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# SPITE CORNER

By FRANK CRAVEN



**SAMUEL FRENCH, 25 West 45th St., New York**

## YOU AND I

Comedy in 3 acts. By Philip Barry. 4 males, 3 females. 2 interiors.  
Modern costumes. Plays 2½ hours.

Maitland White is prosperous, still young, happily married, and devoted to his wife and only son. But he is not content, because his ambition in life is to be a painter. Fate has driven him into a business which he despises, and his heart is set upon his boy becoming a great architect. But Roderick falls in love with Veronica, and announces his intention of abandoning his profession, marrying her, and seeking a job in the factory. The father is grieved, and his wife induces him to retire from business and forget his troubles in the pursuit of art. No sooner said than done, and he succeeds in producing a picture which delights him. But everything goes wrong. His investments fail, his place at the factory is filled, and he is threatened with ruin. To add to his perplexities, Veronica breaks her engagement with Roderick in order that he may be free to follow his studies, just at the moment when there is no money to pay for them. At this juncture Mrs. White and an old friend, Geoffrey Nichols, arrange a ball, at which the picture shall be sold at auction. She invites connoisseurs and acquaintances that \$4,000 has been bid. Maitland is delighted, until he is crushed by the discovery that the purchaser is his old "boss," who proposes to use it for advertising. He even offers Maitland his old position and rich remuneration if he will dedicate his art to the service of the factory. At first the latter spurns the proposal, but his pride is overcome by a realization of his own limitations, and he sacrifices inclination to parental duty. An especially attractive play for high schools, colleges, and Little Theaters.

Price, 75 Cents.

## THE YOUNGEST

Comedy in 3 acts. By Philip Barry. 4 males, 5 females. 1 exterior.  
Modern costumes. Plays 2¼ hours.

The success of "You and I," by the same author, was recently augmented by this brilliant comedy, now published for the first time. "The Youngest" is an ingenious variation of the Cinderella theme, in which the hero, a down-trodden son, comes into contact with a charming busybody. The youngest eventually learns to assert himself, and turns upon his oppressors in splendid style. A very human and appealing comedy of contemporary American life, particularly so, is recommended for production by high schools.

Price, 75 Cents.

(The Above Are Subject to Royalty When Produced)

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SAMUEL FRENCH, 25 West 45th Street, New York City

New and Explicit Descriptive Catalogue Mailed Free on Request

# SPITE CORNER

*A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS*

BY

FRANK CRAVEN

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New York  
SAMUEL FRENCH  
PUBLISHER  
25 WEST 45TH STREET

London  
SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.  
26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET  
STRAND

# Spite Corner

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*Printed in the United States of America by  
J. J. LITTLE AND IVES COMPANY, NEW YORK*

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3505

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JOHN GOLDEN

PRESENTS

Madge Kennedy

IN

SPITE CORNER

*A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS*

BY

FRANK CRAVEN

Staged under the direction of the Author.

Produced at the Little Theatre, New York, Monday evening,  
September 25th, 1922.

THE PLAYERS

THE CHARACTERS

EVA CONDON.....	<i>Isabel Burgess</i>
MARIE L. DAY.....	<i>Ann Coolidge</i>
PERCY POLLOCK.....	<i>Eben Gooch</i>
JAMES SEELEY.....	<i>Cap'n Parker</i>
MADGE KENNEDY.....	<i>Elizabeth Dean</i>
MATTIE KEENE.....	<i>Mrs. Douthett</i>
STEPHEN MALEY.....	<i>Nathan Lattimer</i>
GEORGE GORMAN.....	<i>Mr. Nelson</i>
JASON ROBARDS.....	<i>John Lattimer</i>
BEATRICE NOYES.....	<i>Madame Florence</i>
JOHN KEEFE.....	<i>Mr. Dana</i>
SAM COIT.....	<i>Mr. Allen</i>
JO HAYWOOD.....	<i>Mrs. Hathaway</i>

The Scene of the Play is The Shop and The Home of  
Elizabeth Dean in the Town of Dean.

During Act III the curtain will be lowered for one minute  
to denote a lapse of several hours.



# SPITE CORNER

## ACT I

SCENE: *Shop of ELIZABETH DEAN.*

*A small old-fashioned beamed room, wooden-pegged, everything solid and old-fashioned. The only modern touch is the use of lighting R. and L.*

*Center there are large show windows, which look as though they might be enlargements of the original bow windows. These windows contain an assortment of goods including trimmed hats, waists, toys, overalls, shirts, etc.*

*There is a door U.R. leading to the street. Above door is a bell which rings when the door is opened.*

*There is another door U.L. at head of short flight of stairs which leads to ELIZABETH'S sleeping quarters.*

*Up stage left to right is counter, at left end of which is candy case. One chair in front of this counter at left.*

*Back of counter are several shelves running up to a height of six or seven feet. These contain dry goods, boxes of all shapes and sizes containing buttons, threads, soaps, shirts, collars, notions of every description; in fact, this store is the typical country shop which has everything of small necessity.*

*D.R. in front of show window is sewing machine. R.C. a small sewing and cutting table, R. of that a small armchair (rocker) and left a straight chair.*

*As the curtain rises, ISABEL is discovered with MISS COOLIDGE. ISABEL is seated at the sewing machine which is extreme R. in front of window and ANN COOLIDGE is R. of table working on some embroidery. The machine is going as the curtain is raised. After it is well up ISABEL stops at the end of the seam, and looking out of the window more as a matter of habit than anything else, sees a sight that makes her stop her work.*

BELLE. Well! (*With a "what do you know about that" tone.*) That's a new buggy Elmer Parsons is driving.

(*MISS COOLIDGE listens and then, seeing there is a possibility of also getting a look, takes off her working glasses and puts them on the table; takes her long-distance glasses from the table where they are always on hand for just such emergencies; adjusts them and goes to the window, looking over BELLE'S shoulder critically.*)

ANN. Yes. (*There is a second or two pause while she takes a careful survey; then she returns to chair, changes back to working glasses and resumes her embroidery, while BELLE continues her sewing, this time with needle and thread. ELMER has evidently passed from view.*) About time, too, I should say. (*She returns to chair and changes glasses once more.*) The old one would like to have fallen to pieces the last time I drove in it.

BELLE. Where is his house, Miss Coolidge?

ANN. Do you know where the Brewsters live?

BELLE. (*Doubtfully*) No.

ANN. You know where the Lattimer house is?

BELLE. Yes.

ANN. Well, it's the third house on the right hand side, on the road to the left just beyond there. You can't miss it; it has three chimneys.

BELLE. Is that the Mr. Parsons who takes summer boarders?

ANN. Yes. Summer complaints, he calls them.

BELLE. They must be a bother. But I guess they are profitable, too.

ANN. (*With a wise nod*) You'd say so if you could see the way his wife feeds the poor things. I ain't no great shucks at eating, but I'd starve to death if I spent a summer there. I hear you and Beth are making her a new dress, aren't you?

BELLE. Two.

ANN. (*Dropping her work a moment, aghast at such extravagance*) Two! Well, my conscience wouldn't let me wear them. But then, we can't all be alike.

BELLE. (*In a casual look out the window she has discovered a new interest*) Look, Miss Coolidge. There goes Nathan Lattimer. (*She stands in order to see better. ANN rises quickly and goes to window but finds she cannot see well with her reading glasses.*)

ANN. Where's my other glasses? (*She turns back to the table and changes glasses, hurrying back to the window and peering out over BELLE'S shoulder.*)

BELLE. Quick!

ANN. The old critter looks pretty spry for one just over a stroke.

BELLE. (*Shaking her head*) He walks rather shaky.

ANN. Yes, but he *is* walking. And I never thought he would again. (*They stand in the win-*

*dow and watch him pass from their view. ANN returns to her easy chair and BELLE sits.)* I always said he'd go off in one of them strokes. And he will, some day.

BELLE. I wonder just what causes them.

ANN. It's bile with him. He gets so full of bad temper it backs up on him. Why, I've seen him when he was only a boy screech and carry on till he was purple in the face when he couldn't get his own way. I wonder he's lived as long as he has.

BELLE. I shouldn't like to be married to a man like that.

ANN. His wife didn't stand him long.

BELLE. (*All interest*) Did she leave him?

ANN. No, she died. Five years was all she could stand of him. Poor Bertha, I never saw a face so resigned as hers was. She was the only Lattimer funeral I'd ever go to, but then, she was a Lothrop and they were of a different piece of cloth.

BELLE. There was an old man like Nathan Lattimer in Wakefield where I worked before I came here. Nobody ever had a good word for him.

ANN. Oh, there's lot of folks in town who think he's just wonderful because he's got money, and they're afraid of him. But I've known the whole kit and parcel of them and Nathan is the worst of a bad lot.

(*Enter EBEN GOOCH. He is a slow, safe-thinking New Englander with the customary philosophy and humor. His exact standing in town is not stated but he will do anything that will bring in an honest dollar, from laying a carpet to working on the road to reduce his taxes.*)

GOOCH. Hello, Isabel. Howdy, Ann. (*Closes door and comes down-stage.*)

BELLE. Good afternoon, Mr. Gooch.

GOOCH. Bethy in?

BELLE. (*Putting down her sewing, and crossing to room left*) Not unless she came in the back way. She said she was going to the post office. (*Calls off up left.*) Beth! (*Goes to foot of stairs; waits; crosses D.L. GOOCH goes up to her.*) No—Did you want to see her, or is it something I can do?

GOOCH. No, I don't know as you can—and I don't know but *what* you can. Mrs. Gooch wanted—four yards, I think it was, of—what is it you put on dresses?

BELLE. We put a lot of things on dresses.

GOOCH. Godfrey, that's so, ain't it? I never could understand why women clutter up their clothes with stuff that don't hold nothin' up nor together.

BELLE. Does seem foolish, I suppose.

GOOCH. Foolish as Ned Allen's youngest boy. Mrs. Gooch said Beth would know better than I could remember, so I didn't pay as much attention as I might.

ANN. Wasn't binding, was it?

GOOCH. That's just what it was, Ann.

BELLE. (*Going back of counter and getting it*) That was a good guess, Miss Coolidge.

GOOCH. Well, she ought to know what everybody's getting. She's in the shop enough. Give me four yards of that, Isabel. I remember that much.

ANN. I see Nathan is over his stroke.

GOOCH. Looks pretty good, too. (*Coming down to table.*) Everybody had given him up.

ANN. That shows what the doctors know.

GOOCH. Well, they must have known something, Ann, or they couldn't have got him well. (*Comes down and sits L. of table R.*)

ANN. Doctors didn't have nothin' to do with

Nathan's being here. It's just that he ain't wanted one place nor the other.

GOOCH. Well, then, the town gains by it.

ANN. Huh. You always did think Nathan was something wonderful.

GOOCH. No, I don't know as I did, and I don't know but *what* I did.

ANN. You always talked so. Anyone would think Nathan was closer to you than the coat on your back.

GOOCH. Oh, I don't dislike Nathan the way you do, and then again we ain't never been no Damon and Pygmalion.

ANN. I don't see why you should be here. Nathan never did a thing for you that I know of.

GOOCH. No, I don't know that he did, and I don't know but *what* he did. Maybe not for me especially, but for the community. He's been a big, public-spirited man.

ANN. Nathan Lattimer never did a thing for this town from public spirit and you know it.

GOOCH. I suppose you call building the high school for the town cussedness?

ANN. Yes, I do. He just wanted to get that piece of property it was built on away from Beth's Uncle Abner.

GOOCH. Abner got paid for it.

ANN. What difference does that make? An insurance company would pay me if I had my arm cut off, but that ain't no sign I want to lose it.

GOOCH. (*Pushes back chair and goes up to counter*) Oh, well, what's the use of trying to tell you!

ANN. No use. I've lived here in this town as long as you have, Eben Gooch.

BELLE. (*Giving him binding*) There you are, Mr. Gooch. Is that all?

GOOCH. Yes, thanks, Belle.



(Bell rings and LYMAN PARKER enters U.R. He is called "Cap'n" by everybody except ANN COOLIDGE.)

PARKER. (*Pausing at door*) Hello! Where is Beth? (*This last to BELLE.*)

BELLE. Post office. She'll be back in a minute. Will you sit?

PARKER. (*Looks at watch; comes down C.*) A minute or two—yes.

(BELLE turns chair L. of table for him. He sits, taking up local paper. BELLE returns to sewing machine R.)

GOOCH. Ann, you'd give the Cap'n credit for being a help to the town, wouldn't you?

ANN. Lyman has been a good man—yes.

PARKER. Thank you, Ann.

ANN. But the other—no.

PARKER. (*Looking at GOOCH*) Who's that?

GOOCH. Nathan.

PARKER. (*With a gesture of despair, as though he knew what ANN thought*) Oh!

GOOCH. Well, the Cap'n thinks he's all right, and he's been closer to him than you or I have.

ANN. Or'd want to be.

GOOCH. I didn't mean it personal.

PARKER. Why, Nathan is all right, Ann. You're just set against him because you've always been friendly with the Deans. But he isn't as black as you'd paint him.

ANN. You've talked that way for years, but I know there warn't one fit member in the whole Lattimer brood. Aaron Lattimer had to be dragged from under his own porch to go to war. Seth made all his money in a distillery——

PARKER. Amos was a florist. No harm in that. And Nathan's grandson—John——

ANN. There's another Lattimer they can be proud of.

PARKER. Well, at least, you don't know enough about him to say anything against him, Ann.

ANN. Have you heard anything of him?

PARKER. No.

ANN. He was just about going to set the world afire—hear him tell it.

PARKER. Maybe he will—he hasn't been gone so long.

ANN. Going on five years.

PARKER. Rome wasn't built in a day.

ANN. No, and I guess it wouldn't be yet if it had been left to him. Nathan never mentions him. I guess he couldn't have amounted to much.

PARKER. Nathan and John never did hit it off very well.

ANN. The reason for that was because John and Beth liked each other.

PARKER. It didn't help matters any.

