# HUMAN WISPS

[Six One-act Plays]

ANNA WOLFROM

# HUMAN WISPS

## SIX ONE-ACT PLAYS

BY

ANNA WOLFROM

Author of "Albion and Rosamond and The Living Voice," etc.


BOSTON

SHERMAN, FRENCH & COMPANY

1917

TO
THE MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER
ANN RANKIN WOLFROM

## CONTENTS

# THE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

A ONE-ACT PLAY

## CHARACTERS

Mrs. Alinsky, a widow
Lipa, her daughter
Her other children
Mr. Hutchens, an adjuster of claims
Mr. Waldstein, a merchant

*Within the four walls of a little shack on the south shore of the muddy Missouri lived a Jewish family, consisting of the father, mother and seven children. The one room is cheaply furnished, with a pretence of some modern pieces. The bed is placed to the center back of the room, between a door and window, instead of in its usual corner. The dresser is at the extreme left, a library table is in the center front, and a few chairs scattered about complete the furnishings.*

Mrs. Alinsky *has just received the body of her husband, who has been killed in one of the large packing houses. His remains have been placed on a cot in a corner to the right, in front of a window. The awe-stricken wife has placed some chairs before the body and draped a shawl over the backs of them, so that the children will not see the horror of death.*

Mrs. Alinsky [*sitting on a chair with her head buried in her hands*]. Oh, life, ees dees vat you have give me — have give me?

LIPA. [*A girl of sixteen, with a shawl thrown over her head, comes in*] What is it, mother? What is it?

MRS. ALINSKY. Vy has life been joking with me — alvays — alvays I must suffer [*pounds her breast as if in great agony*]

LIPA. Why did the policeman send me home from work?

MRS. ALINSKY [*pointing to the corner*]. He ees dere — your poor fater.

LIPA [*staring at the corner, her jaw drops, as she pulls a few strands of hair loose*]. What! is father dead?

MRS. ALINSKY. Did you eber see your fater sleeping in the daytime?

LIPA [*too frightened to go and see*]. What's the matter? What — how — oh, mother! [*Throws herself on the floor at her mother's feet*]

MRS. ALINSKY. Dey keel him — the great, big machines over dere. My poor Ivan [*begins to cry*]!

LIPA. What are we going to do; how can we live?

MRS. ALINSKY. Live! [*In anger*] Vy you talk to live? It takes money to die in dees country.

LIPA. Yes, mother, but we must live; the children must go on living.

MRS. ALINSKY [*with thoughts far away*]. Live? Live, my Gott, ven did I ever live!

LIPA [*with a soothing voice*]. Always, mother, you and father.

MRS. ALINSKY. Yes, my Lipa, alvays — dat ees so. I forget sometimes. I be happy in him, in my cheeldren. If I make you happy as a leetle child — then I live. I say bad things sometimes ven I get mad, but, Lipa, you vill be a mother some day — den you vill understand [*strokes Lipa's hair tenderly*].

LIPA. The boss raised my pay this morning. I'll get five dollars a week now.

MRS. ALINSKY. Dat ees so leetle to feed so many on. If ve could only live without eating. Ach [*drops her arms down in hopeless despair*], life ees hard, life ees hard.

LIPA. Don't say that, mother. [*Rising, she goes over to look at her father*] In Russia it would be harder still; what could so many of us do there?

MRS. ALINSKY. But the neighbors, dey come; dey would make the box, and the priest — he bring a long robe, the blessed robe, and the master

give us a piece of ground. Here — here ve have noting.

LIPA [*in the center of the room, with hope in her face*]. Here we have so much joy and freedom. We have a chance to live our own lives, just what we want them to be, without asking the landlord what he wants us to be.

MRS. ALINSKY [*the little ones come trooping in, all stair steps, four boys and two girls, having been sent home from school*]. Here dey come — all, all of dem.

OLDEST BOY. Say, ma, big policeman come to school. He say — go home quick.

NEXT YOUNGEST. Are they going to send us back to Russia, ma? I don't want to go back there.

MRS. ALINSKY. Ach, my cheeldren, vy you come here like dees?

LITTLE GIRL. What you think, ma; I make big face at that policeman what won't let me go to school.

LIPA [*trying to assume her mother's burden*]. Come with me, children. I'll tell you all about it. Let's go into the shed. [*Leads them through the door into a shed kitchen*]

MRS. ALINSKY [*pitifully*]. My leetle ones —

my leetle ones. [*Goes up cautiously to the dead body*]

OLDEST BOY [*breaking in*]. Where is he, where is he, mother?

MRS. ALINSKY. Fater?

OLDEST BOY. What have they done with him?

MRS. ALINSKY. Here he ees, son. Your fater [*grabs his head in her hands*], your fater ees no more.

OLDEST BOY. Lipa say the machines grind him up. Grind him [*shakes his little, stiff hands with frenzy*] —

MRS. ALINSKY. Yes, my boy. Dere [*points to the body behind the chairs*]

OLDEST BOY [*looks in bewilderment, as if trying to make out what it all means*]. I hope I live, mother, to break those machines. Maybe now. Maybe I can stop those big things that kill like guns. [*He grabs his hat and rushes out.* MRS. ALINSKY *stands terrified as he goes through the door, leaving it open*]

MRS. ALINSKY. No, no, you cannot do dat, my boy. Dose big machines dey make for life, dey make for death [*laughs aloud for a moment, then stops as if the sound of her laughter calls some thought hidden away, back in the years gone by.*

*A knock at the door arouses her; she stands for a moment looking*]

Mr. Hutchens [*a young lawyer, a university graduate of recent date, getting no response to his knock, steps in*]. Oh, I thought no one was here. I am looking for Mrs. Alinsky.

Mrs. Alinsky. Yes, I be Mrs. Alinsky.

Mr. Hutchens. Your husband was killed in the packing house this morning?

Mrs. Alinsky. Yes, yes, dat was him.

Mr. Hutchens [*kindly*]. I am the adjuster of claims.

Mrs. Alinsky. Oh, and vat ees dat?

Mr. Hutchens. The packing house company has sent me to make a settlement [*seeing that she does not understand*], with money to pay his funeral expenses, and —

Mrs. Alinsky. You pay to bury him. [*After a pause*] I see.

Mr. Hutchens. Yes, that is it. We want to do the fair thing.

Mrs. Alinsky [*brightening up*]. Yes, that ees good for 'em. I have so many leetle ones, I know not vat to do and ve no save very much with so many, many cheeldren.

Mr. Hutchens. No, that is just it. Now we give you one hundred twenty-five dollars for his funeral expenses, and the same amount to cover his loss.

Mrs. Alinsky. Yes, I lose him.

Mr. Hutchens. And for that we are going to pay you one hundred twenty-five dollars.

Mrs. Alinsky. Dat is so good von you. [*Heaves a sigh of relief; then calls in a cheerful voice*] Lipa, Lipa!

Lipa [*entering from the kitchen*]. Yes, mother?

Mrs. Alinsky [*in excitement*]. Vat you tink? The factory, he sent a man to bury the fater and vill pay for it all — every bit of it.

Lipa [*looking at the young lawyer in surprise*]. Oh, sir, that is very kind; we need it so very much.

Mr. Hutchens. The house always makes a settlement [*with importance*], and of course we do it in time so you will not be embarrassed as to meeting the funeral expenses.

Mrs. Alinsky [*with tenderness*]. Oh, God, He be goot after all; dees morning I almost cursed Him in my heart. He take [*pointing to the bed*] my poor Ivan away. [*Commences to cry*]

LIPA [*consoling her mother*]. Now, now, mother, you must not do that before this man. He won't help you if you do not stop.

MRS. ALINSKY [*wiping her eyes*]. Yes, yes, Lipa? I be goot. I stop.

MR. HUTCHENS. Now, Mrs. Alinsky, will you let me have your marriage certificate?

MRS. ALINSKY. Vat is that?

MR. HUTCHENS. A piece of paper with your names —

MRS. ALINSKY. Oh, you want a piece of paper. [*Turning to Lipa*] Lipa, get the man a piece of paper.

MR. HUTCHENS. No, not that. The paper you got when you were married, with your names, the date of your birth and marriage.

MRS. ALINSKY [*bewildered*]. Names, birth, marriage?

LIPA. That is called a marriage certificate, mother.

MRS. ALINSKY [*with no concern*]. Ve no get married.

MR. HUTCHENS. You must have something to show that you are his lawful wife.

MRS. ALINSKY. I'm hees wife all right, but I no get married. You see back in Russia it takes

so much money to take to the priest that ve no have it, and ve have no house to live in so ve just work on together just the same. Ve work on big land for a rich, rich man and when Lipa, she come, ve say she is the — vat you call it? [*looking hopelessly for the word*]

LIPA [*coming to her aid*]. The marriage certificate.

MRS. ALINSKY [*continuing*]. Yes, dat ees it. Dat marriage certificate [*a short sound on the a*], and den ven ve have all dees leetle cheeldren ve have lots of marriage papers.

MR. HUTCHENS. Yes, Mrs. Alinsky, I do not doubt your word, but the house does not pay compensation only to those duly married. Otherwise, in this country there would arise so much trouble. We recognize only one marriage and that by certificate.

MRS. ALINSKY [*infuriated*]. Vat you say, you say me no married?

MR. HUTCHENS. That is so — according to the laws of the church and state.

MRS. ALINSKY. But to Gott, be I not married?

MR. HUTCHENS. I have no opinion to express on that, madam. I can only carry out my instructions.

Mrs. Alinsky. Lipa, vat ees dat, dem instructions?

Lipa. He can do but what the big men at the packing house tell him to do.

Mrs. Alinsky. Vell, dey tell you to come here, pay me money to bury my husband, ees dat not so?

Mr. Hutchens. Yes, if you are his wife; but you are not his wife.

Mrs. Alinsky [*with emotion*]. Not hees wife? My Gott, vat you mean? Ven I bear him all dees cheeldren, vash for 'em, cook for 'em, pick up coal to keep 'em warm — you say I am not hees wife. Some vomen, vat have no cheeldren, are dey wives just because dey have marriage cer [*forgetting the word*] paper?

Mr. Hutchens. According to the laws of the church and state, madam. That is all I can say. I am sorry that I cannot do anything at all for you.

Mrs. Alinsky [*throwing her arms about* Lipa]. Ach, my child, you see now vat it ees to live. Dere [*pointing to the couch of death*], dey keel him, he can no help me, but I must go on and live and help you to live just the same — and nobody cares.

Lipa [*looking rather embarrassed for a mo-*

*ment, first at* MR. HUTCHENS, *then at her mother*]. Yes, mother, we care for you; we want you and we will help you [*hugs her mother more closely*]

MR. HUTCHENS [*coldly*]. We have hundreds of just such cases as this to handle every day. We live in a world of chance.

LIPA [*holding her mother, who is still sobbing*]. That is a poor excuse; chance will not give back to us what your machines have taken from us, or change the circumstances of age and conditions in which my parents were brought up.

MR. HUTCHENS [*avoiding an answer*]. Good day, ladies. I am sorry I cannot help you. [*Goes out of the door*]

LIPA. He is gone now, mother. We must help ourselves. [*Goes over and shuts the door*]

MRS. ALINSKY [*standing dejectedly in the middle of the room. After a pause*]. Help ourselves, mit vat?

LIPA. We must find a way, mother. [*Hopefully*] In this wonderful America there are big things to do, and I am going to do them — I must do them. [*A knock is heard at the door*]

MRS. ALINSKY. Ach, maybe my boy; dey bring him home, too.

LIPA [*peeping through a piece of lace curtain hanging over the glass in the door*]. It's the dollar-a-week man, the furniture man.

MRS. ALINSKY [*as if hit another great blow*]. I canno' see him. It vill keel me to tell him I have no money.— I must save it for food.

LIPA. It won't hurt to tell him the truth.

MRS. ALINSKY [*hopelessly*]. Yes, the truth; but the truth vill not bury your fater. [*Loud knocking is heard again*]

LIPA. But he has always been kind to us, mother? Do you remember how much he threw off that time father was sick and couldn't work?

MRS. ALINSKY. Yes, yes, I tell him. [*Goes to the door and opens it*]

MR. WALDSTEIN. [*A Jew, tall and slender, bearing all the traces of the education and refinement of his race, enters. His features are regular, showing great warmth of feeling for his fellow man, yet one that would not be mistaken for a son of his race*] Good morning, Mrs. Alinsky. I thought that you were not in at first, but then —

MRS. ALINSKY. Yes, yes, Mr. Waldstein, I be in, but I have great trouble dees morning, and I could no come to the door.

Mr. Waldstein. More trouble, what is it now?

Mrs. Alinsky. My husband, he get keeled dees morning, and we, me and Lipa, don't know vat to do.

Mr. Waldstein [*with feeling*]. You poor people do have more real sorrow. This is very sad indeed.

Lipa. Father was killed at the packing house by the machinery, and of course one cannot prevent accidents.

Mr. Waldstein. But they should have their machinery guarded so as to prevent accidents. So much useless legislation going on that never results in anything but disagreement.

Lipa. But father oiled the machinery — he couldn't always go in guarded places.

