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The
**INDIFFERENCE OF
JEREMY**

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By BEULAH KING



Price 25 Cents

PUBLISHED BY
ELDRIDGE ENTERTAINMENT HOUSE
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Eldridge Entertainment House

FRANKLIN, OHIO

also

DENVER, COLO.
944 S. Logan St.

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A Play in One Act

By BEULAH KING

Gloucester, Mass.

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ELDRIDGE ENTERTAINMENT HOUSE

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944 So. Logan

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1921

CAST OF CHARACTERS

| | | |
|------------------|----------------|------|
| Judith Leviston | Emily Leviston | |
| Jeremy Leviston | | |
| Patricia Manners | Butler | Maid |

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SCENE

A living room in the country home of the Levistons. In the left wall center a wide doorway hung with portieres, leading into the front hall. In the right wall center a single door leading into the library. At the rear a large fireplace with a smouldering fire. The room is furnished in a way which betokens good taste.

At the rise of the curtain Judith Leviston, a woman of fifty, is seated before the fire knitting. Beside her sits her sister Emily, two years her junior, also knitting. On a stool is Patricia Manners, a girl of twenty-two. She is working at some embroidery, half-heartedly. The first thing one notices about Patricia is her short, bushy hair. It has been recently cut and she is conscious of it.

It is late afternoon of a winter's day. A snowstorm is raging and the wind is heard frequently throughout the scene.

The Indifference of Jeremy

Judith—It must be the effects of the war. There never was a Leviston like him, never!

Emily (who has other ideas)—But Jeremy is not the only Leviston who has fought in wars and won a medal for bravery.

Pat (with a sigh)—Has he been sitting in the library all the morning?

Emily—All the morning—and smoking cigarettes!

Pat—It's dreadful.

Judith—Twenty-eight years old and nothing to interest him.

Emily (slyly)—You don't think he's in love?

Pat (feigning an indifference she does not feel)—With whom?

Emily (slyly)—Oh, I don't know—some girl—perhaps some girl he met in France.

Pat—Then why didn't he marry her and bring her home?

Emily—Too shy to ask her.

(Patricia laughs scornfully.)

Emily—My dear, your great grandfather would never have married your great grandmother if she hadn't proposed to him. He loved her, and she knew it, and she was a woman of spirit.

Pat—Poor Jeremy!

Judith—Things can't go on this way. Something's got to be done or I shall go mad.

Emily—I'm afraid coaxing has failed.

Judith—I should think when he saw how it worries us he would do differently, but he takes no notice. It is as if we did not exist. *(Pat puts down her work and goes to the window.)*

Emily—Oh, yes, we exist for him, Judith dear. We are like two flies that frequently annoy him, and I know he'd like to swat us.

Judith—But if we didn't keep at him he wouldn't eat at all.

Pat (fiercely)—Let him starve then. He makes me tired.

Judith—My dear, such a speech is very unladylike and most unbecoming.

(Emily regards her with a smile.)

Emily—I'm not so sure but Pat's idea is a good one. At least I think we might try other methods. I've had something in mind for a week now.

Pat—Concerning that possible girl in France?

Emily (who has forgotten the girl's existence)—Girl in France? Oh—dear me, no! *(There is a crash, and sound of falling glass.)*

Judith (jumping to her feet)—Ah, this wind, this dreadful wind! It is the dining-room windows! I expected as much! (*She goes off d. l.*)

Pat (running to Emily and catching hold of her)—Come, Aunt Emily, let's see what it looks like to have a snowbank in the dining-room. (*She pulls her to d. l.*) Perhaps this unusual sight will arouse even Jeremy! (*They go off d. l.*)

(Jeremy enters d. r. He is a tall, fine-looking fellow of twenty-eight. He strolls about the room listlessly, and finally bids up before the fireplace and flings himself onto the low chair, his legs extended before him.)

(Lettie, the maid, enters d. l.)

Lettie (in her most pleasing manner)—Will you have a little lunch, sir?

Jeremy—No, Lettie, thank you. Nothing!