BELLE. John was awfully good-looking, wasn't he? Beth has a picture of him in her album.

GOCH. (*Who has been leaning against up-stage counter*) I guess she's got more than one picture of him. They used to be thicker than burs in a cow's tail.

BELLE. What business was he in?

ANN. Beth said he was a promoter—but that never sounded like a real business to me.

BELLE. In the whole year that I've worked for her, Beth has hardly ever spoken of him.

ANN. Sensitive. Everybody twitting her about him—expecting them to marry. I don't think she has heard from him in a dog's age.

BELLE. And she still loves him!

ANN. (*Disgustedly*) Yes.

BELLE. Isn't it wonderful?

GOCH. Nothing wonderful about it. There

ain't nobody in town between the high school and the soldiers' home to make her forget him.

ANN. Belle, don't you let on to Beth I said anything about John Lattimer.

BELLE. I won't.

ANN. 'Cause she'd know in a minute you got it from me—and I don't want her to think I'm the talkative kind, 'cause I ain't.

(PARKER and GOOCH exchange glances.)

BELLE. I'll remember.

(BETH enters from the street. She has a couple of circular letters which she hands to ISABEL together with a local paper.)

BETH. Good afternoon, Cap'n Parker.

PARKER. Ah, Beth!

BETH. Nothing for you, Belle. How are you, Mr. Gooch? Is there anything I can do for you gentlemen? (She goes behind counter.)

GOOCH. No thanks, Beth. I'm all attended to, except paying you. How much, Belle?

BELLE. Twelve cents.

GOOCH. (As he digs up a collection of buttons and keys from his pocket) Charge it. (Crosses to door, opens it and stands looking up at sky.) Looks like it might rain.

PARKER. (Who has risen and placed chair where it belongs) Yes.

GOOCH. (With conviction) Well, if it does, we'll get it. (Exits. BELLE hands newspaper to ANN COOLIDGE; tears wrapper from magazine and reads it.)

PARKER. (Crosses and meets BETH at the foot of stairs L.) Beth, I want to know if you'll meet the Board of Selectmen here in about fifteen minutes.

BETH. (*Greatly surprised*) The Board of Selectmen?

PARKER. Yes—and Nathan Lattimer.

BETH. Nathan Lattimer hasn't been in here since this place was built.

PARKER. I know he hasn't. Of course, you have the right to object if you want to, but I'd like to bring him here.

BETH. Why can't you tell me what it's all about?

PARKER. Well, I'd rather wait until we're all together before I tell you.

BETH. (*About to go*) It must be terrible important.

PARKER. Yes, I think you'll say it is. May we come?

BETH. Of course.

PARKER. And it will be all right to bring Nathan?

BETH. Do you have to?

PARKER. Yes.

BETH. All right, Cap'n Parker.

PARKER. And we can be private?

BETH. I think everybody will be cleared out. If not, we can go upstairs.

PARKER. Good! (*Turns to exit*) So long, Ann—Belle.

BELLE. Good afternoon, Cap'n Parker.

ANN. Good-by, Lyman. (*PARKER exits.*)

BETH. (*Stands looking after PARKER until he exits*) Belle, Mrs. Douthett is coming in for her skirt—will you get it ready for her. (*Starts upstairs; half-way up she pauses.*) Don't go away, Miss Coolidge. There's something important I want you to do for me. (*Exits U.L.*)

BELLE. Beth doesn't seem to have that bitter feeling against the Lattimers that you say the rest of the Deans had. Do you think it's because of John?

ANN. (*Handing back the newspaper*) I suppose so. A girl is nearly always sweet on a fellow's

family until she marries him. (*Enter U.R. from the street LETTY DOUTHETT.*)

LETTY. Hello, Belle. How are you, Ann? Got my skirt fixed?

BELLE. Yes, it's all ready for you. (*BELLE goes up behind counter and gets paper to wrap skirt. LETTY seats herself in front of the counter, to the L.*)

ANN. This makes the fourth year of that skirt for you, doesn't it, Letty?

LETTY. (*Turning chair so that she faces directly up stage*) No—only three.

ANN. Why, you got it—

LETTY. I know when I got it. It was three years ago.

BELLE. (*Folding skirt*) She's right, Miss Coolidge. Beth and I can tell the age of any skirt in town by the hem. There's a ring for each year like a horse's tooth.

ANN. Well, three or four, it's about time you was getting a new one, seems to me.

LETTY. I am going to when I see you in a new bonnet. I don't want folks to think I ain't as careful with my clothes as you are. There is something I will need, though, and that is a black silk.

BELLE. (*Packing skirt in box with tissue paper*) We'll cut it for you any time you say.

LETTY. There ain't no hurry for it. Everybody I know looks pretty healthy.

ANN. You believe in waiting until the last moment for everything, don't you?

LETTY. Not for everything, Ann. I was married when I was eighteen. Say, I hear Nathan wants to buy this place.

BELLE. What?

ANN. Where'd you hear that? (*Dropping her work.*)

LETTY. Sam said that Arthur Freeman heard

Charlie Atchinson talking to Captain Parker about it.

ANN. (*To BELLE*) Beth say anything to you about it?

BELLE. Not a word.

LETTY. It would be fine for Beth if he should buy it.

ANN. Why would it?

LETTY. Oh, I know you wouldn't like it. You wouldn't have any place to sit all day. But Beth ain't goin' to get many chances to sell this place!

ANN. What's the odds so long as she wants to stay here?

LETTY. Oh, if she wants to carry on the shop the rest of her life, that's different. And, I suppose, that's all there is for her now. If she'd been sensible a few years back she'd have a man working for her.

BELLE. I never heard Beth complain of being single.

LETTY. No. Only men complain of being single. They can afford to. Beth is getting to where she wants folks to think it is choice with her. (*With a sarcastic laugh.*)

ANN. What are you laughing at? I've stayed single through choice.

LETTY. Yes, but it was the men's choice, Ann, not yours. (*She rises, crossing to chair L. of table R.C.*) Beth ought to be raising a family now. Didn't I tell you if she ever let Johnny Lattimer get out of town she'd lose him?

BELLE. What makes you say that?

LETTY. (*Sitting*) They all do. That city life gets them walking in circles.

ANN. Well, if it gets him to walking that way, maybe he'll come back to where Beth can get another chance at him.

LETTY. Yes, if he hasn't picked up with somebody else in the meantime.







BELLE. (*Crossing D.R. to machine*) Maybe Beth wouldn't look at him.

LETTY. She'd say "yes" to him with her eyes shut.

ANN. She ain't the first woman who has taken a man that way, either.

BELLE. (*Sitting in chair by machine and sewing*) If he's that sort then Beth would be better off without him.

LETTY. Isabel, I'm not going to get into any argument about men with you or Ann, because neither of you know anything about them. But I've been married going on thirty years and I've raised a family and I want to tell you that married life is like a three ring circus. There's a whole lot you have to overlook, but it's worth while going.

BETH. (*Enters down-stairs left*) You got your skirt all right, Mrs. Douthett?

LETTY. Yes, thank you, Beth. (*Rising, and going up stage to counter; picking up box.*) Well, are you coming along with me or are you going to sit here the rest of the night?

ANN. (*Rising*) What time is it?

LETTY. Going on five. (*She has opened the door U.R. a crack.*)

ANN. (*Putting away sewing hastily*) Goodness, I didn't know it was that late. I must be going.

BETH. (*Stopping her*) Don't go yet, Miss Coolidge.

ANN. I must, Beth.

BETH. Not before you do something for me.

ANN. What?

BETH. You know.

ANN. (*Puzzled*) No! (*BETH whispers to her.*) Not again, Beth!

BETH. A short one.

ANN. I told you only last week.

BETH. Please—just a little one—please?

ANN. Well, a short one, then.

BETH. (*Giving her a hug*) You're a dear. Clear the table, Belle.

(*BELLE takes the things from table and BETH goes to the sewing machine drawer, gets pack of cards. BELLE, with BETH'S help, turns the table so its long side is parallel with curtain line; BELLE places the three chairs with MISS COOLIDGE'S chair at back; ANN goes up and puts her reticule on the counter.*)

LETTY. (*Closing door and coming D.C.*) Are you getting ready to peer into the future again?

BETH. Miss Coolidge tells lovely fortunes.

LETTY. Everyone who tells them does, or people wouldn't listen to them.

ANN. (*Seating herself back of table*) I only tell what I see, Letty.

LETTY. (*Sitting in chair at counter*) Well, that's not your reputation, Ann.

BETH. Now, you two stop it. You're like a couple of bad children. (*Sits R. of table, BELLE L.*)

ANN. Before I begin I want it understood there's to be no interruptions. (*Cuts cards three times.*)

(*LETTY gives her a laugh, picks up fashion magazine, and back to audience, begins reading it. BETH cuts the pack into three and ANN turns the first lot over and studies them carefully.*)

My, my, my!

BETH. What is it?

ANN. I don't like it.

BETH. Black?

ANN. Awful black! You're going to have a lot of trouble, Beth.

LETTY. Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't go telling the child a lot of stuff to upset her.

ANN. Don't you interrupt and spoil the girl's pleasure.

LETTY. Spoil her pleasure. You haven't made her laugh herself sick the way you've started!

ANN. I'm only telling her what the cards say.

BETH. Just as I want you to do. I don't mind, Mrs. Douthett. Go on, Miss Coolidge. What is all the trouble about?

ANN. (*Laying out a second pack*) It's about business—there's a man and a woman mixed up in it.

BETH. Would that be me?

ANN. No—here you are.

BELLE. Is it a young man?

ANN. Well, there's a lot of men mixed up in this. But there it is—trouble and about business.

(*LETTY'S curiosity is too much for her. She rises, and comes to the back of ANN, looking over her shoulder.*)

LETTY. Huh!

ANN. There's a journey.

LETTY. I never heard a fortune that didn't have a journey in it.

ANN. And anger—between an old man and a young man.

BETH. Which is angry?

ANN. Seems like it was this older man—and about business—and there's that dark woman keeps running through it. (*Picks up cards and shuffles them.*)

BETH. I can't imagine who that woman can be. The only person I have had any words with at all has been Mrs. Fish.

BELLE. (*To ANN*) Well, I wouldn't call Mrs. Fish dark. She'd be more a heart, wouldn't she?

ANN. Of course.

LETTY. Well, I don't see how anyone could get along with Minnie Fish. I was over to her house the other day and of all the ridiculous——

ANN. Do you want to tell her about Minnie Fish or do you want your fortune told?

BETH. I'm sorry, Miss Coolidge. (ANN, *suiting the action, lays out the cards*) To yourself—to your house—to your luck. What you do expect—what you don't expect—what's sure to come true. To yourself is trouble and tears—considerable trouble—

LETTY. (*Leaning over ANN's shoulder and fingering cards*) Where's that?

ANN. (*Disgustedly*) You're not in this. (LETTY *draws back and ANN continues.*) And about business! To your house—to your house is sickness. It ain't anything to speak of; I'd tell you if it was. To your luck—well, it ain't what you'd call good and it ain't what you'd call bad. It starts worse than it ends, it seems to me. It just ain't plain sailing, that's all. What you do expect—what you do expect is a letter—a business letter?

BETH. That's right—I do! About the material for the girls' graduation dresses.

ANN (*Triumphantly*) There it is! What you expect—is a visit—from a dark woman.

BETH. A woman—I wonder who that can be.

LETTY. You will probably have a dozen of them in here before the day is over.

ANN. Now, what's sure to come true is a journey on water.

BELLE. That's your honeymoon, Beth.

BETH. Don't be silly. (*To ANN*) On water?

ANN. Yes, there it is. And here's your luck card along with it. That's the really first good card you've had in your fortune. Now, shuffle and wish.

(*They all lean forward and look at BETH.*)

BETH. (*More to herself than as a question*) What shall I wish? (*She then shuffles and starts to cut them away from her.*)

ANN. Don't you know that's bad luck? (BETH cuts toward her—in three packs.)

ANN. Wished?

BETH. Yes.

ANN. (*Turning packs over*) Business—dark man—nine of hearts.

BELLE. You get it.

LETTY. Ann Coolidge, I'd never have forgiven you if you hadn't turned up that wish card. (*She goes back to counter.*)

ANN. I didn't do it—it just came that way. (*BELLE goes up back to counter.*)

BETH. Of course. It was dear of you to tell it for me, Miss Coolidge.

ANN. I'm glad to do it for you, Beth. There are so many people who ask because they can't think of no other way to entertain you. (*She goes up to get her hat and bag.*)

LETTY. Well, if that's what you call entertainment I won't be surprised to come in here some day and find you all playing Puss in the Corner. Now, you come along with me. (*Crosses U.R. and opens door.*)

ANN. I don't know that I oughter.

LETTY. Yes, you had. You ought to have someone with you all the time. You're getting so you ain't responsible. Come on—good-bye, Belle—Beth! (*She takes ANN by the arm and forces her out. Clock strikes five.*)

BELLE. (*Following them to door; turns and draws curtains on shelves*) How those two fight and yet they never seem to get offended.

BETH. They have done it for years, Belle. They know each other.

BELLE. I know. Mrs. Douthett says it's a Christian charity on her part because Miss Coolidge is a poor, lonely old woman with no one at all to pick on.

*(The girls are now picking up odds and ends of work and tidying up the shop.)*

BETH. We're both lonely old maids.

BELLE. You're young yet, Beth.

BETH. Not young, Belle. I'm just not old. I'll soon be reaching the time when children will call me Betsy Dean. *(Picks up mirror, looks in it—pause.)* Betsey Dean!

*(BELLE takes hat off rack; goes to long glass; is about to put hat on when she sees BETH; comes R. to her and puts an arm around her.)*

BELLE. It's enough to make any girl old before her time—the lonesome life you have led here. You ought to get away, Beth. Why don't you? You have no ties.

BETH. Why should I? I couldn't be happy anywhere else. *(Busies herself picking up pins and threads.)* I am my own boss here. The only friends I have or ever have had are right in this village and when I am through with my work all I have to do is climb the stairs and I'm home. I can make enough to pay your wages, run the house and sometimes have a penny for a rainy day. I think I am a very lucky girl. *(Crosses back to BELLE.)* There's nothing more I could ask.

