside your grandmother's door?

Sue. Guess I've counted 'em.

Dan. I've worked like hell to make my den in the woods to bring my beauty to. An' here we are. Now, come. [*Holds out his arms.*]

Sue. [*Advancing prettily. Then, drawn by irresistible fascination, looks at the window.*] Pin up somethin' there.

Dan. [*Carelessly, absorbed in his passion for her.*] Get you a curtain to-morrer. Nothin' but owls an' foxes in these woods. [*Puts a hand on her shoulder.*]

Sue. [*Withstanding him.*] Look! Was that—a face?

Dan. [*Calling over his shoulder in a rough humor-*

ous certainty that there is no one to hear.] Hi, there!

Sue. [*Beside herself.*] Oh, don't! They might throw somethin'.

Dan. Fellers round here don't throw things. They'd get their face smashed. [*He goes to the window and peers, to reassure her.*] Moon's out. Ye can see down the cart-path to the turn. [*Comes back.*] Come.

Sue. [*Giving herself up now to the moment. Coquettishly.*] I don't know's I want to come.

Dan. Why not?

Sue. You sure you love me?

Dan. What else have I brought ye here for, an' cast off my wife, an' earned the spite of all my neighbors?

Sue. D'you love me real hard?

Dan. I love you so's I can't think of anything else.

Sue. [*In gratified vanity.*] How you do talk. Tell me some more about the day you see me first. Was I —pretty?

Dan. I didn't know whether you were pretty or not. I knew how I felt. We'd been all froze up, Mary an' me, takin' care of Mary's mother. We'd been doin' it for a year, an' we'd set with her by day an' watched by night. Didn't seem as if there was anything in the world but sickness an' pain.

Sue. [*Indifferently.*] Cancer, wa'n't it?

Dan. [*In serious musing.*] Yes.

Sue. Died just before I come.

Dan. Yes. An' when she went Mary 'peared to pick up, an' we had a week or so like we used to have, an' then she give out an' couldn't hardly crawl round,

an' I 'most give out myself. Then I went over to your grandmother's to do that job, an' you walked into the room, with your yeller hair, an' you looked at me.

Sue. I didn't, either. The idea!

Dan. You looked at me an' I hated you.

Sue. You said you liked me.

Dan. That first minute I hated you. I said, "She's a light woman. She's no business to look at a man like that."

Sue. If I'd known that was the way you felt, I wouldn't ha' looked at you at all.

Dan. Then we got talkin', an' I says to myself, "She likes me. That's the reason she looked at me. She don't know she did it. She's too innocent to know." [*In sudden rage, seizing her wrists.*] Would you look at another man like that?

Sue. Oh! you hurt me.

Dan. Tell me you wouldn't look at another man like that.

Sue. Course I wouldn't.

Dan. You never looked so at any man?

Sue. Silly! no!

Dan. Because if there's anybody else in this, don't let me see him, that's all.

Sue. [*In gratified vanity.*] Say, Dan, what'd you do to him?

Dan. [*Loudly.*] Do? I'd——

Sue. [*Glancing at the window.*] Hush!

Dan. [*Quieting.*] I tell you what I'd do. I'd leave you in your tracks.

Sue. Leave me?

Dan. If you're that kind, you ain't my kind, that's all. See here, Sue, the only thing that justifies what we're doin' now is to have it a big thing. It ain't a little one.

Sue. [*Perfunctorily.*] No, course not.

Dan. D'you love me?

Sue. Guess I do.

Dan. Enough to tough it out? This ain't no job for a day, my lady.

Sue. What d'you mean?

Dan. You ain't here to kiss me to-night an' to-morrer night. You're here for the whole hard cold winter. An' we'll be plannin' what to do. I'll see a lawyer, an' fix things up fair an' square, an' I'll be honest with you both—you an' Mary.

Sue. [*Poutingly.*] Seems if I was a kind of a prisoner.

Dan. You are. So'm I. You've got me by a look. But I've got you. Where d'you want this bread put?

Sue. Oh, some place. You find one.

Dan. [*Smiling indulgently.*] You ain't much of a housekeeper, be you?

Sue. [*Yawning.*] No more'n the cat.

[*Dan goes about earnestly trying to dispose of things. Sue regards him a moment and then bursts out:*]

It's an awful lonesome place up here.

Dan. You didn't think o' that when I brought ye.

Sue. [*Sobbing a little.*] I did, too. But I never thought I'd be alone all night long as I was last night. I 'most died; but every minute I thought you'd come.

Dan. I should ha' come. I couldn't, that's all. D'you think I could come here an' settle down afore I'd told her?

Sue. [*Perversely.*] Told who?

Dan. Mary. No, I ain't mean enough for that,—yet. An' I walked the floor, an' I tried to go in to her where she laid in her bed, an' tell her the truth, an' the words wouldn't come.

Sue. [*Meltingly, after a flash of anger at mention of Mary.*] Seems if you might ha' thought o' me up here alone. An' no fastenin' on the door. I tried to drag the bed acrost it. You might ha' thought o' me.

Dan. I did think o' ye. I thought o' ye both. Seemed as if ye was there in the room fightin'—fightin'—— [*His voice grows solemn in awe.*]

Sue. [*Flippantly.*] Fightin' for you?

Dan. Not so much me as mebbe—for—my soul.

Sue. [*After staring at him a moment uncomprehendingly.*] I ain't goin' to fight for any man. A man that wants me's got to fight for *me*.

Dan. [*Passion coming at her call.*] I will fight for you. [*Throwing down the package he is opening. Approaching her.*] I'd face the devil himself. I'd take the pangs of death and hell. What would you do for me?

Sue. [*Warming to the appeal.*] The same. I'd do the same.

Dan. Come. [*He seats himself beside her on the bench and they kiss.*]

Sue. Then if you'd do all that, why ain't I livin' down there in your house an' she up here?

Dan. She?

Sue. Your—wife?

Dan. Mary? Mary up here?

Sue. Then let her go away somewheres. But why ain't I in your nice house where I'd be comfortable?

Dan. Turn Mary out?

Sue. I'm your wife in everything but name. That's the words you said.

Dan. I know it. But I can't do anything rough to Mary.

Sue. You told her you wa'n't goin' to live with her.

Dan. I had to be honest with her. You have to be —with Mary.

Sue. You s'pose she cares?

Dan. Sometimes I've thought this last year, while she was bound up in her mother, she didn't know I was in the world. When 't was all over, I tried to call her back. [*His face getting dreamy.*] I tried—[*dismissing it*] but never mind.

Sue. Now see here. You takin' up with me because she's offish?

Dan. [*His passion returning.*] I'm takin' up with you because you're the woman I want an' the woman I've got to have.

Sue. We're just alike, ain't we?

Dan. Yes. When we're together. You put the devil into me.

Sue. [*Jealously.*] Does she put the devil into you?

Dan. [*His face softening.*] Mary? Le's not bring her name in here.

Sue. But does she?

Dan. Mary don't raise devils. She casts the devil out.

Sue. [*Frowning for an instant but prudently changing her mind and putting her face to his.*] My! what a rough cheek.

Dan. Yourn's like roses.

Sue. Oh, how strong you are! [*In wild excitement, listening.*] Hush! Listen! She's come back.

Dan. Who?

Sue. Don't let her in. She'll kill me.

[*Enter Mary, breathless. Dan and Sue loose each other and rise, he doggedly determined.*]

Mary. Dan!

Dan. [*Gently, but with determination.*] What you here for?

Mary. [*As if she couldn't get control of her breath to go on.*] Dan!

Dan. Go back home. This ain't no place for you.

Mary. They're comin'. Get her away.

