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Henry, Where Are You?

A Play in One Act

By

BEULAH KING

Author of "The Rev. Peter Brice, Bachelor," etc.

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Henry, Where Are You?

CHARACTERS

UNCLE HENRY.
MRS. MARIA PRATT, *his sister.*
FRANCES FENTON, *his niece.*
MARY MOORE, *his niece.*
ANNE MOWBRAY, *his niece.*
MRS. LEPAGE, *widow.*
MAID.



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Henry, Where Are You?

SCENE.—*The west veranda of UNCLE HENRY'S country house, Grasmere. At R., steps leading to the lawn. At L., a door leading within the house. The furnishings are of wicker and cretonne with bunches of flowers in vases hung and set about. A large wicker settle at c. back with cretonne cushions and pillows; at the left of it a high-backed chair. Table, chairs, etc., complete the setting.*

(*At the rise of the curtain the stage is empty. A second and ANNE, a very pretty girl of twenty, enters hurriedly from L., walks half across the stage, stops, listens and runs down the steps at R. At the same time AUNT MARIA'S voice is heard from the house speaking to UNCLE HENRY.*)

AUNT MARIA. There, there, what did I tell you? Did you see? There, there, if I never breathe again— (UNCLE HENRY, a small, kind man of forty-five, and AUNT MARIA, gaunt and sharp-faced, enter) I saw a woman —

UNCLE HENRY. Oh, Maria, don't—not a woman, I beg of you.

AUNT MARIA. Well, a figure, a figure in skirts—a ghost—a spirit, then.

UNCLE HENRY. By, my dear Maria, I never thought — .

AUNT MARIA. Of course you never did. Any one would know that by your actions. (*She sits in the high-*

backed chair and UNCLE HENRY *continues to walk about nervously.*) Henry, that woman is here and you are trying to deceive me. As your sister, I have a right to know, and I should think that out of kindness to me, who have put myself out—yes, put myself out considerably to come to you because I thought you were lonely——

UNCLE HENRY (*deprecatingly*). Don't, Maria, don't!

AUNT MARIA. Ah, you know too well it is the truth. Your own conscience tells you that you are wrong. (*Pause during which she glowers at him.*) Henry, have you or have you not married that widow?

UNCLE HENRY. I have not, Maria.

AUNT MARIA. My God! (*In a sepulchral voice.*) Henry, is she here at this house?

UNCLE HENRY. Maria, you insult me with such a question. I refuse to answer you.

AUNT MARIA (*tragically*). Henry, then who—who is that figure that wanders through this house, oftentimes just escaping us by a tree, a hedge, a corner? Henry, in the name of honor, tell me. (*Pause.*) Ah, you cannot! You know you cannot, for it is she—the Widow LePage!

UNCLE HENRY (*suddenly getting possession of an idea*). Maria, this is an old estate. This house, built in eighteen hundred, has its traditions. Can you, a Dudley, who have grown up among the associations of this place, forget that night in November, after the guests had gone, when on your way to your bedchamber, you——

AUNT MARIA (*unnerved in spite of her efforts to control herself*). Don't, Henry, don't!

UNCLE HENRY (*realizing he has made a good beginning*). But you saw with your own eyes, Maria. You described every detail of the dress it wore.

AUNT MARIA. *It.* Oh, don't! (*She shudders.*)

UNCLE HENRY. The startled look of the eyes—the paleness. Just where *did* you see it, Maria?

AUNT MARIA (*catching the spell he has woven*). In the east corridor just beyond the first door, but her white ruffled dress trailed almost to the top stair. I had just reached the landing—oh, it was horrible——

UNCLE HENRY. There, there, Maria, don't try to recall it.

AUNT MARIA (*whose eyes are staring straight ahead*). —when I heard a whisper as plain as I heard you speak just now. It said—and oh, the agony of it—“Henry, where are you? Henry, where are you?” (*She shudders.*) It was the ghost of poor Mary Dudley calling for her lost lover.

UNCLE HENRY (*with feeling*). Poor Mary, she had a hard time of it.

AUNT MARIA. You never saw anything out of the way—at—at any time, did you, Henry?

UNCLE HENRY (*a little ashamed of himself*). Once when I sat on this piazza in the late afternoon—the clock had just struck seven, I had been reading—I happened to look up when I saw just where that chair is by the rail——

AUNT MARIA (*unable to control herself, rises hastily*). Oh, don't! I can't bear to hear it.

(*She goes off at L.; UNCLE HENRY chuckles to himself as he takes a seat on the settle; a second and ANNE MOWBRAY enters from R. and goes up to him.*)

ANNE. Has she really gone at last!

UNCLE HENRY (*who suddenly realizes some one is beside him, starts*). Oh—hulloa, my dear, you here!

ANNE. You have a perfectly horrible way of not noticing your niece, you naughty uncle. You're always thinking, thinking, thinking. Look at me! (*She turns his face toward her.*) Now tell me (*severely*), what are you thinking about?