BELLE. *(Casually; arranging chairs)* Nothing more, Beth?

BETH. No.

BELLE. What did you wish in your fortune? *(BETH is confused.)* Wasn't that something more?

BETH. Yes, but I've wished for that so long, Belle, there is never any hope behind it.

BELLE. *(Crossing down-stage to armchair)* Beth, did you two quarrel?

BETH. No. How much do you know about it?

BELLE. I have heard a remark now and then. *(Sitting.)*

BETH. Yes, the whole town gossiped about it for a long time. I guess I'll never *quite* live it down.

BELLE. Do you want to tell me?

BETH. There isn't much to tell. When he left he said that as soon as he had a good position and enough money we were to be married. Of course, we wrote—he, about his plans and hopes, and I, about all the news of the village. Then the letters grew shorter and then they stopped. Maybe it was my fault, too, because when my aunt died and I took to running this place I had very little time and we just stopped—that's all—

BELLE. And you still care for him, don't you?

BETH. Of course. Just as I know he cares for me. If I only knew where to reach him I would write. But, you see, all I can do is to wait.

BELLE. (*Rising, and crossing R.*) Don't you suppose his grandfather keeps track of him?

BETH. I would be the last one he would ever tell.

BELLE. (*Crossing back to BETH*) Beth, did it ever occur to you that he may not have been as constant as you?

BETH. Why, no. I gave him my word and he gave me his. Some day he'll come back. Then I can laugh at all the old cats who laughed at me.

BELLE. (*Patting her shoulders*) I hope so, dear.

(PARKER, LATTIMER *and* NELSON *pass window.*)

BETH. I know so. (*Bell rings.*)

BELLE. Beth! Here comes Nathan Lattimer.

(BELLE *goes up and stands back of door until they enter; then exits. Enter* PARKER, NATHAN LATTIMER *and* NELSON.)

PARKER. Here we are, Beth. (NATHAN *comes down-stage R. peering around and meets* BETH *face-*

*to-face. She is plainly frightened but tries to conceal it and be courteous.)*

BETH. I was glad to hear of your recovery, Mr. Lattimer.

NATHAN. (*Doubting it, merely nods and grunts*)  
Yeh!

BETH. Won't you sit down?

NATHAN. I prefer to walk about. (*Turns and places hat on sewing machine R.; looks over place curiously.*)

NELSON. (*Who, after entering went straight to candy counter, turns to BETH*) Let me have some of them, will you, Bethy?

(*BETH crosses U.L. and gets candy for NELSON, ringing up the money; then returns to C. and takes a seat there L.C. NELSON turns U.L. and stands leaning on counter.*)

BETH. All right, Cap'n Parker.

PARKER. (*With some deliberation*) Beth, have you ever thought of selling this place?

(*NATHAN returns to his first position D.R., watching BETH intently.*)

BETH. Is that what you came in here to ask me?

PARKER. Yes.

BETH. No, Cap'n Parker.

PARKER. Well, that doesn't surprise me. But there is one thing, you know, Beth, that you women sometimes do—and that is change your minds. Now, I knew your family a long, long time. They were always proud-spirited people. None of them ever had much money because they weren't practical. But they all loved this town and gave the best they had for it—and I think you want to do the same, don't you?

BETH. Yes, sir.







PARKER. Now we are terribly behind the times, just plain old-fashioned. We were the last town of any of them around here to get electric lights. We are the only one that hasn't got an up-to-date fire truck. We never would have had the high school if it hadn't been for Mr. Lattimer—and look at our business block in our main square. What is it? A row of old, frame buildings—just a fire trap. Now, it ain't because we don't want the best. It ain't because we don't know what's what. It's just because we haven't had the money to go ahead. But, at last, we are to have our wish fulfilled. We are to have a fine, brick business block, modern in every way—and once more we owe it to the public spirit and generosity of Mr. Lattimer, who has agreed to advance the money to build it.

LATTIMER. With reservations.

PARKER. Of course, Nathan, of course. Mr. Lattimer has had this idea in mind for a long time. Dana, Atchison, Crombie, in fact all the merchants of this block, realizing the practical as well as the philanthropic side of Mr. Lattimer's idea, have co-operated with him to the extent that he is now the owner of this entire property up to here and only needs this corner before starting to build.

BETH. (*With a wave of her hand*) You are going to tear all these stores down?

PARKER. Yes.

BETH. Mr. Atchison's—Mr. Crombie's——

PARKER. Yes.

BETH. Mr. Lattimer has bought all their places?

PARKER. Yes.

BETH. And now he wants to buy mine?

PARKER. Yes.

(*BETH has repeated all that PARKER has told her as though in a daze; now she pulls herself together a bit.*)

BETH. Well, Mr. Atchison and Mr. Dana and all of them have homes away from their stores. This is the only place I have.

NELSON. Well, it ain't as though you were a stranger here, Betty. There's plenty of folks in town who would be glad to board you and not charge you much either.

BETH. That isn't the same as being home, Mr. Nelson.

NELSON. Or you might rent the Folsom place. He's counting on building this spring and I could make a dicker for you.

BETH. But Folsom's place is a mile and a half from town, Mr. Nelson.

NELSON. What's that to a good healthy girl like you? I'd bet that you'd walk that far to a dance and farther.

BETH. Oh, I have done it—but I wouldn't do it six mornings and nights for fifty-two weeks in the year.

NATHAN. Your comfort seems to mean a lot to you, Miss Dean.

BETH. My home means a lot to me, Mr. Lattimer. As this was the first building in the town of Dean, which my folks settled, I am very proud of it and it seems a pity to see such a landmark destroyed.

NATHAN. Landmarks like this have no practical value, though.

BETH. Women aren't supposed to consider the practical side first, Mr. Lattimer.

PARKER. What do you think of it, Betty?

BETH. Why, it may be very fine, of course, I don't see—let me understand you. Is it your plan to simply rebuild and let me stay here on this corner of the new building?

NATHAN. We are not prepared to make promises.

BETH. But what about my business, Captain Parker?

NATHAN. (*Impatiently*) I told you there was no use talking to her. (*Crosses to BETH.*) You don't want to sell to me—that's it, isn't it?

BETH. No, not exactly.

NATHAN. Yes, it is. It's because I want it. It's the old story of the Lattimers and the Deans. We've been bad friends for years.

BETH. For generations, Mr. Lattimer.

NATHAN. And why? Because when your folks settled in this town they tried to run it all. They tried to carry things with a high hand.

BETH. Mr. Lattimer, I can't have——

PARKER. Now, now, Beth. Mr. Lattimer doesn't mean any harm. We're here for a business purpose.

NATHAN. (*Turning and crossing D.R.*) That's all it is. We want this property.

BETH. The Lattimers have always wanted our property. They've taken it away from us, piece by piece, until this little corner's the last bit left that's owned by a Dean and now you want that.

PARKER. For the benefit of the town, Beth.

NATHAN. Just as we've always tried to do—benefit the town. Just as we built the high school and the library. If we'd been shiftless, careless with our money like—other folks—we couldn't have done these things. That's true' aint, it?

PARKER. Yes, yes, of course, Nathan.

NATHAN. It's a simple enough question. Will you be willing, for a good price, to give up this place? That's all we want to know.

(DANA enters very much out of breath U.R.)

DANA. Hello, everybody. Sorry to have been late, Cap'n. (*Comes D.R.*) Say, Nathan, saw your grandson down at the station.

NATHAN. My grandson!

(BETH goes U.R. to window and peers out.)

PARKER. Johnny home! That's fine.

DANA. He got in on the 5:20. Didn't get much chance to talk to him—big crowd around—everybody talking at once.

PARKER. Yes, yes. Nathan, I know you want to get away to see him. And Henry, we've laid the whole thing before Beth and all we've got to do now is get her answer. (*Crosses to L.C., where BETH is now standing.*)

BETH. Must I give you that answer now, Cap'n Parker? You know, it isn't a thing to be decided off-hand. Let me give you an answer in a day or so. Maybe tomorrow. I think it will be favorable.

PARKER. Good. I don't see but what that is the least we can do—if that is satisfactory to you, Nathan.

NATHAN. I don't want to waste any more time with this than I have to. It seems to me you ought to know what you want to do.

BETH. I do know what I want to do, Mr. Lattimer, but I—want to talk it over—with—somebody—that's all.

NATHAN. Well, all right. (*He crosses with DANA and NELSON to door.*)

PARKER. Thank you, Beth. Now you try and give Nathan or me an answer as soon as you can.

BETH. I will, Cap'n Parker. I think it's a wonderful idea.

PARKER. (*Pleased and surprised*) You do, eh?

BETH. Oh yes, I do. Of course, I hate to lose my home, but then I may go away soon—er—settle some place with relatives. Yes. So I would not mind then, you see.

PARKER. No, of course not.

BETH. No. And if I decide to do that I'll let you know very soon.

PARKER. (*Shaking hands*) Fine. Good night, Beth.

BETH. Good night, Cap'n Parker. (*Following them up to door and calling after them as they exit.*) Good night, Mr. Dana—Mr. Nelson. (*Closing door and whispering through it.*) Good night, Grandfather Lattimer. (*Turns, radiant.*) He's come back for me—he's come back—— (*Realizing she is in her working clothes, she starts on a run for her room to primp up a bit. Just as she reaches the foot of the steps the door opens and JOHN enters; carries suitcase.*)

JOHN. Hello! (*Still carrying cap and bag, he crosses L.C. to meet her; with a glad cry she moves to meet him; fully expects to be clasped to his breast; but he only takes her hand and shakes it warmly.*)

BETH. Hello, John! Why didn't you let somebody know you were coming?

JOHN. Didn't have a chance. Just had time to throw a few things in a bag and hustle on.

BETH. But you're here—that's the main thing.

JOHN. Yes. And now that I am here they tell me I'm not wanted.

BETH. Who told you that?

JOHN. Well, the very first thing I heard when I arrived was that my grandfather was well and up and out.

BETH. (*His reason for being there just dawning on her*) Oh! He sent for you?

JOHN. (*Putting bag on floor near counter; hat on the bag*) Yes.

BETH. I see. (*Then, trying to muster an air of mere friendship, she gives a little laugh and seats herself on chair L. of counter.*) Well! You're looking well, John!

JOHN. Feel fine. I never saw you looking better. You haven't changed a bit.

BETH. No?

JOHN. No. Just about the same—a little bit older

—but then we both are—after four years—aren't we?

BETH. Five.

JOHN. Five? It doesn't seem that long, does it?

BETH. Doesn't it?

JOHN. I can't realize it.

BETH. And how have you made out, John? Have you been successful?

JOHN. Well—no—I haven't been what you'd call a success.

BETH. I'm sorry.

JOHN. You were always like that, Beth. But there's no need to get sad about it. I'll get there yet.

BETH. I'm sure you will. Have you—are you—married, John?

JOHN. No, indeed. . . . You're single, of course?

BETH. Oh, yes, of course.

JOHN. (*Trying to apologize*) I mean—there's no reason why you should be—I heard though that you were running the shop, so I thought—

BETH. (*Going back of the counter*) Yes. That's all right.

JOHN. How's your aunt?

BETH. Why, she's dead.

JOHN. I beg your pardon.

BETH. I wrote you!

JOHN. Yes—yes. I'd forgotten. And you're all alone now?

BETH. Yes, I'm all alone. (JOHN *smiles reminiscently*.) What is it?

JOHN. Do you remember how we had it all planned? I was going to make a fortune—be successful and all that. And now here I am back again almost as broke as the day I went away. I tell you everything in this world comes out exactly as you plan it—sometimes. (*He turns up-stage and looks about room.*) Same old place, isn't it? Remember



how I used to come in here for your aunt's home-made taffy and how stuck up you used to be because you could get it for nothing while I had to give up my hard-earned pennies?

BETH. Your grandfather gave them to you.

JOHN. That's what I said—they were hard-earned. But I gave them up cheerfully for that taffy. You know the kind—she used to keep it in a glass case right in that corner. (*Going to candy case U.C.*)

BETH. It's still there.

JOHN. (*Crossing to it*) So it is. How have you kept it looking so fresh?

BETH. I make it.

JOHN. Same recipe?

BETH. To a grain of sugar.

JOHN. Price the same?

BETH. Not to strangers.

JOHN. I suppose you sting them.

BETH. No, we treat them. (*Handing him piece of taffy.*) See if it tastes the same.

JOHN. (*Tasting it*) Better. I tell you, the town has improved! Now, let's see if I have my penny.

BETH. No—you're not to pay for that. I want you to realize at least one of your boyhood dreams.

JOHN. You know, you're making me almost glad I came back.

BETH. You didn't want to come back?

JOHN. Oh yes, I've wanted to lots of times. I don't suppose I would though, if the old man hadn't sent for me. I'm glad he's better.

BETH. He's quite well.

JOHN. So I was told at the station. I had the five years' news pumped into me in I think as many minutes. If they worked here as fast as they talked this would be a hustling little town. How is the old gentleman looking, or haven't you seen him?

BETH. He was in here today. He's looking quite well.

JOHN. My grandfather in here? You don't mean to say you are on friendly terms?

BETH. Hardly that. He wants to buy this place. He wants to tear down this row of buildings and put up a modern block.

JOHN. Are you going to do it?

BETH. I don't know. He'll make me a good offer.

JOHN. Well, if you get a good price you take it.

BETH. You'd do that, would you?

JOHN. Certainly. There's no future here for you, is there?

BETH. I guess not.

JOHN. Then sell.

BETH. It means giving up my home, John.

JOHN. Oh, I know, and it is natural for you to feel sentimental about that—but it doesn't pay to be too sentimental.

BETH. No, I've found that out, John. I've been too sentimental and it doesn't pay. I might have been Mrs. Somebody or other, but I'm not. I was too sentimental. I thought giving a man a chance to make good his promises was fair and womanly, but it was just sentimentality.