Dan. Who's comin'?

Mary. The boys.

Dan. Who?

Mary. All of 'em. Bill Blaine——

Dan. Blaine!

Sue. Billy?

Mary. Billy, Christopher Wills, Alvin Greene——

Dan. Comin' up here?

Mary. [*In anguish.*] The whole neighborhood's in arms. Them three are comin' to do it, an' t'others are hangin' round to hear it's done.

Dan. Do it? Do what?

Sue. [*Screaming out.*] Not *that?*

Mary. [*Always to Dan.*] That's it. Strip her naked. Tar an' feather her. Ride her on a rail.

Sue. [*To Dan.*] O hide me! Hide me quick!

Dan. [*In a rage.*] By God! let's see 'em try it.

Mary. You can't help it, Dan. You're strong, but there's only one o' you.

Dan. [*To Sue.*] Put on somethin' warm. We'll circle round through the woods.

Mary. You'll fall foul of 'em. They're everywhere. I was hidin' in the cedars. I see 'em branchin' off.

Dan. The fools! don't they know I'm here?

Mary. They want you, too—to witness it.

Dan. [*To Sue.*] We'll wait for 'em. [*Ominously.*] Let 'em come.

Sue. I'm afraid. Oh, I'm afraid.

Dan. [*Looking at her in scornful surprise.*] 'T ain't an easy job we've undertook. I told ye that.

Mary. [*To Dan.*] Let her come with me straight along the cart-path to the road.

Sue. [*To Dan.*] She wants to tole me off. She'd kill me.

Mary. [*Impatiently.*] Dan'll come with us.

Sue. [*To Dan. Hysterically.*] She's in league with 'em. She's egged 'em on.

Dan. [*To Mary. Gently.*] You go home. You can't be in this.

Mary. If you're in it, I'm in it, too.

Dan. Go home, I tell you. There'll be murder done.

Mary. We ain't gone through so much together for me to leave you now.

Dan. It ain't your leavin' me. I've left you. I've turned into another path. I don't know where it'll take me, but I can't turn back.

Mary. Dan, you hear to me.

Dan. Go home. Go while ye can. God bless you, Mary, an' good-bye. [*Turning her toward the door.*]

Mary. You've got to let me stay. The boys are crazy mad because they think you're wrongin' me. You leave 'em to me, Dan. I can reason with 'em.

Sue. [*Crying out and listening.*] What's that?

Mary. [*To Sue.*] A step. I heard it. Get behind me.

Dan. [*Advancing.*] Let 'em come. I'm ready.

[*Enter Mrs. Berry in haste, a thick shawl on and another over her head. She is an old woman of character and crude natural values.*]

Mrs. Berry. [*To Sue.*] So you're here, you jade.

Sue. Why, Gramma, what you out for a night like this?

Mary. [*Meeting Mrs. Berry solicitously.*] You'll get your death o' cold.

Mrs. Berry. I don't care if I do. I'd rather die o' cold than live in disgrace. [*To Sue.*] You put on your things, an' step yourself out o' here.

Sue. You turned me out o' doors. D'you s'pose I was goin' to curl up under a tree?

Dan. Where are they?

Mrs. Berry. Not ten rod back.

Dan. How many?

Mrs. Berry. Three to do the job.

Mary. Is Billy there?

Mrs. Berry. He's the ringleader.

Mary. [*Thoughtfully.*] I can get hold of Billy.

Mrs. Berry. Ye could once. Ye can't now. 'T was Billy Blaine that kissed her in my own kitchen not one week ago.

Dan. That's a lie.

Mrs. Berry. It's God's truth. I was sick on my bed, but I see it. He thought he owned her same as you think to-night.

Dan. It's a lie.

Mrs. Berry. If you wa'n't drunk, crazy drunk on yeller hair, you an' he'd shake hands an' fling the jade out into them drifts.

Dan. [*To Sue.*] Tell me it's a lie.

Sue. Ain't she owned she was sick? She was out of her head.

Dan. Has Blaine laid hands on you?

Sue. No! no!

Mary. No, Dan, he hasn't. Billy's never cared for anybody—— [*Stops, remembering what she is saying.*]

Sue. [*In a sudden rage of wounded vanity.*] Yes, he was gone on you, wa'n't he, before you married Dan? Maybe he was, my lady, but there's others.

Dan. [*Doggedly, to Sue.*] Has that old woman told the truth?

Mrs. Berry. [*Flashing out.*] Old woman? Don't ye call me old woman. My name's Berry, an' my

word's as good as yourn in any court o' law, an' better'n any strumpet's from Adam's time till now.

[*A whistle without.*]

Mary. Listen.

[*Another whistle, farther off.*]

Mrs. Berry. They're signallin' the neighbors.

Dan. [*To Sue.*] Has she told the truth?

Sue. [*Beside herself with terror.*] Drag somethin' up before that door. [*Ineffectually begins herself to drag the bed.*]

[*Mary seizes a newspaper and pins it before the window.*]

Dan. [*To Sue.*] If that's a lie, I'll fight for you till there ain't a drop of blood left in my veins. If it's the truth, I'll kill ye both—Bill an' you.

[*They listen. A knock. Dan sets his shoulder against the door.*]

Bill. [*Without.*] Hullo, in there! Hullo!

Dan. What do you want?

Bill. Want to make a call.

Dan. We ain't to home.

Bill. We've come on business.

Dan. I've got no business with ye.

Bill. Oh, yes, you have. An' we've got business with you an' your gaybiddy in there.

Sue. [*Vainly trying to drag the bed and appealing to Mary.*] Help me move this bed.

Mary. [*To Dan, not heeding her.*] You'll have to let 'em in.

Dan. [*Savagely.*] When they put a bullet through me.

Sue. [*Crying out hysterically.*] Then who'll take care o' *me?* [*To Mary, savagely.*] Can't you help me move this bed?

Bill. Dan Masters.

Dan. I'm here.

Bill. When I count ten, we'll bust the door.

Mary. Open it. There's no other way.

[*Sue throws herself upon Dan and tries to drag him away.*]

Sue. Don't mad 'em. They'll kill you an' kill me next.

Bill. One—two—three—four——

Dan. [*To the women.*] Stand back. I'm ready for 'em.

Bill. Five—six—seven—eight—we're comin' in.

Dan. Come—an' be damned. [*Throws the door open, releases himself from Sue, puts her behind him and awaits them, in a savage rage.*]

[*Mary advances to them. Her manner is transformed to the prettiest social grace.*]

Mary. [*Gaily.*] Good evenin'. Evenin', Billy. Come in. Come in, all, do. [*Puts out a hand and laughingly draws Bill in, he much taken aback at sight of her. He carries a pillow-case, stuffed. Mary peers out.*] How many of you out there? Christopher? That you, Alvin? What you got? An iron kettle? Leave that outside. Come in.

[*Christopher and Alvin enter unwillingly and awkwardly.*]

Dan. [*Morosely, to Bill.*] What you got there?

Bill. [*He is a sweet-natured, but rather brutal fel-*

low of strong, unthinking passions. Laconically.] Feathers.

Dan. [*Advancing and looking him challengingly in the eyes.*] What you got feathers for? I depend a good deal on your tellin' me to my face what you brought them feathers *for.*

[*Bill looks at him for a full minute. They seem to be measuring strength. The other men bend forward, breathless, and await the issue.*]

Alvin. [*He is a strait-laced fellow of an earnest cast of countenance who never gets outside convention, especially legal convention, and sees his highest ideal in having everything done according to law.*] Bill, don't you commit yourself.

Dan. [*Bursting out, to Alvin.*] Go lay down.

