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Red Acre Farm

A Rural Comedy Drama in
Three Acts

By

GORDAN V. MAY

Author of "Bar Haven," "At Random Run," etc.



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1910

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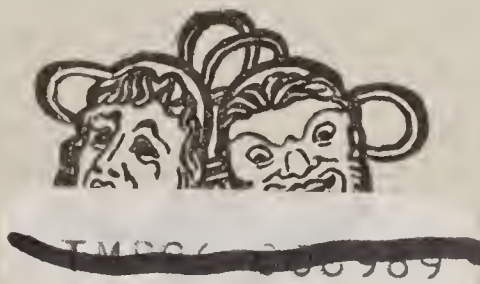
Red Acre Farm

CHARACTERS

JOSIAH ARMSTRONG, *the owner of Red Acre Farm.*
COLONEL BARNABY STRUTT, "*Crawling Codwollopers.*"
JONAH JONES, *a farm helper.*
SQUIRE HARCOURT, *who holds a mortgage.*
HARRY HARCOURT, *his profligate son.*
DICK RANDALL, *who seeks his fortune.*
TOM BUSBY, *a traveling merchant.*
AMANDA ARMSTRONG, *Josiah's wife.*
NELLIE ARMSTRONG, *driven from home.*
LAURA ARMSTRONG, *a poor, weak sinner.*
MRS. BARNABY STRUTT, *the Colonel's wife.*
"JUNIOR," *adopted daughter of the Strutts.*

ACT I.—Living-room of Armstrong's home. Spring.
ACT II.—Garden in front of Armstrong's home. Summer.
ACT III.—Same as Act I. Winter.

TIME :—The present.
PLACE :—Rural New England.
COSTUMES —Modern and appropriate.
TIME OF REPRESENTATION :—Two hours and a half.



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Red Acre Farm

ACT I

SCENE.—*The living-room at Red Acre Farm, JOSIAH ARMSTRONG'S home. A plain room, plainly furnished. Door C. in flat; door R.; door L. There is a window in flat to the right of the door. Above door, R., is a tall clock, practicable; below the door is a sofa placed against the wall. Above door, L., is a wide fireplace, and standing before it is a chair. A table stands down stage a little left of C., with a chair on either side of it. Other furniture and decorations ad libitum, so that they be characteristic. JOSIAH discovered seated right of table at rise, looking over papers. He has one hand supporting his head as if in doubt or despair.*

Enter AMANDA ARMSTRONG, R.

AMANDA (*coming to back of him and laying a hand on his shoulder*). What is the matter, Josiah?

JOS. (*shaking his head sadly*). It's no use, Mandy, it's no use.

AMANDA. What are you talking about?

JOS. The mortgage.

AMANDA. The mortgage? Oh, yes. (*Crosses and sits left of table.*) When is it due?

JOS. To-morrow.

AMANDA. And you are going to pay it off?

JOS. I'd like to, Mandy. God knows I would. But —

(*Hesitates.*)

AMANDA. But? You haven't got the money? Is that it?

JOS. (*nodding his head*). Yep, that's it. You know we

had a mighty bad season last year. Crops waren't near up ter usual. And then I had so many things to buy.

AMANDA. Well, Nellie turned in nearly all she made teaching school.

JOS. I know. But thar wus Laura to think of. Ye know she 'lowed she must have fine clothes and go ter this place and that place. And it all tuck money, Mandy. It all tuck money.

AMANDA. Well, I reckon she'll make a good match some day, and then mebbe we'll git it all back. She hain't like Nellie, ye know.

JOS. No, she hain't.

AMANDA. That gal is satisfied to stick right here and teach the country youngsters all her life. She hain't got no ambition like Laura. Lestwise, her ambition —

JOS. Is worse than none at all. I know it, Mandy. Good Lord! Ter think that any gal o' mine would want to be a play actor. I'd much ruther see her dead.

AMANDA. So would I, Josiah. But thet is only what cums o' lettin' her mix up in them air amateur plays they give down at Pine Valley. I wish we'd never let her go.

JOS. Oh, ye couldn't stop her. She's that headstrong. Especially when Dick Randall wus in it too.

AMANDA. He's another stage-struck fool.

JOS. Indeed he is. His father 'lows thet he stays up half the night a-studyin' speeches out o' plays by some crazy ijit by the name o' Shakespeare. And then he goes out in the barn and struts around, and flings out his arms and hollers. Lord bless me! I told 'Lige Randall thet if he wus a son o' mine, I'd put him in a lunatic asylum afore he got real violent and hurt somebody. But thet hain't neither here nur thar. The mortgage cums due to-morrer, and I hain't got more'n enough ter pay the interest.