UNCLE HENRY (*somewhat embarrassed*). No, no, my dear—that is, nothing, nothing at all.

ANNE (*roguishly*). Do you call the charming widow LePage nothing? There, you didn't know I knew how you felt about her, did you? But I'll never tell, you dear old thing, never. Aren't you my friend and protector, and besides, she's a dear! I love her myself.

UNCLE HENRY. She is rather fine—that is—er—er rather splendid.

ANNE (*kissing him*). Wonderful, you old dear, and I don't blame you a bit for falling in love with her. You've a perfect right to marry if you wish and Aunt Maria can go to grass. She married, and I've heard she just hazed the young man. (*Smoothing UNCLE HENRY'S hair, which is beginning to get sparse in spots.*) How old are you, Uncle Henry?

UNCLE HENRY (*with a little sigh*). Forty-five.

ANNE. Forty-five. Why, that's nothing. Aren't you still handsome? (*She opens his mouth.*) Haven't you all your teeth? (*Examining his hair.*) And your hair. Why, Uncle Henry, you've a regular football head of hair. I'd marry you myself if it weren't for John. (*Pause, while she fondles UNCLE HENRY absently and gazes out over the lawn.*) Dear John, I wonder what he's doing now—right at this minute. (*With sudden enthusiasm.*) Uncle Henry, what time is it?

UNCLE HENRY (*taking out his watch*). Just eight and one-half minutes past two.

ANNE. He's on his way to town. (*Sweetly reminiscent.*) Let's see, he's about at the crossroads near the inn. (*Shakes UNCLE HENRY affectionately.*) And oh, Uncle Henry, he's coming to-night.

UNCLE HENRY (*rising and walking about*). You have told him about your Aunt Maria, my dear?

ANNE. Of course, and he's going to wait for me under the sycamore tree. You see I had to tell him because he would think it was strange.

UNCLE HENRY. Of course, of course, my dear, but even so he must think it a little strange, my dear, that—that you are staying in the same house as your Aunt Maria and that—that she doesn't know it.

ANNE. We-ell, I just told him what a bear she is, and that if she did know I was here he couldn't come—that's all.

UNCLE HENRY. And that was enough, I suppose.

ANNE. And do you realize that if it hadn't been for you I never could have seen him at all? (*Pause, during which she regards him earnestly.*) Uncle Henry, why do you suppose mother doesn't like John?

UNCLE HENRY (*earnestly*). Ah, my dear, we cannot account for the likes and dislikes of our relatives. They are strange indeed.

ANNE. But John is such a dear. Were you awfully surprised the day you got my letter asking if I could come here?

UNCLE HENRY (*who at the time received the shock of his life*). Why, no, my dear, not at all.

ANNE (*persistently*). Not even when I said why—not even when I wrote mother wouldn't have John at the house and that I just had to see him?

UNCLE HENRY. No, my dear, I seemed to understand.

ANNE (*her arms about him*). Of course you did, and I'll do something for you some time. I just wish I had the chance right now.

UNCLE HENRY (*suddenly*). You—you wouldn't—er—er—

ANNE (*eagerly*). Yes?

UNCLE HENRY. I—I was—going to say you wouldn't—er—er—

ANNE. Invite the charming widow to tea? Of course I would—love to. (UNCLE HENRY *beams*.) But what about Aunt Maria? She doesn't even know I'm here and we mustn't tell—oh, never.

UNCLE HENRY (*still beaming*). Aunt Maria is going to town, my dear, by appointment. She won't be home until eight.

ANNE (*catching him about the waist and whirling him around*). Couldn't be better—couldn't be better. The gods favor us, Uncle Henry.

UNCLE HENRY (*attempting to stop her*). You don't think—you don't suppose—(*she stops suddenly and puts both hands on his cheeks*), that we could have tea here, do you? The view of the pond and the sunset—

ANNE. Of course we could. Just the thing. I'll fix the table all cosy.

UNCLE HENRY (*absently, a picture forming in his mind*). Dear child, dear child, you are too good.

ANNE. Not a bit of it. Didn't you rescue me from an enraged parent and give me a home under your roof

and a chance to see the dearest man in the world? Didn't you?

UNCLE HENRY. There, there, my dear, don't think of it. You (*shyly*) you have repaid me.

ANNE. Have I really—just the least little bit?

UNCLE HENRY (*getting bolder*). Doubly paid me.

Enter MAID.

MAID. A young lady to see you, sir.

UNCLE HENRY (*unbelievably*). A young lady to see me?

MAID. She asked for you, sir.

UNCLE HENRY. Er—er show her in—of course.

ANNE (*in a whisper*). Out, you goose.

UNCLE HENRY. Yes, yes, of course, show her out.

[Exit MAID.]

ANNE. The widow! (*She giggles.*)

UNCLE HENRY (*not a bit sure but what she is right*).