Mr. Waldstein. Yes, but they will settle for it. You will receive a benefit; they will make things right.

Mrs. Alinsky. Yes, they send a man dees morning. He come and he go away again.

Mr. Waldstein. Without making a settlement?

Lipa. Mother forgot to get a certificate when she was married.

Mrs. Alinsky. You see he wanted a marriage certificate, and I no have one. You know, Mr. Waldstein, in Russia ve be so poor ve just work for the big landlord like hees own cheeldren, Ivan and me. Our parents, some die and some runned away to America, ve never hear, so Ivan and me just live there until ve get big. Ve have no money to take to the priest, and when Lipa, she come, the big landman he be glad and give us a leetle shack and ve love one another so much.

Mr. Waldstein. And the adjuster refused to give you your compensation just because you couldn't produce a marriage certificate?

Mrs. Alinsky. He be sorry he say, but the church and state.

Mr. Waldstein. Oh, yes, the church and state! That is just the reason my father was expelled from the professorship in a university of Germany and exiled — it was for the church and state, too.

Mrs. Alinsky. Lipa, ven you get big don't you go near the church and state business.

Mr. Waldstein [*a smile passing over his face, with a mingled look of mirth and sadness*]. Ah, but, Lipa, neither is wrong in itself. Like the

rest of us, the leaders haven't reached the height of perfect understanding as yet, and cannot until the understanding of the masses is cleared.

Mrs. Alinsky. Dat ees so. The man — he no understand, but, Mr. Waldstein, life vas never been very goot to us poor people.

Mr. Waldstein. Now I am going to help you; your debt on your furniture is cancelled.

Mrs. Alinsky. Ah, Mr. Waldstein, you be goot, be goot!

Mr. Waldstein. We are a great family, and must help one another.

Lipa. I will help too, Mr. Waldstein. I earn five dollars a week now.

Mrs. Alinsky. Maybe I can get work, too. You vill help me to get work so I can feed my leetle ones, Mr. Waldstein?

Mr. Waldstein. No, Mrs. Alinsky, I will not help you to find work.

Mrs. Alinsky. No? Vy?

Mr. Waldstein. You will do better if you stay at home and take care of these children.

Mrs. Alinsky. I take care of dem — all right [*with a nod of her head*]

Mr. Waldstein. Keep them off the streets,

and teach them that poverty in youth is the greatest training of human mettle. These hard knocks won't hurt them as long as their moral side is cultivated toward the ideal — a good ideal. When they get old enough, the organized society of Jews will find them a place to work, so do not worry about the future, Mrs. Alinsky.

Mrs. Alinsky. But I must find something for dem to eat — everyday.

Oldest Boy [*running in, breathless*]. Mother — mother — I get a job in the packing house. I drive the sheep.

Mrs. Alinsky. Vat, you, my leetle boy? You can no work; the big mans no let you.

Mr. Waldstein [*drawing a check book out of his pocket, begins to write, then pauses to look at the boy*]. Young America, all right!

Oldest Boy. I tell you I will work. I must —

Mr. Waldstein. If you come to the office of our society, Mrs. Alinsky, once a week we will give you an allowance to maintain you until the older ones are able to support sufficiently the rest of the family. Until then, my little man —

Mrs. Alinsky [*wholly transformed and forgetting her sorrow, she holds the boy by his head*

*close to her to silence him*]. Vat dey call Him, dat one vat saves the mans?

LIPA. You mean Christ?

MRS. ALINSKY. Yes, dat ees Him. Dat goot man die out of the hearts of the gentiles long ago, but with the Jew —

MR. WALDSTEIN [*interrupting her*]. We find good men in every creed, my dear woman.

MRS. ALINSKY. No, no dat ees not so. Dat Christ, He jump right back into the heart of a Jew.

OLDEST BOY [*pulling away*]. I am going to work. I — am — going — to — go — to — work — I — tell — you [*he rushes out*]

MRS. ALINSKY. Lipa, can you no stop that boy? [LIPA *follows him to the door, wondering*]

MR. WALDSTEIN [*handing her a check to cover the funeral expenses of her husband*]. Good-bye, Mrs. Alinsky. [*To Lipa*] Good-bye, Lipa. You must help your mother [*extending his hand*]; life is more serious than death, and there are six more little ones that you are, in a way, responsible for. [*He goes out*]

LIPA. Good-bye, Mr. Waldstein. [*Closes the door after him*]

MRS. ALINSKY [*looking at* LIPA, *then at the*

*check, she pauses for a moment and tries to read*]. "M — R — S. Mrs. A — A — linsky." Lipa, what ees dees? Ees dees my marriage cer — tif, certif, certificate?

CURTAIN

# OLD SHOES

A ONE-ACT PLAY

## CHARACTERS

Slender Shoes
High Heels
Chubby Toe
Down at the Heels
Misfits
Sleepy Slippers

*The scene is laid in an old-time restaurant in the north end of the town, which, from its location, bears proof itself that the customers are not of the elite. When the proprietor was a boy — he having inherited the restaurant from his father — the north end of the town boasted of the smart set, who were accustomed to promenade along the edge of the great clay banks that overlooked the great Missouri River. Here were built fine, old southern homes, majestic in appearance as well as in situation, from which both beauty and genius have gone forth to make Washington take notice and marvel at the products of the West. But that was a long time ago (only forty years); the smart set has moved out south, and Italians, swarms of them, now live in the old colonial homes, and the son of the once famous restaurant keeper has changed the menu from chestnut stuffed turkey to "pork chops and."*

*The wearers of these old shoes are the sons and daughters of the once smart set, but, owing to lack of will or gray matter that goes to make up intelligence, or the want of push to make success, or*

*the over abundance of taste for the things that make life sing with pep once in a while, they did not move with their brothers and sisters out south or east, or west, as the selected district of your town may be called.*

Sleepy Slippers [*stretching himself as if half asleep, he reaches for a bucket and mop from a small inner closet*]. Gee! this is hard luck, this here business of getting broke and down on your uppers. I guess that farm would look pretty good to me now, but [*holding his thumbs under his arms*] I wouldn't let dad know it for the world. [*Goes over behind the long counter to a faucet and fills bucket*]

Misfits [*a little slender, trick of a girl enters. She is just a chip of the great human wave in overcrowded cities that has, at an early age, to find a place for herself or starve. She is all sunshine as she opens the door, for, never having known aught but poverty, this place as dishwasher seems as a god-send to her*]. Good morning, Sleepy Slippers. Old sleepy head, now ain't you? It's me that's been up since the first streak of daylight. Didn't I have all them kids to get breakfast for, and ma herself to pack off to work?

Sleepy Slippers. It is just good to see you, little one.

Misfits. Don't you be callin' me little one.

Sleepy Slippers. You know you don't belong in an old joint like this, where only the crumbs of life come. Why don't you get a job in a nice place? [*Seeing the sad look on* Misfits' *face*] Say, I didn't mean it; I'm glad you are here — you stay here, won't you, little Misfits?

Misfits. I should say I would stay. Gettin' my three meals a day, ain't I? And say, washin' dishes is lots of fun [*hanging up her little faded hat and jacket, three sizes too large for her*] and then, Sleepy Slippers, it's fun being here — you.

Sleepy Slippers. I don't see where you gets that dope. I don't see any fun washing floors, washing tables and washing dish rags — oh, gee, them pigs of pa's would look mighty good to me!

Misfits. Say, Sleepy Slippers, was you brought up on a farm where the flowers bloom and the birds sing and —

Sleepy Slippers. No, none of them things down yonder; just big fields of corn and wheat that always need a plowing, and whoops of cows to milk every night and morning. If wishes came

true, all the cows in the world would have gone dry long ago.

Misfits. But don't you say that [*slipping over to him, and pulling her ill-fitting blouse into better shape*]; what would the little folks do, and the sick uns, and them what can't eat meat?

Sleepy Slippers [*grabbing her by the shoulders*]. Little girl, you know you got a heart in your waste paper basket that would do honor to a philanthropy man who preaches against the lights and music of the streets.

Misfits [*laughing*]. It hain't the lights and the music that makes a girl go bad; it's the things she hain't got at home what the lights and the music help her to forget.

Sleepy Slippers. Beat it, Misfits, here comes a customer.

Slender Shoes [*wearing a long, narrow shoe that does not always fit, but the character of this lost individual is soon carved into the leather, outlining his soul. As he enters, slamming the door, he sees that he is blocked by the morning wash-up. He rubs his hands and calls to* Sleepy Slippers, *who is now trying to blow fire into the gas by cursing it*]. Give me a cup of coffee, Sleepy. Make it hot; dope it up a bit with ginger.

Sleepy Slippers. Go along; you bloats done took all the ginger what's to be had in town. Been buying it upon a margin, too.

Slender Shoes. Put pepper in it, then. [*Seeing* Misfits, *who enters through a rear door, carrying a stack of plates*] Hello, little Misfits! What are you doing here?

Misfits [*wearing a lace shoe of one color and length, and a button shoe of another*]. Well, I'm not here a-sponging off of Sleepy Slippers for my breakfast. I'se workin' for my board, I is.

Slender Shoes. Since when?

Misfits. I'm earnin' a respectable livin', I is. [*Sets her plates down on a long shelf behind the counter*] I ain't got no lawyer brother to fill my stomach with gin phizes — I got to work.

Slender Shoes. For yours?

Misfits. No, for what pa gets.

Slender Shoes. [*Though he has been out all night he is trim and neat, but, seeing a thread on his coat, he brushes it off, and deftly crosses over the wet floor to a table by the wall*] Loan me a dime, will you, kid?

Misfits. What's the joke? Is brother out of town?

Slender Shoes. Guess so. Something's

wrong. I went out there last night to bum my supper, and his wife threw the dish water in my face.

Misfits. She's a Kelly all right. What did you do?

Slender Shoes. Me, humph! I just walked around the corner to another mansion, old Red Top Boots', and goes up like a gentleman and calls for him. But he wasn't there either.

Misfits. Wasn't there [*sympathetically*]? And then what?

Slender Shoes. Well, you know, Red Top Boots and I were boys together, and his wife, Miss Toe Slipper, was a little neighbor girl. I loved the little neighbor girl, but Red Top never knew it — he married her.

Misfits. Wasn't that too bad?

Slender Shoes. A lucky thing for her. Well, when she heard my voice, she came right out and invited me in, but I was in no condition to make an impression, so I hesitated. My hesitation brought a piece of gold quickly to the light.

Misfits. Gee, what a find!

Slender Shoes. Well, you don't know how I wanted to bring it down to the boys, and give them a good old time.

Misfits [*disappointed*]. And you didn't?

Slender Shoes. No, it would have been different if it had been Red Top Boots, because he understands, but from her — no; I just thanked her all the same.

Misfits. You old piker. Catch me refusin' gold them old rich dames is throwin' to the birds. Now you are a-beggin' me for a drop — go along [*stumps out angrily*]

Down At The Heels [*gazing in through the glass in the door to ascertain the humor of the keepers and his chances for a breakfast, he sees* Slender Shoes *and takes courage. Crossing over to the table, he greets him like an old, old friend. He is fat, short, with his head sunk into his neck, and even though his face shows a remaining trace of youth, his blotchy skin denotes dissipation*]. Well, if here isn't old Slender Shoes; glad to meet you. Spose you are just going to work, eh? Now what's the name of the firm that employs you — Malt, Gin and Co, or Coke, Dope and Son?

Slender Shoes. I am in the embalming business just now. Have rediscovered the effects of myrrh of the old Egyptians, and I can put a lining in your stomach that will resist carbolic acid.

Down At The Heels. What a fortune you will make; better than an oil well in Oklahoma.

Slender Shoes. The trouble is my victims have no large sums of money. Desire is cheaper, so they satisfy that.

Chubby Toe [*slips in quietly and surveys the interior; seeing the two old friends, she comes waddling over to their table. Her foot is short and fat, and the pressure of the body with the thinness of the leather has made her foot look much like a horse's hoof. As she sits down a kind smile passes over the countenance of* Slender Shoes, *but one of annoyance over that of* Down At The Heels]. You old skunk [*addressing* Down At The Heels], you don't have to pay for my breakfast — I've got a dollar of my own.

Down At The Heels. You're lucky. Where did you make the sneak? You can pay for my sinkers, too.

Chubby Toe [*taking out a powder puff and small glass, she dashes a bit of powder on her nose*]. I have paid for too many of yours already. I'm through doing charity work, and I am going to start a bank account with my own surplus.

Misfits [*limping over to the table*]. Well, if

here ain't de bunch. Whose funeral is it today? I never sees you here dis hour in the mornin' 'cept-in' when yous been to a wake.

Chubby Toe. Rotten business, Misfits. Worse than a funeral, for then we gets some old clothing to wear or sell [*sizing up the cash in her pocket book*] Wouldn't that get your goat — a nickel and a penny?

Down at the Heels. Do you mind, Misfits, when we waked old man Sullivan — all the eats and drinks we had then?

Misfits. And it's me that does mind, for when the good Lord takes him, he takes the best friend on the levee.

Chubby Toe. Go along, you old blubbers — crying over old man Sullivan. I'd like to hit him one in his tea-kettle. Didn't he call me names long before I earned them?