AMANDA (*rising*). I wish we were quit of it.

(*Comes in front of table.*)

JOS. So do I. So do I.

AMANDA. For Squire Harcourt hain't been very accommodating to us; although bless me if I can understand why.

JOS. (*laughing*). Ye can't, eh? Why, bless yer dear heart, Mandy, Squire Harcourt hez never forgive me fur winning ye away from him, nigh forty years ago.

AMANDA. Why, Josiah!

Jos. It's gospel truth, and ye know it. (*Draws her down on his knee.*) D'ye remember thet night down at Bascomb's huskin' party? Ye wus thar, a-lookin' as sweet and purty as a gal could. Lord! half the boys in the county wus a-swearin' by ye. But even the most conceited o' 'em 'lowed thet the race wus between Hank Harcourt and me. I vowed thet night while I slicked my hair thet I wus a-goin' ter have it out afore I cum home. And then I went out ter the barn and made a little speech ter dad's old brindle cow. (*Laughs.*) Lord bless me, I kin remember yit how old bossy looked at me, jest as if she wus a-wonderin' ef I had suddenly gone crazy. But I wus in dead earnest then, and I went to thet huskin' a-mumblin' wot I wus a-goin' ter say to ye all the way. And wusn't I hoppin' mad when ye druve up to the gate in Hank's rig, and he helped ye out so gallantly. And how close he stuck ter ye too. Cum ter find out arterward, he wus bent on poppin' thet night, same as me. Gosh, how hard I tried ter git a chance. At last I saw ye slip out o' the barn and go down by the old apple tree. It didn't take me long ter foller ye. But by gum, Hank wus ahead o' me. And thar I see him, a-kneelin' at yer feet and a-sayin' all kinds o' purty things. Lord, how my fingers itched ter grab him by the seat o' his britches and duck him in the horse trough. But I didn't. I jest stood by and let him have his fling. And then how my heart jumped fur joy. Suddenly I saw him git up, toss his head angry like, and strut back to the barn. Then I cum forward, and —— (*Laughs.*) I furgot all about my fine speech. I jest grabbed ye 'round the waist, and I said: "Mandy, I love ye. Will ye have me?"

AMANDA (*softly*). And I said, "Yes."

Jos. So ye did, Mandy. God bless ye! I hope ye've never regretted it.

AMANDA. I never have, Josiah.

Jos. I know I hain't give ye all the comforts I'd like to, but ——

AMANDA (*tenderly*). But you've loved me, Josiah, all these years, and that's worth more'n riches.

Jos. So it is, Mandy. So it is.

AMANDA. And now about this mortgage?

Jos. Oh, I s'pose we'll have ter pay the interest and let it go on fur another year.

AMANDA (*decidedly*). No, we won't, Josiah. We'll pay that mortgage off to-morrer.

Jos. (*surprised*). How?

AMANDA. D'ye remember grandmother's necklace?

JOS. The heirloom?

AMANDA. Yes. It's pearls, ye know, and wuth more'n five thousand dollars.

JOS. But, good Lord, Mandy, ye wouldn't sell that, now would ye?

AMANDA. Yes, Josiah, I would. I know it is an heirloom, but I am sure grandmother would be willing to have us sacrifice it to save our farm. (*Rises and goes toward clock.*) Yes, we will give that to Squire Harcourt, and mebbe some day we will be able to buy it back.

JOS. (*rising; overcome*). Mandy. My darlin' gal. My sweetheart.

(*AMANDA gets necklace from clock, and hands it to him.*)

AMANDA. There, Josiah. Pay off the mortgage with grandmother's heirloom.

(*JOS. takes it, but still holds her hands.*)

JOS. (*fervently*). God bless ye, Mandy. God bless ye.

(*Draws her to him, and kisses her.*)

Enter LAURA ARMSTRONG, D. F.

LAURA (*coming down and noticing the necklace*). Why, father, what are you doing with great-grandmother's necklace? Are you going to give it to me?

JOS. No, Laura.

LAURA. But you know you promised that it should be my wedding present.

JOS. (*hesitating*). I—know—but—but — Well, ye see ye—hain't married—yit.

AMANDA. We're goin' to give it away, Laura.

LAURA (*surprised*). Give it away?

JOS. Mother don't mean that exactly. We're goin' ter use it to pay off the mortgage.

LAURA (*aghast*). You are going to—to use—that? (*Points.*)

JOS. Yes, child. But don't ye worry, my gal. We'll have it back ag'in afore yer married. (*Near her.*) Mebbe ye'll git it as a weddin' present, even ef we don't git it back.