Lettie (in wheedling tones)—Little cakes, sir, all iced, and with nut filling.

Jeremy—Nothing, Lettie.

(She approaches him almost as a suppliant.)

Lettie—Beau-ti-ful little cakes, sir, really gems of little cakes.

Jeremy—I'm sorry, Lettie.

(She starts off; at d. l. she turns back and says with a wail)—French pastry, sir, made especially for you.

Jeremy—Nothing, Lettie.

Lettie (with a sob in her voice)—Flaky, marvelous little tarts, sir, filled with *creme de fraise*!

Jeremy—Nothing, Lettie.

(Lettie shakes her head sadly and goes off d. l. On the threshold she meets Emily and Judith entering. She has a short pantomime with them, which shows she has once again failed to tempt this dreadful boy. She goes off, and Emily and Judith come up to Jeremy.)

Judith (with a lightheartedness she does not feel)—There, he isn't going to eat those little cakes because he wants a big appetite for dinner. I know. (*To Emily*) And he wants to surprise us, the dear boy!

Jeremy (rising slowly)—To be perfectly frank with you, my dear aunts, I wouldn't mind if I never partook of another dinner. (*He comes down stage.*)

Judith—He smokes too many cigarettes! Of course he hasn't any appetite.

Emily (coming down stage)—Doesn't anything appeal to you, Jeremy?

Judith (following her)—Steak and mushrooms?

Emily—Liver and bacon?

Judith—Scallops with Devonshire sauce?

Emily—Piccadilly pudding with *wine* sauce?

Judith (duly horrified)—Emily!

Emily (with a smile)—Well, you see, Judith, I might as well

have suggested that as anything. (*They go back to the fireplace, and Jeremy stands staring into space.*)

(*Enter Standish, the butler, d. l.*)

Standish (*to Jeremy*)—Shall I replenish the fire, sir?

Jeremy—If you like. Perhaps my aunts would like a fire.

(*Standish stands perplexed.*)

Judith—You may replenish it, Standish.

(*Standish goes to the fireplace, amends the fire.*)

(*Jeremy takes a cigarette from his pocket and lights it.*)

Judith (*putting a detaining hand on his arm*)—Please, Jerry.

Jeremy (*putting the cigarette back in its case*)—Very well,

Aunt Judith.

Judith—Well, of course, you may smoke if you wish. Do you wish to, Jerry?

Jeremy—It really doesn't matter to me whether I smoke or not.

Judith (*near tears*)—Do smoke it, Jerry. Please! (*He puts it in his mouth.*)

Judith (*heartbroken*)—You do like your cigarettes, don't you, Jerry?

Jeremy—Just a matter of habit, Aunt Judith.

(*At this, Judith casts upon Emily one look of despair and flees from the room by d. l. weeping.*)

Emily—I had a letter from Colonel Pratt this morning.

Jeremy—Um—um!

Emily—He mentioned you.

Jeremy—He generally does, doesn't he?

Emily—He will never forget what you did in France, Jerry.

Jeremy—That's a pity.

(*Pause.*)

Emily—Did you go to the office yesterday?

Jeremy—No.

Emily—You promised me when I went out that you would go.

Jeremy—Did I?

Emily—I wish, Jeremy, you'd show more interest in the business. Your father would have wished it. I should think for his sake you would try. And your mother—it was her ambition for you!

Jeremy—I'm sorry.

Emily—Then I wish you'd show it. (*She goes off d. l.*)

Standish (*getting to his feet*)—You'll pardon me, sir, if I suggest something that might lead to your happiness?

Jeremy—I'll pardon anything, Standish.

Standish—You—you should get married, sir, to some nice girl. Ah, there's not a girl hereabouts, and all of them fine, too—but would have you. (*He averts awkwardly for some reply, but Jeremy continues to stare into the fire.*)

Standish—You aren't angry, sir?

Jeremy—No, Standish, and I thank you for the advice, but really I'm not interested.