Alvin. [*To Bill.*] You ain't obleeged to speak. Remember anything you say may be used ag'inst ye.

Dan. What's them feathers for?

Bill. [*With an air of considering, and then, sarcastically, turning to Sue.*] I heard this—lady—was here. I knew she was fond o' dewdads. So I brought her up some feathers.

Sue. [*With a ghastly attempt at lightness.*] The idea!

Bill. [*Ignoring her and speaking to the others with an air of elaborate courtesy.*] Thought mebbe the lady'd like to see the kind o' fowl we raise round here. Thought she might like to be reminded they're the same breed, mebbe, as they picked feathers off'n a hundred years ago to trim up another—lady.

Dan. [*Roaring.*] Quit that.

Bill. [*Breaking out at him.*] You clean your own doorstep 'fore you 'tend to mine.

Alvin. Easy. This business is ourn, Dan, as a committee o' three. We've debated on it, an' we've weighed the consequences.

Chris. [*He is fanatically religious, yet quite in earnest.*] I've made it a subject o' prayer.

Mrs. Berry. [*Contemptuously.*] Ye have, have ye? Religion an' the law, says you. Well, I see clearer'n that. Bill Blaine's drunk with jealousy, an', man-like, you two are follerin' like sheep goin' over a wall. Law an' religion! Pox take 'em both. You're drunk, all on ye, one one way an' one another.

Mary. [*Looking up at her earnestly.*] They're honest, Mis' Berry. I know Alvin. He does uphold the law. I believe Chris. Chris always prays.

Bill. [*To Mary gently.*] Mary, you better go home.

Mary. Oh, no, I ain't goin' home.

Bill. Ye can't stay, Mary. Mis' Berry, you an' Mary get your things an' go.

Mrs. Berry. [*Scornfully.*] What's all this hurrah-boys because Dan's turned out to be no better'n the rest on ye? Mary here, she thought he's made o' weddin' cake. [*To Mary.*] An' you've been takin' care o' your mother night an' day, an' now she's dead, you poor child, you're all bound up in grief. You se' down an' ruffle ye up some new clo'es, that's what you do. Look at that yeller hair. You drag yourn up on the top o' your head, an' tie on a red ribbin, an' paint

your cheeks an' look slantin' 'stead o' straight before ye. If that's the kind o' fodder he wants, you feed it out to him.

Bill. [*Grimly.*] No more talk. Time for talkin's past.

Mary. [*Sharply.*] Le's have no more beatin' about the bush. Le's speak the truth.

Bill. [*With relief.*] Then this is the truth as I know it. The errand we've come here on ain't a peaceable one.

Chris. [*Raptly.*] "I bring not peace but a sword."

Bill. An' this ain't no place for a woman—like you.

Mary. Every place is a place for women, Billy, from the minute you come into the world till the time you go out of it.

Mrs. Berry. [*Sardonically.*] Yes. There ain't many roads for ye to ride your high hosses except through our territory.

Bill. [*Doggedly.*] I tell you this ain't no place for women—except one.

Mary. [*Smiling at him.*] You men better not keep no places that ain't fit for women.

Alvin. Mary, we know what you be, an' there ain't a woman in the county more set by an' more respected: but man's work's beyond ye. You ain't responsible for the community, same as we be.

Chris. The prophet commanded 'em to throw down Jezebel an' trample her under foot.

Sue. [*In irrepressible irritation.*] If any man calls me dirty names, I'll have the law on him.

Alvin. I don't call no names. That's libel. But I say if anybody that's evil-mannered creeps into the community, we got to run 'em out.

Bill. Mary, what we're here for to-night don't concern you, in one way, an' in another it's for your sake.

Mary. Then, if it's for the sake o' me, you go home an' tell the neighbors to go home, an' Dan an' I'll do the same. An' Gramma Berry an' Sue'll go home an' we'll all wake up to-morrer mornin' an' not be ashamed to face the sun.

Bill. An' the guilty one'll git up an' paint her face an' begin all over. No, by God!

Chris. He that is filthy will be filthy still.

Bill. No, Mary, we can't turn back.

Mary. There was a time when you three boys thought you'd do anything in the world for me.

Bill. So there is now. An' what we're doin' is for you.

Mary. I never've asked you to do anything for me, but I ask it now.

Bill. Don't ask what we can't do, Mary.

Mary. I ask you to give up this vile, unlawful——

Alvin. 'T ain't unlawful, so to speak.

Mary. [*Going on quietly.*] Cowardly undertakin', an' go out o' here an' whistle the neighbors together an' tell 'em you've got back your decency an' your self-respect, an' they're to go home to bed, for you'll do the same.

Bill. Can't be done.

Alvin. We're under an agreement. It can't be broke.

Chris. "Swear not falsely."

Mary. Why, you're all Dan's friends. You went to school together.

Bill. We don't find much o' the man we used to run with in the man that's took up with a doxey under his wife's nose.

Mrs. Berry. Boys, ye can't find no penalty that's meet for jades. Sence Adam's time they've been, an' till Gabriel's time they'll be. Ye might as well go home an' not make yourselves liable for jail.

Bill. [*To Dan.*] Bear witness to it there's nothin' underhand about this meetin'. We three men are a vigilance committee, reg'larly app'inted——

Alvin. Accordin' to law.

Chris. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Exodus XXII, 18.

Mary. Ain't it queer, Chris, you have to travel way back to the Old Testament? I don't get no further than, "Bless them that curse you."

Chris. One text's good as another. Ye can't pick an' choose.

Mary. [*Dreamily.*] Do you know what I've been thinkin' about lately when I read my testament? How He was born in Bethlehem o' Judea.

Chris. 'T was so to be. Everything had to be fulfilled.

Alvin. Accordin' to the law. An' so't must be today.

Mary. About His mother, too. I've been thinkin' about her.

Mrs. Berry. [*Idly.*] You're her namesake, so to

speak. I guess everybody 't was named Mary come by it that way.

Mary. I dunno why we shouldn't think o' Him same's any other baby. Lately I think o' Him 'most all the time.

Bill. Mary, the evenin's goin'. You'll have to git out o' this.

Mary. [*Smiling bravely.*] I guess not. This is the first evenin' I've been here since Dan fixed up the place. I brought my knittin', too. I carry it round everywhere, I love it so. [*Pulls it out of her apron pocket and holds it up.*] What do you s'pose it is?

Dan. [*Irrepressibly.*] Mary!

Mary. It's a baby's shirt.

[*They suddenly take her meaning, start a little, look at one another and draw back a pace reverently.*]

Sometimes a woman don't speak about the baby that's comin', but I'm so thankful I can't keep it hid. An' you boys are my best friends.

Bill. Sure.

Alvin. You bet your life.

Chris. Under God.

Mary. You're goin' to be baby's friends, too.

Bill. Mary, don't ye see now you've got to clear out o' this?

Chris. 'Tis for your good.

Alvin. An' the good o' the community.

Mary. No! I'm the one to stay. Why, you all remember about that girl that was tortured a hundred years ago.

Mrs. Berry. [*Perfunctorily.*] She was a jade.

Mary. You know what come o' that night's work. The man's poor wife—died. Her baby was born that June, as it might be the baby that's comin' to me—she died, bringin' it into the world. She never'd got over the shock o' knowin' her husband's sin had ruined him an' turned his neighbors into brutes.

Mrs. Berry. [*Indifferently.*] The young one lived, but 't wa'n't every ways right, they say.

Mary. No. 'T was born half-witted. Boys, if there's one thing we've got to do in this world, it's to be faithful to them that are comin' into it. We beckon 'em. [*Her face growing rapt.*] We call to 'em. We sing to 'em an' the songs are all about how warm we'll keep 'em in winter an' in the summer there'll be the flowers an' the birds.