(*LAURA turns on him, and he laughs, shaking a finger at her.*)
Oh, I know that Harry Harcourt cums here purty regular.

LAURA (*bitterly*). But it is not for me he comes. It is for Nellie.

JOS. Nonsense. Harry wouldn't make up to no gal like Nellie. It's you he's arter, and jest ye go in and win him, and thar won't be no trouble about yer gittin' thet air necklace fur a weddin' present. (*He places necklace in clock.*)

Enter JONAH JONES, D. F. He falls in the doorway.

AMANDA (*starting*). Lord bless me, Jonah. What on airth is the matter?

JONAH (*rising slowly to his feet, rubbing his shins*). Dod rot thet air door-step. But I say, Josiah. The old cow hez got her head through the bars and can't get it out.

JOS. Why didn't ye take the bars down, then?

JONAH (*slapping his knee*). Wal, by gosh, I never thought of that. (*Runs off at D. F., with much noise.*)

JOS. Thet boy'll be the death o' me yit. [*Exit, c.*]

(LAURA has taken a book and thrown herself on sofa down R. and is reading.)

AMANDA (C.). Laura, dear, I expect Colonel Barnaby Strutt and his wife over to tea. Won't ye jest set the table, while I go out and pick some strawberries and hull 'em?

LAURA (*impatiently*). Oh, let Nellie do it when she comes home from school. I am too interested in this novel.

AMANDA (*patiently*). All right, dear. [*Exit L., slowly.*]

LAURA (*closing book and rising to a sitting posture*). So the poor girl, Lucille, married the marquis after all. (*Musingly.*) Oh, I wish I could marry one. And they think Harry Harcourt is coming here to see me? I wish he was. His father is rich. He will have plenty of money one of these days. But no. It is Nell. Nell, with her baby face and winning ways. Bah! (*Rises.*) If I only had some really fine clothes, I might — (*Pauses near clock.*) And they are going to give that necklace away for this farm. And some day the very thing they promised to me will belong to Nell. Oh, how I hate it all. (*Opens clock; takes out necklace.*) If I only had it, what dresses I could buy. Silks and satins that would dazzle even Harry Harcourt. And they always said it was to be mine. (*Stamps her foot angrily.*) Oh, it is a shame. I'd like to —

(*Noise outside. She quickly shoves the necklace in her bosom.*)

Enter JUNIOR, D. F.

JUN. Hello, Laura.

LAURA. What do you want, Mehitabel?

JUN. I want to be called right, fur one thing. Ye know my name hain't Mehitabel.

LAURA. Of course it is. Only your adopted father took it into his silly head to call you Mehitabel Junior.

JUN. Wal, thet wus so's folks wouldn't git me mixed with his wife. Land sakes, how I hate the name. I'm glad he tuk ter callin' me Junior. It sounds a heap better, don't ye think?

LAURA (*idly*). Oh, I don't think anything about it. I don't care.

JUN. No, I reckon ye don't. Yer too lazy ter think, and too stupid to care.

LAURA (*severely*). Junior!

JUN. Oh, ye don't like the truth, do ye? I reckon ye hain't used ter hearin' it around hum.

LAURA. I'd like to slap your impudent face.

JUN. Ef ye tried it on, I'd bite yer fingers off, that I would. (*Crash outside. Enter JONAH, D. F.*) Fur the land's sakes, Jonah, wot air 'ye tryin' ter do?

JONAH (*coming down c.*). Oh, nuthin'. I kicked over the milk pail, thet's all. I wus in such a hurry ter see ye. Say, wot d'ye s'pose we've got down in the barn?

JUN. Oh, I don't know.

JONAH. Guess.

JUN. Kittens?

JONAH. Nop.

JUN. Pups?

JONAH. Nop.

JUN. A calf?

JONAH. Nop.

JUN. A lamb?

JONAH. Nop.

JUN. Well, I give it up.

JONAH. A live skunk.

JUN. Oh, shucks!

JONAH. Cum on down and have a look at it.

JUN. I don't want to. It stinks.

JONAH. No, it don't. Lestwise, not so much. Ye see, I dumped Laura's bottle o' cologne over him this mornin'.

LAURA. What!

JONAH (*without noticing her*). And thet sorter helped make him smell a little better. Cum on.

(*Both up stage at D. F.*)

JUN. (*looking off*). Oh, here cums Nellie and her feller.

[*Exit D. F., followed by JONAH.*]

LAURA (*at window*). Harry Harcourt. And still they are blind enough to say that he is coming here to see me. Oh, I wish I had fine clothes. I would win him yet. (*Catches at necklace.*) If I only owned this. [*Exit, R.*]

Enter HARRY HARCOURT and NELLIE ARMSTRONG, D. F.