Standish (*with a wag of his head*)—Ah, sir, I am afraid you are in a bad way, sir. (*He goes off d. l.*)

(*Jeremy walks over to the stool and picks up Patricia's embroidery, regards it solemnly for a moment, then places it back on the stool.*)

(*Patricia enters d. l.*)

Pat—Oh, Jerry, you should see the dining-room. A blizzard's been raging there! Lee had all he could do to board up the window.

Jeremy—That so? (*He walks over to the window.*)

Pat (*wistfully*)—Jerry?

Jeremy—Yes.

Pat—Look at me. (*He turns and faces her.*) How do you like it?

Jeremy—Like what?

Pat—Stupid, look at me—hard!

Jeremy (*irritably*)—I am looking at you.

Pat—Well?

Jeremy—Oh, your hair's fixed different.

Pat (*with a moan*)—Fixed different! I've had it cut off!

Jeremy—Oh, so you have!

Pat (*bravely*)—I had it cut off because I thought you'd like it. Do you?

Jeremy—It's all right.

Pat (*persistently*)—Do you like it?

Jeremy—Yes, and I liked it before.

Pat—Isn't there such a word in your vocabulary as "prefer"? Don't you ever prefer anything?

Jeremy—Yes; I prefer to be let alone.

Pat—Well, you won't be in this world. (*She walks to the window.*) I should think you might take a little interest in me, if I am only a fourth cousin. It's awfully stupid here, and I can't get away (*wistfully*). You could be awfully jolly if you'd only show a little interest now and then (*coming back to the fire*). Why, we could take walks together, and rides together, and you—you could read to me, and we could discuss things. (*He looks at her solemnly.*) But instead of being nice, you are just horrid to me. You won't even look at me, and if you do, you're so damned indifferent you don't take me in. There!

(*He comes down the stage and stands with his legs apart and his hands in his pockets.*)

Pat—When you first came back from France I used to spend hours dressing in hopes to please you, but you never so much as looked twice at me (*coming down to him*)! I was sure you'd have lots to tell me about France and the beautiful Parisian ladies and the Louvre and the Brittany peasants and the dear little French children with wooden shoes. (*Pause.*) *Jeremy?*

Jeremy—Um?

Pat—Nothing! I just wanted to know if you were listening. And the Germans! I've wondered and wondered about them. Why—I've even dreamed about them. And when I heard you'd won a medal for bravery I was wild with pride, but you haven't even showed me the medal (*she goes back to the fireplace*). Your indifference is terrible—simply terrible! You think because you went to war and won a medal that's all that's expected of you, but it isn't, and you'd better wake up. (*He crosses to left*.) Why, there are millions of men that would envy you your position in life, but instead of taking things in hand you sit and mope before the fire, and Aunt Judith comes in and says, (*mimicking*) "Jerry, dear, what will you have for dinner?" (*He gives her a bewildered glance*.) And Aunt Emily says, "Please, Jeremy, do go out for a nice ride this beautiful morning." (*Coming down stage*.) But no, you just sit there like a stuffed bird and pity yourself. (*Unnoticed by her, he steals off d. l.*) I call it disgraceful! (*She turns to say something more and finds he has gone*.) JEREMY! (*in rage*.) Well, I annoyed him, anyway, or he wouldn't have gone out of the room (*with doubts*). Still, perhaps he went out because he had reached the door. I shouldn't wonder! Oh dear! (*She flings herself on the stool by the fire*.)

(*Enter Emily d. r.*)

Pat (*running to her*)—Oh, Aunt Emily, he's terrible! He's impossible! He didn't even know my hair was cut short!

Emily—Now, now, dear, don't be disheartened just as I have thought of an excellent plan to arouse him!

Pat—Nothing will arouse him.

Emily—I'm not so sure about that. (*They come down stage*.) Listen, because you're in the scheme. In fact, you are the leading lady.

Pat—The leading lady? Me? Are you quite sure I am capable of taking the part?

Emily—There's no one else who could take it. Can you endure the solitude of the garage for a half hour perched on a pair of snowshoes?

Pat—For heaven's sake, Aunt Emily, have you gone mad?