[*The men listen reverently. Dan, in a rapt forgetfulness of the situation, advances slightly and hangs, breathless, on her words. Mrs. Berry, in a business-like way, draws up to the fire and begins to warm her feet. Sue hangs her head and keeps her sullen look.*]

Why, we wouldn't no more call 'em here to suffer what we'd suffered! Only we think we can make it better for 'em. We can smooth the way for their little feet. An' if we're goin' to give 'em a father an' mother that's parted in sorrow, an' expect 'em to grow up in a neighborhood where there's revenge an' hate an' jealousy, why, then—[*she rises and grows majestic*] why, then, I say a woman that's goin' to bring a little innocent child into such a place, better die before the baby comes.

[*Bill, Christopher and Alvin retreat awkwardly*

and quietly to the door, but seem unable to make their exit, looking from one to another as if to select a spokesman.]

[*Quietly, to Mrs. Berry.*] You wrapped up warm enough? [*To Sue.*] Sue, you're goin' now.

[*Sue rises. Dan advances to her.*]

Dan. [*To Sue.*] Come. Mary, I'll be back.

Mary. [*Seating herself and taking up her knitting.*] All right. I'll wait for you.

[*Mrs. Berry throws her extra shawl over her head. Sue gets on her hat and pins it tremblingly, looking at no one. Dashes at one or two articles and crams them into her travelling bag.*]

Mrs. Berry. [*At the door.*] Boys, you don't need to run anybody out o' town, with your committees o' three. I'm a committee o' one, an' I'll do it for ye.

Bill. [*Striding forward, as Sue is at the door.*] Wait. I meant well by you.

Sue. [*Flippantly, now the danger seems past.*] Let you tell it.

Bill. That night we come together, I thought, as God's my witness, you were goin' to marry me.

Dan. [*Starting back.*] What night?

Bill. [*Savagely.*] None o' your business what night, ye thief an' perjurer. You're the man that could marry Mary Lincoln an' then take up with *that.*

Dan. [*Ominously, to Sue.*] What night? Tell me what night?

Mrs. Berry. I've told ye once. Ye couldn't take an old woman's word. Can ye take it now I'm a commit-

tee o' one? She's a jade, I tell ye, an' you're fools—fools—the kind there's been from Adam down.

Sue. [*Defeated and yet suddenly plucking up impudence and calling to Dan.*] Comin'?

Dan. No!

Mrs. Berry. [*At the door.*] Come! come! I shall git my death. I'll be along to-morrer, Mary, an' pick up her things an' send 'em arter her.

[*Exeunt Mrs. Berry and Sue.*]

Bill. [*Awkwardly.*] Want us to stay a spell, Mary, till they git out o' reach?

Mary. Oh, no! Whistle up the neighbors an' le's all go home an' get to bed early an' have a good day to-morrer.

Bill. [*Lingering as they go.*] I ain't all brute, Mary. It's true what I told ye. I was strikin' one blow for myself an' two for you.

Mary. You're good boys. But can't anybody strike a blow for me that hits Dan—or another woman.

Bill. [*Taking up his bag of feathers. Then, awkwardly, with an embarrassed laugh.*] Feel better 'f I should leave these here?

Mary. No. [*Then laughing suddenly.*] Yes! I'll stuff a piller for the cradle. Good-night, boys. Good-night. [*Leans out of the door and watches them. A whistle. Another in the distance. She shuts the door, and, all her strength and fire gone, sinks into a chair and looks up at Dan.*] There! I've done all I can.

Dan. [*Tenderly, while he draws the lamp toward him and prepares to put it out.*] Git your things on.

Mary. [*Breathlessly.*] Dan, I've saved her. Ain't I saved her?

Dan. Yes, an' the whole neighborhood.

Mary. [*Half sobbingly.*] Then you do this for me. You come home now, an' you leave me soon's you see fit. But you leave me decent. We can't have baby born into murderin's an' things worse than murder.

Dan. Mary! Mary!

Mary. She ain't a good woman, Dan. She ain't clean an' right. But mebbe that's a thing a man's got to settle for himself. So if you want her enough to pay for her, I'll pay, too. But I can't have baby pay no more'n he must—a little creatur' like that, his troubles all made ready for him 'fore he's born into the world.

Dan. [*Straightening himself and looking his manliness.*] He ain't goin' to pay. Nor you ain't—except so fur's any woman's got to that's tied to a man that's been drunk—an' got up out o' the gutter an' tried to wash the mud off his face an' hands. Faugh!

[*They look at each other a moment in tenderness and understanding. He puts out the light. She opens the door and moonlight floods the room.*]

Mary. [*With an exquisite emotion thrilling her voice.*] How still it is! Now le's go home.

CURTAIN

A MARCH WIND

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

[*In the order of their appearance*]

'Melia, a middle-aged New England woman

Enoch, her husband

Rosie, Enoch's child

Josiah Pease, 'Melia's cousin

A MARCH WIND

Time: The early afternoon of a wintry day.

Place: A farmhouse kitchen comfortably furnished, the kettle boiling on the stove, a plain sofa, a clock on the mantel, etc. 'Melia, a handsome, middle-aged woman in print dress and apron, is scouring tins at a table. Enoch, a gentle-looking middle-aged man, virile, but with the worn appearance of an artisan who has worked too hard, stands before the mantel clock regarding it absorbedly, starting the pendulum, moving the hands, etc. Rosie is putting her doll to bed on the sofa.

'Melia. [*To Enoch.*] What's the matter with it?

Enoch. Dunno yet. She's balky.

'Melia. When it give up strikin' I lost all patience. Le's cart it off into the attic an' buy us one o' them little nickel ones.

Enoch. Oh, I guess we'll give her a chance. [*Lifts it down carefully.*] Should you jest as soon I'd bring in that old shoemaker's bench out o' the shed? It's low, an' I could reach my tools off'n the floor.

'Melia. Law, yes. It's a good day to clutter up. There won't be nobody in.

[*Exit Enoch. Rosie runs up to 'Melia.*]

Rosie. Dolly's asleep.

'Melia. [*Fondly.*] Somebody's 'most asleep herself. She ain't had no nap to-day. You cover up with mother's red shawl an' go bylow.

[*Enter Enoch, with bench.*]

Enoch. [*Having arranged himself on the bench, a clutter of clock and tools on the floor before him.*] There! Now, sirree, sir, I'll see 'f I can 'tend to ye.

'Melia. [*Proudly.*] You can if anybody. Never see sich a hand with tools.

Rosie. [*Who has been wandering about, singing a little song, brings up at 'Melia's side again.*] Dolly's asleep now.

'Melia. Ain't you goin' bylow? I know what little folks want. They want suthin' to do. You go fetch the button box out o' that lower drawer. Then you set down on your cricket an' sort 'em out. The white ones are white cows, an' the black ones are black cows, an' they're all goin' to pastur'.

[*Rosie runs delightedly to obey.*]

Enoch, there ain't a soul been in to-day.

Enoch. [*Speaking absorbedly, as he takes the clock apart with a delicate care.*] Well, I can stand it if you can.

'Melia. [*Laughing.*] Three's company—in this house.

Rosie. [*Seating herself on her cricket and pouring the buttons in her lap.*] Black cows. White cows.

'Melia. Yes, black cows an' white cows.

Rosie. Where's the pastur'?

'Melia. Rosie's apron pockets. The black cows are goin' into one pocket, the white cows into t'other.

Enoch. I kinder thought Elbridge True'd be over to-day 'bout them cows.

'Melia. Which you goin' to swap?