HAR. Of course you are tired. Who would not be, who had to stand all day and try and knock some sense into the heads of such a lot of numskulls as there are in that school? If it was me, I know I should kill a few of them within a week.

NELL. (*laying aside books, shawl, etc.; laughing*). Then I fear you would get a greater rest than you would care for. A very long one, in fact. (*Seated on sofa.*)

HAR. No doubt. But why don't you give it up? (*Seated beside her.*) You have education. You are pretty—(*as NELL. makes a gesture*) oh, yes, you are. You have talent as an actress. I have seen you in some of those plays down at Pine Valley, and you compare favorably with many a professional that I have seen in New York. Why don't you go to the metropolis? You would have no difficulty in getting a position far better than trying to teach a lot of country louts their letters.

NELL. That has always been my one ambition. But—but—no. Father and mother are both opposed to the stage.

HAR. Oh, pshaw! You have got yourself to think of, as well as them. Come, what do you say? I will take you to New York and introduce you to a friend of mine who will get you a good place. Something where you can work up to a star.

NELL. (*shaking her head*). No. I shall probably never go. If I did—(*decidedly*) it would be—alone.

HAR. (*frowning, then laughing*). You would have a mighty hard time of it—alone.

NELL. (*rising*). Oh, I would risk all that. I am no baby.

HAR. No, but you haven't cut your wisdom teeth yet. You need some one who is wise. Some one who has been there, and knows the snares and pitfalls. (*Rises and goes to her.*) Come, now, don't be foolish. Let us kiss and make up.

(*Attempts to kiss her. She slaps his face.*)

NELL. (*crossing to L.*). I may not have *cut* my wisdom teeth yet, Mr. Harcourt, but I think they are almost ready to come through the gums.

HAR. (*R., aside*). Curse her.

Enter COLONEL BARNABY STRUTT and MRS. BARNABY STRUTT,
D. F.

MRS. S. (*to NELL.*). Howdy, Nellie? Whar's yer mother? (*To HAR.*) Good-afternoon, Harry. Is yer father well? I haven't seen him in quite a spell. (*To NELL.*) How's yer old mare? I heard it wus threatened with the glanders. If it is, thar's nuthin' better than Bullock's Glander Cure. My uncle's brother-in-law had a horse thet wus tuk with the glanders once, and he used jest one bottle o' Bullock's Glander Cure, and the horse wus better than he ever wus before. (*To HAR.*) Did the Squire buy Judson's pasture field thet he wus thinkin' o' buyin'? Lordy me, but it is terrible hot to-day fur May, hain't it?

COL. Hot! Crawling Codwollopers! Ye don't call this hot, now do ye? Why, it hain't nuthin'. Why, when I wus in Timbucktoo, I remember one day when it wus a hundred and ninety-two in the shade. (*General ejaculations.*) Fact! We wus away in the interior, and our provisions hed about run out. Didn't even have matches ter build a fire with. Suddenly, a flock o' sea-gulls —

NELL. A flock of sea-gulls? Colonel Strutt!

COL. Fact! I never could quite understand how them air sea-gulls got a thousand miles ere so frum water. But thar they were. And as they flew over our heads, they began to lay eggs. (*Ejaculations.*) Fact! Crawling Codwollopers, it jest fairly rained eggs fur a while. And d'ye know, it wus so hot, and so moist, and so steamy like, thet when them air eggs struck the earth, they wus hard boiled. Every danged one o' 'em. Fact!

HAR. (*sneeringly*). Wonderful.

COL. Wusn't it? I never saw the beat in all my life. And I have seen some mighty curious things, too.

MRS. S. But whar's yer ma, Nellie? She invited us over ter tea.

NELL. I think I saw her in the strawberry patch as I came in. I will go and call her. (*Going.*)

MRS. S. Oh, ye needn't mind. I'll go too. I hear ye got some fine berries this year.

NELL. We have. And so large and sweet. Father brought in one yesterday that was almost as large as a walnut.

COL. Crawling Codwollopers! A walnut? Huh! That's nuthin'. Why, when I wus in Timbucktoo — (MRS. S. and NELL. *exeunt* D. F. COL. *turns to* HAR.) When I wus in Timbucktoo — (HAR. *exits*, R. COL. *glances about*.) When—I—wus—in—Timbucktoo — Huh!

[*Exit L., in disgust.*]

Enter HAR., R.

HAR. Confound him and his Timbucktoo. He is forever talking about that place, and I don't believe he was ever outside the county in his life. So our little schoolmarm does not take to me, eh? That slap left a sting that I shall not forget in a hurry. She will not have me? Oh, very well. I will try her sister then. Either one will do for a lark.