Emily (*smiling*)—Perhaps you think so now, but wait a while—wait a while.

Pat—Go on. This is exciting.

Emily—I want you to invite Jeremy for a snowshoe tramp to Parkman's Hollow.

Pat—What—today?

Emily—Um-um. Of course, he'll refuse, then you must tell him you'll go alone. (*Pat smiles at that*.) He won't put up much resistance. He might suggest you ask us, and if he does, tell him you have already, and that we have given our consent. He'll think us a bit mad, but then—!

Pat (*excitedly*)—Yes.

Emily—As soon as you are ready—be sure you let him know you've started—go out to the barn and wait. When you see him start after you —

Pat—Oh, but Aunt Emily, that's where you make a mistake, a grave mistake. He won't start after me. He won't care enough.

Emily (severely)—Are you going to do as I say?

Pat—Y-yes —

Emily—Then don't question. When you see him start out after you, come out of the garage and call from the depths of the drifts—faint from exhaustion. He won't know but what you've been a quarter of a mile and can't make the house.

Pat—Why, Aunt Emily, what an old schemer you are. How is it you never got married?

Emily (laughing)—I'll let Aunt Judy in on the secret. I'll have to, to make it work out a success. You wait here and I'll send Jerry in to you. (*She starts to d. l.*)

Pat (running after her)—But suppose he doesn't come to me. Suppose he doesn't care if I do perish in the snow.

Emily—In that case I'll telephone the garage and you can come in. (*With a smile she goes off d. l.*) (*Patricia stands still a moment, smiling wistfully, then walks over to the window and is looking out when Jeremy enters d. l.*)

Pat (turning)—I hope you've forgiven me, Jerry, for what I said just now. Come and look out at the storm. (*He walks over to the window leisurely.*)

Pat—You can't see the short for trees. They're completely covered.

Jeremy—Um-um!

Pat (as if seized with a very sudden idea)—Jeremy, wouldn't it be wonderful to walk on the tree tops! Right over the crests of the young apple trees (*claspng her hands*). Jerry, let's go snow-shoeing.

Jeremy (coming back to the fireplace)—No.

Pat—I believe I will.

Jeremy (looking at her quickly)—Better consult your aunts!

Pat—Oh, I did say something about it to them awhile ago, and they said go, if I wished. (*Jeremy is genuinely surprised.*)

Jeremy—There's a wicked wind. You're mad to go out in it.

Pat—I like the wind, and besides, if anything happens to me, there's no one to care.

Jeremy—Don't be sentimental.

Pat—I'm not. I'm truthful.

Jeremy—Aunt Emily would have hysterics and a long fit of nervous prostration, and bore every one around her with her sorrow. Aunt Judith would shut herself up like a clam, and eventually be lugged off to an insane asylum.

Pat—Oh, no, they wouldn't, Jerry. (*Turning back to the window.*) The drifts are wonderful. I could go over to Parkman's

Hollow; (*Laughing suddenly*) How foolish! I wouldn't know it, of course, because it isn't a hollow by now —

Jeremy—Parkman's Hollow?

Pat—It's only a two-mile hike. What's that on snowshoes? Besides, it isn't so terribly cold. It never is when it snows, you know.

Jeremy—No!

Pat (*coming up to him*)—Can I wear your moccasins? Mine are punctured.

Jeremy—Yes, if you are really going.

Pat—I am. Where can I find them?

Jeremy—Ask Honnors. (*She starts to d. l.*)

Pat—Thank you, Jerry. I want you to know I appreciate your kindness if anything happens.

Jeremy (*boxing elaborately*)—Il n'y a pas de quoi, mademoiselle. (*She goes off d. l.*) (*He goes to the window, looks out, gives a low whistle, and starts as if to go after her, then paces the floor nervously.*)

(*Judith, followed by Emily, enters d. r.*)

Judith (*taking the chair by the fire*)—Pull down the shades, Jeremy, and light up. (*He pulls the shades and turns the switch.*)

Jeremy (*under his breath*)—Beastly night!