Enoch. Ain't much to choose. He's got a mighty nice Alderney, an' if he's goin' to sell milk next year he'll be glad to get two good milkers instead. I guess we can trade.

'Melia. [*Glancing from the window.*] I wouldn't go out such a day as this, cows or no cows. My! how them trees rock. Ain't this a wind! Makes me as nervous as a witch. [*Laughing.*] You know folks say if anything's goin' to happen it's on a day like this when the wind's been blowin' all night an' got everybody's nerves on edge.

Enoch. [*Absorbed in his work and talking half absently.*] 'T was a day about like this, a year ago, when Rosie an' me come along the road an' I asked if you didn't want a hired man.

'Melia. So 't was. Don't put the buttons in your mouth, Rosie. Sort 'em out pretty an' drive 'em off to pastur'.

Enoch. [*Going musingly on.*] "I want to hire out," I says. "I've got two to feed," says I, "Rosie an' me." [*Slyly.*] Remember what you says, 'Melia?

'Melia. [*Confused and laughing.*] There! don't call up that old tale. When I think on't in the night my face burns like fire.

Enoch. [*Laughing quietly.*] You says, says you, "I don't hire tramps."

'Melia. [*Defensively.*] Well, what if I did, Enoch? What if I did? You stood there starin' down

on Rosie's hood. You didn't once lift your eyes. But minute you give me a look, I says right off, "You come in an' I'll git the little girl some milk."

Enoch. So ye did, 'Melia. So ye did. An' I sawed wood all that arternoon, an' when I appeared, to git Rosie an' take the road ag'in, she was sound asleep covered over with your red shawl.

Rosie. [*Over her buttons.*] Now the white cows' goin' to pastur'. Now the black cows' comin' home.

'Melia. I says to you, "Don't you wake her up. I'll put her to bed byme-by."

Enoch. An' so't went on from day to day. An' 't wa'n't a month 'fore we found out how we prized one another, an' we was man an' wife.

'Melia. [*Dropping her scouring cloth.*] There! I dropped my dish cloth.

Enoch. Sign of a stranger?

'Melia. Sure sign. [*She laughs.*]

Enoch. What you laughin' at?

'Melia. I was thinkin' how there hadn't been a soul in to-day, an' the month after we was married they come from fur an' near.

Enoch. [*With a mild amusement.*] Swarmed like bees, didn't they?

'Melia. Flew like blackbirds, an' every one of 'em lighted right down here.

Enoch. Clattered like 'em, too.

'Melia. Now le's not go back to that, makes me so hot. I'm mad as fire only thinkin' on't. Mebbe I shouldn't be so mad if the wind wa'n't blowin so.

Enoch. [*Indulgently.*] There! there! 't was only

human natur'. They'd heerd you'd married a tramp, an' 't was meat an' drink to 'em to see how't worked.

'Melia. Didn't find out much, did they?

Enoch. No, you was as short as pie crust.

Rosie. [*Precipitating herself on him.*] Father, here's a white cow rolled away. You come get her for me.

Enoch. Byme-by. Father's got his clock to pieces now. He can't 'tend to little girls.

[*'Melia picks up the button.*]

Rosie. Father, you lemme take your soldier button for a great big ox.

Enoch. No. Can't have that.

Rosie. O father, please.

[*Enoch shakes his head and goes absorbedly on with his work.*]

'Melia. [*Surprised.*] Why, Enoch, give it to the child. Whatever 't is, you give it to her.

Enoch. Can't do that, 'Melia.

'Melia. Can't give her a button? Well, I never. Why not?

Enoch. I could any other button, but this one I promised to wear as long's I lived.

'Melia. [*With interest.*] Why, I never see it on ye.

Enoch. No. I sewed it on inside here. [*Throws back his coat and turns out his waistcoat pocket for her to see.*]

'Melia. [*Amused, but with growing interest.*] Why, ye don't sew it into every weskit you got, do ye?

Enoch. [*Laughing indulgently.*] I ain't had many new weskits, for quite a few years.

'Melia. [*Walking back and forth at her work, she suddenly feels the significance of the situation. She stops short, and speaks with a quickly growing excitement.*] Enoch, I ain't asked you no questions about—'bout anything, have I?

Enoch. No.

'Melia. Well, now I do. Who'd you make that promise to?

Enoch. [*Looking at Rosie in trouble, and then at 'Melia. Speaks with hesitation.*] A—a woman.

'Melia. Well, she's got a name, ain't she?

Enoch. [*Still indicating Rosie.*] I dunno's I want to speak it jest now. There's little pitchers——

'Melia. [*Touched.*] If it's a name you can't speak afore Rosie——

Enoch. [*Gravely.*] It *is* a name I can't speak afore Rosie.

Rosie. [*Rushing at him in high glee.*] Why can't you? Why can't you? [*Instantly forgets her interest and returns to her game.*]

'Melia. [*With decision, trying to control herself.*] Yes. Why can't you?

Enoch. [*Laughing, yet in a troubled way and seeking to recall her.*] One button ain't no great matter.

'Melia. It ain't the button. It's—it's—— [*Stops on the verge of tears.*]

Enoch. You think it's queer I promised to wear it? Well, 'Melia, a promise is a promise, ain't it?

'Melia. [*Bitterly.*] There's promises you made to —to me—before the minister.

Enoch. [*Gravely.*] Well, if I didn't keep all my

promises, how'd you be sure I'd keep the ones to you?

[*A knock at the door. 'Melia stands transfixed.*]

'Melia. My land! who's that? Rosie, you run to the sidelight an' peek. I hope to my soul 't ain't company, a day like this.

[*Rosie jumps up, loosens her clutch on her pinafore, and the buttons fall and roll in wild confusion. She stands looking at them, aghast.*]

Oh, my soul an' body!

Enoch. [*After the brief trouble of his scene with 'Melia, he has gone back to his work in relief, and now glances up at Rosie in a mild reproach.*] See there now, what ye done.

[*Rosie relinquishes the problem of the buttons and Exit to "peek."*]

'Melia. [*Listening.*] Now, who should you s'pose 't could be?

[*Knock repeated.*]

Enoch. Mebbe it's Elbridge about them cows.

'Melia. No, 't ain't. He'd walk right in.

[*Enter Rosie.*]

Rosie. [*With importance, as the bearer of news.*] It's a man. He's got on a blue coat 'n' a fuzzy hat. He's got a big nose.

'Melia. [*In despair.*] Enoch, do you know what's happened?

Enoch. [*Absently.*] Them buttons? I'll pick 'em up byme-by, when I git this cog trued. Rosie 'n' me'll do it together.

'Melia. Buttons! I ain't talkin' about buttons. You know who that is out there? It's Cousin Josiah Pease.

Enoch. [*Amiably, though without interest.*] Is it? Want me to go to the door?

'Melia. Go to the door? No, I don't want nobody to go to the door till this room's cleared up. If 't wa'n't so everlastin' cold, I'd take him right into the front room an' blaze a fire. But ye couldn't keep him there, more'n ye could a hornet.

Enoch. [*Abstractedly.*] Oh, you have him right in here where it's good an' warm.

'Melia. [*Advancing on him.*] You gether up them tools an' things, an' I'll help carry out the bench.

Enoch. Look out. You'll joggle. No, I guess I won't move. If he's any kind of a man he'll know what 'tis to clean a clock.

'Melia. [*Imploringly.*] Don't you see, Enoch? This room looks like the Old Boy an' so do you, an' he'll go home an' tell all the folks.

Enoch. [*Absently.*] Tell 'em what?