Enter LAURA, R.

LAURA. Good-afternoon, Mr. Harcourt.

HAR. Good-afternoon, Miss Armstrong.

LAURA. I am so glad to see you, I —

(*Hesitates ; speaks coquettishly.*)

HAR. (*gallantly*). And I am glad to be here. You have a very pleasant home.

LAURA. And yet, how I loathe it all. There is no novelty, no variety. No chance for ambition. It is the same old grind. The same faces, the same ground, and trees, and sky. Bah! I am sick of it all. I long to get out into the world. To do something. To be somebody.

(LAURA *seated on sofa.*)

HAR. (C., *aside*). This conquest will be easy. (*Aloud.*) So you really have ambitions, eh? Perhaps I can help you to attain them.

LAURA (*quickly*). Oh, Harry—ere—I—mean—Mr. Harcourt.

HAR. (*bending near her*). Call me Harry if you like. May I call you Laura?

LAURA (*after a moment answering with mock shyness*). Yes.

HAR. (*seated by her side*). Then tell me, what would you like to be?

LAURA. I'd like first of all to get away from this place. To go to the city. To see life. To drink deep of the cup of pleasure. To—to—live. I merely exist here.

HAR. Suppose I was to offer you the chance you so much desire?

LAURA. You? Oh, Harry, don't mock me.

HAR. I am not. I mean it. We will go to New York. We will taste of life and pleasure and happiness to its full. We will know what it is to live.

LAURA (*clasping her hands in ecstasy*). Oh, Harry!

HAR. (*bending near her*). Will you go?

LAURA. Will I? Indeed, yes. When and where you choose.

HAR. Let us seal the bargain then. (*Kisses her; rises.*) Keep up your heart, my dear. You shall have all that you wish, and more. As soon as I can make the necessary arrangements to get away—heigho for New York, and a revel. (*Up stage.*) Good-bye. [*Exit, D. F.*]

LAURA (*exhibiting her joy*). Can it really be true? Am I at last to see the fulfilment of my heart's greatest wish? (*Rises.*) To go out into the world, and—and conquer? Oh, it seems impossible. And yet—he has said so, and I will believe him. We shall go to the great city. We shall see life and happiness. We shall love—we shall ——— (*Pauses, then suddenly presses her hands to her heart.*) Marry? He did not speak of marriage. He did not even say he loved me. (*Pause. She appears startled.*) My God! can he—mean ———

(*Buries her face in her hands.*)

Enter TOM BUSBY, D. F.

TOM (*glancing about*). Good-afternoon, everybody.

LAURA (*turning quickly*). Eh?

TOM (*coming down c., bowing*). I beg your pardon. My name is Busby. Tom Busby. My card. (*Offers her a card.*)

I am a traveling merchant. I have some fine things to sell, and I also buy anything I can get. Wouldn't you like to look over my goods?

LAURA. No—I——

TOM. I have some nice silks and satins. Latest styles. Fine goods and neat patterns. Just the thing for dresses. You ought to have some, you are such a fine-looking lady.

LAURA. I—I—have no money.

TOM. Maybe you have something you would like to sell, then? (*Looks about the room.*) I buy everything. Furniture, laces, clocks, silverware, jewelry. (LAURA *starts.*) Ah! You have some jewelry, eh? I will pay the highest prices for it. Rings, bracelets, studs, watches, necklaces—— (LAURA *grasps at the necklace in her bosom. TOM catches her hand, and draws out the necklace.*) Ah. A fine necklace. Pearls. Ummm. If you have no money, why don't you sell this? I will give you fifty dollars for it.

LAURA. Fifty dollars? It is worth more than that.

TOM. Oh, yes, if you went to buy it. But you must not forget that it is second-hand; and so old-fashioned, I couldn't sell it to anybody this way. I would have to have the stones all reset; and that costs a lot of money. Well, say seventy-five dollars then. (*Takes out wallet.*) Shall I count out seventy-five dollars?

LAURA. No—no—I—I——

TOM. Wait. I'll tell you what I'll do. You are such a fine-looking lady, and I know you want some fine clothing. (*Counts out money.*) Here is one hundred dollars.

LAURA (*hesitating*). I—I——

TOM. Yes, sure. Of course. One hundred dollars. Count it.

(*He carefully places the money in her hand. She clutches at it, and he slowly draws the necklace from her fingers.*)

LAURA. Oh, heavens! What have I done? What have I done?

TOM (*slowly retiring up stage*). Only completed a little business transaction, my dear lady. Now you can buy some really fine clothing.