Emily (*seating herself*)—If possible, the wind seems wilder. The alder on the north corner has lost its biggest branch. (*The two women knit.*)

Judith—If it keeps on the windows will be completely buried.

Emily—It reminds me of the night Lucy Lane was overcome near Parkman's Hollow. (*Jeremy gives her a quick look.*)

Jeremy—Of course you know Pat has gone out snow-shoeing?

Emily—Yes, and I thought it unwise, but Judith said let her go. She knows the surrounding country from A to Z.

Judith—Yes, I'm sure she's familiar with every landmark hereabout.

Jeremy (*with some sarcasm*)—Perhaps you aren't aware the familiar landmarks are completely covered with snow. (*They pay no heed to his remark. He begins to pace the floor in a kind of desperation.*)

Judith—Well, I look at it this way. The child's been shut up here for three days now, and there's nothing to amuse her —

Jeremy (*with some heat*)—There's the piano.

Judith—And so when she came to me and asked whether she could go out, I didn't have the heart to refuse her. No, I wouldn't have if a Montana blizzard had been raging.

Jeremy—One is!

Emily—Of course, she's not a delicate girl.

Judith—No, she is unusually strong.

Jeremy—She's young, and very slender.

Emily—Do you remember the day she tamed the colt?

Jeremy—A colt and this gale are not comparable.

Judith—Wasn't she plucky?

Emily—And persevering. (*Without the sound of a limb crack- ing.*)

Judith (*jumping up*)—Oh, hear that wind! What was that? (*Followed by Emily, she runs to the window.*)

Emily—The oak branch.

Judith—Snapped off like a twig! (*They stare at each other tensely. There is a pause.*)

Emily (*with a sly wink*)—I was thinking, *Judith*—suppose—suppose *Patricia*——(*pause again. Jeremy is frozen with terror. It is evident now that he is suffering.*) Suppose *Patricia* should be struck by a—

Judith (*coming back to the fireplace*)—Don't be foolishly alarmed, *Emily*. She won't go where the trees are. (*Emily comes back to her chair and sits.*)

Jeremy (*in desperation*)—But *Parkman's Hollow* is surrounded by trees.

Emily—She won't go to *Parkman's Hollow*.

Jeremy—Yes, she will. She said she would.

Judith—She won't when she gets out and sees how the trees are falling. (*An unforgiving look from Jeremy.*)

Emily—No, she'll keep to the moors.

Jeremy—Are you fools? Keep to the moors! She'll be buried alive—that's what!—and you are her murderers!

(*He makes a bolt and runs off at d. l.*)

(*Judith stares at Emily, who smiles back to her quietly.*)

Emily—Oh, *Judy* dear, don't you see? The miracle has come. For the first time in three months he has shown a spark of interest.

Judith—What does it mean? Yet we—we mustn't be too hopeful.

Emily—Why not? Doesn't this prove his interest is not dead, but only sleeping?

(*Enter Standish, d. r.*)

Standish—Did you ring, miss?

Judith—No *Standish*—that is, I don't think so. (*He turns to go.*)

Judith—*Standish*, have you seen *Mr. Leviston*?

Standish—Just now, madam. He bolted past me up the stairs.

Emily (*with satisfaction*)—Ah!

Judith (*to Standish*)—You mean he was running?

Standish—Running, madam? He was on wings. He barely touched the stairs, if you'll believe it.

Emily—Ah!

(*Enter Lettie, d. l.*)

Lettie (*to Judith*)—Your pardon, madam, but *Mr. Leviston* has rushed out in the storm with no coat—only his snowshoes! (*Hysterically.*) Oh, oh, oh, he is mad! Please madam, send someone after him.

Emily—Hush, Lettie. (*To Judith*) We'd better watch from the library window in case anything does go wrong.

Judith—Yes, yes! (*She runs off, d. r.*)

Emily (to Lettie)—It's all right, Lettie. Don't be alarmed! Nothing dreadful is going to happen.

Judith (calling from the library)—Quick, Emily, he's found her.