Oh, no, my dear—

Enter MARY MOORE, a fluffy, dainty little blonde, very pretty. She rushes straight across to UNCLE HENRY, flings her arms about his neck and begins to sob uncontrollably.

ANNE. Mary Moore, what is the matter?

UNCLE HENRY (*in a smothered voice*). There, there, my dear, don't feel so. There, there, don't cry. What is it, my dear, what is it? Tell your Uncle Henry. Come, do. (*More sobs.*)

ANNE. Cousin Mary, stop it. (*Shakes her gently.*) Stop it, I say, and tell us what you are making such a fuss about. (*Exasperated.*) Uncle Henry, make her stop.

UNCLE HENRY. There, there, my dear, do stop. Come, you will make yourself sick.

MARY (*with one mighty effort*). I—c-c-c-an't!

UNCLE HENRY. Yes, yes, my dear. You can if you try. There, there.

(Pats her affectionately; more sobs.)

ANNE (*getting hysterical in turn*). Stop, Mary, you ridiculous thing.

UNCLE HENRY (*fearing worse trouble*). Yes, yes, she will; won't you, my dear?

ANNE (*fairly screaming*). She's terrible — Oh, if you don't stop.

(ANNE *begins to sob and falls on* UNCLE HENRY'S *other shoulder.*)

UNCLE HENRY (*freeing one arm to put about ANNE*). Well, well, this is too bad. This is unfortunate. (*Sobs again.*) Come, come, please, my dears.

ANNE. Well, Mary is s-s-so f-fooli-sh.

MARY (*from UNCLE HENRY'S shoulder*). I'm not. You don't know a-any-th-thing a-bout it. (*More sobs.*)

UNCLE HENRY (*a bright idea occurring*). Hush!—your Aunt Maria!

(*Both stand up straight and cease instantly.*)

ANNE and MARY (*simultaneously*). Aunt Maria!

MARY. Is Aunt Maria here?

UNCLE HENRY (*fearing another outburst*). Yes, but you won't have to see her—no, no indeed, you won't. In fact, just at present she is out.

ANNE. She doesn't know I'm here.

MARY. Why, neither do I—did I, I mean. What are you here for, Anne?

ANNE. The same reason as you are, I suppose.

MARY (*a bit nonplussed*). Well, well, of course you must think it strange—that is, Uncle Henry must think it strange for me to come in on him like this, but —

UNCLE HENRY (*quite spent*). No, no, my dear, not at all—not at all; in fact quite nice, my dear.

ANNE (*reproachfully*). You did frighten him, Mary, and Uncle Henry has troubles of his own.

MARY (*resentfully*). Well, then, perhaps he'll understand mine.

ANNE. Yours—pooh! I don't believe they're half so bad as mine.

MARY (*near to tears again*). They are. Papa won't let me see John.

UNCLE HENRY and ANNE. What!

MARY. Papa won't let me see John, and I just can't live without seeing him.

UNCLE HENRY. Won't let you see John? Why, I am surprised at your father, my dear, surprised.

MARY (*fluttering up to him*). Oh, Uncle Henry, do you know John?

ANNE. He knows my John too.

MARY. I knew you would understand, you dear, dear Uncle Henry! (*Kisses him.*) And so I came here to ask you if—if I might see him here—at your house.

UNCLE HENRY. By all means, my dear.

MARY (*smothering him with her arms*). Oh, how can I ever repay you?

ANNE (*drawing MARY to one side*). I'll tell you, Mary. (*She winks at UNCLE HENRY.*) You may not know it, but Uncle Henry has an affair of his own.

MARY (*round eyes*). What! Uncle Henry!

ANNE. Yes, and beside it our own affairs are quite commonplace. He's in love with the widow LePage.

UNCLE HENRY. There, there, my dear —

ANNE (*archly*). Well, aren't you?

UNCLE HENRY (*at a loss*). Well, of course, if I—if I —

MARY (*going up to him*). How romantic. Who is she? Tell me about her.

ANNE. Just a minute, Mary—not so fast. And I say Uncle Henry has a right to marry if he wants.

MARY (*with all the sympathy in the world*). Of course, poor dear!

ANNE. The worst of it is Aunt Maria has heard of the widow and she has come down here to break things up.

UNCLE HENRY (*glad of an idea*). And still, and still she says I must be lonely here.

MARY. Well, oo dear, if oo wants to marry the widow oo do it, that's all. We'll help oo, yes we will.

ANNE. We were planning a tea party for five. I think she would come.

MARY (*whose own affairs have been straightened out well for her*). Oh, do, do. Out on this delightful porch—a tea party. (*Squeals with delight.*)

UNCLE HENRY. Do—do you think she would care to come? Perhaps—

ANNE. Care to come, you ridiculous man; of course she'd care to come. Who wouldn't want to be Mistress of Grasmere and have my Uncle Henry for a husband?

UNCLE HENRY. There, there, my dear, you flatter me.