Misfits. He was tryin' to reform you.

Chubby Toe. Say, Misfits, run into the dive next door and get me a whisky sour. Tell Slip Shod I'll hand him a piece tonight as I pass the door.

Slender Shoes. Misfits, put my order in too, and tell him I'll pay him my bill in a day or two.

Misfits. When you see your rich brother, I

'specks. [*All turn around to greet* High Heels *as she comes tripping in, all fluffy in her togs like the last petals on a June rose*]

Down At The Heels. Well, if here ain't High Heels. Been an age since I seen you. Thought you had moved to the other end of town with Mrs. Gout. There ain't many of us old pals left.

Slender Shoes [*gets her a chair*]. That is so, old girl; there are not many of us left.

High Heels [*sitting down*]. Not many of us left? To whom does us refer? There are lots of us left when you refer to them higher up, for I see them at every turn, it seems to me, displaying their wealth in some form or other. [*Putting her hand on the shoulder of* Slender Shoes] But for us, the ones that haven't made good — yes, it is only a few of us left. Most of us are in the potter's field.

Down At The Heels. Cut it out for heaven's sake.

Chubby Toe. Do you think I want to eat my breakfast with such reminiscences? I'm here because I'm here. I like a good friend, a good drink, and a good laugh. What do I care about your friends in Swelldom?

Slender Shoes. While this argument is on its way, suppose little Misfits trots in next door to see what she can find.

Misfits [*going on with her work, setting the chairs around the tables*]. I'm not helpin' with the liquor traffic, ladies and gents. I've been promised a place at the head of the procession when the women start their campaign "Vote the old town dry." [*She dances a step with a chair as she swings it into place*]

High Heels. Good God, Misfits! I pray that I'll be dead then. The men are all crazy now, but when the women get started I want to be softly sleeping in a bank of clay.

Slender Shoes. I don't see where you get that dope on the men. What, as a woman, have you offered to mankind? [*handing her a cup of coffee from the tray that* Sleepy Slippers has *just brought in*]

High Heels. What have I offered? What did I ever get to give? A drunken father, that beat the daylights out of my mother if she refused to give him the wash money, gave me a distaste for men when I was a kid.

Chubby Toe. I notice that you have been trying to get even with them ever since.

High Heels [*sarcastically*]. Like some other women I know, my vanity fooled me for a time.

Down At The Heels [*like a man*]. And a long time it's been, at that.

High Heels [*pulling her youth to the front*]. Some people never get old.

Chubby Toe. Not if they change towns often enough, but twenty-five years on one beat is a dead give-away.

Slender Shoes [*slipping his hand over and patting the hand of* High Heels]. Don't mind them, girl. We were kids together, pals in prosperous days, and old friends on the path of glory. Chubby Toe has the road before her yet — it is not such a happy one.

High Heels. Her heart is a heart of stone, and she'll get all that there is in the game. But when a woman's heart has been burned and seared and dried as mine, what is there left for a woman to do but the only thing that will make her forget?

Down At The Heels. Are you referring to your boy-and-girl affair with Slender Shoes?

Chubby Toe. Now don't rub it in.

High Heels. Yes, if we had been married when our love was at its height.

Slender Shoes. I was in no position to marry. What does a boy of eighteen —

High Heels. You were at your zenith as a clog dancer, and the world was at your feet.

Slender Shoes. If I had got a job then of driving team — or something worth while?

High Heels. It was worth while when you were called to dance before all the crowned heads of Europe. Ah, the night you went away — the whole town with a brass band was there to see you off.

Slender Shoes. And you kissed me the last — even after my mother.

High Heels [*in an appealing voice*]. Ah, you do remember? I have never forgotten the thrill. In all these years it has been the one memory that stands out above all the others.

Chubby Toe. Even if you have *long* ceased to be thrilled.

High Heels. Shut up, Chubby Toe; I am serious.

Down At The Heels. I had a thrill once, but the winds took it —

Chubby Toe. What does a man know about a thrill?

High Heels. You can laugh all you want to.

We women who are nobody,— and we women who are — are one and the same. We want the love in a home, of little children, of a husband —

Chubby Toe. But for the prank of a foolish day?

Slender Shoes. You pay, you pay.

Down At The Heels. Better than the harder road through life.

Chubby Toe. The next time I falls into a crowd for my eats, I hope it won't be a dead one. I want a real, live song to cheer me up; I got enough of them thoughts right down here. [*Slaps her hand over her heart*]

Down At The Heels. Gee! and not a sou in in the crowd to buy a drink to drown them thoughts down there, either.

Slender Shoes [*rising and leaning on the back of the chair of* High Heels]. I must be on my way, friends.

High Heels. And where?

Slender Shoes. Think I'll go out to my brother's, and make one last appeal for mother's clock.

Down At The Heels. Why this sentimental journey so early in the morning?

High Heels. You see what a man I could

have made of him with all the history of years behind him?

Chubby Toe. That wouldn't bear printing.

High Heels [*continuing*]. You see there is left a trace of feeling — his mother's clock. [*Begins to sob*]

Slender Shoes. It is the only thing that's left.

High Heels. Are you going to give it to me as a peace offering?

Chubby Toe. 'Fess up now, Slender Shoes.

Slender Shoes. If you wait here long enough, I'll bring you the result.

Down At The Heels. What, a good jag?

Slender Shoes. No, the last remnant of a heart string.

High Heels. How?

Slender Shoes. I'll have nothing else to pawn.

High Heels. Don't jest [*rising*]. Do you want the spirit of your mother to haunt you?

Slender Shoes. Well, I'll drown the haunt good and plenty — if I have enough.

Down At The Heels. Don't I come in on that?

SLENDER SHOES. Hope we don't have to share it with many more.

HIGH HEELS. No, Slender Shoes, if you and I had only married when our love was bursting the heart strings, mother's clock would have been sitting on our mantel.

CHUBBY TOE [*looking at the far-away stare in the eyes of* SLENDER SHOES]. More mush.

SLENDER SHOES. The torch bearer is off, then. [*Steps toward the door*]

DOWN AT THE HEELS. Bring us good tidings then, brother. [SLENDER SHOES *nods; goes out*]

CHUBBY TOE. He was a fine old brother — twenty years ago.

HIGH HEELS [*rising*]. Twenty years ago! The value of the human pawn shop goes down with age, but wine — What are we going to talk about tomorrow morning, comrades?

CHUBBY TOE. Why High Heels is always late. [*They go out*]

SLEEPY SLIPPERS. [MISFITS *has just come in with another stack of plates*] I suppose that is to be charged to Slender Shoes, too.

MISFITS. Sure, his rich brother don't care. When the boss sends the bill in, a check comes by return mail, and do you know cause why?

Sleepy Slippers. Cannot guess, for many brothers ain't like that.

Misfits [*dashing out in front*]. Cause when Slender Shoes' mother was a dyin'— he's her baby boy — she made the lawyer boy promise to share his last penny with his brother.

Sleepy Slippers. I hain't got no chicken heart in me like that.

Misfits. You ain't? You hain't got no little brothers and sisters, then.

Sleepy Slippers. Cut it out, cut it out. Let's quit the job and take to the farm while the quitting's good.

Misfits. What would I do there?

Sleepy Slippers. Don't you know? Don't you — you'd be my wife.

Misfits. Your wife? Gee! that sounds good.

Sleepy Slippers. Sure we'll go back to dad — to the flowers and the birds.

Misfits. To the miles and miles of corn stalks what needs a-plowin'?

Sleepy Slippers. That ain't no joke. But you would be there, Misfits, and life would be different then.

Misfits [*shaking her head*]. Life *would* be different then.

SLEEPY SLIPPERS [*taking her in his arms*]. Say it, little one; say you will come.

MISFITS. It is like a stab in my heart to say it — but I can't. Ma's got eight little ones, with me as the oldest, and I couldn't let them starve. I've *got* to help ma.

SLEEPY SLIPPERS. You are the first gal I ever asked.

MISFITS. I likes the compliment. To have a man like you lovin' me, makes me glad right here [*strikes her side*], but —

SLEEPY SLIPPERS. Ain't you going to say yes?

MISFITS [*silent for a moment*]. It hurts, it hurts.

SLEEPY SLIPPERS [*hearing the boss calling*]. Say yes, and I'll tell him to take the fiery trail. You will, if you love me.

MISFITS. Yes, my boy, but when a feller has got eight children to feed he hain't got no right to be talkin' of love.

SLEEPY SLIPPERS [*hears the boss calling again*]. And you turns me down? [*Looks at her for a moment rather dejectedly, then stalks out*]

MISFITS [*alone, thinking*]. When they are all big and got homes of their own — where will my home be?

CURTAIN

# A WILL-O'-WISP

A ONE-ACT PLAY

## CHARACTERS

STRANGER, a father in search of his son.
PATRICK BRADY, a farmer
MRS. BRADY, his wife
MARY BRADY, their daughter
MIKE HENNESY, a farm-hand
SAM, PATSY } sons

*Scene: The kitchen of an old farm house in eastern New York, with the heavy beams of the ceiling crossing and crisscrossing. To the right is situated a fireplace, where a spreading flame sends forth a cheerful flicker of light upon the old brass and copper utensils hanging about. At the back are some low Dutch windows, before which stand the kitchen table and an old-fashioned cupboard. To the left of the room is a dining table, with several old hand-made chairs, sitting against the wall. The supper is being cooked in a pot, hanging on a crane in the fireplace. A terrific storm is raging without.* MARY BRADY, *who was to have been married today, is getting supper for the family and her future husband. All is quiet for the moment, as the curtain goes up; then* MARY *bursts out in song, as she goes about her work.*

MIKE HENNESY [*enters with a pail of milk*]. Sure and it's raining a bit this night, darling Mary.

MARY. I know it is that, Mike. Good it is we didn't walk over to Father Malone's to get

married this morning. It's no luck to the bride if it rains on her.

MIKE. Luck or no luck, rain or no rain, and divil a bit I care just so you are mine. [*Stoops over to kiss her, as he spills the milk on her dress*]

MARY [*with anger*]. See now, what you be a doing? My good frock at that. [*Taking the bucket, she sets it on the table and arranges the pans. While* MIKE *is talking she pours the milk into them*]

MIKE. I'll be buying you a fine dress, Mary, when I go to Hudson next week. What kind will you have, a rose-colored one or a black — like mother wears?

MARY. Faith and I have never seen your mother — what would I be knowing what she wears?

MIKE [*with all good nature*]. Ah, she wears a frill about her neck, Mary. She is just like a little angel, my little mother. I wish you could see her as I do now. [*His face softens*] Won't she be happy when she gets my letter telling her about me marrying my master's daughter? She will be proud of her lad, she will.

MARY [*turns preparatory to handing him the*

*pail*]. And it is proud your Mary will be, too, Mike. You are the finest lad in the land here about.

MIKE [*grabbing the pail with one hand, he squeezes her with his right arm and hurries out*]. It does me good to hear you say that, Love.

MARY [*to herself*]. It does me good to be saying it myself. [*Turns*] He is a fine lad — he is that.

MRS. BRADY. [*A woman, stout in figure, turning grey about the temples, with a florid face, and seeming to have all the character and energy of the family, enters*] We will have supper in the kitchen tonight, Mary. It is cold and damp in the living room and the wood is too wet to burn in the stove.

MARY. The rain has spoiled everything today.

MRS. BRADY. You are not disappointed a bit, are you, that father couldn't spare the horses to take you to your wedding?

MARY [*stirring the contents in the pot in the fireplace*]. No, I am used to waiting. I 'spose if one of us should die, the funeral would have to be put off a day if it was the day dad had to take the milk to the boat.

Mrs. Brady. It would be a great loss to have all that milk sour on us. [*Begins to set the table*]

Mary. A day more or less matters little to you when you are dead, I reckon.

Mrs. Brady. When a man is in business, business must be first.

Mary. It's poor business when you can't take time to get married on.

Mr. Brady [*enters before the last sentence is finished*]. The rain would never have stopped me from getting married on my wedding day. [*Shakes a long finger at the mother, while his tall muscular figure shows in its pose the lack of decision and love of work*] Change your name three times, my girl, and you will never need enter the kingdom of heaven — you can go to Ireland, my own country.

Mrs. Brady. The grog has gone to your head, Patrick. Why didn't you stay in bed when I put you there?

Mr. Brady. You 'ave put me there too often already, mother. Why should a man get put to bed when he has just taken a drop too much?

Mary. Husbands must be learnt, father [*with a short accent on the a*].

Mr. Brady. Your mother has been learning me all me life, daughter [*hanging up his coat and lantern by the fireplace*]. I'd like to be a lad with the other lads down by the wharf. It does a man good to get where he can hear a good tale once in a while, just to get a whiff of the salt air once more. [*His eyes snapping*] Then to see a good fight, eh?

Mrs. Brady. Pat, will you never get away from the drunks? If it wa'n't for me we'd be in the poorhouse. It's me that keeps soul and body together here. I'd be well fed if you put as much in my stomach as you put in the till of the tavern.

Mr. Brady. Who's better fed than you, I'd like to know — not even the pigs.