'Melia. He's been livin' with Cousin Sarah, out west, an' minute he gits back, here he is to spy out the land. [*In renewed despair.*] Enoch, you wake up. He's come to find out.

Enoch. [*At sea, yet absorbed in the clock.*] Find out what?

'Melia. You stop mullin' over that clock, an' you hear to me. He's come to find out—about us.

Enoch. [*Bewildered.*] What's he want to know? Whatever 'tis, why don't ye tell him an' git rid of him?

'Melia. It's about you, Enoch. Don't you see?

Enoch. [*Indulgently.*] Law, there ain't nothin'

about me 't would take a man long to find out. I guess you better ask him in. Don't you let him bother ye.

'Melia. [*Superbly.*] He don't bother me an' I will let him in.

[*Exit 'Melia, walking over buttons with a tragic dignity. Rosie gives a little cry, regards her buttons sorrowfully, picks up a few, relinquishes the enormous task, and kneels to put a forefinger on Enoch's tools.*]

Enoch. [*Mildly.*] No! no!

[*Rosie goes to the sofa and covers her doll with her handkerchief for a quilt. Enter 'Melia and Josiah Pease.*]

Josiah. [*He is a spare lantern-jawed old man, sharp-eyed and hateful. He bustles up to the fire and struggles out of his coat.*] There! there, 'Melia! Can't begin to talk till I git he't through. [*Rubbing his hands unctuously at the stove.*] That your man?

['*Melia gets the broom and begins sweeping buttons ruthlessly. Rosie rushes to the rescue and, unafraid of the broom, gets in its way and clutches at buttons as she can as they whirl by.*]

'Melia. That's my husband. Enoch, here's Cousin Josiah Pease.

Enoch. [*Looking up mildly and putting out a hand which Josiah does not see.*] Pleased to meet you, sir. I'd git up, but you see I'm tinkerin' a clock.

Josiah. [*Drawing a chair close to the stove and hovering.*] You a clock mender by trade.

Enoch. No, not to say by trade.

Josiah. [*With a consuming curiosity.*] Ain't got no trade, have ye?

Enoch. [*Mildly.*] Oh, I've got a kind of an insight into one or two.

Josiah. No reg'lar trade, have ye?

[*Enoch shakes his head.*]

That's what I thought.

[*'Melia is putting the tins together with a clash.*]

Law, 'Melia, to think o' your bein' married.

'Melia. [*Coldly.*] Good many folks marry, fust an' last. There's been quite a few couples sence Adam an' Eve.

Josiah. [*With a toothless laugh.*] Adam an' Eve! Adam an' Eve! Yes, yes. Gardin of Eden. Got turned out, didn't they. Got turned out.

'Melia. [*With a cold acidity.*] I b'lieve I've heerd some tale about a snake round there.

Josiah. So there was! So there was! Resky business, gittin' married. Well, 'Melia, I never'd ha' thought it o' you.

Enoch. [*Arriving at a fortunate conclusion with the clock, and bursting out.*] There ye be.

Josiah. No, I never'd ha' thought o' your marryin' —your time o' life.

'Melia. [*Starting nervously and frowning at him.*] You never'd ha' thought it o' me? Well, I never'd ha' thought it o' myself. Ye don't know what ye'll do till you've tried.

Josiah. [*With a hideous joviality.*] Love will go where it's sent if it hits the pigpen.

'Melia. What do you mean by that?

Josiah. Oh, I's only thinkin' on't over. I do a good deal o' thinkin' fust an' last, an' when I stepped into this door I says to myself: "It's Natur', that's all 'tis, Natur'. Natur' says to folks, 'You up an' marry,' an' if there ain't nobody else for 'em to marry they'll pitch upon the most unsignifyin' creatur's that ever stepped."

'Melia. [*In a cold rage.*] I dunno what there is about this house to start ye off on a tack like that.

Josiah. [*Speciously.*] Law, no. I'm a thoughtful man, that's all. Things come into my head.

'Melia. [*Curtly.*] You had your dinner?

Josiah. [*Ingratiatingly.*] I ain't had a bite sence six o'clock this mornin'.

'Melia. I'll make ye a cup o' tea. [*Does it rapidly and grudgingly and sets food on the table.*]

Josiah. Your hair looks real thick, 'Melia. I warrant 't ain't all your own.

'Melia. [*Stopping suddenly and facing him.*] Josiah Pease, I know your tricks. You was always one to hector an' thorn anybody till they flew all to pieces an' didn't care what they said, an' mebbe 't would prove to be what you was itchin' to find out. For all the world like that March wind blowin' outside there.

Josiah. Law, 'Melia, I never had such a thought. I was jest lookin' at your hair. Ain't a gray thread in it. [*In a tone mysteriously lowered, pointing to Enoch.*] He's a leetle mite gray. Gittin' along in years, ain't he?

'Melia. [*Curtly.*] I never inquired.

Josiah. [*Mumbling over the stove.*] Well! well!

[*Rousing.*] 'Melia, ain't you ever had your teeth out?

'Melia. [*Coldly.*] My teeth'll last me quite a spell yet. So'll my tongue.

Josiah. They looked real white an' firm last time I see 'em, but ye never can tell what's goin' on underneath.

[*From without a jovial* Whoa! *Enoch hastily puts his tools aside, rises and peers from the window.*]

Enoch. There's Elbridge True. He's come round to trade for them cows. [*Takes out his watch and looks at it.*] 'Most time to feed the hens, 'Melia. You keep the water bilin' so't I can give 'em some warm dough.

[*Exit Enoch.*]

Josiah. [*Alive with curiosity.*] Whose watch was that he took out o' his pocket?

'Melia. [*Coldly.*] His, I suppose. Whose should it be?

Josiah. I could ha' took my oath that was your Gran'ther Baldwin's gold watch. You git a look at it, fust chance you find, an' see 'f you don't think so, too.

'Melia. [*Violently.*] Do you s'pose if Gran'ther Baldwin's watch is in my husband's pocket, 't is for any reason except I put it there?

Josiah. [*Soothingly.*] I know how ye feel. Stan' by him as long as ye can—but, 'Melia, you git that watch back.

'Melia. There. You draw up an' I'll give you some tea an' have it over.

Josiah. [*Obeying, greedily and in haste. Points his fork testingly at a dish.*] What do ye call that?

'Melia. Fried pork an' apples. We had it left.

Josiah. I dunno when I've tasted pork an' apples. We used to call that livin' pretty nigh the wind.

[*Rosie, attracted by food, has slipped up to the table and with difficulty reached over to get a bit of bread.*]

'Melia. [*Harshly.*] You've had your dinner. Go an' se' down.

[*Rosie looks at her in amazement, drops the bread and goes quietly off to nurse her doll.*]

Josiah. [*Pointing at her with his fork.*] That his gal?

'Melia. [*Perversely.*] Whose?

Josiah. His. Your man's.

'Melia. Yes.

Josiah. [*Eating rapidly.*] Mother dead?

'Melia. Josiah Pease, I never thought a poor insignificant creatur' like you could rile me so. Mother dead? Ain't I been an' married her father?

Josiah. Law, 'Melia, do se' down. You give me a mite o' that butter whilst I eat. I'll be bound you thought the woman was dead, or ye wouldn't ha' took such a step.

'Melia. Do you think everybody's scamps an' raskils?

Josiah. [*Soothingly.*] Course he told ye t'other woman was dead. Course you b'lieved him. All I meant was, did ye see her death in the paper, or the matter o' that?

'Melia. [*Violently.*] No.

Josiah. Well, there now! I'm dretful sorry. There was a woman down Tiverton way—I heerd on't only yisterday—she took in a tramp to pick her apples, an' next thing the neighbors knew, there she laid, front o' the fireplace, as it might ha' been there [*pointing with his knife*] head split open as neat as ever you see.