JOHN. (*Struck by the hard note in her voice*) What do you mean?

BETH. I mean I've waited and waited and waited for you. That's all that's kept me here. Don't you suppose I've wanted to get out and see what the rest of the world was like? Don't you suppose it's taken courage to live this humdrum life—to face the women who have come in here day after day asking "Have you heard anything from John?" with nothing to answer them?

JOHN. But, Betsey—

BETH. Don't call me *Betsey!* (*The bell rings and NATHAN enters.*) Come in, Mr. Lattimer.





(NATHAN comes down with a cold eye on JOHN and doesn't take the hand JOHN extends.)

NATHAN. What are you doing here?

JOHN. I came in answer to your telegram.

NATHAN. I sent another saying there was no need of you.

JOHN. I never received that. I had started by then, I suppose.

NATHAN. Well, did you come on to see this young woman or to see me?

BETH. Oh, not to see me, Mr. Lattimer. You can be sure of that. We have just been having a little talk about my selling this place.

NATHAN. Eh?

BETH. (*Answering NATHAN'S look to JOHN*) Oh, he's a Lattimer all right—he advised me to get out. Just as all the Lattimers have advised all the Deans. But I'm not going to do it.

NATHAN. You're not?

BETH. No, I'm not.

NATHAN. Your uncle said that—but he isn't here.

BETH. Well, I am, and to stay! If your grandson had kept faith with me you could have had this little old place and welcome, but his word is as worthless as any Lattimer's. (*Turns to go upstairs at L.*)

JOHN. Beth, dear, listen to me.

BETH. Again? I did that once and I've learned my lesson.

NATHAN. Betsey Dean, I want this place.

BETH. (*Half-way up the stairs L.*) You can't have it.

NATHAN. And it's always been my habit to get what I wanted.

BETH. (*Pausing at the door of her room U.L.*) Nathan Lattimer, if you offered me a fortune and a palace to move to, I wouldn't let you—or one of

your tribe—have this place for any purpose of any kind. You couldn't have it now—not for spite. And that's all I have to say to you, Mr. Lattimer. Good-night! (*Slams the door on them and CURTAIN descends on JOHN and NATHAN looking after her.*)

CURTAIN

## ACT II

SCENE: Same as Act. I.

ELIZABETH is discovered back of counter busy with some bills. After the curtain is up JOHN appears at door, comes cautiously into the room, and tiptoes down to the counter. BETH looks up, sees him, jumps down from stool and rushes upstairs into her room U.L. JOHN follows her to stairs, trying to stop her.

JOHN. Elizabeth, I want to talk to you.

(After she exits, he turns as though to exit; then reconsidering, places a chair R.C. facing her room and sits there determined to wait until she come out. PARKER enters U.R., gives JOHN one hasty look.)

PARKER. Hello, Johnny.

JOHN. Hello, Cap'n Parker.

PARKER. (At foot of stairs, calls) Beth! Oh, Beth! (The door opens half-way and then is hastily slammed. PARKER turning, sees JOHN and realizes that he is the cause of BETH'S anger; crosses L. to him.) Do you know it would help me a whole lot if you'd stay away from here?

JOHN. How?

PARKER. Your grand-dad and me had Betsey almost thinking our way till you came along and you ain't helping matters any by hanging around all the time.

JOHN. I'm trying to make her change her mind.

PARKER. You needn't; I'll attend to that.

JOHN. No, I mean about me personally.

PARKER. Better not tell your grand-dad that. He ain't feeling any too strong yet.

JOHN. Oh, I'm sorry about that. He'd feel a lot better, though, if he'd stop working this scheme to get Beth out of this place.

PARKER. There is no scheme, Sonny.

JOHN. Oh yes, there is. It's his one object in building this block and we both know it.

PARKER. I don't know anything of the kind.

JOHN. You do, but you won't admit it. Only you ought to play fair.

PARKER. Play fair? Didn't we go to Betsey and ask her if she wanted to sell?

JOHN. And she refused.

PARKER. Well, you expect a person to the first time, don't you? So now we're going to raise the price. That's no scheme, as I see things.

JOHN. Wait a minute. Is it fair to bring a dress-maker from town to open a shop in the same block and undersell her?

PARKER. We can't help tradesmen from coming here.

JOHN. No, but Madame Florence didn't come here. She was brought. I guess it doesn't matter much where you go—when a man like my grand-father wants something done and he's got money—there are—people who see things the way they are pointed out to them.

PARKER. Sonny, let me tell you something. When a man is elected to office, whether it is the presidency of the United States, or Chairman of the Board of Selectmen, he takes an oath that he will just make so many enemies—he doesn't want to, but when he says "to the best of my ability" that settles him. I've given thirty-eight years' service to this town. I love it. I love Betsey, but I promised I'd do the best I could by the people who elected me and I wouldn't



care if she was Susie Smith or Tilly Jones, if it is for the good of the majority of the people in this town to have that building I'm going to consider the majority. (JOHN *starts to speak.*) Now you run along. I've got business with Betsey and I'll never get her here while you're around.

JOHN. All right. (*Goes up to door.*) Tell her I'll be back later, will you? (*Exits.*)

PARKER. Oh, Beth?

BETH. (*Off-stage*) Yes?

PARKER. It's all right, he's gone.

(*The door U.L. opens slowly and BETH comes downstairs, crosses over to back of sewing table without paying any attention to CAP'N PARKER and starts to work on her sewing—evidently a hat.*)

PARKER. How are you?

BETH. (*Busily measuring, cutting, etc.*) Fine, thank you.

PARKER. Changed your mind any about things?

BETH. I have about people, Cap'n Parker.

PARKER. Meaning me?

BETH. You're one of them.

PARKER. Oh now, Betsy, don't be silly. (*Sits in rocker R. of table R.C.*)

BETH. No matter how good a cause a woman has to be mad, a man says it's silly.

PARKER. Who are you mad at?

BETH. All of you.

PARKER. Why?

BETH. Why? Because you're all plotting against me.

PARKER. You're mad at Johnny Lattimer.

BETH. (*Tearing a stiff piece of buckram viciously*) You bet I am!

PARKER. So now you are taking it out on the rest of us?

BETH. That isn't true, Cap'n Parker.

PARKER. You were all ready to listen to reason when we first came to you. Then along came Johnny and everything is changed.

BETH. I had cause.

PARKER. Cause to change your feelings toward him. (*Rises and crosses to BETH.*) But how about the rest of us?

BETH. I'm not thinking of the rest of you.

PARKER. Of course you're not. And that's not like you. Beth, you've always been one to go out of your way to help folks.

BETH. Yes, and they're the ones now who snub me, who have taken their business from me, who make fun of me—a lot of good it does to consider other people. The only way is to do what suits you and never mind about the others.

PARKER. That's not the only way, Beth—for you or anybody else. The thing for you to do first is to make up with Johnny Lattimer, so—the next time he comes in here why don't you have a talk with him?

BETH. Talk to him? I wouldn't look at him! (*Crosses U.L. back of counter, where she unpins pattern from shelf curtain and laying it on counter, begins cutting velvet.*)

PARKER. Well, I'll tell you why I'm here. Nathan has agreed to go to eight thousand, but that's the last offer—and it's a good one, Beth.

BETH. He couldn't have it for eighty thousand.

PARKER. You're cutting off your nose to spite your face.

BETH. Well, it's my nose.

PARKER. Yes, but you'll need it. It isn't going to do you any good to get the whole town mad at you. Why, they're calling it "Spite Corner" already.

BETH. I don't care what they call it. (*Crosses L.*)

PARKER. Then you have decided, have you, Beth?  
(*He goes up to end of counter, facing her.*)

BETH. Yes, Cap'n Parker.

PARKER. It may be very unpleasant for you, Beth.

BETH. If the whole town wants to take sides against me, I can't help it.

PARKER. You mean you won't. Beth, there is a way by which we can force you to give up this place.

BETH. You couldn't—you wouldn't do that.

PARKER. I've warned you, Betsey!

BETH. That's all you can do, Cap'n.

(PARKER *turns R. to exit, meeting ANN who enters U.R.*)

PARKER. Hello, Ann.

ANN. There's some folks I don't pass the time of day to, Lyman Parker.

PARKER. Suit yourself, Ann. (*He exits U.R. ANN seats herself in rocker R. of table R.C. BETH crosses over R. to door, looking after PARKER.*)

ANN. Oh, Beth, give me a skein of that green silk for leaves. (*BETH returns to counter; gets skein, brings it over to MISS COOLIDGE, who pays her; BETH goes back to counter.*) Well, I've been into that new model shop of Madame Florence's—not to buy anything.

BETH. Many people there?

ANN. A dozen. She's brazen—calls herself Madame Florence and not a sign of a wedding ring.

BETH. Maybe she's French.

ANN. She ain't. That is, she doesn't speak English—not the kind I was taught—but I know it ain't French.

BETH. Has she got nice things?

ANN. Hussy clothes, I call them. Beth, they're disgraceful. I never thought the women of this

town would buy such things. She hasn't had any of my trade. I just went over to see what her place was like, but I wouldn't spend a nickel with her.

BETH. (*Coming D.R. to ANN*) You old dear! (*She sits back of sewing table.*)

ANN. Never mind, Beth—let them go—they'll be back. Nathan can't ruin you that way.

BETH. I know, but it doesn't help to lose your trade.

ANN. Well, Nathan's not a young man; you ought to be able to hold out longer than he can. (*BELLE enters U.R. in great excitement.*)

BETH. But can I hold out against the whole town? That's what's worrying me!

BELLE. Beth, what do you think? Dana won't sell me the chops.

BETH. He refused you?

BELLE. That's what it amounted to. Everything I asked for they said they didn't have.

BETH. You mean Dana didn't have any chops?

BELLE. He *said* he didn't.

BETH. Well, then, we must get something else.

BELLE. But he did have the chops. I saw them.

ANN. They are going to boycott you, Beth.

BETH. That's what Cap'n Parker meant. I'll be back in a moment. (*She starts for door U.R. just as JOHN enters. She stamps her foot in rage, turns, runs upstairs; exits U.L.*)

(*ANN looks up mystified and is almost at the point of rising and following her when JOHN appears on the scene, and stops her. All during this scene he is very much embarrassed as though he knew the two women were on to him. He tries, however, to carry the situation with bravado. As he enters there is an awkward pause.*)

BELLE. How do you do?

JOHN. How do you do?

(BELLE crosses U.L. to back of counter.)

ANN. (*Sizing him up over her glasses; nods*)  
Was there something you wanted?

JOHN. Yes—yes—please. Let me see—— (*His eyes roam the shelves as though to find a suggestion.*)  
Oh yes, I want some buttons. (*This with an air of finality as though he had been wanting them all the time.*)

BELLE. What kind?

JOHN. Why, for a grey coat.

BELLE. How many?

JOHN. (*Counting buttons on his coat*) Well, five or six—how do you sell them?

BELLE. I can let you have half a dozen. (*Wrapping up buttons.*)

JOHN. And how—how is Miss Dean today?

BELLE. Very well, thank you.

JOHN. Yes—that's good. I thought as I had not seen her out much lately, she might not be feeling well.

BELLE. She is.

JOHN. Well, I am very glad to hear it—very glad. (*By this time the buttons are ready.*) How much are they?

BELLE. Twenty-four cents.

JOHN. Have you change for a bill?

BELLE. How large is it?

JOHN. Ten. (*BELLE looks in drawer doubtfully.*)  
If not, I can get it changed somewhere and be right back. (*He starts to door eagerly.*)

BELLE. Oh, wait a minute, I can change it for you. (*She goes over to ANN.*) Miss Coolidge, will you change this?

(ANN rummages in her stocking, after carefully turning away from JOHN, and produces the change.)

JOHN. (*Visibly disappointed as BELLE counts out change*) I am sorry to inconvenience you.

BELLE. That's all right.

JOHN. (*Crossing over to ANN*) How have you been, Miss Coolidge?

ANN. I'm always well.

JOHN. Yes? That's good. Health—that's the great thing, after all, isn't it?

ANN. So everyone says.

JOHN. Yes—yes—— (*Looking around trying to kill time*) Well—good-day. (*Is about to go.*)

BELLE. (*Following him to door with change and parcel*) You have forgotten your buttons and change.

JOHN. Oh, yes! Thank you, good-day. (*Returns and gets buttons, smiles once more at BELLE and exits.*)

ANN. Is he all right or ain't he?

BELLE. What do you mean?

ANN. He *acts* absent-minded.

BELLE. On purpose. He has bought more things in here than he'll ever use just to get a chance to speak with Beth. But she won't listen to him.

ANN. I wondered what ailed her.

BELLE. Well, she has more power of resistance than I'd have.

(DANA, the local market man, is seen outside the door. He stops just before coming past doorway, evidently to someone down the street.)

BETH. Mr. Dana—Oh, Mr. Dana. Will you come in here please? (*BETH rushes downstairs L. and to door U.R.*)

DANA. Well, what is it? I haven't got much time. (*Enters and stands in doorway.*)

BETH. I think you'll be interested in this.

DANA. (*Crossing D.C.*) Is it about the new building?

BETH. No, about the chops. I want to know why you wouldn't give Belle what she ordered.

DANA. Maybe we didn't have them.

BELLE. (*Coming down on his R.*) Yes, you did. I saw Albert cutting some for Mrs. Bartlett.

DANA. Oh, those! She ordered them ahead.

BETH. Mrs. Bartlett never orders them ahead—I know her.

DANA. Well, she must have done it this time. Now I come to think of it, she did.

BELLE. No, she didn't. She came after I did and ordered them because she didn't know what else to get.

BETH. Is that your idea of fair treatment?

DANA. Yes, it is. You have something here we want—but you won't let us have it. You think that's all right, don't you? What you are doing, we can do.

BETH. It isn't the same thing at all.

DANA. Yes, it is, and as long as you hold off with giving us a chance to get what we want, you needn't expect anything from me—and that's all there is to it.

BELLE. (*Sitting back of table*) Well, I think that is abominable.