(*Bows and quietly exits, D. F.*)

LAURA (*standing c., in deep thought*). Yes, yes, I will. It was mine anyway. They always said so. Why should I

not take it? It was worthless here. Now I shall have what I want. And perhaps—who knows—one day I shall be Mrs. Harcourt. One day? (*Sighs, then speaks vehemently.*) I will. I will. [*Exit, R.*]

Enter JONAH and JUN., D. F.

JONAH. Well, of course ef ye don't want it, ye needn't have it.

JUN. No, I don't want it. Land sakes, Mrs. Strutt would sure have a conniption fit, ef I wus ter bring a skunk—a real, live skunk, inter the house.

JONAH. I'm awfully sorry, June. I kinder had hopes thet ye might like it,—er—seein' as I wus the one who caught it.

JUN. I'll tell ye wot ye kin do.

JONAH. Wot?

JUN. You kill it.

JONAH. Yep.

JUN. And skin it.

JONAH. All right.

JUN. And git old Barstow ter cure the hide.

JONAH. And then ye kin make a pair o' ear tabs, eh?

JUN. No, but I kin make a little cap, or a muff.

JONAH (*slapping his knee*). Gosh, I never thought o' that. I'll do it, the fust thing to-morrer mornin'.

JUN. All right. But come, let us set Mrs. Armstrong's table for her. Poor, dear woman. 'Thar she wus, out in the sun, a-pickin' strawberries; and that lazy gal, Laura, a-layin' in here on her back, a-readin' some love story. She jest makes me sick, she does.

JONAH. Wal, I kinder reckon it's purty nigh all their own fault. They let her have her own way and do jest as she pleases. Nell, she's gotter git out and teach school. But Laura—— Huh! (*Confidentially.*) I tell ye, June. Wot she needs is a darn good wollopin'. Ef old Josiah would only take a nice big shingle and give it to her, good and plenty—well—she'd have ter take her meals off a shelf fur a while, and that would keep her frum layin' down so much, anyway.

JUN. Where does Mrs. Armstrong keep her dishes?

JONAH. Out in the pantry. Cum on and I'll show ye. (*Both exeunt L. and reënter with dishes, which they proceed to place on the table. While JUN. is putting on the cloth and arranging the dishes, JONAH exits and returns with several*

plates.) Say, June, d'ye remember the circus thet wus here last fall?

JUN. Do I? Wal, I jest reckon I do. Didn't I coax two shillin's out o' old Strutt, so's I could go?

JONAH. Yep, and I fed the animals, and they give me a free ticket. Wal, say, d'ye remember that gagler?

JUN. The wot? I don't remember any animal like that. Did it have a long neck?

JONAH. No, no. I mean the feller wot held a feather on his nose, and throwed balls and plates and things inter the air, and caught 'em all when they cum down.

JUN. Oh, yep, I remember him. He wus a slick one, wusn't he?

JONAH. Oh, I don't know. I reckon I could do it myself.

JUN. (*clapping her hands*). Could ye, Jonah?

JONAH. Sure. I've tried that air feather business already. And ef I hadn't a-sneezed, it would have stayed thar all right. But the danged thing tickled my nose so that I had to kerchoo. I never tried the balls and plates and things, but I know it must be easy. Ye jest watch me.

(*He takes several plates, tosses them in the air, and makes frantic efforts to catch them, but misses every one. They smash on the floor. JUN., who has seated herself on the edge of table, jumps down with an exclamation.*)

JUN. Glory be!

JONAH. Wal, that wus only the fust time. Next time I'll do better.

JUN. Next time? I don't reckon thar'll be any next time when Mrs. Armstrong sees them air plates all smashed to pieces.

JONAH (*staring, then slapping his knee*). By gosh! I never thought o' that.

Enter AMANDA, MRS. S. and COL., D. F.

AMANDA. Gracious, whatever is all the racket about?

JONAH. Wal, ye see ——— (*Pauses.*)

JUN. It wus this way. We thought we'd set the table fur ye ———

MRS. S. And ye've broke some o' Mrs. Armstrong's best chiny dishes, eh? I'll bet ye wus a-carryin' on. Now ye go right hum and feed the chickens, and then ye kin git yer own supper and go ter bed. Now go, afore I cut a switch and lay it across yer back. (*JUN. starts up stage with a toss of her*

head.) And don't ye dare give me no sassy looks, er I'll whale ye when I do git hum. [Exit JUN., D. F.]

COL. (after viewing the broken dishes). Crawling Codwollers! Did ye break all o' them air plates, Jonah Jones?

JONAH (whimpering). Y-e-s, s-i-r.

COL. (catching him by the collar). Wal, yew kin jest cum out to the barn with me. I'll teach ye to break dishes. Why, when I wus in Timbucktoo — [Exit D. F., with JONAH.]