'Melia. If anybody's head's split open in this house 't won't be mine nor [*tenderly*] my husband's neither.

Josiah. So I say, 'Melia. Don't ye do nothin' ye could be hauled up for. When ye find ye can't stan' folks no longer, you jest open the door an' tell 'em to cut.

'Melia. [*Meaningly.*] I will.

Josiah. He ain't made no mention of any other woman, has he?

'Melia. [*Hysterically.*] Another woman! What are you talkin' about another woman for? Seems if you was the snake in the garden, come to put words into my mouth.

Josiah. [*With greedy satisfaction.*] There is another woman, then? He owns to't! What'd he say about her, 'Melia? what'd he say?

'Melia. [*Tortured, yet fascinated.*] He didn't say nothin'. Nor I ain't said nothin'. What do you think you're draggin' out o' my lips. It's p'ison, that's what it is—p'ison words—p'ison thoughts.

Josiah. [*Soothingly.*] There, there, 'Melia, you can talk to me. I'm your own kin.

'Melia. [*In horror at herself.*] O my God! have I got to be like you?

Josiah. If there's another woman, ye know, 'Melia, he's said the same things to her t' he has to you. He's made her the same promises——

'Melia. [*Wildly.*] Promises! promises! Don't you remind me o' that word!

Josiah. Where's he gone?

'Melia. [*Getting hold of herself.*] He's gone out to look at a cow.

Josiah. Find he's sellin' things off pretty fast?

'Melia. More tea?

Josiah. You kep' your bank stock in your own name?

'Melia. Here's the sugar.

Josiah. Your father left consid'able. I guess he'd turn in his grave if he could know 't was goin' to waste.

'Melia. Butter?

Josiah. [*Ingratiatingly.*] If you had the courage to kinder put things into my hands so't I could manage for ye, I'd do it in a minute.

'Melia. You finished?

Josiah. [*Leaning back in his chair and looking up at her.*] 'Melia, you do look terribly tried.

'Melia. Ain't you finished?

Josiah. No, no. I'll take my time. Got suthin' on your mind, ain't ye, 'Melia? Kind o' worried?

'Melia. [*Going to the window.*] Blows harder 'n' harder. It's an awful wind.

Josiah. [*Following her.*] Find he's a drinkin' man?

'Melia. [*Controlling herself with difficulty.*] You'll have hard work to git home 'fore dark.

Josiah. I thought mebbe he'd harness up. [*Suddenly attracted by what he sees from the window.*] What's that? What's that? I'll be buttered if he ain't been an' traded off both your cows.

'Melia. [*Pouncing upon his coat and holding it out for him.*] Here's your coat.

Josiah. [*Still absorbed at the window.*] My Lord, 'Melia! be you goin' to stan' there an' let them two cows walk off from under your nose? If he's got anything to boot, he's put it into his pocket, an' when it comes out o' there 't'll go onto somebody's back—an' 't won't be yourn.

'Melia. Here's your coat, I tell you. Git into it as quick as ever you can.

Josiah. [*Recalled to his own plight. Helplessly.*] I was in hopes he'd harness up.

'Melia. Here. Put t'other arm in fust.

Josiah. I was in hopes——

'Melia. This your neck hankercher? [*Summarily ties it.*] Here's your hat.

Josiah. I was in hopes——

'Melia. Got your mittins? [*Snatches them from his pocket and thrusts them on him.*] Here they be. This way. [*Goes to the door and throws it open.*]

Josiah. [*Feebly.*] I ain't finished my dinner.

'Melia. This is the door you come to by your own will, an' this is the door you'll go out of by mine. Come. Come, Josiah Pease, out you go.

[*Exit Josiah tremblingly.*]

[*She calls to him.*] Josiah Pease, this is the end. I've done with ye, egg an' bird. [*Closes the door and goes swiftly back to the window.*]

[*Rosie comes and lays a hand on her skirt, and 'Melia stoops and hugs her violently.*]

You little lamb! you never see mother carry on like that, did ye? Well, I'll warrant you never will ag'in so long as Josiah Pease keeps out o' here. [*Kisses Rosie and lets her go. Laughs a little to herself, half crying.*] My soul! I'd ruther see a hornet. I feel as if I's stung all over an' if anybody laid a finger on me I'd scream right out! Don't seem as if Josiah Pease could ha' done it all. I guess some on't 's that aggravatin' wind.

[*Enter Enoch in high feather.*]

Enoch. [*Jovially.*] Well, I've made us a good trade. Company gone? Se' down whilst I tinker, an' I'll tell ye all about it. Yes, I made us a good trade.

[*'Melia watches him in growing excitement while, not looking at her, he seats himself on his bench and tenderly takes up his work.*]

'Melia. [*Suddenly, with shrill violence.*] You've made a good trade, have you? You've sold my cows an' had 'em drove off the place without if or but. That's what you call a good trade.

Enoch. [*Rising, aghast.*] 'Melia! Why, 'Melia!

'Melia. Ever sence you set foot in this house it's been the same. Have I had my say once?

Enoch. Why, 'Melia, I thought 't was all as smooth as silk.

'Melia. Here we be on my own farm. Be I the mistress of it? No. You took the head o' things an' you've kep' it.

Enoch. [*Dazed.*] Don't seem as if I took it—that way. Seems if you give it to me.

'Melia. [*With rising violence.*] 'T was all mine. Now what's mine's yourn.

Enoch. [*With a recalling tenderness.*] I didn't have anything to bring ye, 'Melia. If I had, 't would ha' been all yourn.

'Melia. [*Bitterly.*] If you'd had anything, you wouldn't ha' been a tramp.

Enoch. [*Touching her arm gently and smiling at her.*] Then I might never ha' come this way. 'T wa'n't such a bad thing to be a tramp, if it brought me to this door.

'Melia. [*Repelling his touch.*] A tramp! I'm the laughin' stock of the town. There ain't a man or woman in it that don't know I've married a tramp.

Enoch. [*Looks at her a moment, as if really to understand, and turns to his bench.*] I guess I'll move this back where 't was.

[*Exit with bench. Enters and rapidly picks up his tools, putting them in a drawer. 'Melia watches him coldly, and then begins clearing away Cousin Josiah's meal. As she works she sings* The Bailiff's Daughter *in a high, angry voice. Enoch sets the clock again on its shelf.*]

I'll leave the clock as 't is. If any kind of a tinker comes along, he wouldn't find it any the wuss for what I've done. [*Takes his hat from the nail.*] Good-bye, 'Melia.

'Melia. [*Coldly.*] Where you bound for?

Enoch. [*Taking out his watch.*] I can ketch the four o'clock down by the crossin'. [*Is about to restore the watch to his pocket, but with a sudden thought,*

lays it on the table.] That's your watch. I like to forgot. Reminds me—[*pulling out a roll of bills*] This money's yourn too.

'Melia. [*In growing trouble.*] Mine? What makes it mine?

Enoch. I got it to boot, tradin' them cows. [*Selects some of the money and puts it in his pocket.*] Here's two eighty-seven. That's mine. He paid it to me for fixin' his pump. Good-bye, 'Melia. You've been good to me. Better'n anybody ever was in the world.

'Melia. [*Uneasily following him a step to the door.*] Where you goin'?

Enoch. [*Reassuringly.*] I dunno—yet.

'Melia. [*Bitterly.*] On the tramp?

Enoch. I s'pose ye could call it that—till I pick up suthin' to do.