ANN. I suppose this is another of Nathan's tricks.

DANA. Well, I don't know as you have a right to ask questions. But I'll say this though—it was Nathan in a way. As he says, it's up to us if we get what we want or not.

BETH. I could have the law on you for this.

DANA. No, you couldn't. We have asked Cap'n Parker about it and he says there ain't nobody can tell us what to do with our goods. If I tell you I ain't got a thing, then I ain't got it. And if I say such a thing is for somebody else—then that is so, too.

BETH. But if I could prove that Mrs. Bartlett

hadn't ordered those chops and that you had refused to sell them to me——

DANA. You can't prove that I hadn't made up my mind to make her a present of them.

BELLE. But she paid for them.

DANA. I don't mind telling you this, Bessie, 'cause Cap'n Parker says it would be a terrible tough case in law, and that he didn't see any way where an undesirable can force us to sell if we don't want to. And in this case we have decided that as long as you are interfering with public improvement, you are undesirable.

ANN. It seems to me that for a lot of you men, who have known Beth since she was a baby, and her mother and father before her, that it is about as low down a trick as I ever heard of.

DANA. (*Crossing over to ANN COOLIDGE*) Well now, that's something I think works two ways. Beth has known us, too—and our families—and it seems to me as she is one against seven, she ought to consider the majority. Besides us, there was all the labor that was to be done—all of it local contracts—and that means a lot of money to a lot of people. They are as mad about it as we are, and I don't see as you can blame them. As Nathan says, "The town's center is the town's shop window and it's up to all of us to make it as attractive as possible."

ANN. It's taken him a lot of years to figure that out.

DANA. Well, whether it has or not, there is a lot in it and just because Beth is mad at Johnny Lattimer——

BETH. John Lattimer hasn't anything to do with this.

DANA. Seems to have had——

BETH. Well, he hasn't. What I told John



Lattimer and his grandfather I meant. I wouldn't sell this place to one of them if I was starving.

DANA. But that's what everybody is trying to tell you. It ain't to Nathan—it's the town.

BETH. Yes, as the High School was. Well, let him try and get it—and you and all the others try and help him. I don't have to eat meat!

DANA. Well, what are you going to do for vegetables, flour, eggs, milk and all the truck you will need? We mean business, Beth, and we won't sell nothing to anybody that we don't want nobody to have.

BETH. You don't have to, Mr. Dana. There are other shops in other towns where they will sell something to somebody.

DANA. (*Crossing up to door U.R.*) Well, Beth, anyone that is as stubborn as you are can't expect much consideration.

BETH. I don't expect it, Mr. Dana. Send in any bill you may have against me and if you haven't overcharged me, I'll pay it. (*DANA exits U.R. Turns to two women.*) Now, you see! I know just where I stand—I am an undesirable! (*She is almost on the verge of tears.*) If I only had the money I'd hire a lawyer and have them up for conspiracy—that's exactly what it is—conspiracy.

ANN. Well, I don't see as a lawyer would stand much of a chance with this crew. I wouldn't feel safe eating his meat. I wouldn't think that he was beyond poisoning it. (*BETH turns L. and is about to go upstairs.*)

FLORENCE. (*Enters from street*) Have you got one of those drop skirts of sail cloth the women in this town wear.

BETH. Why?

FLORENCE. Why? I want to buy one. I've had a dozen calls for one and I haven't one in stock.

I'd as soon think of selling bustles. But if they want them I guess they'll have to have them.

BETH. You're Madame Florence, aren't you?

FLORENCE. Yes.

BETH. Don't you think you are asking a good deal?

FLORENCE. Why, I expect to pay you. That's what you are in business for. Have you got one?

BETH. Yes. But we don't have to sell nothing to nobody we don't want anybody to have. (*Exits U.L. to room.*)

FLORENCE. I wanted to come in here before this, but I thought I wouldn't be welcome. (*To Miss COOLIDGE*) Miss Coolidge, ain't it?

ANN. Yes.

FLORENCE. I've heard all about you. (*To BELLE*) Don't you love her? She reminds me so of an aunt of mine. She's been in the shop——

ANN. But I didn't buy anything.

FLORENCE. (*Sitting in chair back of table R.C.*) No, just looking around. Didn't buy anything. And say, you'd have laughed yourself sick if you could have seen her face when she was looking at those combinations. All I could see was that aunt of mine. I don't want Miss Dean to be sore at me. When I got this job I thought it was going to be a nice legitimate business. I didn't know it was to crowd her out.

BELLE. Then why do you stay?

FLORENCE. For the same reason that keeps a lot of us doing things we ain't stuck on doing—the jack.

ANN. Who?

FLORENCE. Jack—money. I'm just getting a salary.

ANN. Well, if it wasn't you they'd have got someone else.

FLORENCE. Sure! That's the way to look at it.

She'd ought to have one consolation though. Old man Lattimer is spending a lot of money on this vendetta and I'll bet his eleventh commandment is "Thou Shalt Not Spend."

ANN. I wouldn't be sacrilegious, young woman, not even to be funny.

FLORENCE. (*Rising*) You're right about that, and I promise I won't, if you promise to call me Florence.

ANN. Is that your first name or your last?

FLORENCE. First, of course.

ANN. What's the "Madame" for? You ain't French.

FLORENCE. About as much as you are Swedish. And say! I hear they won't sell her any groceries. Now listen—any time you want, you let me know and I'll do the buying. They'll sell them to me all right.

BELLE. Thank you.

FLORENCE. And then, Auntie Coolidge. (*ANN looks at her, astonished.*) I don't mean to be fresh but all I can think of is that aunt of mine—you could bring the food over. You'd do that little thing, wouldn't you?

ANN. Yes—and more.

FLORENCE. God love you! (*Pinches ANN's cheek affectionately. To BELLE*) I think she's a scream.

BELLE. You're being nicer to us than the neighbors have been.

FLORENCE. Well, you don't always get the best treatment from your own family. Good luck to you. (*She goes up to door U.R.; then turns*) And, Auntie Coolidge, any time they are house-cleaning here and there's no room for you, bring your doiley over to my store and we'll knock this town from the depot to the cemetery. Good-bye. (*Exits U.R.*)

ANN. (*After a short pause*) It don't take her long to make acquaintances, does it? It just shows

what an outsider thinks of this business. Well, I must be going.

BELLE. Really? (*ANN crosses to stairs L.*)

ANN. Beth, I'm going now.

BETH. (*Entering U.L.*) Leaving?

ANN. Yes. I stayed longer than I should. Don't worry, everything will come out all right. The cards said so, and I never knew them to be wrong yet, no matter what Letty Douthett says. (*She is at door U.R.; suddenly turns.*) Oh!

BETH. What is it?

ANN. She's the dark woman! (*Exits U.R.*)

BELLE. She's right.

BETH. She said there were a lot of men mixed up in my fortune—and it was all about business, too!

BELLE. Yes, and she said there was to be a honeymoon—on water. He bought buttons the last time. He does try so hard to think of what he wants—he's bought all the socks and men's handkerchiefs we had.

BETH. Well, he's bought his last in this store.

BELLE. Beth!

BETH. I mean it! I don't want one cent of his money. What Dana and the rest have done to me I can do to him. I don't want you to sell him a thing.

BELLE. What can I say?

BETH. Say to him what Dana said to me—we don't have to sell nothing to nobody we don't want anybody to have. Belle, don't you ever mention his name to me again!

BELLE. You don't mean that, Beth.

BETH. Yes, I do.

BELLE. Beth, you do love him, don't you? (*BETH nods. She is sitting in chair R.C. BELLE kneels L. of her and puts arm about her.*) Then why not let him know it?

BETH. Not for anything in the world! I'm going to pay him back—you see if I don't.

BELLE. But you have. Do you think he'd keep coming in here if he didn't love you? Don't you know he's suffering now just as you did?

BETH. Yes, but he didn't have five years of it. I hope he does suffer. I hope people are laughing at him the way they did at me.

BELLE. (*Rising*) Oh, Beth!

BETH. Yes, I do.

BELLE. But you might be so happy!

BETH. I don't want to be happy—I want to—to—to—die!

GOOCH. (*Appearing outside window*) How's Bethy today?

(*BELLE goes U.R. and behind counter.*)

BETH. Better, thank you, Mr. Gooch.

GOOCH. (*Entering U.R.*) What have they been doing to you now?

BETH. Trying to starve me out.

GOOCH. Suppose that is one of the things they thought out at the meeting last night?

BETH. What do you think about it, Mr. Gooch?

GOOCH. Well, of course, I think the whole thing is pretty poor business. Trying to starve a young girl out!

BETH. I didn't mean that—I mean the building?

GOOCH. Oh, I don't know. I ain't goin' to lose nothin' if it ain't built—and it won't mean anything in my pocket if it is. 'Course, it would have been fun to stand around and watch them work. You heard Nathan and John had quite a fight, didn't you?

BELLE. Really?

GOOCH. Yes. I don't know what it was about—but John took his kit and moved down to the Palace Hotel. Looks as though he had decided to settle down there for a while.

BELLE. Is that so?

GOOCH. Folks say he is going to be sure to be in town if anything happens to the old man. I think if he felt like that, though, he wouldn't be fighting with him. Then others think that it must be on Bethy's account—that's what always used to get them started.

BETH. (*Jumping up*) Mr. John Lattimer needn't quarrel with anyone on my account. He will get no thanks for it. He's been in here twenty times a day until I—if I was a man or had a brother or father I'd have him throw him out.

GOOCH. I wish you would let me tell him that.

BETH. (*Crossing U.L. to stairs*) I wish you would.

GOOCH. By Godfrey, I will! Everybody is getting mixed up in this thing, and so far I ain't been nothin' but an outsider.

(*JOHN enters U.R., hesitates, then crosses to candy counter.*)

JOHN. Good afternoon—I'd like some candy.

BETH. (*Coldly*) Isabel—a customer! (*She exits upstairs; GOOCH laughs quietly to himself. BELLE crosses U.L. hesitatingly as if she didn't quite know what to do.*)

JOHN. (*Stands looking at BETH'S door; he has lost sight and thought of BELLE. After a second he realizes*) I'd still like some candy, please. I want some of the taffy.

BELLE. There isn't any more.

JOHN. When do you expect to have some?

BELLE. We don't. Miss Dean isn't making it now.

JOHN. Why not? Surely not because there isn't a demand for it? I eat quite a lot of it.

BELLE. I don't know, I'm sure.

JOHN. Then I will have some peppermints.

BELLE. We haven't any.

JOHN. (*Looking at her curiously*) Are those painted on the dish—there they are.

GOOCH. (*Sitting L. of table R.C.*) Don't matter whether they are or not. You can't have any.

JOHN. (*Looking around in astonishment*) Are you running the shop, too?

GOOCH. I am—to some customers. So long as Beth ain't got no men folks of her own to stand up for her when she needs them, I have taken over the job.

JOHN. I envy you your position.

GOOCH. Well, young man, if you don't keep away from here you won't envy yours.

JOHN. You wouldn't start a brawl in here, would you, Mr. Gooch?

GOOCH. Yes, I would in a minute. This place used to be a fort in the old days and a fight in here now wouldn't be anything new.

JOHN. But we don't want a fight—at least, I don't. I'd much rather talk. That is why I have been coming in here.

GOOCH. Ain't you about discouraged?

JOHN. No. This time, if she refuses to listen to me, at least she has left a representative. I can talk to you. (*Takes chair at counter, places it L. of GOOCH and sits facing him. BELLE is busy behind counter.*)

GOOCH. No, you can't. I won't listen to you.

JOHN. Don't you think I deserve to be heard?

GOOCH. No, I don't.

JOHN. You disappoint me, Mr. Gooch. That is Elizabeth's attitude—a woman's—and you are a man—a married man, too. Have you ever been judged without a hearing?

GOOCH. Often.

JOHN. Did you think it was fair?

GOOCH. Well——

JOHN. As man to man?

GOOCH. I think the principle is wrong.

JOHN. Of course. Any criminal is entitled to a hearing.

GOOCH. Yes.

JOHN. And I won't leave this town until I have a talk with her.

GOOCH. You're going to settle here, are you?

JOHN. She's got to hear me—some time.

GOOCH. It ain't going to do you no good.

JOHN. How do you know?

GOOCH. 'Cause I know what she has been through and how she feels.

JOHN. Does she know what I've been through—and how I feel? Sometimes that makes a difference. When I came in here the other night, it made a difference to me to know that she had still kept faith in me all these years. I hadn't met another one who had. I had even reached the point where I had lost faith in myself.

GOOCH. You mean you had got so you didn't think you would amount to much?

JOHN. Exactly.

GOOCH. I felt that way about you before you left town.

JOHN. You couldn't have convinced me of that then. I went away with a purpose and I failed miserably. If I had succeeded I would have burned the rails getting back, because there hasn't been anyone to take her place—there hasn't been another girl.

GOOCH. Remember, you're talking to an old man.

JOHN. It's the truth.

GOOCH. I suppose you lost her address. No? Oh, just forgot in the excitement.

JOHN. You probably won't understand, but when a fellow leaves a town like this and goes to the city he goes to a mighty lonesome spot.



GOOCH. Well, I never heard that before, did you, Belle?

BELLE. I always heard it was pretty gay.

JOHN. I didn't find it so. I was lonesome—and I wanted to come home.

GOOCH. Why didn't you?

JOHN. Pride! I didn't think I could stand what people'd think.

GOOCH. You're standing it now!

JOHN. Now I don't care what people think—only what she thinks. Have you ever gone visiting? Then you know the relief of getting home, and finding all your old familiar odds and ends just where you left them; and where you like to see them. That's the way with me now. I am home again—all the happier at being here because I wasn't treated very well where I was visiting. Everything is a joy to me—the post office is in the same spot; the Methodist meeting house and the carriage sheds back of it where we boys used to have our fights—the High School still guards the Common. Why, I found myself looking over my shoulder as I crossed to see if old Winthrop was watching from the upstairs window to catch me with a cigarette—and the same old people, some a little grayer, some a little more stooped—but still the same old greeting, "Howdy, John, how's the old man?" I tell you, Mr. Gooch, I am just a yap—like you—and I'm a boy all over again. And I want her now, just like I used to want her—no, more, because now I have a man's knowledge of what she really is. I wish I could do something to help her.