ANNE. I'll go ring her up. Come, Mary, you don't even know where your room is yet, and I've got to hide you from Aunt Maria.

MARY (*with the sweetest smile in the world turns to* UNCLE HENRY). You're not angry, are you, because I came?

UNCLE HENRY (*captivated*). Not a bit.

MARY. And you don't mind if I did cry a little on your shoulder?

UNCLE HENRY. My dear!

MARY. And I can really entertain John all I want?

UNCLE HENRY (*putting an arm about her and waxing eloquent*). It would be cruel to deny him the sight of you.

MARY. Thank you so much. (*She draws away gently and walks toward ANNE.*) And I am sure I shall love the widow.

(*ANNE and MARY go into the house. UNCLE HENRY paces the floor, thoughts of the coming tea party making him smile. Enter MAID.*)

MAID. A young lady to see you, sir.

UNCLE HENRY (*in just the tone he said it before*). A young lady to see me?

MAID. She asked for you, sir.

UNCLE HENRY. Ah, yes, show her in—that is out, my d—

(*Exit MAID; UNCLE HENRY braces himself as if for another attack. Enter FRANCES FENTON, a tall, willowy, stunning girl.*)

FRANCES (*offering a hand and placing a hearty kiss on UNCLE HENRY'S cheek*). Do you know me?

UNCLE HENRY (*not daring to say no before the challenge of her eyes*). Why, why you must be—that is, you are——

FRANCES (*taking pity on his apparent embarrassment*). Of course I am. I knew you'd know me although you haven't seen me since that winter in Paris.

UNCLE HENRY (*obliged to carry on*). Of course—so it is that winter in Paris.

FRANCES (*catching his hands*). Didn't we have the loveliest times together? Will you ever forget them? I won't. Just this morning I was thinking of that night at the opera——

UNCLE HENRY. Yes, yes, of course, at the opera; but who——

FRANCES (*gaining enthusiasm as she talks*). And that night before we came away, father and I. I was so sad and you told me, do you remember, that I was like a drooping lily.

UNCLE HENRY. Yes, yes, like a drooping lily.

FRANCES (*laughing gayly*). And papa said, "Well, Henry, if you weren't her uncle, I might think——"

UNCLE HENRY (*light dawning upon him*). Oh, you are Frances—my dear niece. Of course, of course.

FRANCES. Well, now, I've caught you. You've taken so many women to the opera in Paris that you couldn't recall just which one—— Oh, yes, I see it all. (*Roguishly.*) I wouldn't have thought it of you, though. But there, I suppose you are wondering why I came in on you so suddenly, you poor dear. (*She pulls him on to the settle beside her.*) You see, you and I are such good friends—that is, we always were such good friends, that somehow I thought if I came to you with my troubles you would help me. You see, it's this way. I'm in love.

UNCLE HENRY. Why, yes, of course, my dear. I understand perfectly, perfectly.

FRANCES. And he's the cleverest and best man in the world, but because he's poor—you see, he's a doctor and just building up his practice—mother says it's ridiculous and all that. (*Earnestly.*) It isn't ridiculous, is it, Uncle Henry?

UNCLE HENRY. No, my dear, not at all. In fact, not a bit.

FRANCES. And you can't help it if you love somebody, can you?

UNCLE HENRY (*more vehemently*). I should say no; no by all means.

FRANCES. Not if all your people are against you.

UNCLE HENRY. Not even then.

FRANCES. I knew you'd understand, and I thought if I came you'd let me see John here.

UNCLE HENRY (*a little bewildered by so many Johns*). John?

FRANCES. Yes, Dr. John Atherton. Isn't that a fine name? And I know you'll like him.

UNCLE HENRY. When is he coming, my dear?

FRANCES. Well, he's going to run down by motor to-night; that is, of course, if you don't mind.

UNCLE HENRY. Fine. Couldn't be a better time, for, you see, your Aunt Maria —

FRANCES (*rising in alarm*). Aunt Maria. Is she here?

UNCLE HENRY. There, there, don't get excited, my dear. She shan't bother you not the least little bit.

FRANCES (*sitting with a wail*). Oh, but she is terrible. Aunt Maria of all people!

UNCLE HENRY. There, dear, we'll fix things all right. In fact, your cousins have everything arranged.

FRANCES. My cousins!

UNCLE HENRY. Yes, dear, your cousins are here too — Mary and Anne!

FRANCES. Really! How strange! What are they here for?

UNCLE HENRY (*chuckling*). Well, they came—why, they came for the same reason you did, my dear, really.

FRANCES (*giving herself away*). To see John!

UNCLE HENRY. Um-um, so they said, my dear.

FRANCES. But, Uncle Henry, they don't know John.

UNCLE HENRY. Don't they, my dear? But they said they did. They spoke of a John—yes, I'm sure they spoke distinctly of a John. That was the name.

FRANCES. But I don't understand.