Mary. [*A great gust of wind blows the door open*] I would hate to be a lone traveler on the road tonight.

Mrs. Brady. Let's pray that there is none to meet such a night in his walks.

Mr. Brady [*while he is trying to shut the door, it is thrust open again, as his two sons enter*]. I'm mighty glad you are home, lads. You are soaked through. Didn't you get a lift from town at all?

Patsy [*looking at* Sam, *who is as drenched as*

*he*]. Who would give us a lift, when there is no one out this cursed night but fools?

Sam. We be the fools then. I told Patsy to stay in town tonight, but he didn't know who would be doing the milking, thinking sister might be gone on a honeymoon.

Mrs. Brady. And when did you ever do so much thinking about the milking before?

Mary. Where's the chance to get away on a honeymoon here, I'd like to know? Mother couldn't get along without someone to help her. Who is helping Mike milk eighty cows out there?

Mr. Brady. I never was fond of running a milk dairy, and above all when it is raining cats and dogs on the roof.

Patsy. What would you rather be running than a dairy? [*hanging his coat behind the hearth to dry*]

Sam. A sausage factory or a broom works?

Mr. Brady [*ignoring their remarks*]. Who did you see at the river? Was Mike Casey there to have a game with me, as usual?

Patsy. No, he was there to get his fill of grog — as usual.

Mrs. Brady. It's the likes of you two that I

have had to bother me all my life. Sit down to your supper and eat your fill.

MARY [*carrying the steaming vegetables to the table with the aid of her apron*]. It's hot — sure I'll drop them.

MRS. BRADY [*watches* MARY *as she carries the things to the table, then ceasing to stare, exclaims*]. My God, Mary!

MARY [*unconscious of her mother's discovery, still holds her apron in her hands after finishing*]. What have I done now? [MRS. BRADY *runs out of the room*] Mother has gone wrong, too.

MR. BRADY. Where's Mike?

PATSY. Isn't he on a holiday?

SAM. Father didn't give him one — not even to get married on.

MARY [*standing quietly by the kitchen table*]. We couldn't walk five miles in this weather to get married. We didn't want to miss the chance to put on holiday dress.

PATSY. Dad never expects a hired man to put on dress-up clothes.

MR. BRADY. When do I ever get a chance to put on dress-up clothes?

SAM. You have had a bit of a holiday today.

You were three hours late getting home with the milk wagon, and mother here a-swearing because she would be late washing the milk bottles. Then we had to go after you.

MIKE [*enters hastily, leading a stranger*]. Here, Mr. Brady, is a lost man. He is asking to sleep in the barn.

MR. BRADY. Sit you down, sir. Here by our fireside you are welcome. There's plenty of room in the house. Make a place for him at the table, Mary.

MARY [*coming with service, smiles kindly at the old man*]. It's welcome you are here, sir. [*While* MIKE *is taking his place at the table*] There is a bad storm out tonight.

STRANGER [*taking his seat at the table*]. I didn't think I'd have such good luck tonight. For an hour I have looked far and near for shelter, and I began to fear the people in these parts lived up in the trees.

PATSY. If it is luck it is you are looking for, you better not be abiding in this house.

MR. BRADY. And why not? If it's anything like lightning, it's apt to strike us any time. Have you come afar, stranger?

STRANGER. Yes, your lordship, I came up this

morning on the boat from beyond in the Catskills.

MR. BRADY. Are you looking for work, I would like to ask?

STRANGER. No, I am looking for a good cow. I heard up hereabouts a man could buy them cheap.

SAM. Yes, father has a lot of worn-out devils he'd like to sell you. [MIKE *is eyeing* MARY *all the while as she sits by the fireside, knitting*]

STRANGER. I have a lot of the likes of them at home.

MR. BRADY. Give us some more tea, Mary. Wait on Mike there; he is starving to death.

MARY [*coming over with the tea-pot, she fills the cups as she circles the table*]. You know he will ask for it when it is not where it is to be seen, can't you, Mike?

MIKE. Sure I can, Mary, but I'd rather be seeing you any day.

PATSY. It's a good thing someone is glad to see you, hey, sis? If our scullery-maid ever leaves the family, heavens knows what will become of us.

MARY. I don't think I'll be leaving you soon, brother — mother needs me.

MR. BRADY. You'll be leaving her awhile with us yet, won't you, Mike?

MIKE. And we haven't talked about the doings of the morrow as yet, have we, Mary girl?

STRANGER. It does no good anyway. Sometimes it is better not to decide yourself — older heads know better.

SAM. Sure they do, even if they are boneheads.

MR. BRADY [*moving away from the table*]. Take a seat by the fire, stranger. Fill your pipe and make yourself to home while me and the boys goes out to finish up. [SAM *and* PATSY *go out*]

MIKE [*going over to* MARY]. I won't be long, Mary. You'll be looking for me, won't you, gal? [*She gives him a sly glance, as she starts to clear off the table*]

MR. BRADY [*who has been lighting his lantern*]. This is a fine shower for the grass and growing things. The earth was good and thirsty. [*To* MIKE] Come, let's be off, boy.

MIKE. The ground will be too soaked to be a-plowing in the morning. I can help you with your washing, Mary [*closing the door behind him*]

MARY [*clearing the dining table, she carries the things over to the kitchen table. Then she looks in a bewildering manner at the stranger, not knowing what to say*]. You have walked a long way today, man, have you not?

STRANGER. Yes, miss, it is a long way to come.

MARY. You said you came part way on the river.

STRANGER. Yes, but a river is no place to find a cow, unless a dead one.

MARY. And you don't want a dead one, I'm sure.

STRANGER. You do not know where a body could find a cow hereabout, cheap like?

MARY. No, sir, because my father would have bought it up if it was for sale cheap.

STRANGER. They are precious animals these days. Worth more than our wives, and I am sure they have better care.

MARY [*thinking he is referring to her*]. It's not such hard work to do, anyway. [*Her youth and health beam forth from the twist of her shoulders*]

STRANGER. And you are married, are you, Miss?

MARY. I was to be today, sir, but it was too far to walk in the storm.

STRANGER [*turning around in astonishment*]. And so this was to be your wedding day?

MARY. Yes, your honor.

STRANGER. Do me no honor, I'm just poor

folk. But why delay your singing and the wedding supper?

MARY [*casting her eyes to the ground*]. Father is too busy in the dairy to spare the horses, and mother is too busy in the kitchen to spare me.

STRANGER. I see. You are bound just like the slaves. In this land of milk and honey, man is no better than a dog. In Ireland you are worth enough to stop a day for, anyway.

MARY. Yes, I know, but the cows have to be milked; the milk has to be shipped to New York, or else the babies would be without their bottles. I'd rather work than have a baby starve.

STRANGER. So would I. It is nice of you to think of it in that way. I'm sorry, Miss, I said anything. Forgive me. [*Shakes his hand in a forgiving manner*]

MARY. Yes, stranger, you are quite forgiven.

STRANGER. I can smell the honeysuckle now. It makes the home a place worth going back to, and I feel sorry for the man that has no flower in his yard, as I do for the babies that have no milk.

MARY. So you have honeysuckles a-growing in your garden. But there are men who have flowers growing in their hearts — they need no yard to grow them in.

Mrs. Brady [*enters abruptly and stares first at the* Stranger, *then at* Mary]. It's a fine pair you are. [*To the* Stranger] What are you doing here?

Stranger [Mary *turns to hide her embarrassment in her dishes*]. The gintleman told me to abide here until he came back.

Mrs. Brady. You are a fine couple to stand at the head of a corpse. You come here a-making love to my gal, the likes of you.

Mary. Mother, this is a stranger.

Mrs. Brady. I know you, Miss, now. You are not a drop of my own body. Carry your shame with you. Get you gone out of me house before I brand you.

Mary [*covering her face with her hands*]. Mother!

Stranger. I'll go, madam; do not blame the girl.

Mrs. Brady. Blame you then, I suppose. You are the father of her child.

Stranger. Child! What child? Has she a child?

Mrs. Brady. She soon will have. No wonder she wants to get married to poor Mike to cover up her disgrace.

MARY. Mother, mother, forgive me. [*Stretching out her arms to her mother*]

MRS. BRADY. Go to the priest; pray with him, but the likes of you can never stay in my house.

STRANGER. If you are her mother, can you not help her to hide her shame?

MRS. BRADY. What! Me! No, I'm not a low-bred woman. I'll not house a strumpet, if she is my own daughter.

MARY [*regaining herself, draws her shoulders up defiantly*]. I'm not a strumpet — take that back. I've worked here like a dog ever since I was a little child. I have had no chance to go to school; I never could go out on Sundays like other girls; I have known nothing but the kitchen for years; I never get to town but once in twelve months.

MRS. BRADY. What more do I get?

MARY. But I am not calling you names. I have done wrong, but I am sorry. [*Sobs*] Will you not forgive me?

MRS. BRADY. Sorry you were when you tried to marry a nice boy, and here comes this old scoundrel back just in time to tell Mike what you are.

STRANGER. My God, woman; let the girl be! I know her not. Before my God I swear it.

[Mrs. Brady *gives him a look of contempt and goes out*]

Mary. Forgive my mother, Stranger. I did wrong to promise to marry Mike, but my lad said he would come back for me, and when he never came and Mike said we would be married, I just thought God made it that way to bless me — and to bless my babe.

Stranger [*in a weeping voice*]. And he came not.

Mary [*weeping and leaning against the table*]. No.

Stranger. And what think you to be a-doing now, my lass?

Mary. That I know not. You be after saying that you are from beyond by the Catskills. Perhaps if I went there I could find the father.

Stranger. What good would that be a-doing? It's a bad man he is or he never would have left you.

Mary. He doesn't know. He was only a stranger, passing by.

Stranger [*turning around to eye her*]. Sure and I am in a fair way to get the blame myself then.

Mary. But he said he came from your coun-

try. If I could see him and tell him how I love him, perhaps it would melt his heart, if he loved me not afore.

STRANGER. They are a bad lot down my way. There's my son, and he is the worst of them all. His mother would not sleep at nights till I went out to look him up, far and near over the hills — and here I am.

MARY. But you said you were looking for a cow.

STRANGER. So I did. But if I told anybody I was looking for that lad, I'd be asked to pay his debts, and it's poor I am now paying up what he owes.

MARY [*going over to him*]. It is troubles, too, you have then. It is all trouble in this world, it seems.

STRANGER. No, lassie. The dew sparkles on the clover, and the rain waters the rose whether we have our troubles or not. Cheer up. [*Wipes his tear-stained glasses*]

MARY [*in better spirits*]. Is it a fine lad you have, stranger?

STRANGER. A finer bairn you never saw. He is like the slender aspen that bows and croons as if sugar wouldn't melt in his mouth. He's ready

with a story and a good answer, and all the girls run after him, as if he was the lord of the castle beyond.

MARY. It is fine to have such a boy. The likes of him his mother must be proud of.

STRANGER. She could not sleep these nights, or I wouldn't be walking over the country roads looking for his body. For if he has a spell of drinking on him I'm apt to find him in any ditch.

MARY. God save him!

MRS. BRADY [*just entering*]. And is here you are yet? No dishes washed. [*Begins to pack them up*]. Let me at them myself, you lazy hussy.

STRANGER. She has been talking to me, your ladyship. I am feeling sorry for her.

MRS. BRADY. Sorry you are for her! Take her off then to your own kin. Perhaps they are the likes of her.

MARY. Don't talk that way to the poor man. [*Begins to sob*] I have no knowing of him at all. If you like, I'll go to the river and drown myself.

STRANGER. Save yourself, child. There you will find yourself a heap sight worse off.

MARY. I am in a terrible plight. May God take pity on me.

MR. BRADY [*entering with* SAM, PATSY *and*

MIKE]. Now, mother, we are ready for a bit of fun tonight — I've promised Mike to drive him and Mary over to the Father's tomorrow.

MRS. BRADY. Better with the likes of him there that came to claim her. It's to him she belongs.

STRANGER [*rising and returning the gaze of the men*]. It is a sad plight I am in. Your lady is accusing me of being an ungodly man, and before God I swear I never saw your daughter before.

MR. BRADY. And why should she accuse you?

MARY [*runs and throws herself into* MIKE'S *arms*]. Save me, Mike. They will kill me by their talking.

MRS. BRADY. God forgive me, Patrick, but our daughter has been making a fool of us. Meeting this man here until she is with child with him.

MIKE [*thrusting* MARY *aside*]. What are you saying, Mrs. Brady? This man came a stranger tonight, asking a bed in the barn.

MR. BRADY. And I asked him into the house to sleep in the best bed — gave him a place at my table. [*His large figure swaying with emotion*]

MRS. BRADY. Ask Mary — she will not deny it.

MIKE [*shaking* MARY *with impatience*]. No, no, Mary, you will deny it; you can deny it.

PATSY. I dare any of you to accuse my sister.

SAM. She is the best girl in the world hereabouts. [*Going over to her*] Mary, you are not afraid — I will stand by you. Reel it off.

STRANGER. I will leave it to the lass, she never saw me before until tonight.