[*Exit Enoch. 'Melia runs to the window and looks after him, to the door, opens it and then shuts it again. Stands motionless, her hands tense at her side. Suddenly relaxes and gives a little scornful laugh.*]

'Melia. Well, that's over. [*Goes on clearing the table. Stops suddenly.*] He's gone. It's over.

[*Enter Rosie with a red shawl pinned about her, to make a long skirt.*]

Rosie! Rosie! he's gone. Your father's gone. He's forgot you. Take off that thing. [*Snatches off the shawl.*] Here's your hood. [*Snatches it from a nail.*] On with it, quick.

Rosie. Where's father?

'Melia. He's gone, I tell you, an' he's forgot to take you with him. [*Snatches the child's coat from a nail and puts her into it.*] Here! In with you. When we git outdoor, I'll carry ye.

Rosie. Where we goin'?

'Melia. [*Bitterly.*] Down to the crossin'. Then you're goin' with father an' I'm comin' home—alone.

[*Enter Enoch.*]

[*Wildly.*] Enoch! Enoch! in the name of God have you come back? [*Rushes to him and throws her arms about him.*]

Enoch. [*Gently drawing her arms from his neck.*] There! there! don't take on so.

'Melia. O Enoch, you've come home. If it's only for a minute, you're in this house ag'in.

Enoch. I jest turned back for Rosie. Mebbe you won't believe it, but I forgot her.

'Melia. [*Putting out her hand and touching his sleeve.*] I can see you. I can touch your coat. If you should walk out o' that door now, I've had you a minute more.

Enoch. Rosie, git your mittins.

'Melia. Don't lay up anything ag'inst me. You couldn't if you knew.

Enoch. [*Gently.*] Knew what?

'Melia. He talked about you. He said things. I couldn't stand 'em.

Enoch. [*Sternly.*] Did you believe 'em?

'Melia. No, as I'm a livin' woman, no! I've been nervous as a witch all day—that wind out there,

blowin', set me all on edge—an' then he pitched upon you.

Enoch. [*To Rosie.*] You run along an' father'll come.

[*Rosie hesitates, takes up her doll and lays it down.*]

Enoch. Yes, you take that with ye. I guess nobody'd grudge ye that.

[*Exit Rosie slowly, with the doll.*]

You see, 'Melia, I couldn't stan' bein' less'n other men be jest because the woman had the money an' I hadn't.

'Melia. Money! money! That word betwixt you an' me?

Enoch. I don't know but 't was kind o' queer about the cows, but somehow you set me at the head o' things, an' if there was a trade to make, seemed kind o' nat'ral for me to make it.

'Melia. So you're goin' to punish me. You're goin' away.

Enoch. Why, I got to, dear. We couldn't live together nohow, feelin' as you do.

'Melia. We've lived together a whole year.

Enoch. Yes, an' it's been all springtime, birds singin' an' flowers in bloom. But springtime passes. [*Musingly.*] I thought mebbe this wouldn't. Mebbe you thought so, too. Or I thought if it did, 't would be summer an' the flowers brighter yet. An' then the leaves fallin', an' we layin' down amongst 'em, an' then the snow to cover us. But together, that's what I thought, together. [*Recovering himself.*] I'm dream-

in', ain't I? Dreamin' out loud. Well, 'Melia, I got to look at ye once more, so I won't never forgit. I ain't likely to, though. I ain't likely to. [*Looks at her long and tenderly, and turns away with a sigh.*] Good-bye, 'Melia. God Almighty bless you.

[*He has reached the door and she calls him piercingly.*]

'Melia. Enoch!

[*He halts.*]

You've made up your mind. You're goin' on the tramp.

Enoch. Yes. That's what it amounts to.

'Melia. Then you've got to take me with you. Talkin' won't make you see that what I said never meant no more than that wind out there blowin' up trouble an' not meanin' to. The farm's come between us. Le's leave it. If you tramp, I'll tramp. If you work out, so'll I.

Enoch. [*Returning. Incredulously.*] Would you go with me?

'Melia. I'm goin'. Here, take your watch. [*Thrusts it into his coat pocket.*]

Enoch. Goin' with me? S'pose I say you mustn't?

'Melia. I'll foller on behind. Here's your money. Take it. [*Thrusts it into his coat pocket.*]

Enoch. To walk an' walk, to find no work mebbe. 'Most al'ays a little hungry. Sometimes cold.

'Melia. Three's company, you an' me an' Rosie. We'll laugh an' sing.

Enoch. Don't ye want to pack up some things an' git on a bunnit?

'Melia. No.

Enoch. Don't ye want to leave the key with some o' the neighbors?

'Melia. I don't want anything in the world but you.

Enoch. [*Stepping forward, arms outstretched and then dropping them and speaking wistfully.*] You sure you think enough o' me? You didn't a minute ago.

'Melia. [*Wildly.*] 'T was because I thought so much o' you, not because I didn't. Can't you understand that? [*Losing control of herself.*] O what's the use of excusin' myself! It's that button. It all goes back to that. An' that aggravatin' wind.

Enoch. [*Dazed.*] Rosie lose a button? [*Light breaking on him.*] Why, 'Melia, you can't mean that old soldier button in my weskit.

'Melia. [*In shame and tumultuous emotion.*] 'T wa'n't the button. No, no, 't wa'n't that. You might be sewed all over buttons. But you said 't was a woman, an' you said you promised her, an' you said she couldn't be talked about afore Rosie——

Enoch. [*Sternly.*] 'Melia, le's stop right here. She was Rosie's mother an' she can't be talked about afore Rosie, because if I've got any pity in me for that little creatur' I'm goin' to wipe out o' her mind the foul words she's heard an' the blows she's had from the woman that brought her into the world.

'Melia. Enoch! Enoch!

Enoch. An' if I said I was goin' to keep a promise made to that poor creatur' that's dead, 't was because every promise she made to me she broke,—the promise

to be faithful, to put by the liquor that turned her into a beast—oh! [*in disgust*]. An' because my promises to her are broken as hers be to me—I promised to love her an' I don't. I promised to make Rosie love her an' I can't—why, I s'pose I thought if there was some poor miserable little promise I could keep, I'd be the more a man for doin' it.

'Melia. [*In a wild compassion.*] Oh, if I'd known! if I'd only known! You never'll forgive me. No, you never can.

Enoch. [*In a rapt tenderness.*] Why, who is it that's makin' Rosie forgit the mother that's dead? 'T ain't me. It's you.

'Melia. [*Timidly.*] Me, Enoch?

Enoch. Now she sees what mothers be. Who is it 's makin' me forgit all them old days when I cursed God for bringin' me into the world?

'Melia. [*In an incredulous hope.*] Not me, Enoch? It ain't me?

Enoch. [*Laughing tenderly.*] Want I should throw away the old soldier button, darlin'?

'Melia. [*In growing hope and thankfulness.*] No, no, Enoch, no! You keep your promise. We'll have it to remind us, you an' me. 'T ain't yourn. It's ours.

Enoch. [*Taking her in his arms.*] Spring an' summer, darlin', an' then the snow.

'Melia. [*Happily.*] The snow now, if it covers both of us together.

Enoch. There ain't anything in my life I couldn't tell you. You say the word an' I'll go over every day of it.

'Melia. [*Laughing.*] There's only one thing you've got to say—jest one.

Enoch. Name it, darlin' dear.

'Melia. Whose cows were them you sold to-day?

Enoch. [*Laughing.*] That ain't fair. I'll take the money for one of 'em, if you say so, or I'll own it don't make no difference whose they be. But as to lyin'——

'Melia. Say it. Whose were they?

Enoch. Mine.

[*Rosie enters timorously, and each holds out a hand to her. She runs to them delightedly.*]

CURTAIN