MRS. S. Lordy me, but thet wus a dreadful shame.

(AMANDA begins to gather up the broken pieces.)

Enter NELL., D. F.

NELL. (noticing dishes and beginning to help pick up the pieces while speaking). Why, mother dear—did you let the dishes fall?

AMANDA. No, it wus Jonah and Junior that did it.

NELL. Well, you go out on the porch with Mrs. Strutt and rest a while. I will set the table.

AMANDA. All right. Come, Mrs. Strutt, and I'll show ye that new patchwork pattern I wus a-tellin' ye about.

MRS. S. And don't furgit thet air receipt fur strawberry jam. [Exeunt AMANDA and MRS. S., L.]

NELL. (after picking up all the pieces). Six plates. And mother's best china, too. Let me see. Perhaps if I do not buy that new hat I was thinking of, I may be able to save enough to get her some others. [Exit, R.]

Enter DICK RANDALL, D. F. He is dressed for traveling and carries a suit case. Looks about.

DICK. No one here. I wonder where she can be? (Enter NELL. R., with dishes.) Nellie!

NELL. Dick Randall! What are you doing here?

DICK. I have come to say good-bye, Nellie.

NELL. What? (Sets dishes on table and faces him.) Where are you going?

DICK. To New York.

NELL. Oh, Dick.

DICK (crossing and sitting on sofa). Yes. I cannot stay here any longer. Perhaps I am wrong. Father says I am. But if so, I cannot help it. I have ambitions. I want to make a name for myself. What chance have I here? What have I to look forward to save the drudgery of the farm? To get up at

four o'clock and follow the plow all day in the hot sun. To hoe and rake and dig and thrash. Milk cows and feed stock. And all for what? A mere pittance. Not enough to keep body and soul together. There may have been a time when a man of life and ambition could gain a competence at the work. But that time has passed now. The creamery people grind you down to the last farthing, and then very often refuse your milk. The accursed commission brokers take your stock and either let it rot in their cellars or pay you about half what it is worth. Oh, don't tell me. I have watched the thing work for many years. It is a slavery worse than that for which our forefathers fought in '61. And when you are old? What? It is a back, bent and broken with toil. Rheumatism. A withered spirit, and a grouty disposition. No, Nellie, I—I—cannot go on with only such a prospect before me. Good God, I would go mad.

NELL. But what do you intend to do?

DICK. Go to New York. Other men with a strong body and a brave heart have gone there and gained a fortune from their toil. So will I.

NELL. (*seated by his side*). But how, Dick? How? Have you no plans?

DICK. Well—er—yes, Nell, I have—but ——

NELL. Tell me, then.

DICK (*hesitating*). I—I—am afraid you will only laugh at me. Everybody has, and I ——

NELL. Oh, Dick, you know I wouldn't do that. Come, tell me your ambitions. What is it you wish to be?

DICK (*speaking after a pause*). An actor.

NELL. Dick!

DICK. I want to thrill people. I want them to feel the emotions I feel. I want to sway them. To make them laugh and cry at my bidding. I—I—want to make them better.

NELL. To make them better?

DICK. Yes. The stage, rightly directed, is a greater agent for good, a greater force for the betterment of humanity, mentally and morally, than all the pulpits in Christendom. For you can appeal to them with the senses. You can make them see and hear and feel the effects of sin. You can show them the gain of righteousness. You can force home upon them the great truths of morality, chastity, aye, and Christianity as well, with greater power than a Demosthenes can do it with the lips alone.

NELL. (*fervently*). Oh, Dick. I hope—I shall pray that you may succeed.

DICK. Thank you, Nellie. It will be an added inspiration to me to know that there is at least one—friend in this place who believes in me.

NELL. Believes in you, Dick? Of course I do. I always have. I—I—only regret that—that—I cannot—go—with you.

DICK (*surprised*). Nellie?

NELL. You have struck a responsive chord in my heart, Dick. (*Pauses, then rises and goes C., with an embarrassed laugh.*) Some day, when you are famous, I will come to you and ask you to teach me your art.

DICK (*rising*). Teach you, Nellie? Ah, if I could only teach you one thing, I would ——

NELL. What is it, Dick?

DICK. To—to—love me.

NELL. (*turning away*). Oh, Dick.

DICK (*with a despairing gesture*). Oh, I know full well that I cannot. (*A pause.*) Well, good-bye. (*He holds out a hand, which she does not take. Pause.*) I hope I haven't insulted you, Nellie? I—I—should not have spoken. Forgive me. I was presumptuous. I am sorry. (*He turns her face toward him. She is crying.*) What? Crying, Nellie?