UNCLE HENRY (*now quite bewildered*). Run up and speak to them, my dear. They'll explain. Third floor—last suite. (*Leads her to the door.*) Here—here's Susan. She'll show you. (*Exit FRANCES; UNCLE HENRY stands by the door mopping his brow. Presently the picture he has in mind of the tea party returns to his vision and he smiles at the table, mentally placing each guest. In his enthusiasm he moves the chairs around and while in the act AUNT MARIA enters from L. UNCLE HENRY, aghast.*) Maria!

MARIA. Well, you *are* nervous. Really, Henry, I don't know what has come over you. You act strange.

UNCLE HENRY. But, Maria, you told me you had left.

MARIA. Told you I had left? Henry!

UNCLE HENRY. I mean—that is, I meant that you were going. (*In desperation.*) Aren't you—aren't you going, Maria?

MARIA. One can be delayed, can't one?

UNCLE HENRY (*with relief*). Of course, of course.

MARIA. And what are you doing with those chairs? It looks as if you were having a nice little game of Going to Jerusalem. Henry, living alone in this great house has made you strange. I intend to see to it that such a life as you have led this last year does not continue.

UNCLE HENRY. So do I, Maria, so do I.

MARIA. I shall close up Cedarwood and come here. It is my duty.

UNCLE HENRY. You would never be happy, Maria, never. The—the house is strange. You are not used to it. You are nervous, far too nervous, Maria. In fact the—the house is haunted.

MARIA. You tell me it is haunted, but how do I know?

UNCLE HENRY. You saw, Maria, you saw on the night of November —

MARIA. Henry, I implore you.

UNCLE HENRY. And the time I sat on this very piazza, Maria, and at the stroke of seven —

MARIA. Henry!

UNCLE HENRY. And the tones of the voice, the agony of it. "Henry," it cried, "where are you?" Tell me,

Maria, have you heard nothing, seen nothing strange since you came here?

MARIA (*who has heard much*). I refuse to tell, Henry, I refuse absolutely. (*Rising suddenly.*) Good-bye. I shall be back by seven.

UNCLE HENRY (*in sepulchral tones*). Seven—Maria—seven!

MARIA (*trying not to notice*). Seven or a little after.

UNCLE HENRY. Better make it a little after, Maria. Good-bye.

(*Exit AUNT MARIA. UNCLE HENRY goes on arranging the chairs, smiling as before. Presently the three nieces enter dressed in dainty muslins. FRANCES and MARY have made themselves at home and are very good friends indeed.*)

ANNE. Uncle Henry.

MARY. Has she gone?

FRANCES. Oh, we almost ran into her. (*They rush up and kiss him all at once.*) How did you ever manage her? You're a wonder!

ANNE (*sitting on settle*). But what will we do about to-night? She'll be back early.

UNCLE HENRY. Not before seven, my dears, not before seven.

MARY (*curling up in the high-backed chair*). Why seven?

UNCLE HENRY. A mystic hour, a mystic hour for Aunt Maria.

ANNE (*pulling UNCLE HENRY down beside her*). You ridiculous old thing, what have you been doing with the chairs?

UNCLE HENRY (*with some anxiety*). Is she coming?

ALL. She's coming.

(*A smile spreads over UNCLE HENRY'S face.*)

MARY (*shaking a finger at him*). And if you don't go up-stairs pretty soon and get fixed up, she'll think you're a terrible old pig!

UNCLE HENRY (*who is immaculate in spite of his recent rumplings*). What time is she coming?

ANNE (*severely*). Promptly at five, and it's four, after four, now.

UNCLE HENRY (*rising*). After four?

ANNE (*rising*). Now put on your white flannels. You do look too sweet in them.

MARY (*with feeling*). Oh, of course, your white flannels.

ANNE (*her fingers running through his hair*). And comb your hair a little to one side and then the place where it is thin will be covered.

MARY (*rising and going over to him*). Uncle Henry, have you a dark figured tie? I just adore them.

ANNE. Of course he has. He's a regular dandy. He has every kind of a tie, I'll have you know.

FRANCES (*joining the group so that now UNCLE HENRY is completely surrounded*). And don't forget your white shoes.

ANNE. Yes, those that you wore the day I came, with the plain tips.

MARY. Oh, I just adore that kind.

ANNE (*pulling him from the group toward the door*). Come, if you intend to make all these preparations, sir, you'd better be about it. Scoot!

(*She pushes him off at L. and returns to the girls.*)

MARY. Isn't he a dear? I just adore him. Why do you suppose he never married?

ANNE. Never met the right one until this summer.

FRANCES. What do you mean? Has Uncle Henry—

ANNE. Yes, he has. He's in love with this very charming widow who's coming to tea. I'm sure of it, and we ought to do all we can to help him win her.

FRANCES. Why, of course!

MARY (*vehemently*). Why, most certainly. Isn't he helping us?

FRANCES. If only Aunt Maria would go home.

ANNE. Well, she won't of her own accord anyway. We must find a way to get her home.