MARY. What you say is true — all true; I never saw this man until tonight.

MRS. BRADY. Who is it then?

MIKE. Speak, Mary, speak darling. It is not so. This was to be our wedding day. There is no truth in the other.

MR. BRADY. Come, let's not dilly-dally longer.

MIKE [*holding her gently*]. It is not true, is it, Mary?

MARY. Yes, Mike, it is all true. I have deceived you — I have deceived them, and I was going on to deceive you some more, but mother — she found me out and told you. I ask pity from you, Mike.

MIKE [*throwing her from him*]. Out with you — you hussy. It is a fine wedding day for me. [*Looking at the* STRANGER] Take her if it is your kind she is after. A bed of straw and the cow barn for you — to the depths of the sea with you. [*Runs out*]

STRANGER. Sorry I am to bring all this trou-

ble on the family. I'll be out into the night myself and find some place to sleep.

MARY. Oh, do not go without me.

MRS. BRADY. And now you want to be leaving her, too.

SAM. Mary, sister, tell us before the rest of them is gone. I'll ram my fist down his throat. I'm aching —

MARY. Oh, Sam — I — I cannot.

STRANGER. Mary, if it is a home you want, you kin have it. I have a hut and a few acres, and my lad's mother will be a good mother to you. We will never throw you in the ditch because you do not know his name.

MR. BRADY. It's a slick way you have, man, of proving yourself innocent.

PATSY. Mary, if you don't tell us his name I'll murder this man, old as he is, and may God forgive me.

MARY. He — the stranger? So was my lad a stranger, and all I know was that his name was Willie O'Hara — that lived beyond in the Catskills.

STRANGER. Willie O'Hara. That's my own lad, the skalawag. Cheat the divil of his soul anyway. He has caused me all this trouble to-

night, as if I hadn't had twenty long years of it already.

MRS. BRADY [*wiping the last of her pots*]. And sure she is hard up to be taking up and harboring strangers. Father, I will none of her or her brats about this house.

SAM. She is our sister, dad.

MR. BRADY. Mary — you may stay if you like. Your dad will stick to you.

MARY. No, I have no place in this house any longer.

MRS. BRADY. Let her go make her bed with the likes of her.

MARY [*putting a shawl about her head, she walks over and takes the* STRANGER'S *hand*]. If you believe in me, take me — to him.

STRANGER. 'Tis a pity God himself cannot take you before I take you back to Willie O'Hara. [*They go out into the night*]

CURTAIN

# RIPENING WHEAT

A ONE-ACT PLAY

## CHARACTERS

JOHN MENTON, 39 years old, a farmer
ALICE, 45 years old, his wife
FRANK SAWYER, 56 years old, a neighbor
MATTIE, 22 years old, his wife

*The room is low and narrow, with a long window across the south wall to let in all the warmth and sunlight that is to be enjoyed during the long winters of western Canada. It is now June, and the windows, through which the great wheat fields can be seen for miles in one stretch of dark green, are pushed back. The room comprises the living-room and kitchen, so necessary where fuel is to be considered during the cold weather. To the right is a cook stove; to the back, below the windows is a long table; in the corner stands an old English sideboard, to the right of which is a door leading to a pantry. To the left is a drop-leaf table, standing by the side of the wall; several chairs are placed at regular intervals by the wall. Two old-fashioned but comfortable rocking chairs with red cushions are sitting in the middle of the room. As the curtain goes up there is no one on the stage, but after a moment* JOHN MENTON *and* MATTIE SAWYER *come in together, having been to church.*

JOHN. Take off your hat and shawl, Mattie; make yourself at home. I'll have a fire made 'fore Alice and Frank get here.

MATTIE. They are for stoppin' always at the barn to look at the calves. What can a body see in a cow to admire, now just tell me?

JOHN. I don't be a caring as long as I got you.

MATTIE [*with her Cockney drawl*]. 'Ow should anybody be a carin' for cattle when they got people to love?

JOHN. I use to think a great deal about them until you came.

MATTIE. [*Tall and slender as a blade of grass, with youth beaming forth from every look and gesture, she hangs her shawl and hat upon a nail, and then runs her fingers through her soft, yellow hair*] You ain't got me all the time, that's what's worryin' me.

JOHN [*studying*]. Things are one-sided in this world — mine has always been so.

MATTIE. Mine has been lop-sided from the very beginning.

JOHN. If I had only tried to right them, but I just let things drift along too long before I knew just where I was at.

MATTIE. What's done can't be 'elped, and if I 'ad stayed in London, you never would 'ave found me.

JOHN [*with the tan of spring plowing and sow-*

*ing still on his face, is dressed in his Sunday clothes, bought some ten years before. There is kindness as well as character, gained through privation, well marked on his features as he stands looking at* MATTIE]. Yes, that is so; in London I never would have found you.

MATTIE. Just think, I've only known you two months.

JOHN. [*Goes over to her by the pantry door*] Mattie, Mattie! do you understand me — my love?

MATTIE. Be off with you and do your feedin' 'fore they get 'ere. I'll meet you tomorrow where the road branches off to McKeever's.

JOHN. I cannot wait until then to have you tell me — Mattie!

SAWYER [*appears in the doorway as the last word is spoken. He stops, and* MATTIE, *facing him, wards off* JOHN's *approach by the changed look in her face*]. Is it here you are without a fire laid?

JOHN [*going into the pantry, knocks a lot of pans down in his confusion*]. Alice is such a fine housekeeper that one can never lay his hands on a thing that's wanted.

SAWYER. What's wanting, John?

JOHN. [MATTIE *is taking down* ALICE's *apron*

*to help prepare dinner*] The kindling. I cannot find a shaving.

SAWYER [*going to the basket behind the stove*]. Here's a plenty.

JOHN [*in surprise and disgust*]. Oh?

SAWYER [*takes a bit and begins to lay the fire himself*]. You're a bit nervous, lad. Let me do it.

MATTIE [*in a storming rage*]. You are a fine guest comin' 'ere to put a man hout of 'is wits, and not lettin' 'm do 'is own chores. Out wid you, let Mr. Menton himself —

SAWYER [*standing erect and facing her, with shavings in his hands*]. I have had enough of this now, Mattie. What's come over you the last month? There is no living with you any more.

MATTIE. [JOHN *is lighting the fire*] Matter enough; when you married me why didn't you tell me of what was expectin' of me?

SAWYER. So I did.

MATTIE. No, there were no words of 'ouse-work, milkin', feedin' stock and the likes no woman ever 'eard of in Hingland.

SAWYER. I told you of my great wheat fields.

MATTIE That's just hit. You was full of the wind sweepin' the grain like waves of the ocean,

and the gold field that called forth the man of life within you when your harvest was on.

SAWYER. And you'll see it all, Mattie, when the wheat is growing and ripening. Now she is but a green carpet, covering the old, brown earth.

MATTIE. But she doesn't come in and do my work. You are makin' a slave of me instead of the lidy I ought to be. [JOHN *coughs and goes out*]

SAWYER. The lady you ought to be. Sure I took you out of the slums of London, out of where the rats even refused to live, and brought you out here — where life is wholesome and sweet.

MATTIE. You said I would be a lily in the wheat fields.

SAWYER. So you are, lass.

MATTIE. No, I am not [*standing in pantry door with pan in hand*], rather a —

SAWYER [*walking back and forth across the floor*]. It is hard work transplanting plants from one soil to another, and I 'spose I did make a mistake bringing you out here.

MATTIE. I likes the soil all right, but what is there in the world for me now? I can see just what I am to do every day for the next forty years. Day in and day out it will be —

SAWYER. Isn't it a fine work then we will do? In twenty years we will be the greatest land owners in miles about.

MATTIE. You can 'ave the land, but what I wants is life — life. [*Looking about*] I cannot find a potato in the 'ouse.

SAWYER. Let me go to the cave and get some.

MATTIE. No, I wants to go myself. [*Goes out carrying pan*]

SAWYER [*still pacing the floor*]. You cannot make wheat grow in a worn-out soil, and you cannot make a girl love an old man. [*Stands wringing his hands*]

ALICE MENTON [*comes in at the door. She has a strong face, somewhat hard, made so by the long years of pioneer life. There are traces of her former beauty in the outline of her features, although the wind and weather on the prairie have taken all the softness out of her skin*]. I'm not much of a neighbor when I leave your wife to get dinner, but I was worried about that sick calf.

SAWYER. She don't mind a bit, Alice. She —

ALICE. No, no; don't tell me that. She's but a girl yet, and it is no easy work to settle down to this rough life.

SAWYER. Yes, I know. But I was in the hopes

she would like it. I have been trying to make things as easy as I could. I —

ALICE. It killed your first wife. For ten years I watched her growing sadder and sadder 'fore she took to her bed. [*Goes into room on the left to lay her hat and shawl away*]

SAWYER. And the five years she was bed-ridden you was mighty good to her. [*Sits down in a rocker*]

ALICE. I just tried to be a good neighbor, man. [*Begins setting the table*]

SAWYER. You were that. I always wanted to repay you in some way.

ALICE [*coming over to him*]. Repay me? Repay. I told you oft that I asked but one thing in return.

SAWYER [*impatiently*]. Yes, yes. I know.

ALICE [*waiting; after a moment's pause*]. Did you see her when you was in London?

SAWYER [*trying to evade answer*]. Mattie went to get some potatoes.

ALICE. I have waited and waited for you to tell me. You said as soon as you got to London you'd hunt up my little one, my child, and tell me about her.

SAWYER. Yes?

ALICE [*in an agonized manner*]. But where was she? Would I —

SAWYER. She'd be no disgrace to you.

ALICE [*stretching out her arms to him*]. You did see her, then?

SAWYER [*crosses his legs, and looks as if he were being cross-examined. Biting his lips, nods in answer*]

ALICE. What was she doing, what is she like?

SAWYER. I will tell you some other time, Alice; I cannot tell you now.

ALICE. Then I would be ashamed of her. 'Tis me to blame. I deserted her, left her in a foundlings' home.

SAWYER. Alice, you are a good woman; you have been kind to every neighbor for miles around here.

ALICE [*with a silencing hand*]. No, no; I have been punished in my silence.

SAWYER. But I cannot understand how you could desert a little child — your own child. It doesn't seem like you.

ALICE [*throwing her hands to her eyes*]. No, no, don't.

SAWYER. Perhaps I have no right to judge.

ALICE. I met John then, and I dared not tell

him. He was young, handsome, and the girls were all after him.

SAWYER. He loved you.

ALICE. No, I loved him, and I urged him to go out to Canada where I could have him all to myself.

SAWYER. He would have forgave you.

ALICE. No, no, Frank Sawyer; I tried it on him several times by putting my story in other women's hearts, and he listened with no sympathy whatever.

SAWYER. Ah, John always seemed a kind, good man.

ALICE. So he is, but he never would have forgave me for deceiving him. He —

SAWYER. Neither will God.

ALICE. Don't say that, Sawyer. God is merciful. I had been deceived by the child's father, and how could I support a child on five bob a week? But I always intended to do the right thing by the little one until I met John.

SAWYER. He would have helped you.

ALICE. I loved him too much. I couldn't bear to see him a lovin' anybody else.

SAWYER. Not even your own child?

ALICE [*slowly*]. Not even my own child.

SAWYER [*thoughtfully*]. Queer?

ALICE. No, you cannot understand. John being younger than myself, with a girl around growing up into womanhood it may have made him like her —

SAWYER. Like his own daughter.

ALICE. I was afraid of even that. I could not share John's love with even my own child.

SAWYER. But —

ALICE. Tell me of her. What is she like, what is she doing? Is she a fine lass?

SAWYER. She is.

ALICE [*waiting*]. And?

SAWYER. She? Why —

ALICE [*clenching her hands*]. Yes!

SAWYER. [MATTIE's *voice is heard as she comes down the path singing a refrain from an old English ballad*] Mattie is coming; she'll hear you. [*As she passes the window, with wind-tossed hair, her youth is all aglow*] She is a fine lass that.

ALICE [*to* MATTIE]. Your husband is here doting on you.

MATTIE. There won't be much left to dote on after a woman 'as been out 'ere a year. In two months my skin is like a piece of old leather.

SAWYER. Yes, it even hurts my poor lass to laugh.

MATTIE. Mr. Menton is troubled about the sick calf, Frank, and wants you to come out and 'elp 'im.

ALICE. I am afraid we are going to lose that little heifer, and them so scarce these days.

SAWYER. I'll go and see what I can do. [*Goes out*]

MATTIE. Sure a calf, more or less, in these parts don't matter.

ALICE. Oh, yes, it does matter, my girl. Every little one means a hundred dollars in a year. That's good interest on a small investment.

MATTIE. What do I care about the hinterest? It's a 'undred dollars taken out of my life's blood, and more —

ALICE. Don't say that, child. In twenty years you'll be rich enough to go into Calgary and buy a nice home, and be at ease the rest of your life.

MATTIE [*dropping the knife into the pan of potatoes with a thud*]. Twenty years! Twenty years did you say?

ALICE. Yes.

MATTIE. Give twenty years of life slavin' and starvin' to 'ave money to retire on? What am I goin' to 'ave now — now that I 'ave my youth? My very heart is beatin' my sides now to get free.