Emily (to Standish)—Get something hot, Standish. (*Standish goes off d. l.*) (*Emily runs off d. r., followed by Lettie.*)

Lettie (from the library)—Oh, ma'am, where is he? Is he buried alive?

Judith—Hush! He has just come in!

(*The front door slams, and a second later Jeremy enters d. l., carrying Patricia, whose eyes are closed. He places her in a chair and rings for Standish, meanwhile unbuttoning her coat and chafing her hands.*)

(*Enter Standish d. l., with glass.*)

Jeremy (lacking no enthusiasm now)—Quick! (*He takes the glass from Standish and pours it between Pat's lips. Standish goes off d. l.*) (*Aunt Judith and Emily appear at d. r. and watch. Emily smiles at the scene and droves Judith away.*)

Pat (opening her eyes)—Jeremy! (*She sits up.*)

Jeremy (in an excited voice)—Yes!

Pat—Oh! (*She looks straight into his eyes, and he turns to the fire as if he were ashamed of what he had done.*)

Pat—Thank you, Jeremy. I believe you have saved my life! (*Pause, but he does not look at her.*)

Pat—Jeremy?

Jeremy—Yes.

Pat—Did Aunt Judith ask you to come for me?

Jeremy—No.

Pat—Did Aunt Emily?

Jeremy—No.

Pat—You came because you wanted to?

Jeremy (facing her)—I didn't want to see you die an untimely death. You are young, and have a great deal to live for.

Pat—Perhaps, and perhaps not! Jeremy?

Jeremy—Yes?

Pat—Suppose you had perished, too?

Jeremy—That wouldn't have mattered in the least.

Pat—You mean it wouldn't have mattered in the least since I had already perished? (*Pause.*) Just what did you mean, Jeremy?

Jeremy (coming down stage)—Because a man saves a girl from death does not always mean he cannot live without her.

Pat (rising)—But you—Jeremy—you have been so strange—nothing could arouse you, and so I thought that maybe—(*she comes down stage and puts a hand on his arm.*) Jeremy, would

you have gone out for Aunt Judith in this storm? That is—would you have wanted to?

Jeremy (moving uncomfortably)—Certainly!

Pat—Without your coat?

Jeremy—Yes.

Pat (going back to the fireplace and picking up her coat and snowshoes)—Thank you. That's all I wanted to know.

(He does not look at her as she goes out dragging her snowshoes after her. At the door she turns and looks wistfully back at him, then goes off, d. l.) (Jeremy stands, staring straight ahead.)

(Enter Standish, d. r.)

Standish—Dinner is served, sir.

Jeremy—Damn it! I don't want any! *(Standish is startled.)*

Standish—Very well, sir. *(He goes off, d. l.)*

(Jeremy paces back and forth, back and forth.)

(Enter d. l. Emily and Judith.)

Judith (with determination in her eye)—Jeremy, you are going to eat some dinner. *(Emily stands back and smiles to herself at the scene. Jeremy takes a cigarette from his pocket and lights it.)* And you are going to put that dreadful thing away. *(She attempts to take it away from him, but he puts it behind him stubbornly.)* Very well, I shall send for a doctor! *(She starts to d. l., then Emily comes forward.)*

Emily (slyly)—What have you done to Patricia? The child refuses to come to dinner. Jeremy, you must do differently. You have a bad effect on her, a very bad effect. *(Pause. Judith waits.)*

Jeremy—Where is she?

Emily—Upstairs in the living room—weeping her heart out. *(He flings his cigarette in the fire and runs off d. l.)*

Judith—Heavens, Emily, what ails him?

Emily (going to her sister)—We can't complain of indifference now. I call that downright enthusiasm.

Judith—But what does it mean?

Emily—Stupid! He loves Pat, of course.

Judith—He loves Patricia!

Emily—Yes, and I've suspected it all along *(taking her sister's arm)*. Come, let's go out to dinner. *(She leads Judith off d. l. as the curtain falls.)*

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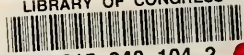
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