BELLE. I'd like to see somebody do something. Especially to Mr. Dana.

JOHN. What's he said to her?

BELLE. It isn't what he's said—it's what he's done. He won't sell her any food.

GOOCH. He said they'd try that.

JOHN. Mr. Gooch, do you want to come along with me while I have a little talk with Mr. Dana? (*He rises and places chair U.L. in front of counter, then exits.*)

GOOCH. You bet I do! I never did like Dana, anyway. (*Gets up; crosses U.R. to door; then turns to BELLE.*) Belle, tell Bethy her representative has been taken by the enemy. (*As GOOCH exits he meets LETTY who enters U.R. dressed in MADAME FLORENCE'S latest creation. He stands looking at her in amazement.*)

LETTY. Well, what are you laughing at?

GOOCH. Godfrey, Letty, I wish I could tell you! (*Exits. LETTY comes D.C.*)

LETTY. I want to see Beth.

BELLE. (*Crossing to foot of stairs L.*) I'll call her. Beth!

LETTY. Trade seems to have dropped off considerably with you, Belle.

BELLE. (*Trying desperately to control her giggling*) Some of it has left us, yes. Beth!

BETH. (*Off-stage*) Yes?

BELLE. Mrs. Douthett!

BETH. (*Off-stage*) All right. I'll be right down.

LETTY. Well, of course, if Beth doesn't want to cater to public taste and demand, she has got to expect it. I've had in mind many times the style of dress I wanted—told it to Beth—and then I would pick up the Sunday papers and there would be exactly what I had described to her.

BELLE. (*Grabbing parcel from counter, crossing U.R. to door*) Is the dress you have on your own idea, Mrs. Douthett?

LETTY. Well, it is more on the order of what I have wanted. (*She crosses C.; BETH enters.*)

BELLE. (*At door U.R.*) I'm mailing this, Beth. (*She exits, convulsed with laughter.*)

BETH. How do you do, Mrs. Douthett?

LETTY. How do you do, Bessie? I didn't know you would come down. I heard you weren't seeing anyone.

BETH. (*Overcome with amazement*) I wouldn't have missed seeing you, Mrs. Douthett.

LETTY. (*Vaguely conscious that she is being laughed at, pauses a second*) Well, I came in to pay what I owe you. (*Handing bill to BETH.*) If you will just receipt this bill for me.

BETH. Certainly. (*She takes money and bill and goes back of counter.*)

LETTY. And—oh, I want to tell you, Beth, that Mabel is going to get her graduation dress from Madame Florence.

BETH. Yes, I thought she might.

LETTY. Most of the girls are—she's got them cheaper—and——

BETH. (*Finishing the sentence for her*) Better.

LETTY. Well, in a way, they are.

BETH. Thank you for letting me know in time.

LETTY. I knew you kinder counted on her.

BETH. Yes, I did. But Mabel is very much like you—I thought she would go there.

LETTY. Well, as a matter of fact, her father made her go. Sam is only one of the men in this town who have made their families trade with Madame Florence.

BETH. (*Visibly annoyed*) Well, Mrs. Douthett, they are all entitled to their opinions. (*She comes out from counter L., laughing quietly to herself.*) As far as I'm concerned, I feel that I am even with your husband.

LETTY. Are you poking fun at me, Beth?

BETH. (*Turning, with an entirely new front and manner*) Why not? You have all poked fun at me for years. Why shouldn't I have a little fun out of it?

LETTY. Well, you needn't try to get it at my expense.

BETH. Then you shouldn't have come in here in that get-up.

LETTY. Get-up? You haven't got anything in here like it.

BETH. No, and I wouldn't.

LETTY. I wear what suits me, Beth Dean.

BETH. You may wear what pleases you, but I know you are not wearing what suits you, Mrs. Douthett. (*Returns bill to LETTY; PARKER enters U.R.*)

PARKER. Well, Beth, I'm back again.

BETH. With more offers?

PARKER. No, I've run out of them. (*Sees LETTY and turns to her*) Waitin' to buy somethin', Letty?

LETTY. (*Indignantly*) I was just leaving. (*She crosses U.R. to door and opens it, about to go.*)

PARKER. Well, good-bye. And—Letty—go behind my horse, will you? (*LETTY exits in a rage.*) Now, Beth, listen. By jingo, I wish you were married so I could talk to a man.

BETH. Go right ahead, Cap'n Parker. I shall never marry.

PARKER. My God, Betsy, you don't believe in improvement at all, do you? Well, all right. This building is coming down to make room for the Nathan Lattimer Block.

(*Enter DANA, with paper parcel, backed by GOOCH and JOHN.*)

DANA. Here's your chops! (*Turning to PARKER.*) Say, will you please tell him that I have the right to sell how, when and to whom I please?

PARKER. (*To JOHN*) You'd better keep out of this. Your grandfather won't thank you for interfering in his affairs.

JOHN. No, of course he won't. But he is my grandfather and the chief conspirator—so I think that gives me some rights.

PARKER. Yes, he is your grandfather, and my friend. And if you haven't any respect for him, I have, so don't use that word "conspirator."

JOHN. What other word is there for him—or you—or you? That's what you all are—conspirators. And there is a punishment for conspirators.

DANA. Yes, so there is for defamation of character. So you'd better keep a civil tongue in your head, Johnnie Lattimer.

GOOCH. Go ahead, Johnnie, make the charge assault and battery. I'll bail you out.

BETH. I wish you'd please remember you are in my house.

PARKER. It's not your house now, Beth!

BETH. What?

PARKER. We tried every way to make you sensible but you just wouldn't. The whole town wants to see a business block on this property and they're going to get it.

BETH. Oh, no, they're not!

PARKER. Yes, they are! The Board has taken action. Fifteen minutes ago we met and this property was formally condemned to be dedicated to business and township purposes.

JOHN. You can't do that!

PARKER. Oh, can't we? We've done it. The right of eminent domain gives us that privilege where property is needed for town improvement. You've lost your home, Beth, and it's all over.

JOHN. This is an outrage.

PARKER. No, it ain't. You know and everybody else knows this property ain't worth a cent over six thousand dollars on an honest appraisal, but Nathan Lattimer wanted to be square. He wrote out his

check—not for six—but for ten thousand dollars, and here's the money.

BETH. (*Dazed*) Then I've lost it—my little shop—my little home! (*She is about to take check from counter where PARKER has placed it.*)

JOHN. Don't you take that check.

BETH. (*Flaring up*) Yes, I will. You told me to take it if I got a good offer. You told me there was no future here for me. Well, I'll go out and make a future. So go and tell your grandfather the place is his—and go now, please. (*JOHN exits U.R.*)

NELSON. (*Entering with doleful countenance*) Sad, ain't it?

BETH. Hello, Mr. Nelson.

NELSON. Did they tell you?

BETH. Yes.

NELSON. Well, maybe it is all for the best. Let me have a necktie, will you?

BETH. (*Going U.L. behind counter*) What kind do you want?

NELSON. Black-tied kind.

PARKER. Who are you going into mourning for, George?

NELSON. Why, Nathan!

PARKER. What?

NELSON. Yes, that's what I asked you—if it wasn't sad. I just came by the house and old Lem Taylor told me he had another stroke.

JOHN. Grandfather?

GOOCH. Well, how about that check, Cap'n?

PARKER. The estate will cash it. Johnnie is Nathan's sole heir and executor. I know—I made the will.

GOOCH. Suppose Johnnie refuses to honor it?

BETH. He can't. I insist that you'll see that he doesn't. Will you, Cap'n Parker?

PARKER. Yes, Beth, I'll see to that.

BETH. Well, there's nothing more for you gentlemen to wait for, is there? (PARKER, NELSON and DANA *exit*. GOOCH *turns U.R. to follow them out.*) Mr. Gooch—Mr. Gooch! (*Crosses U.R. to him and takes him by the hand.*) You don't have to go just yet, do you?

GOOCH. No.

BETH. I'd kind of like to have you stay a little while. We'll talk a little bit.

GOOCH. I'll have Mrs. Gooch come over after supper.

BETH. That'll be nice.

GOOCH. Yes.

BETH. You know, I feel kind of lonesome here in the store.

GOOCH. You do?

BETH. (*Almost sobbing*) Yes. I never felt lonesome in the store before.

GOOCH. You didn't?

BETH. No, I didn't. Mr. Gooch, do you think I was too harsh with him?

GOOCH. Bethie, you gave it to him good!

BETH. I did give it to him, didn't I?

GOOCH. And you were right in everything you said.

BETH. (*Burying her head in MR. GOOCH'S shoulder*) Yes, but I didn't mean a word of it.

CURTAIN

## ACT III

SCENE: *Same as Acts I and II, except that the room is dismantled and the merchandise from shelves piled on counter up-stage.*

AT RISE: *An auction sale is in progress. BETH is at L., seated behind a packing case, acting as cashier. ANN is in rocking chair down R.C. BELLE is standing R. examining and pinning "Sold" tags on merchandise. MR. ALLEN, the auctioneer L.; GOOCH and MR. GODDARD, a truckman, are clearing the door. Large crowd of neighbors are examining the goods.)*

ALLEN. Got everything, Mr. Goddard?

GODDARD. *(As he exits U.R. with lot of articles)*

Yes.

ALLEN. *(To BETH)* Check off, will you, Beth?

*(GODDARD continues carrying and hauling large pieces.)*

BETH. Yes. You do that, will you, Belle?

BELLE. All right. *(Crosses D.R.)* Two boxes women's waists!

BETH. Right.

BELLE. One step ladder.

BETH. Right.

BELLE. One barrel crockery.

BETH. Right.

BELLE. One Green Mountain Ice Cream Freezer.

BETH. Right.

BELLE. One sewing machine.

BETH. Right.



(*BELLE crosses to back of counter. GODDARD and GOOCH carry out ladder, sewing machine and other articles.*)

BETH. (*As GODDARD re-enters*) Six dollars and forty cents, Mr. Goddard. (*He crosses U.L. to box, and pays BETH; then takes out remainder of goods.*)

ALLEN. All right to go on?

BETH. All right, Mr. Allen.

(*ALLEN moves on to center of counter.*)

ALLEN. Now, then, ladies—if you'll get outside of the counter! When I get started I need a lot of room. Last lot to be sold! (*BELLE hands him the various pieces.*) Seven boxes of scented soap! Three bolts of cloth, two gingham—one muslin!

MRS. HATHAWAY. How many yards in them?

ALLEN. Ain't got time to measure 'em, ma'am. Have to judge for yourself. There they be.

MRS. HATHAWAY. Can't you auction them separate?

ALLEN. Could, but ain't goin' to. You'd better bid in on the soap along with it—may want to wash them some time. Five boxes buttons—all kinds except collar! Four cards hooks and eyes—twelve cards snap hooks—seventeen spools of thread—

BELLE. No. That's sewing silk!

ALLEN. All right. All colors—eight hanks of yarn—

BELLE. No—skeins.

ALLEN. What's the difference—used to be hanks when I was a boy! (*BELLE crosses L. to BETH.*) Now, folks, look them over. There's something in it for everybody. I'm going to sell them in one lot. What am I offered for the lot? Somebody start it.

MRS. HATHAWAY. Two dollars!

ALLEN. Two dollars! I know money talks, but

two dollars don't say nothin' to me. Somebody make a real offer.

MRS. HATHAWAY. Two-fifty.

ALLEN. That's something like. Two-fifty. Do I hear sixty? Do I hear sixty? Sixty! The buttons alone are worth that! Sixty I want—do I get it? If I don't hear sixty, I'll buy it myself!

LADY. Sixty!

ALLEN. Sixty! sixty! Sixty I've got! Do I hear seventy? Seventy! Seventy!

ANOTHER LADY. Seventy!

ALLEN. Seventy! Now we're going—who says times are hard? Seventy! Somebody make it three dollars—even money. Do I hear three dollars? Three dollars! Three dollars!

ANOTHER LADY. Two-eighty!

ALLEN. I didn't say nothin' about two-eighty; I said three dollars. Come on, now, folks, here's a bargain. Do I hear you say three dollars? (*He pounds the counter suddenly and the women scream and back away.*) What's the matter with you women? Don't you know the cloth alone is worth three dollars? Come now, folks, who'll give me three dollars for this lot of stuff? Henry, what's the matter with you? Come on, loosen up! Money won't grow in your pocket like hair on your head. Come on, buy these bolts of cloth, save them till Christmas and give them to your gal. Make yourself solid with her, Henry. Did I hear you say three dollars?

HENRY. Three dollars. (*A young girl L. crosses R. to him smilingly.*)

ALLEN. That's the boy! Soap won't do you any harm either, Henry. Three dollars! Three dollars! Do I hear three-ten? Three ten!

MRS. HATHAWAY. Three ten!

ALLEN. Come on now, folks, the sky's the limit. Three-ten! Do I hear three-twenty? Who says

three-twenty? Henry, you ain't goin' to let the lady get the best of you? Do I hear you say three-twenty? (*He pauses expectantly but HENRY, in spite of the girl's gently whispered hints and nudges, is speechless.*) Be a sport—three-twenty? Anybody say three-twenty? Three ten once; three-ten twice; Henry, this is going to be your last chance—third and last call—do I hear three-twenty? Are you all done? Sold for three-ten to—what's the name?

MRS. HATHAWAY. Mrs. Hathaway.

ALLEN. Sold to Mrs. Hathaway for three-ten. Pay your money to Beth, Mrs. Hathaway, and take the stuff away. Sale's over! (*The crowd slowly melts away, BELLE helping them out with goods, and exiting last.*)

MRS. HATHAWAY. Ain't you goin' to put that rocker up?

ALLEN. What rocker's that?