ALICE. To get free! Mattie, you don't mean —

MATTIE. Yes, I mean that I would rather go to jail or die than endure this life any longer.

ALICE. You have a good husband; he's had such a hard pull of it for years. Now with you he is just getting on his feet.

MATTIE. 'E'll not make a beast of burden of me [*with a thoughtful stare*], carryin' slop to the pigs, sucklin' the calves, drivin' the plow from sun-up to sun-down.

ALICE. That's what I have done for more than fifteen years, Mattie, and now see what John and I have got — something for our old age. But I cannot let the little thing die, I must go and see if I can help, too. [*Goes out*]

MATTIE [*alone*]. What John and I 'ave, what John and I 'ave. [*Sees* JOHN *coming past the window*] What's the matter?

JOHN. Nothing, lass. I want to get some hot water.

MATTIE. Alice 's just been talkin' to me about

'ow 'ard she 'as worked for what you and she 'ave. Perhaps —

JOHN. Perhaps nothing. You are not going back on your word. We'll out of it all, and go where we can have one another. What more do we want?

MATTIE [*obedient*]. Nothin', John, nothin'.

JOHN. Well, then let her do the worrying. She's driven me like a horse ever since I married her. I was a mere lad, and knew nothing of love. She told me that I loved her, but when I met you, lass, then I knew for the first time what love was.

MATTIE. 'Tis the love of my dreams all come real.

JOHN. Year after year as I plowed the fields and sowed the grain I saw you always a little ahead of me in the furrow. I use to call to you to stop; didn't you ever hear me?

MATTIE. Yes, John, I heard you, but I was far across the waters.

JOHN [*throwing his arms about her, he buries his face against hers*]. Oh, my love, my love!

ALICE [*is seen looking through the window. She comes in with a mad rush, grabbing* JOHN's *sleeve*]. What do you mean? What —

JOHN. Alice!

ALICE [*going at* MATTIE]. You hypocrite, out of here! Why do you come here and steal my husband?

JOHN [*standing between them, extending a protecting arm to* MATTIE]. Alice, it is my doing; blame me.

ALICE. You, my husband! No, I will not believe it.

JOHN. I have been a changed man ever since I saw Mattie. I love her!

ALICE. She's a harlot. I knew it the first time I saw her. She has a good husband, and she treats him like a dog.

MATTIE [*in a rage*]. Yes, I treat him like a dog. I know it, but I am no beast of burden for him to ride to death.

ALICE. You are too lazy to work.

MATTIE. How can a woman work when there is no love in the doing of things, or for the man that you are married to?

ALICE. He is your husband.

MATTIE. Yes, in name only. I was born in the filth of London, reared in its darkness and poverty, and when Frank Sawyer came along and hoffered to take me out into the sunlight, I gladly haccepted. Then when I came 'ere I found love.

JOHN. Yes, we love one another, Alice. We —

ALICE. You dare to flaunt it in my face. You, my husband, that I have trusted.

JOHN. I have sacrificed enough of my life with you.

MATTIE. I 'ave my life to live, too. You don't think I am going to sacrifice hit for marriage scruples either.

ALICE. You are a cur — worse than the lowest of women.

JOHN. Alice!

ALICE. A woman that would take the husband of another woman is a thief without a price.

MATTIE [*taking the knife out of the pan and swinging it in her wrath*]. That is not so. I 'ad my chance in the slums of London, but I wouldn't sell myself that cheap.

ALICE. You came out here with Frank Sawyer as a mere blind. You sold yourself to him for a railroad ticket just so you could flirt with men. Here I find you in the arms of my husband.

JOHN. We are going away, Alice. Mattie and I will start life in some new place.

ALICE. Away! [*Staggers back toward the door*] Away! No, no, my God, don't do that.

MATTIE. You 'ave 'ad 'im long enough without

love. Your marriage has been on the altar of make-believe, too.

ALICE. Without love?

JOHN. Yes, Alice. I never loved you.

MATTIE. 'E loves me, 'e loves me. See! [*She goes up and throws her arms about John*]

ALICE [*pulling a revolver from the table drawer*]. He does, does he? [*Shoots*]

MATTIE [*falling in* JOHN'S *arms*]. John!

JOHN. What have you done, Alice?

SAWYER [*appearing in the doorway hesitates for a moment, then staggers forward and grabs the revolver out of* ALICE'S *hand*]. My God, woman! You have shot your own daughter.

ALICE [*stands pinned to the floor for a minute, then rushes forward and takes* MATTIE *in her arms, weeping*]. My — little — girl!

CURTAIN

# THE NEW RACE

A ONE-ACT PLAY

## CHARACTERS

STRENGTH, a Russian, father of the new race
CHERRY BLOSSOM, a Japanese, mother of the new race
LIFE, the last of the old American race
OLD AGE, his mother
TIME, father of all time
Japanese Travelers

*The façade of an ancient and dilapidated cathedral on Morningside Heights in New York is faintly seen in the dying day. Beyond, in the west, silver clouds are fading away into the red sky, deepening with the setting of the sun. This is soon changed into a sombre gray, as a few dark clouds develop and roll across the sky, behind which the new moon can be seen at intervals. A half discernible figure of a decrepit old man can be seen moving across the foreground into the church. A few lights spring up through the windows and door of the cathedral, then slowly a red glow, the reflection of a large bonfire, one of many that the inhabitants start at dusk to light the remnant of their city, spreads over the great mass of rock that once was the pride of the greatest city in America.*

*Time 2500* A. D.

LIFE. [*A small, ill-shaped individual, representing the last of the American race, is seen crouching on the steps*] Why stand you there, Time, eyeing me like a toad? Think you that it is my day to pass into the great eternity?

TIME [*the old, symbolic figure, chuckles to him-*

*self as he stands, enveloped in a long coat, in the arched doorway*]. What difference does it make whether you live in this world or the next, so spent are your forces?

Life. So say you, but I know no other. I have always been like this. You tell me of my people — of a strong and mighty race that lived here, the mingling of all the nations of Europe. Methinks it is another childish story of yours [*shrieks*], like the glove of the giant in the thumb of which Thor lived.

Time [*drawing his mantle more closely about him and with a weary sigh*]. So it is, so it has ever been, so it shall ever be!

Life [*with a conquering cough*]. Then why do you stand here mocking me and my people? We are living, loving, forgetting!

Strength. [*A strong stalwart youth, whose dress indicates that he belongs to the steppes of Russia, appears over the edge of the rocks, carrying a heavy sack on his back*] Living, loving, forgetting. Life, you are too serious. [*Looks at* Life *with pity, and disappears through a hole into the crypt*]

Time. You are living only on the dregs of the past, my boy.

LIFE. What do we care! Our ancestors made the world in which we live, and we are content with it. You stay here, I see.

TIME. Content to be shriveled up — mere ghosts of your forefathers; content to eat the food that the animals of your ancestors refused; content with the lustful existence that was only licensed to the fallen?

LIFE. Say not so, Father Time. You are an old prude. You judge the present standards with the moral code of the Puritans.

TIME. When America first built her boat, it was her intention to gather the best brain and brawn of Europe and man it, but wealth and luxury came too easily and they hired out the work of its steering. Before they knew it, others who were jealous bribed the crew. When the crew could no longer be relied upon, what was to be expected of their children, their children's children?

LIFE. And now, old father?

TIME [*sighing, reflecting, and pausing as his eye scans the city before him*]. Now, all seem to be misguided, flitting before the lights of mockery; the children of these misguided parents cry and sing in their superficial happiness. The bones of

the dead are too saturated with vice to rot; they sing in their sizzling with joy over the ruin they have brought to the once God-given America.

LIFE [*frightened, drawing back*]. Time, you blaspheme this sacred earth!

TIME [*with a hollow laugh*]. Sacred!!! Sacred!!! [*The sneer dies away in echoes*]

OLD AGE. [*A very old, bent and ragged form comes creeping up the steps*] 'Tis you, Time, that I have spent thirty-five years in finding. You robbed me of my youth, my jewels, my ability to earn a living. You took from me my beauty, my wealth, the keen edge of my wits, and have left only these old rags in their place. Do you think that they glorify me? Down on your knees; beg my pardon and ask the great Divine Spirit to forgive you. The footlights of the world are calling me back, are calling me back to amuse them, but you wrinkled my brow, you parched my skin, and made me the hag that you now see me. Give me back my youth, my beauty, my lovers.

TIME. Ha! ha! ha! You witch; thousands have fallen in your pathway. I gave you warning innumerable times, but you waved them aside only to mock me. Here is your child, Life. Behold him in all his magnificence. He represents

the glittering diamond, the wine room, the pawn shop, all in one; contrast him with your old millionaire lover that had lost every trace of manhood. His bag of gold bought you the late suppers, but stole from you the bloom of your cheeks, and little by little we see no longer beauty, but the dissipated girl who soon became an old woman, a toothless scrub-woman, then the beggar. Look at him well, Old Age. His shrunken frame is the result of a life of pleasure begun with the first glass of wine. Do you remember how you blushed and apologized as you circled your sweet white hand about the stem of the crystal glass? He was lurking in its depths; you did not see him then, but he has no doubt been revealed to you in the dreary years that have followed, in the cuffs and the rebuffs, in the curses that society put upon you as it stamped you under its feet, and photographed him to you of what he might have been. [*Laughs*] I saw him then as I see him now, pleading with you for a chance at manhood, to be all that God intended him to be — you robbed him of everything,— then you ask for mercy?

Old Age [*shaking with rage*]. Curses on thee, get thee gone! Out of my sight, you bewildering fool. What do you mean by laying the curse of

the world at my feet? May God smite you with his rod of iron! You have lived too long now. [*In a pleading voice*] Oh, give me back my youth, my beauty, for woman is naught without them. [*Falls in a swoon*]

LIFE. What have you done now, Time?

TIME. Just what I have been doing for a million years or more.

LIFE [*hobbling over to his mother*]. My mother! How sacred is the word! Arise, fear him not, for I am here to shield you. All the Rolands of old are not dead yet. (Time mocks me, but I heed him not) yes; here lingers chivalry, duty, loyalty. Mother, do you not hear your son's voice? He calls, he calls.

TIME. Yes, but he calls in vain [*in a sarcastic voice*]

LIFE. Well has my mother defined you; well has she outlined your deeds, your crimes. Away with you, vanish into the world of forgetfulness; I want one more hour to live.

TIME [*fading away slowly as he speaks*]. What is one hour compared to the millions of eternity?

LIFE. I know of this hour; I know nothing of the lies that you tell about the future and the mil-

lion and million of years to come. [*Looks up, and seeing that* TIME *has gone cries*] Thief, where goest thou now?

FIRST TRAVELER. [*A band of weary travelers, with heavy sacks on their backs, comes over the ledge in front of the cathedral. They are dark skinned, arched eyed, and dressed in heavy tunics, roped in at the waist like the fathers of the East. They drop their loads*] Let us rest awhile here, comrades; there seems to be habitation here, and perhaps some living soul will give us a bidding; perhaps life is better here than we have seen it down at the shore.

SECOND TRAVELER. No, no, brother, stay not here. The pathway was strewn with death. We come here for life, so let us seek shelter for the night where the vultures will not mistake us for the dead.

THIRD TRAVELER. Methinks if we hurry we can yet reach yonder shore, where our camp is pitched.

STRENGTH [*coming out of hole in the crypt*]. Oh, ho, some strangers, I see. Welcome to this city of desolation. Such as it is, you may share.

FIRST TRAVELER. Kind sir, we are looking for homes, and in our search wandered farther away

from our camp than was wise for the time of day.

STRENGTH. Tarry not long here then, strangers. This is the home of everything but God's love. [*Sees* CHERRY BLOSSOM *and pauses*]

FIRST TRAVELER [*after a moment's silence*]. Speak to the stranger, daughter. Have you no word of greeting?

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*embarrassed*]. What shall I say, my father?

STRENGTH [*wishing to help her*]. It is my place to greet her. Welcome you are, fair daughter of the East.

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*spellbound*]. We tarry not long, stranger, but we thank you.

SECOND TRAVELER. Our camp is on yonder hills; can you direct us there by some short route?

STRENGTH [*with a glance toward* CHERRY BLOSSOM]. Will you not remain here for a while? The church is at your disposal, and I live in the cellar yonder in great comfort, which shall be yours as long as you care to stay.

THIRD TRAVELER. It is not comforts that we are looking for, sir. We are looking for life, and all the things that make for life.

STRENGTH. So I offer you here.

First Traveler. Say not so, stranger. We find this once great city nothing but heaps of stone and brick, and the dwellers poor imitations of what men ought to be.

Strength. Put yourself to test here, then; abide in their midst, and teach them to the way of higher life.

Second Traveler. So great are they in number they would pull our children down and our people would soon be wiped out. [*Turning to the crowd*] No, no, brethren, let us not remain here in the midst of rack and ruin, but go to the open fields again.

Cherry Blossom [*seeing the men are about to take up their packs, she looks hopefully at* Strength, *then runs to her father*]. Can we not remain a day or two, father, just to see some of the wonderful old buildings and the great underground passages?