MARY (*earnestly*). But how?

ANNE (*sparkling*). I've a plan. (*She pulls them down on the settle beside her.*) Aunt Maria thinks the house is haunted. One night she saw —

MARY. Oh—don't!

FRANCES. Hush! Put your feelings aside. We've got to get rid of Aunt Maria, haven't we?

MARY (*meekly but fearfully*). Yes.

ANNE. It happened two or three years ago but she never forgot it, and the other day she caught a glimpse of me down by the pond and of course not knowing I was here she thought naturally —

MARY (*with deep feeling*). Oh, poor Aunt Maria!

ANNE (*severely*). Hush! She thought I was a ghost—the ghost.

FRANCES. But who is *the* ghost?

MARY. Probably great-aunt Mary, who was kept a prisoner here by her horrid old father. Her lover's name was Henry, and she goes around saying with a moan, "Henry, where are you? Oh—Henry—where —"

ANNE. Well, no matter who she thinks it is, we'll frighten her.

MARY. Suppose, just suppose she should take it into her head to return early while the tea was at its height.

(ANNE and FRANCES laugh.)

FRANCES. You ridiculous child, tea is never at its height. It's just a mild beverage and a safe means of entertainment.

Enter MAID.

MAID. Mrs. LePage.

ANNE (*dramatically*). Show her out.

(*Exit MAID; hysterical giggles from MARY.*)

FRANCES. I wonder what she's like.

ANNE. Well, you won't have to wonder long, my dear.

MARY (*softly*). I hope she loves Uncle Henry. It would be so dreadful if —

FRANCES. Hush!

(*A second of expectancy, a flutter, and MRS. LEPAGE, a sweet, affectionate woman of about thirty-five, enters.*)

ANNE. My dear Mrs. LePage, how sweet of you to come.

MRS. LEPAGE. Not at all, my dear, but how sweet of you to ask me.

ANNE. My cousins, Mary Moore and Frances Fenton.

(*Business of introduction.*)

MRS. LEPAGE. What! More cousins. (*All laugh.*) How popular you must be with your uncle.

(*Business of finding chairs; FRANCES pulls the chairs around facing the settle, MRS. LEPAGE having been ensconced there among the pillows, and the three cousins sit before her prepared to worship.*)

ANNE. The other way around. He's popular with us. Ever since we were little tots he's been a kind of magician sending us the things we wanted most.

MARY. And when he came to visit us—oh my, such times! Do you know he's the best person in the world to go to a circus with. Do you like circuses?

MRS. LEPAGE. Indeed I do.

MARY. Well, you'd just love to go with Uncle Henry. He can't do enough. Why, when I was scarcely four he took me to a circus in London and we didn't get home until dark and mother was nearly wild.

FRANCES. And the opera. Why, when I was in Paris we went to see everything there was to see. - I never spent such a glorious winter in my life. He couldn't do enough. Do you like opera?

MRS. LEPAGE. I love it.

FRANCES. Then you'd love to go with Uncle Henry. He always knows the best and all about the singers. He's so interesting.

ANNE (*with enthusiasm*). Oh, Uncle Henry's a

dear—a perfect dear. (*Enter UNCLE HENRY, resplendent and beaming.*) Aren't you, Uncle Henry?

UNCLE HENRY (*absently using the words that are most frequent with him*). Why, yes, of course, my dear, of course.

(*Every one laughs; business of greeting; UNCLE HENRY sits in the high-backed chair.*)

MRS. LEPAGE (*with content*). Isn't this delightful!

UNCLE HENRY. You think so, really? I'm so glad.

(*Girls exchange glances. It has become the mission of their lives to make UNCLE HENRY happy.*)

FRANCES. We think this porch is the best. The view ———

UNCLE HENRY (*rising and addressing MRS. LEPAGE*). You can't see the pond from where you are sitting.

MRS. LEPAGE (*rising and going toward UNCLE HENRY*). Pond? Is there a pond?

MARY (*affectionately to MRS. LEPAGE*). Do you adore ponds? So do I.

(*UNCLE HENRY leads her to the rail at the back and the girls group themselves near the front.*)

MRS. LEPAGE. Ah, now I see! What a delightful spot! (*With a sigh.*) Oh, after Moorlands this is paradise.

UNCLE HENRY (*radiant*). You think so? I am so glad!

MRS. LEPAGE. It is ideal, perfect. What more can I say?

UNCLE HENRY (*with a sigh*). I am so glad!

MRS. LEPAGE (*archly*). I wish I had such a spot in which to entertain you at Moorlands.