MRS. HATHAWAY. (*Pointing to the one MISS COOLIDGE is seated in*) That one over there.

ALLEN. I didn't know nothing about that. What about it, Beth?

BETH. Oh—that one——

ANN. It won't do you no good to bid it in because I'll buy it myself anyway.

BETH. No, that isn't for sale. I've given that to Miss Coolidge.

(ALLEN goes up to counter, puts on hat; turns to BETH.)

ALLEN. Well, Beth, we didn't get no fancy prices, but you said you were in a hurry to get away so I hustled around and did the best I could. I'd a got more if I'd had more time.

BETH. I'm satisfied with the way you've handled things, Mr. Allen.

ALLEN. How much did we get?

BETH. Let me see—eight hundred thirty-nine dollars and sixty-five cents. Now with your ten per cent—let me see—gracious, you'll have to figure that out for yourself, Mr. Allen. (*She hands pencil and pad to MR. ALLEN, who figures out the commission.*)

ALLEN. Eighty-three dollars, ninety six and a half. Tell you what I'll do—I'll match you to see whether it's ninety-six or ninety-seven cents. (*He digs into pocket and produces a coin.*)

BETH. I'd rather you'd have it.

ALLEN. I'd just as lief toss you for it.

BETH. Oh, no, you keep it. (*ALLEN returns coin to pocket*) And I'll pay you right now.

ALLEN. (*Looking at watch; BETH counts out the money*) Quarter to six. I figured it would be later than that. But the job's done.

BETH. Almost time for my train.

ALLEN. Taking the eight-forty?

BETH. Yes, Madame Florence and I. There you are, Mr. Allen. Count it and see if it's right.

(*ALLEN counts it and puts it in pocket.*)

ALLEN. Right to the penny! Well, good-bye. (*Crosses U.R.*) And good luck to you! (*At door.*) I'll take down the flag.

GOOCH. (*U.R. turning to look at him*) You'll do that, will you?

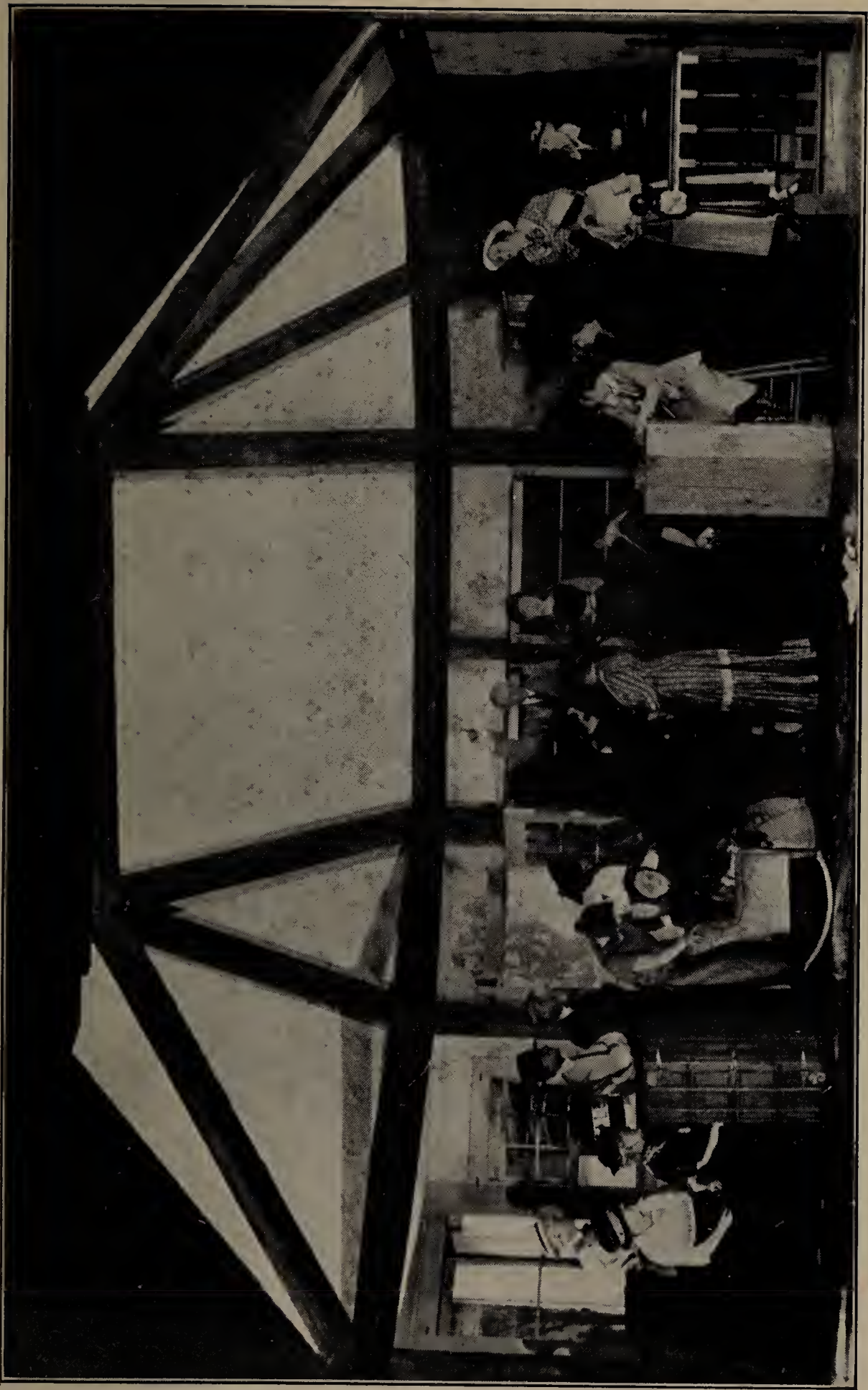
ALLEN. Yes, yes.

GOOCH. Well now, that's nice of you, I'm sure. Well, I guess Johnnie Lattimer knows you mean business now—and that it's all over.

BETH. I hope he does.

GOOCH. I guess you'll find New York a little different, Beth.

BETH. Now I'll have a chance to find out if





people can be so busy in the city they can't find time to write to their friends!

GOOCH. Have you decided where you are going to put up there?

BETH. No. I think we'll stop at a hotel for a few days first.

GOOCH. Well, they have some good ones there.

BETH. Yes, father used to tell me about the Hoffman House and I thought that we'd go there for a few days.

GOOCH. I don't think I'd stop there, if I was you, Beth.

BETH. Why not?

GOOCH. That was torn down years ago.

BETH. It was?

GOOCH. They tell me they've got a fine big business block there now. I guess the hotel got to be too—old-fashioned.

BETH. Even in New York! (*She counts money, puts it in purse, and rises as ANN COOLIDGE comes L. and upstairs*) Where are you going, Miss Coolidge? There's nothing up there now.

ANN. I'm just going to have a last look at the old rooms. (*Exits U.L. BETH crosses R.C. to trunks.*)

BETH. Oh, Mr. Gooch—there's a trunk upstairs that wants to come down—after I've looked through this you can take it to Belle—and this one you can burn. (*She goes to second trunk and opens it.*) Will you lift the tray out, Mr. Gooch?

(GOOCH obligingly lifts out tray; then busies himself about shop.)

(BETH takes "Dean High School" cushion from tray, dusts it, puts it on floor above trunk and sits. From the tray she lifts a party fan, reads names written on back of it, counts on fingers and shakes head; then a dance program brings back

*memories; finds a small doll, which she lifts up and down, closing and opening its eyes, smiling tearfully; a paisley shawl next, full of moth balls which scatter over the floor; she picks them up, carefully folds them into shawl and replaces it; takes out some pictures and glances through them; then a bunch of letters tied with ribbon; she is on the verge of crying; opens one, tears it violently, then smoothes it out carefully.)*

GOOCH. (*Coming down-stage to her*) There, there, Bethy. It don't do no good to cry.

BETH. I know; it's very foolish of me.

GOOCH. If you'd sob and carry on like Liddy Gooch does and get over it, you might feel better, but that silent crying takes it out of you.

BETH. I've stopped now. I haven't gone through this trunk in I don't know when.

GOOCH. Makes you feel as though you was about seventy, I suppose.

BETH. It does seem years since I went to these parties and had these pictures taken. Look! (*She picks up soiled, white dress.*) My graduation dress!

(*GOOCH takes up a picture from tray of trunk.*)

GOOCH. Who's that? (*BETH leans over.*)

BETH. George Pickett.

GOOCH. Judge Pickett's boy?

BETH. Yes. (*She sorts over clothes in bottom of trunk, discarding some; folding others carefully and replacing them.*)

GOOCH. That's so. I shot him once!

BETH. Was it an accident?

GOOCH. No, I don't know as it was, and I don't know but what it was. He was in my yard knocking down my sickel pears—I came out and caught him just as he was turning the corner of the carriage



house. Judge was going to have the law on me but the case never came to trial.

BETH. Did you settle?

GOOCH. Yes. I sent him half a bushel of the pears. (*Picks up another photograph.*) That's your father, ain't it?

BETH. Yes.

GOOCH. Yes, sir, that's Boswell, all decked out in his Knight's Templar uniform. Godfrey, just think—your father and George Tucker, my brother Harry—Arthur Damon—and all the old crowd!

BETH. Don't those pictures make you feel old, Mr. Gooch?

GOOCH. Well, Betsey, I've got a right to feel seventy!

BETH. Don't forget what you told me—it doesn't do any good to cry.

GOOCH. I wasn't going to. Folks at my age ain't much on crying. (*Taking up another photograph.*) That's you, ain't it?

BETH. Yes—and mother.

GOOCH. Yes, sir. That's her. I can remember the afternoon you were born—upstairs in the corner room!

BETH. Yes?

GOOCH. Your father and me sat out in the barn with a jug of cider waiting the returns; seems to me he took a drink a minute. Had no more effect on him than water. It was hard cider, too. Then Ann Coolidge came out to where he was and gave your father a hard look and said, "If you can walk, Boswell Dean, you'd better come in and see your daughter." Well, he was gone a little while and when he came back he had another jug. He believed in preparedness, your father did, and we drank your health in that. Then what hadn't affected him—did. He had been too worried before that.

BETH. Poor father!

GOOCH. Yes, you would have said that if you could have seen him.

BETH. What about you?

GOOCH. Well, it's a good thing you didn't arrive a day later or I would have been tight myself!

*(Takes up package of photos of JOHN LATTIMER.)*

Johnnie Lattimer, ain't it?

BETH. *(Not deigning to look)* Yes.

GOOCH. You've got enough of him, ain't ye?

BETH. *(Snatching photos from his hand and throwing them carelessly into the third trunk)* Yes, Mr. Gooch, I've had enough of him.

GOOCH. *(After a short pause)* Say, Bethy, I ain't you or you ain't me—but if I was I'd forgive him.

BETH. And have everybody say I'd married him because he was rich?

GOOCH. Wal, if I was a gal, that'd be a good reason for me to marry a fellow.

*(ANN enters U.L., crosses D.R. and sits.)*

ANN. Are you throwing that away, Beth?

*(BETH has just thrown into the old trunk an ancient skirt.)*

BETH. Yes.

*(GOOCH crosses U.L. to counter.)*

ANN. I can use it.

BETH. You may have it.

ANN. All right.

GOOCH. Didn't go to the funeral, Ann, did you?

ANN. I did not. Didn't expect me to, did you?

GOOCH. No—I don't know as I did, and I didn't

know but what I did. When a man like Nathan passes off, it's kinder respectful to go—and you meet folks!

ANN. (*Picking up piece of velvet that BETH has thrown out*) Well, I ain't no hand at being hyper-critical, and I just couldn't have gone and listened to everybody telling what a wonderful man Nathan was when I knew different. I suppose that's what they all did!

GOOCH. A churchyard ain't no place to rake up a man's faults, Ann.

ANN. No more is it a place to falsify about a man's virtues. They want to put up a monument to him now.

GOOCH. Yes. I told them I'd subscribe. What would be your idea of a tablet for Nathan, Ann?

ANN. My idea of a tablet for Nathan years ago was cyanide of potassium. Beth Dean, that's a perfectly good waist.

GOOCH. Sweet, simple, lovable soul.

ANN. Do you mean Nathan?

GOOCH. No—you, Ann.

ANN. Well, I'll just take these things over to the house, Beth.

BETH. Won't you have a cup of tea?

ANN. No, but I think you ought to have some. Why don't you go to the Palace Hotel and get something before you go?

BETH. No, all I want is a cup of tea and I can make that right here. I've got an alcohol lamp and a tea kettle in that box over there. (*Takes money from pocket.*) Will you stop in Parsons, on the way back and get ten cents' worth of alcohol?

ANN. Won't I get you some sandwiches?

BETH. No, just the alcohol. Here's the money.

ANN. I have it.

BETH. No—here it is right here.

ANN. (*Taking the coin*) But I do think you

ought to have something! You're so obstinate you just have to have your own way about everything. (*Goes to door.*) If you have anything else to throw away, Beth, save it until I come back.

BETH. All right. (*Turns to GOOCH.*) Mr. Gooch, please put the tray back. (*She locks trunk.*) This trunk goes to Belle—and the other you can burn. (*Exits U.L. into room. GOOCH picks up trunk as JOHN passes quickly by U.R. He drops trunk and rushes to door.*)

GOOCH. John! John!

JOHN. Yes?

GOOCH. Come in here!

JOHN. No, sir! I know where I'm not wanted!

GOOCH. I only want you to give me a hand with this trunk.

JOHN. No. I was told to stay out.

GOOCH. It's all right. Beth ain't here. I want you to help me with this.

(*JOHN enters, comes down to R. side of trunk R.C. and lifts it with ease.*)

JOHN. Why, this isn't heavy.

GOOCH. It isn't, eh? Well, I wouldn't want to wear it for a hat. (*As JOHN again lifts trunk, GOOCH lowers his end and sits on it*) I wish you two would get a little sense.

JOHN. (*Putting down the trunk*) I've got sense. (*Lifts his end again*) Come on, I don't want her to find me here.