Strength [*with enthusiasm*]. And I will show them to you, my —

First Traveler. No, no, my child, this is no place for you to abide, show us the way, my friend, and we will make for our boats.

Strength [*reluctantly*]. To the right behind the cathedral you will find a pathway that will

take you to the river, where you will find some fishermen; they will direct you from there.

SECOND TRAVELER. Onward then, my men. [*They all lift their burdens and start forward, except* CHERRY BLOSSOM. *She stands gazing at* STRENGTH] The moon will soon be up to help us keep in the path.

STRENGTH [*following* CHERRY BLOSSOM, *as she is the last to leave the stage, he stops just at the feet of* LIFE, *who is still sitting in the corner of the steps. With outstretched arms*]. Come to me again in my dreams, my fairy one. Come to me — [CHERRY BLOSSOM *looks back until she disappears, but says nothing*]

LIFE [*with a laugh that echoes through the very walls of the church*]. And you lost your little fairy one, didn't you?

STRENGTH [*wishing to kick him*]. Whelp!

LIFE. She was a pretty one, wasn't she? If you hadn't been here I might have stood a chance myself.

STRENGTH [*with contempt*]. You! Life, you cannot see your own shortcomings. Don't you see your shriveled body, your crooked legs, your cocked eyes, all of which are hideous to beautiful woman?

LIFE. My heart throbs just the same as yours for the love of the beautiful. If women had learned that lesson long ago, that love and ugliness brought harmony to the home, there would have been fewer of you Apollos brought into the divorce courts.

STRENGTH [*going on his way*]. My people have all been Apollos, but none of them ever sought a divorce, because life began and ended in the home. Something very strange must have entered into the homes of this land?

LIFE [*alone*]. Some day I am going to throttle that fellow. He —

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*comes running back*]. Where is he, where is he?

LIFE. Who? Strength?

CHERRY BLOSSOM. That handsome youth, with eyes like the stars above, and a face like the sea when the sun is rising.

LIFE. Ah! You mean me.

CHERRY BLOSSOM. You?

LIFE. I change my expression sometimes to fit my mood.

CHERRY BLOSSOM. You must be in a very ugly mood now. [*He rises and starts to hobble toward her*] You are hideous — oh —go away — I —

LIFE. Be not afraid, fair one. You see, to me you are the most wonderful creature I have ever seen. I changed my body into this [*grabbing his sides*] when I thought that I had lost you. Now that you have frightened me, I cannot turn back.

CHERRY BLOSSOM. What is your name?

LIFE. They call me Life, because I am the last of a great race.

CHERRY BLOSSOM. But you, Life, are merely the shell of a man.

LIFE. I am the best of my people when I am in my other mood. But tell me, why came you here; you are a strange people?

CHERRY BLOSSOM. I lived in a beautiful land in the East, where the temples went skyward, and trees and flowers were so many in number they were but rainbows stretched across the earth.

LIFE. Why came you here then among us, so poor, so weary of what existence we know?

CHERRY BLOSSOM. The father of our people told all the young families to find new homes beyond our sea — our lands were getting too small for so many. Many of our people stopped on the islands on the way, but our ship was driven by a storm through a great canal into the warm seas.

When we arrived upon the shores we were met by large hosts of birds — vultures, eagles — that followed us to tear the very life out of us. We were trying to get back to our people when we came here. [STRENGTH *has come up behind her and has been listening*]

STRENGTH. We are very glad that you lost your way, and that Fate sent you to us.

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*looking at one, then at the other in surprise*]. Fate was kind to send me your way, even though it were a perilous journey.

STRENGTH. See what you have found in the end? Behold Life, the great king, and his lost world empire!

LIFE [*hobbling away in anger*]. This is no place for me.

CHERRY BLOSSOM. Oh, sir, your land is terrible. We traveled far, and only found great wastes of land, with millions of dead souls that served as carrion for the birds of prey. From east to west, from north to south, it was the same.

STRENGTH. A great pestilence struck this wonderful America with one blow [*seeing* LIFE *as he trudges up the steps into the cathedral*], but this city was lost long before the great known One laid His hand upon the country people.

CHERRY BLOSSOM. So feared our great ruler when he sent our fathers with their families out in search of new homes.

STRENGTH. How can you share the want and suffering that is necessary in these long pilgrimages? You are but a lily —

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*interrupting him*]. Thousands of lilies like me are left behind in the rice fields. Their brown eyes tell no tales but famine, suffering.

STRENGTH. From the land of want to the land of death you came?

CHERRY BLOSSOM. But I must be on my way before my father misses me.

STRENGTH. I will guarantee you a safe return, if you wish, but won't you remain here with me a little while?

CHERRY BLOSSOM. Oh, no, no. I am afraid.

STRENGTH. Of me? [*Leads her over to the stairway, and touches a button. The interior of the crypt, which can be seen through a large hole in the wall, loosened by the ravages of time, is instantly lit up. About, one can see costly articles of silver and gold and brass that* STRENGTH *has picked up from the ruins. Vases, urns, candlesticks, statues, exquisite in design and finish, adorn*

*the wonderful old furniture within*] Why do you tremble; do you fear me?

CHERRY BLOSSOM. Take me not into the earth. I want the open, the great, wide world.

STRENGTH [*tapping loudly on the rocks*]. Lycia, Lycia!

[*An old, decrepit woman comes out of the opening*]

LYCIA. I come, master; I come.

STRENGTH. Who has been here?

LYCIA. Life has been here.

STRENGTH [*seats* CHERRY BLOSSOM *on the top of the steps while he stands at the foot*]. Have I not warned you of the consequences?

LYCIA. What harm can poor little Life do?

STRENGTH. You shall see. Everything that he touches falls; if you wish to be happy, shun him as you would a house these days above the ground. Go prepare a room for Cherry Blossom. [LYCIA *goes back*]

CHERRY BLOSSOM. Tell me, how came you here? Where are your people?

STRENGTH. In Russia Land, my child; the land of light, free air and plenty.

CHERRY BLOSSOM. Why came you here?

STRENGTH. One day I was out for a lark, test-

ing my new air engine, and two days brought me to these shores. Finding such a wasted mess of men and men's work, I became interested, and remained — oh — I know not why.

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*jumping down*]. But you must help me now to get to my people; it is getting late.

STRENGTH. But you are going to stay with me, Cherry Blossom; it was for you that I remained here — now I know.

CHERRY BLOSSOM. How?

STRENGTH. I had a great premonition that I was to start a world empire here upon the ashes of the old. You are going to help me.

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*runs to the ledge*]. See, they are building a fire by the river; they have built it to guide me to them.

STRENGTH [*seizing her*]. No, no, Cherry Blossom, you are to be mine. This last remnant of civilization has to be wiped out. I have wires of radium running in all directions, and with one touch the whole ruins will fall. One I have stretched across the river to destroy all boats that dare to approach these shores.

CHERRY BLOSSOM. But you will not destroy my people?

STRENGTH. Am I not more to you than your people?

CHERRY BLOSSOM. No, no, not more than my people. They are sacred to me. We seek new homes, new lands that we may increase the earth. That is our mission. We have been sent out by the great emperor himself; we must do his bidding.

STRENGTH. Believe in me. Help me to conquer my world. [*Before she realizes he has wrapped her close in his arms and kissed her*]

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*struggling against the tide*]. But you have committed a great crime. In my country even a husband does not kiss his wife.

STRENGTH. I would hate to live in your land, then.

CHERRY BLOSSOM. That is what has kept our world pure and free from disaster.

STRENGTH. No, Cherry Blossom, not that. There are other things in your character, strong underlying principles, born and fostered by want and suffering, that have kept the nation's family together.

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*looking westward*]. The ship is going down stream without me. Give them a signal that I am coming.

STRENGTH. Won't you decide to give them up?

CHERRY BLOSSOM. What, my people!

STRENGTH. You have lived with them all your few, short years, and all your life has been their life. You have known me but a short hour. Have you not lived more than one life in that hour? Tell me, Cherry Blossom [*holding her hands*], what has this hour been to you?

CHERRY BLOSSOM. Oh, I cannot tell you — I only know that the world here, that was so terrible a land of waste and disease, looks beautiful to me now.

STRENGTH [*points to the out-going ship*]. Now you must choose.

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*in wonder*]. Choose?

STRENGTH. Between me and your fair land.

CHERRY BLOSSOM. No, I will not stay — I cannot. [*Begins to cry on his arm*]

STRENGTH. Good-by, then. In my land of great hopes and plenty I'll remember you always. [*He embraces her fondly on the forehead, then leads her to the ledge to the right of the cathedral*]

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*hesitating*]. But you will go with me — to my people?

STRENGTH. No, Cherry Blossom. I'll watch

you until you are safe on the boat; they have stopped for they have felt the shock of the radium.

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*in an imploring tone*]. But you said that you wanted me to help you?

STRENGTH. So I do, but my wife must go with me, not to her people, nor to mine — just with me. [*Reaches his hands to her, pleadingly*]

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*climbing back on the rocks, looking toward the boats*]. Good-by, my people; good-by, my cherished land.

STRENGTH. You have decided well, my fair one.

CHERRY BLOSSOM [*holding him by one hand, as she waves the other in farewell from the cliff*]. Yes, Strength, I will stay with you, for I, too, must be a parent in a new land. I must give to a new race the best that is in my people; I must teach my children to love and respect the far East, for much as she has been held down by tradition, much has she given to civilization.

STRENGTH. The best that is in us, that will we give to the new race.

CHERRY BLOSSOM. The best that is in us. [*She holds her face to his, as he leads her across the tiles*]

STRENGTH [*his face and hers in dark silhouette against the light within the crypt*]. Nations will rise and fall, as other worlds have done, but the love for husband and wife lives on, and will live down through the ages and through all eternity. [*A great rumbling sound is heard as* CHERRY BLOSSOM *draws closer to* STRENGTH] What is it? Are we in eternity?

STRENGTH. Yes, in our eternity. I have touched off the wires; the last of the ruins are falling. In the morning there will be nothing left but a few dead bodies to tell that life was recent — the last of great lives and noble aims. To the city, the accumulator of wit, wisdom, and vice, I give you back the ashes of your glorious work. Your fathers built well, but thy children, oh, thy children reaped and forgot to sow again. Farewell. [*The falling and crashing of buildings is heard*]

CHERRY BLOSSOM. Farewell to what, my husband?

STRENGTH. To the past. [*The little form of* LIFE *is seen coming out of the church and hobbling across the tiles*]

CHERRY BLOSSOM. Every home and every family dedicate their love to the future. [LIFE *has*

*touched a wire, stumbles back on the stage, and falls dead at their feet*]

STRENGTH [*Their forms are hidden half the time from the gusts of wind and flame that wreak ravages upon the city*]. So shall we dedicate our love to the future, a wonderful future.

CURTAIN

# DANNY

## A ONE-ACT PLAY

*"And all men kill the thing they love,*
*By all let this be heard,*
*Some do it with a bitter look,*
*Some with a flattering word,*
*The coward does it with a kiss,*
*The brave man with a sword."*

## CHARACTERS

DANNY, a hunchback
ANN, a half-witted girl
MRS. WELSH, Danny's mother
JACK WYNN, a neighbor
MRS. NOLAN, a neighbor

*Scene: A sitting room of a family of very modest means, but in no way poor. To the left a door opening from the street; at the back two large windows some five feet apart, in which space stands an old-fashioned stove. Before each window is a rocking chair, where the members of the family are wont to sit to get a good view of the street. To the right a sofa, to the left of which, and halfway between the front stage and the windows, is a table with chairs at either side. An old ingrain carpet is on the floor; crayon portraits of the brothers and sisters, as well as those of all the grandparents, adorn the wall.*

*Time: Early spring.*

MRS. WELSH [*sewing at the window to the left*]. Rouse yourself from there, lad. You haven't got your chores done as yet.

DANNY [*curled up on the sofa*]. Wait a bit, mother. I don't feel much fit this morning.

MRS. WELSH. You were out most of the night. Where do you go, lad, these dark nights?

DANNY. I likes to talk with the little men and women in the trees, mother. They tell such funny stories.

MRS. WELSH. About what, Danny?

DANNY. How the spider gets his silver from the stars, and builds himself a house more beautiful than the kings.

MRS. WELSH. Don't be silly, Danny.

DANNY [*with an attempt to rouse himself*]. I'm no silly, little mother.

MRS. WELSH. You are always so queer, lad. You never play with other children, but instead you roam through the brake by the river, or the trees in the woods, or by the rocks in the quarry.

DANNY. Yes, mother. [*Throws himself back on the sofa, and draws himself up into a heap that doesn't look much larger than the hump on his back*]

MRS. WELSH. And why?

DANNY. I love to see my friends, the hobgoblins. They tell me such queer things, mother; perhaps that's why I'm queer.

MRS. WELSH. You are too old for that now, lad.

DANNY. Eighteen my last birthday, mother.

MRS. WELSH. And you such a little fellow.