(*ANNE goes out for the tea; MARY and FRANCES arrange things.*)

UNCLE HENRY. Don't speak of it. You—you, madam, quite suffice for any lack of beauty in scenery or ———

MRS. LEPAGE. Oh, Mr. Dudley, you are too kind —
 UNCLE HENRY (*earnestly*). Don't call me Mr. Dudley. Dear lady, I—I—I had hoped it was to be Henry—after—after —

MRS. LEPAGE (*suddenly demure*). Oh—but I —
 UNCLE HENRY (*catching her hand*). Don't you love me? A—a little? I—I love you so much —

MRS. LEPAGE (*fearing the girls may overhear*). I—I can't say now—wait. (*She draws her hand away gently.*) The girls—your nieces — What will they think —

UNCLE HENRY (*fully aware by this time of the sympathy of his nieces*). But you will call me Henry? You will do that, won't you?

Enter ANNE and MAID with tea things.

MRS. LEPAGE. I—I—(*turns to the girls in relief although it is apparent she loves him*) I suppose Grasmere has a wonderful attraction for you.

FRANCES (*joining her*). Most certainly. I expect to spend some of my happiest days here.

(Business of serving tea begins.)

MARY. Isn't it just adorable here? And then there's nobody like Uncle Henry.

FRANCES. She says that as if she were the only one that thought so.

MRS. LEPAGE (*with a twinkle*). Oh, but she isn't, my dear, she isn't. (*All laugh.*)

ANNE. I should say not. Wasn't I the first one to discover him? Wasn't I — [Exit MAID.

MARY (*to MRS. LEPAGE*). I'll tell you something if you won't tell. He's the best man in the world, and it's about time somebody found it out besides his relatives. (UNCLE HENRY *moves nervously.*) And he's going to let us entertain our beaux to-night.

UNCLE HENRY (*suddenly reminded of AUNT MARIA, whom he has completely forgotten*). Provided, my dear, provided —

MARY (*misinterpreting his thought*). Provided, of course, we help him. (*Awkward pause.*)

MRS. LEPAGE (*tactfully*). Isn't your sister here, Mr. Dudley?

UNCLE HENRY. Why, yes, that is, I believe so—that is, she was called away unexpectedly.

MRS. LEPAGE. I'm so sorry.

ANNE. Aunt Maria has an appointment in town.

MARY (*with her usual tact*). Aunt Maria is terribly stern. I don't believe you'd like her.

UNCLE HENRY (*nervously*). Yes, yes, Maria has a will of her own.

MARY (*bound to out with the truth*). She doesn't know we're here!

MRS. LEPAGE (*wondering what she has gotten into*). Your Aunt Maria doesn't know you are here? But how —

FRANCES. Oh, it's awful to be dodging some one all the time.

MRS. LEPAGE. But doesn't she suspect? I don't understand.

(MRS. LEPAGE *gets more and more puzzled as the conversation goes on until in the end she is quite bewildered.*)

ANNE. One day she caught a glimpse of me and she thought I was a ghost.

MRS. LEPAGE. Poor soul!

ANNE. She saw a ghost here once, you know, three years ago, and she thinks the house is haunted.

Enter MAID.

MAID. A gentleman to see you, Mr. Dudley.

MARY. Now, Uncle Henry —

FRANCES (*catching his sleeve*). You can't go.

ANNE. Tell the man you have —

UNCLE HENRY (*rising with an effort*). But—but I had an appointment — (*Looking at MRS. LEPAGE.*) It won't take long. I shall be back presently. (*Backing toward the door.*) You can spare me for a moment.

MRS. LEPAGE. But no longer.

(UNCLE HENRY, *beaming, follows the MAID out.*)

ANNE. His tea will get cold.

MRS. LEPAGE. Oh, we'll make him some new gladly, at least I will —

MARY (*anxious to hasten the affair*). Of course, and he'll probably like it all the better.

MRS. LEPAGE (*unable to get AUNT MARIA and the strange circumstances out of her mind*). But couldn't—couldn't your Aunt Maria be won over by kindness?

FRANCES. Kindness! Aunt Maria!

(*The girls laugh heartily; voices from the house.*)

AUNT MARIA (*speaking to the MAID*). Has Mr. Dudley company?

ANNE. Hush! It's she. It's Aunt Maria!

MARY (*beginning to cry*). Aunt Maria, oh, what shall we do? What shall we do? What shall we do?

ANNE. Hush! (*She rises hastily; to MRS. LEPAGE.*) Get behind the high-backed chair.

MRS. LEPAGE (*rising in bewilderment*). Behind the big chair?

ANNE (*in desperation, dragging her toward it*). You must!

MARY (*running about hysterically*). Oh, you don't know Aunt Maria. You don't know Aunt Maria. You don't know Aunt Maria. You don't —

FRANCES (*running after her and shaking her*). Hush!

MRS. LEPAGE (*being unwillingly pushed behind the chair*). But—but I don't understand.

ANNE (*pushing her down so that she is completely hidden*). But you don't have to. Just stay there until you are called out. You must.

MRS. LEPAGE (*with one final groan of misapprehension, doubt and fear*). Oh—oh, Henry, where are you?

(AUNT MARIA'S voice without.)

AUNT MARIA. It's strange, all very strange!