GOOCH. Why not? You've got a right here. The property is yours, ain't it?

JOHN. Yes. But until she goes, I don't want to be in here. (*He once more picks up trunk. Enter BETH from room up-stage.*)

BETH. Mr. Gooch! Oh! (*She hesitates; then comes calmly down-stage.*)

JOHN. You tell Beth why I'm here.

GOOCH. I asked John to help me with this trunk. He didn't want to come in.

BETH. (*Up-stage, getting kettle and alcohol lamp from box*) That's all right.

GOOCH. Says that's all right, John.

JOHN. I wouldn't want her to think that I'd intrude.

GOOCH. Beth, John don't want you to think he'd force himself where he wasn't wanted.

BETH. Nothing Mr. Lattimer could do would surprise me.

GOOCH. (*After a moment*) She says you can't surprise her none, John.

JOHN. No, and I don't suppose anybody could do anything to please Miss Dean?

GOOCH. I'll ask her, John. Beth, anything John could do to please you?

BETH. He might help you out with that trunk, Mr. Gooch!

GOOCH. She says——

JOHN. Yes, I heard her. Come on, Gooch. (*He once more lifts trunk.*)

GOOCH. Beth, I guess you won't get another chance to tell John good-bye. (*BETH crosses to stairs; hesitates a moment, then starts up the stairs. GOOCH watches her a moment; then:*) She ain't sayin' nothin', John! (*They exit with trunk. BETH turns quickly and races to door, on the point of calling him back. ANN appears in doorway with bottle of alcohol which BETH grabs and rushes upstairs with.*)

BETH. I wondered where you'd been with that alcohol! (*She exits U.L.—ANN sits R.C.; GOOCH re-enters.*)

ANN. Is everything all settled?

GOOCH. I don't know as it is—and I don't know what it is! (*Exits with trunk. BETH enters U.L. and sees that ANN is crying softly to herself.*)

BETH. (*Crosses R.C.*) What's the matter, dear?

ANN. Oh, I don't know what's come over them all with all these fool notions about buildings and town offices. Seems to me we were happy enough and doing all right.

BETH. It's improvement, dear.

ANN. Improvement, Jack Robinson! They said those electric lights were going to be an improvement, but what did they do? They cut down four of the finest maple trees along our road to make room for their old poles. There wasn't a finer street anywhere around than we had. Now it looks like someone with half their front teeth out. Do you call that improvement?

BETH. We don't, dear, but then we're old-fashioned.

ANN. Beth, I'm so used to coming down here and spending a couple of hours every day! Outside of my garden it is the only thing I have to cheer me up! (*Sobbing.*) Thank goodness I won't have to be here much longer anyway!

BETH. (*With her arms around ANN*) Don't, dear, I can't stand it!

BELLE. (*Entering U.R. in great excitement*) Beth, Beth, what do you think? They're not going to tear this place down!

BETH. What?

BELLE. And oh, Bethy, Bethy, it seems too good to be true! (*Crossing to her and looking at her anxiously.*) I hope you won't refuse to let me take it.

BETH. Take what?

BELLE. John Lattimer stopped me on the street and gave me the place—this place—for two years—free of rent.

ANN. And the store's going to stay right here?

BETH. Yes, and you can come in just as you've always done, Miss Coolidge.







ANN. Oh, Belle!

(BELLE crosses to BETH and puts an arm about her.)

BELLE. Of course, it will never be the same with Bethy gone. But it will be nearly like old times. (She sobs; ANN is sobbing, and BETH is on the verge of it.)

BETH. It's wonderful, Belle. But you deserve all the good things people can do for you. I'm going to miss you—I don't want to start that—I don't want to cry.

BELLE. Of course, I realize it's all on your account, Beth. But wasn't it splendid of him?

BETH. Yes, dear, it was wonderful!

(DANA enters, followed by LETTY and MR. NELSON.)

DANA. Beth, I'd like to have about five minutes' talk with you. (Crosses D.L. followed by the others.)

LETTY. It's the last thing we're going to ask you, Beth.

BETH. Well, what is it?

DANA. We're a committee—now this ain't got nothing to do with the Board of Selectmen or the Lattimers. It's just a committee to ask you to do something for the people of this town before you go. John Lattimer says there ain't no building going up on this site at all. I guess everybody in town's pleaded with him about it, but he's refused.

LETTY. And we've been appointed a committee of three to go to see John and try to induce him to carry out his grandfather's wishes.

NELSON. Yes, we pointed out to him that you were leaving town anyway.

DANA. He said there was just one person could make him change his mind.

LETTY. I guess you know who that person is!

DANA. It was you! So now the committee has

come to you. All we want you to do is see him before your train leaves and ask him to tear down this building.

BETH. I'm very sorry; I can't do that. Mr. Lattimer probably has some good reason for his action.

LETTY. Yes, but they're the silliest reasons I ever heard!

BETH. Well, maybe he doesn't think so.

LETTY. Do you know what they are?

BETH. I haven't the slightest idea.

DANA. He said he was going to make a historical spot out of this place!

BETH. Well, it is! It's the site of the first building in the town of Dean.

DANA. Talks about putting up a tablet on it, same as they've got on the houses in Concord and Lexington where Lincoln was shot. What good's that going to do the town?

LETTY. And the funniest part—he says that this is a historical spot because you was born here! (*Laughs heartily.*)

NELSON. And wants it to stand as a monument to the faith of the finest, truest woman he ever knew!

LETTY. Now I ask you—ain't that silly?

BETH. Not to me!

DANA. (*Crossing R.C. to her*) No, of course not. You'd think it was flattering. But I've got an idea it's nothing more than talk with him, and what he is really trying to do is either square himself with you or make his reason so darned ridiculous nobody will be in sympathy with it—and we ain't. Now, Bess, it ain't going to hurt you to see him and ask him to cut out all this nonsense and go ahead with that building. Will you do it?

BETH. No!

DANA. Why not?

BETH. For the same reason you wouldn't sell me the chops. I will be leaving Dean in a little while and I shall probably never see it again. And you'll have to settle all your little differences yourselves. So far as I'm concerned, you may tear it down, burn it down or do as you please with it.

DANA. That's all, is it, Beth?

BETH. That's all.

DANA. Well, come on, Letty. I don't know what's getting into young folks now-a-days. When I was a boy we listened to our elders.

LETTY. Yes. We didn't always do as they said, but we did listen. (*Exits U.R. with DANA and NELSON.*)

ANN. My Lord, there ain't been so much fighting around here since 1850.

BETH. Oh, that water must be boiling by this time. You'll have to take the dishes over to your house, Miss Coolidge, in order to wash them. There was just enough water in the pipes to fill the kettle.

ANN. All right, Beth. Have you got your bags packed?

BETH. Yes, they're all ready, dear. (*She exits U.L. and in a moment reappears*) Get Mr. Gooch quick, Belle!

BELLE. What is it?

BETH. We've got a fire here!

ANN. A fire! Merciful Heavens, it's a visitation. (*She runs frantically around the room, wrapping various articles in paper, etc.*)

BELLE. (*Running across stage and upstairs L.*) My poor store! Oh, my poor store!

BETH. I don't want you, Belle—I want Mr. Gooch!

(*BELLE runs to door, sees NELSON and drags him toward foot of stairs.*)

BELLE. Mr. Nelson—Mr. Nelson, come quick.

NELSON. (*Stopping C.*) What is it?

BELLE. Beth's room is on fire!

NELSON. A fire! Great Scott! (*He runs to door U.R.*)

BELLE. (*Following him quickly*) Where are you going?

NELSON. Fire house.

BELLE. But the fire is here!

NELSON. I know it is, but I've got to turn in the alarm! Besides, I drive the truck! (*He rushes out U.R. and off.*)

BELLE. You idiot! (*She crosses L. and up the stairs as BETH appears on landing with suitcase. ANN meanwhile takes rocker to door, sticks there with it.*)

BETH. Belle, where is Mr. Gooch?

BELLE. I can't find him.

BETH. Well, find somebody.

BELLE. I'm trying to. (*She goes to door where ANN and the chair form an effective blockade. Assists ANN in removing chair; which ANN brings down-stage once more and sees MR. GOOCH passing*)—Oh, Mr. Gooch, Mr. Gooch—come quick!

GOOCH. (*Entering, smells the smoke and rushes for stairway*) How did it happen?

ANN. Never mind, you damn fool, put it out.

BETH. (*Entering U.L.*) Hurry, Mr. Gooch!

GOOCH. (*As he exits U.L.*) How did it happen?

(BELLE follows GOOCH to stairs.)

BETH. Belle, go turn in the fire alarm.

(BELLE goes downstairs; taking second suitcase which BETH has handed her.)

BELLE. Nelson's done that. (*Goes back upstairs; GOOCH comes out.*)

GOOCH. Tell Mrs. Gooch to give you my fire hat and boots. Hurry up! (JOHN appears in doorway.)

JOHN. What's all the smoke?

BELLE. Fire! (Exits U.R. JOHN rushes upstairs just as BETH, reeling with the smoke and fire, stumbles out of door U.L.)

JOHN. Are you hurt?

BETH. Would it matter?

JOHN. You're all right. (Starts to exit U.L. BETH pulls him back.)

BETH. Come here! I told you to stay out of there.

JOHN. Have you got any pails?

BETH. No. (TWO MEN enter, U.R.)

JOHN. I'll go and get some! (He rushes downstairs meeting the two men.) Come along with me, fellows, and get some pails! (They exit U.R. GOOCH comes on with trunk which he throws downstairs. Exits U.L. GIRL enters; looks around.) How did it happen?

ANN. Never mind. Help me get this trunk out. (Together they drag trunk off U.R. BETH enters with box.)

LETTY. (Running on U.R.) My God, Bethy, ain't that terrible?

BETH. (Crossing R. with box) Horrible!

LETTY. Got all your things out?

BETH. (Giving LETTY the package) Everything but what's in this box.

LETTY. They had the fire horses working in the express wagon that was hauling your trunks.

ALLEN. (Entering U.R. with huge fire extinguisher) Where's the fire?

BETH. Up there! (ALLEN exits U.L.) I wonder where that fire department can be?

LETTY. They're not going to hurry, Beth. (Fire alarm is heard.)

BETH. Why not?

LETTY. 'Cause that's what they've all been waiting for.

BETH. I think that's abominable. (*ANN and GIRL enter and take off boxes. GOOCH enters from U.L.*) Ain't anybody turned in the alarm?

BETH. Yes. Can't you hear it? (*BELLE enters with coat, fire boots and hat.*)

BELLE. Here you are, Mr. GOOCH! (*She crosses D.L. meeting GOOCH who rushes downstairs, dons hat and coat, and, carrying the boots in his hand, rushes upstairs and into the room. ANN reënters and takes off chair. Enter DANA.*)

BETH. If my store goes, yours goes, too, Mr. Dana.

DANA. That's all right, I'm insured. Looks like justice was being done at last!

BETH. Your idea of justice is getting what you want, whether it's right or wrong. (*JOHN enters U.R.*)

ALLEN. (*Entering U.L.*) Might as well try to blow it out! (*He takes the two pails JOHN hands him and exits.*)

JOHN. (*Starting U.R., sees DANA standing*) What are you standing there for? Why don't you try and help?

DANA. What's the use?

BETH. He wants it to burn!

JOHN. Oh, that's it, is it? Dana, you'd like to see something rebuilt on this property, wouldn't you? But you're not going to get it—not if the whole town burns!

DANA. We'll take good care that don't happen! (*Turns to BETH.*) You said you didn't care if it burned down, didn't you?

BETH. You don't think I really meant that, do you?

DANA. Yes, I do. And I'm not so sure but what

you set it! (*JOHN whirls him around and punches him on the nose.*)

JOHN. You had that coming to you! (*DANA picks himself up, shakes his head and exits U.R.*)

BETH. (*Crossing to JOHN*) You don't think I did it, do you?

JOHN. Did I act as though I did?

BETH. The alcohol lamp must have leaked——

JOHN. I wouldn't care if you did set it. Anything you did would be all right with me because—I love you.

BETH. Johnny Lattimer, why haven't you said that before?

JOHN. (*Grabbing her and holding her close a moment*) Beth! (*Pushing her away.*) You meet me here the minute this fire is out! (*GOOCH and ALLEN appear U.R. FIREMEN enter U.R. with hose.*)

GOOCH. Are you ready, boys? Let her go!

(*A feeble stream of water flows ineffectively from the nozzle.*)

(*The lights go out for half a minute or so and when they go on again, BETH is discovered standing in the midst of the ruins; the rear and L. walls are only charred timbers, beyond which are seen many curious bystanders, who scatter quickly. JOHN stumbles down the steps, L., carrying a lantern, and happens upon her R.C.*)

JOHN. Why, what are you doing here?

BETH. You told me to meet you here after the fire was out! (*JOHN takes her in his arms.*)

BETH. (*After a short pause*) There's nothing much left to quarrel about now, is there?

JOHN. Everything happens just right, doesn't it? You see, your house didn't burn until after you had no need for it.

BETH. It's easy to philosophize when you're happy. There was a time when I just used to hate to hear Miss Coolidge say "Everything comes to him who waits."

JOHN. Love finds a way.

BETH. Patience is a virtue—John, I'm not different from other girls!

JOHN. Oh, yes, you are.

BETH. No, I'm not. I can be catty and obstinate and spiteful—

JOHN. And constant and forgiving and loving—

BETH. Well, of course, I have some good qualities!

JOHN. You'll need them, darling.

BETH. Are you going to let Cap'n Parker build here?

JOHN. If you say so.

BETH. Yes, I do. I don't mind so long as it has my name on it.

JOHN. They want to call it the Lattimer Block!

BETH. Well— (*She buries her head on his shoulder.*)

(GOOCH enters U.R. followed by two other firemen who remain U.R. GOOCH comes slowly D.R.C., peering around with the aid of a lantern; crosses to JOHN and BETH.)

GOOCH. All right, you can go home now, boys. The fire's out!

CURTAIN