DANNY. It's the hump on my back that makes me little. If God hadn't given me that, but instead had made me a big, fine fellow so the girls would not run when they see me, or the gamblers pat my back to bring them luck, I'd —

MRS. WELSH. You'd what? [*Stops sewing and looks, wondering*]

DANNY Never mind, mother. If I wa'n't as ugly as a toad, maybe I'd have a sweetheart, too.

MRS. WELSH. What! You are not thinking of the girls already?

DANNY. Yes, mother. I be a man now. I may not look it.

MRS. WELSH [*distressed*]. A man? [*A knock on the door*] Who is that, now? [*Opening the door*] Well, good-morning, Mrs. Nolan; come in, will you?

MRS. NOLAN [*in great excitement*]. Have you heard what the quarrymen found when they went to work this morning?

MRS. WELSH. No, I have not, Mrs. Nolan.

MRS. NOLAN. Well, they found the murdered body of Minnie Wynn, they did.

MRS. WELSH [*surprised*]. What are you telling me, Mrs. Nolan. [*A groan is heard from* DANNY *on the sofa*]

Mrs. Nolan. They did that, and she so good to your Danny there.

Mrs. Welsh. What do you think of that, Danny? Poor Mrs. Wynn has been murdered. [*Not a sound from* Danny]

Mrs. Nolan. They have been looking all over for her husband, and they cannot find him.

Danny [*rises up in great excitement*]. What? [*Then falls back again*]

Mrs. Welsh. You'll have no one to bake you little cakes with sugar on any more, my lad.

Mrs. Nolan. Where was Danny last night?

Mrs. Welsh [*looking at* Danny *and then at* Mrs. Nolan, *her jaw dropping*]. Danny was at home, Mrs. Nolan.

Mrs. Nolan. Some one said they saw him going through her gate before her man came home from work.

Mrs. Welsh. If it is here you come to make trouble, Mrs. Nolan, you can excuse yourself at once. I'll not have a bit of it.

Mrs. Nolan. I'm only asking, Mrs. Welsh.

Mrs. Welsh. But it's for idle gossip you are asking, Mrs. Nolan. My Danny is innocent. Go [*opening the door*], go tell the whole neighbor-

hood that my Danny is innocent. [MRS. NOLAN *goes out*]

DANNY [*arousing himself*]. Is she gone?

MRS. WELSH. She is that, bad luck to her evil tongue.

DANNY. Where do you think Jack Wynn has gone?

MRS. WELSH. He is gone where they can't get him. I can tell you that.

DANNY [*rising to a sitting position*]. Why?

MRS. WELSH. Well, if it is him that's killed his little wife, he ain't going to stay around here to let them string him up on a rope.

DANNY. Why should he kill his little wife?

MRS. WELSH. I'll tell you something, my Danny boy, these here married folks often have reasons for killing one another. It's often a bad business relationship. It's a wonder more of them ain't killed than are.

DANNY. Oh! [*wondering*] I thought it was all so beautiful. [*Crouches again in his corner*]

MRS. WELSH. There's more of your queer thinking now. [*The door squeaks.* MRS. WELSH *jumps and looks in surprise as she sees the face of* SILLY ANN *peeping through the door*]

ANN. Can — I — come — in?

MRS. WELSH [*pausing before she answers*]. Yes, come in, Ann.

ANN [*looking about, and seeing* DANNY *on the sofa, she laughs in her half-witted way*]. He! he!

MRS. WELSH. Danny isn't feeling well this morning, Ann.

ANN. He! he!

MRS. WELSH. Would you do his chores for him? I have got a nice, big cake in the pantry saved for you.

ANN. He! he!

MRS. WELSH. Feed the pigs, Ann, before you milk. They are squealing their heads off.

ANN [*looking at the sofa, surprised*]. He! he! [*Slips out*]

DANNY. My! But she makes me squirm.

MRS. WELSH. Nothing to be scared about, son. She is as harmless as a kitten.

DANNY. Well, she just thinks it.

MRS. WELSH. Thinks what now?

DANNY. I know. [*Buries himself deeper in his corner*]

MRS. WELSH. You don't think [*pausing*] that she's heard of Mrs. Wynn getting killed, do you? You don't reckon she thinks — Oh, Danny, if you hadn't stayed out so late last night!

DANNY. I was sleeping in the barn most of the time, mother. It's warm in the cow's manger, and I likes to snuggle up in the hay and think.

MRS. WELSH [*reassured*]. Of course you do; of course you do. I think I'll run down to Mrs. Horner's to see if they know any particulars about — about Mrs. Wynn. [*Takes her shawl from a hook behind the door and throws it over her head*] I won't be gone long, Danny.

DANNY [*hearing his mother close the door, he looks up with a somewhat turbulent expression*]. Ma, you are a fool! [*The door begins to open slowly; the squeak startles* DANNY, *and he gazes open-mouthed with an expression of fear on his face until he sees the head of* SILLY ANN *appear*]

ANN [*coming in slowly, and looking to the back and the side*]. He! he!

DANNY. Silly Ann, you're a fool, a damn fool!

ANN [*with her monotonous grin*]. He! he!

DANNY [*his shoulders raised, his head sunk in the hollow of his chest, his claw-like hands on the edge of the sofa*]. Don't you say I did it, now!

ANN. He! he!

DANNY. You did it yourself.

ANN. He! he!

DANNY [*throwing his legs out from under him*]. You know you are in love with Jack Wynn.

ANN. He! he! [*Nods*] He! he!

DANNY. I saw you give her the blow on the head.

ANN. He! he!

DANNY [*jumps into the middle of the room*]. Then you strangled her, didn't you?

ANN. He! he!

DANNY [*emphatically*]. Now didn't you?

ANN [*nods*]. He! he!

DANNY. Then you [*covers his eyes with his hands*], my God! Then you cut her head off.

ANN [*pointing to the blood on his wrist*]. He! he!

DANNY [*jumping about the floor with short steps, a weird expression of excitement on his face*]. I got that when I helped you to pull her down into the hole.

ANN. He! he!

DANNY. Why do you stand there staring at me like an owl?

ANN. He! he!

DANNY [*recovering himself*]. What did you do with the hatchet?

ANN. He! he!

DANNY [*mocking her*]. He! he!

[ANN, *grinning, with her mouth screwed up to one side, just lets out a shrill note*].

DANNY. Didn't you bury it?

ANN [*shakes her head*]. He! he!

DANNY [*tearing around the room, limping, his two arms half-raised as if he had a tomahawk in each one; and with every step and pause,* ANN *steps and pauses*]. What are you going to say when they take you to jail?

ANN. He! he!

DANNY. Yes; he! he! That grin is driving me mad. Why didn't you dig a hole in the ground and put that bloody thing in it?

ANN. I — gave — it — to — Jack — Wynn. He! he!

DANNY [*stunned*]. You?

ANN. He! he!

DANNY [*grabs up an iron off the stove to throw it at her, when voices are heard outside. Listening*]. Now they have found you out.

ANN. He! he!

MRS. WELSH [*entering, followed by* JACK WYNN]. You'll not harm a hair of his head, I say.

JACK [*a strong, giant-like fellow of the labor-*

*ing type*]. My poor little harmless wife; they killed her!

Mrs. Welsh. Not a word of it is true, if the whole neighborhood is saying that it is. Look at them, the two harmless things. [Ann *and* Danny *look lank and dejected in their innocence*]

Jack. Danny, I loved you better than my own boy; now to kill the thing I loved.

Ann. He! he!

Mrs. Welsh. Speak up, Danny. Declare your innocence.

Ann. He! he! [Danny *remains silent*]

Jack. Danny — you — oh, I felt so safe to go to lodge when you was there with her.

Mrs. Welsh. Ann, my God, you speak.

Danny. Ann did it.

Ann. He! he!

Jack. You wouldn't do a thing like that to Jack, would you? I have been a brother to you all my life.

Ann [*shakes her head*]. He! he!

Mrs. Welsh. Ann, now own up; we won't hurt you if you tell the truth.

Danny. You choked her, didn't you?

Ann. He! he!

JACK [*his hands at his throat*]. No, no; not that, Ann!

ANN [*shaking her head*]. He! he!

DANNY. Ann, you'll swing for it!

ANN [*in terror, her eyes widening, points to* DANNY]. No, no,— he — he — killed — Minnie.

JACK [*with up-raised chair*]. I'll brain you without the law.

MRS. WELSH. No, Jack, you know Danny loved Minnie as his own sister; he couldn't have hurt the child.

JACK. But he killed her, Mrs. Welsh. He killed the only thing I loved. [*Weeps, sitting down on the chair, with back turned to the audience, to hide his tears*]

MRS. WELSH. Danny couldn't even kill a bird, Jack.

DANNY [*aroused*]. Yes, mother, I did kill the only thing he loved.

ANN. He! he!

MRS. WELSH. Danny!

DANNY. Yes, I did it because he loved the only thing that I loved.

MRS. WELSH. But she was his wife!

DANNY. I wanted her.

ANN. He! he!

MRS. WELSH. Danny! Jack, do you hear what he says?

DANNY. Yes, I loved her; oh, more than the soul of any able-bodied man ever loved. I loved her fingers; I loved her eyes; I loved her mouth.

JACK [*sobbing*]. Oh!

DANNY [*with great emphasis*]. Yes, I loved her. You all laugh at me; she laughed at me.

ANN. He! he!

DANNY. You vile critter — shut up! I loved her — I wanted her, but she wanted [*pointing to* JACK] she wanted him.

JACK. Oh, my God! Give me forgiveness, but I [*rises*] must kill him.

MRS. WELSH [*runs toward him*]. No, no, Jack. He didn't do it; he is shielding Ann.

ANN. He! he!

JACK. Why should he shield Ann?

MRS. WELSH. Because she loves you.

DANNY. Because we love things that don't love us, and are despised for it.

JACK. Loves me; oh, Ann, my little weak sister! [*holding out his hands to her*]

ANN [*going to him*]. He! he!

JACK. You didn't kill Minnie, did you?

Ann. He! he! [*Shakes her head as he wraps his arms about her*]

Danny [*in a rage*]. Mother, let me tell you, and you, too, Jack; I killed her; I strangled her; I — oh, my God, what did I do? I killed the thing I loved!

Mrs. Welsh. The thing you loved!

Danny. Yes, mother.

Ann. He! he! [Jack *tries to silence her*]

Danny. You thought I was a child, a babe still in your arms, but the pangs of manhood have long throbbed in my body. Girls ran from me, women shunned me, and I was a monster to men — among men — I was a man yet deprived of all the joys — their joys.

Jack. But Minnie! She was good to you.

Danny [*breaking away from his mother's grasp*]. Yes, that was just it. Minnie was good to me; she baked cakes for me — but she loved you.

Mrs. Welsh. Oh, Danny! Danny!

Jack [*with compassion*]. My little brother!

Danny. You all pitied me; you pity me now!

Ann. He! he!

Mrs. Welsh. You need pity, my child, if what you say is true; but it isn't true, is it, my Danny?

JACK. Oh, Mrs. Welsh, I fear it is. These half-witted children that we think are harmless often rise up to break our hearts when life, when God, when society alone is to blame.

MRS. WELSH. My Danny is as harmless as a child, Jack Wynn, let me be a-telling you that.

JACK. And you say that after he has told you that he killed Minnie — the only thing I loved.

DANNY [*with scorn*]. The only thing I loved, too, mother, and I am willing to die for it. Life without her was nothing — is nothing — and never —

ANN. He! he!

MRS. WELSH [*stretching her arms out to* ANN *in her last appeal*]. Didn't *you* kill Minnie?

ANN. He! he!

MRS. WELSH. You love Jack, don't you?

ANN [*nods her head*]. He! he!

MRS. WELSH. You see. She owns up to it — see!

DANNY. Listen to sense, mother. [*Falls limp upon the sofa, and, pulling up his sleeve, shows them his blood-stained arm*]

JACK [*throws* ANN *from him and turns to the wall, half faint*]. Oh, my little wife, my little wife!

Danny. If you suffer at the sight of her blood, what do you think I suffered when I saw you kiss her night after night as you came home from work? If you scorn the sin that is to drench my soul, know that I suffered and am willing to suffer for it, and it will never be half — no, not one hundredth part of the agony that I have endured for months when I saw you gather her into your arms at bedtime and carry her upstairs to her room. I had to turn out into the night, home, and alone.

Jack [*to the wall, with outstretched arms*]. My God! give me strength, Thy strength, that I'll not take a life for a life.

Mrs. Welsh. Danny, this will kill me!

Danny. It killed me long ago.

Mrs. Welsh [*hearing something, she peers out of the window*]. Here comes the sheriff — they are coming here. There are some men with him.

Danny [*looks out of the window*]. Yes, they are coming — after me.

Jack. Justice! Justice!

Danny [*with contempt*]. There is no justice. Look at me, then ask God why he made such a critter as me?

Mrs. Welsh. What can we do to save him, Jack?

ANN. He! he!

JACK. He killed the thing I loved.

DANNY. Love killed her and me, mother. I'm no coward to die for the thing I loved. They can take me. [*Goes out to meet them*]

MRS. WELSH [*as door closes behind him, extending her hands*]. Danny, my boy! [*Falls in a faint toward* JACK, *who catches her*]

ANN. He! he!

CURTAIN