ANNE. Quick!

(*She grabs MARY and literally pulls her down the steps.*)

FRANCES, *suddenly aware of the significance of five teacups, rushes to the table in an attempt to grab what she can of them before her escape. She reaches the top of the step, having managed to get three of them, when AUNT MARIA enters, followed by the MAID.*)

AUNT MARIA (*much flurried*). There, did you see? Did you see, I say?

MAID (*terrified*). No, madam, nothing —

AUNT MARIA. You did not see a woman in white descend those steps —

MAID. No, madam.

AUNT MARIA. But, Susan — How can — (*She flops into the high-backed chair, half convinced the house is haunted.*) Susan!

MAID. Yes, madam.

AUNT MARIA. How long have you been in service here?

MAID. One year and two months, madam, come Thursday —

AUNT MARIA. And during that time you have never seen anything—anything strange?

MAID. No, madam, although I've heard the house was haunted.

AUNT MARIA. Heard so? And who told you?

MAID. One night Annie, the cook, saw a figger on this very porch —

AUNT MARIA (*her old nervousness returning*). Did—did it say anything—Susan?

MAID. Yes, madam.

AUNT MARIA (*fearfully, yet bound to know the worst*). And what did it say, Susan?

MAID (*in an awful whisper*). It said, madam, it said, "Henry, where are you?" (AUNT MARIA, *unable to control herself, screams.*) I beg your pardon, madam.

AUNT MARIA (*rising and walking up and down*). Susan, has any one else seen it?

MAID (*whose imagination grows when she has an eager listener*). Yes, madam, Nora saw it just one week later.

AUNT MARIA. And did—did it say anything then?

MAID. The very words, madam, the very words.

AUNT MARIA (*who in her walking has come suddenly upon the tea table*). Susan! (*Aghast.*)

MAID. Yes, madam.

AUNT MARIA. There—has—been—a—tea—party!

MAID (*terrified*). Madam?

AUNT MARIA. A—tea—party—for two. (*She starts to touch the things and recoils from them; SUSAN cannot restrain from a giggle.*) There, there, child, of course you're upset. This is enough to upset any one. The strain is awful, awful, but don't get hysterical, I beg of you. I can't stand hysteria. Susan, I am going to ask you something which I hope you will have discretion never to repeat.

MAID. Yes, madam.

AUNT MARIA. Did—did you ever think that—that Mr. Dudley was a little strange——

MAID. Strange, madam?

AUNT MARIA. Yes, a little unbalanced, a little queer—that is, well, for instance, this tea party and all—— Of course I mean no harm, but you know it does look strange, and, of course, I'm not accusing him—not for a minute, you understand—but—but does he often order tea for two?

MAID (*bewildered*). Yes, madam.

AUNT MARIA. Of course you understand his living alone and all. It affects some people. (*She looks at the cups, all the while horror on her face.*) The second cup has been used too, Susan.

MAID (*desperate*). Perhaps the spirit, madam. (*AUNT MARIA shudders in spite of herself.*) Nora says as' how they eat victuals in Galway; the spirits and the peasants put out a morsel for 'em.

AUNT MARIA. Susan.

MAID. I beg your pardon, madam.

AUNT MARIA. Have—have you ever—after bringing in the tea, watched to see whether——

MAID. Ah, no, madam, not me. I'm that nervous—— (*The door-bell rings.*) If I may go, madam?

[*Exit MAID.*]

(AUNT MARIA, left alone, sits perfectly still and regards the two empty cups in horror. The clock from the front hall strikes seven slowly. AUNT MARIA waits as if spellbound. THE WIDOW LEPAGE, cramped, hurt, and unable to understand, thinking every one has gone, cries out in agony.)

MRS. LEPAGE. Henry, Henry, where are you? (AUNT MARIA rises and stands frozen with horror; UNCLE HENRY enters from the house, hears MRS. LEPAGE and can only realize that she has called him Henry. He does not see AUNT MARIA.) Henry, where are you? (AUNT MARIA, unable to control herself longer, screams and rushes past UNCLE HENRY into the house calling, "Susan!" Simultaneously the widow frees herself and runs to UNCLE HENRY, who is only too glad to take her in his arms.) Oh, Henry, I'm hurt. (He soothes her.)

UNCLE HENRY (blissfully happy). There—there—there—there! What have they done to you?

MRS. LEPAGE. It must be that—that creature.

UNCLE HENRY. What creature?

MRS. LEPAGE. That—that Aunt Maria.

(AUNT MARIA'S voice is heard speaking without.)

AUNT MARIA. Yes, tell her to pack my bags at once. The house is haunted. (With rising inflections.) Its master is haunted. At once, I say.

UNCLE HENRY (chuckling). Can't you see? (MRS. LEPAGE shakes her head.) Why, it's simple enough. If you hadn't called me Henry, it wouldn't have happened.

(MRS. LEPAGE is still uncomprehending, but submits to him entirely.)

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