NELL. Yes—I—oh, Dick, I—I—don't want you to—to go.

DICK. Don't want me to go? Why not?

NELL. (*shyly*). Because—because. (*Pause.*) Because you have already taught me that lesson.

DICK (*joyously*). Nellie! Honest?

NELL. (*laughing*). Honest, Dick.

(*He takes her in his arms.*)

DICK. Oh, you have made me very happy. You have given me the one incentive I lacked. I shall go now, fully armored for the fight. Some day, with name and fame, I will come back to claim you.

NELL. And if you do not—I will come to you.

DICK. Good-bye, Nellie, and may God bless you.

NELL. (*solemnly*). Mispah, Dick.

DICK (*with bowed head*). Amen.

(*Kisses her and exits, D. F. NELL stands at door watching him.*)

Enter JOS., L.

JOS. What, gal? The tea not ready yit?

NELL. (*turning*). Eh?

JOS. Come, come. It is high time we had supper.

NELL. (*coming down stage*). Father, I want to speak to you.

JOS. Wal, what is it? Can't it wait? 'Thar is Mrs. Strutt and the Colonel out thar on the stoop, a-waitin' fur suthin' to eat.

NELL. It will be ready in a few minutes. (JOS. *seated right of table*.) Father, my term at the school will soon be up. When it is, I—I—want to go to New York.

JOS. (*aghast*). To New York? Why, good heavens, gal! Wot fur? Why don't ye know that place is the modern Sodom and Gomorrah? Don't ye know it's Babylon? Gal, are ye crazy?

NELL. (*quietly*). No, father.

JOS. Wal, then, why —

NELL. (*interrupting*). Listen, father. I have taught school for three years now, and I have given you nearly all I made. Now I want to begin doing something for myself.

JOS. Wal, hain't ye? Lord bless me! You've satisfied the school committee, and they're willin' to keep ye as long as ye want to stay. Why, it's a life job. Wot more d'ye want?

NELL. But I do not want to teach school all my life.

JOS. Wal, mebbe ye'll git married some day.

NELL. Perhaps I will. But I am not going to wait for that. I am going to New York.

JOS. And wot's to become o' us? Don't ye think o' me or yer mother, ye ungrateful gal?

NELL. Cannot Laura take my place as a bread-winner?

JOS. Laura? No, of course not. Laura has ambitions.

NELL. So have I, father.

JOS. (*angrily*). Yes, I know. To be a play-actor. To go gallivanting around the country with a lot o' ragmuffins. A-skip-pin' about a filthy stage, and a-showin' yerself off fur money. Ugh! I'm ashamed o' ye.

NELL. Oh, father, you do not understand.

JOS. Don't I? Huh! I reckon I've read all about it.

NELL. Nevertheless, I want to go.

JOS. (*striking table with his fist*). I refuse to let ye.

NELL. (*quietly but decidedly*). Then, father, I shall go without your permission.

JOS. (*rising*). What! What! Gal, d'ye know wot yer sayin'?

NELL. I do, father.

JOS. Ye never acted like this afore.

NELL. And I would not do so now if you would but be reasonable.

JOS. Reasonable! Reasonable? Ye call makin' terms with the devil being reasonable? No, sir. Gal, I want ye to understand this. I refuse to let ye go. If ye dare to disobey me, ye are no longer a daughter o' mine. I'll wash my hands o' ye. (*Enter LAURA, R., unobserved. She remains near door.*) You'll be lost. A play-actor? Good Lord! A play-actor is a scoundrel, a villain, a thief. They're everything that is devilish and bad. If ye hain't entirely lost to all shame, think well on this afore ye decide.

NELL. I have thought about it, father. Long and earnestly. I cannot go on forever with nothing but the dull, commonplace life of a country school-teacher before me. My mind is made up. I shall go.

JOS. Then go, and may —

Enter AMANDA, D. F., followed by MRS. S. and COL. LAURA exits R., at their entrance.

AMANDA. Well, well, hain't tea ready yit?

NELL. I will go and fetch it at once, mother. [*Exit, R.*

(*JOS. sinks limply into chair right of table.*)

AMANDA (*noticing him, and coming quickly to his side*). Why, what on airth is the matter, Josiah?

JOS. Nuthin', Mandy.

COL. Ye look kinder bill-yus, Josiah. And ef ye air, thar hain't nuthin' better'n swamroot tea. Why, when I wus in Timbucktoo, I remember one day when everybody in the party wus tuk sick with bill-yusness. Fact! Every dang one. Crawling Codwollopers! Jest think o' nigh onter fifty thousand men, all tuk sick with bill-yusness. Fact! Some o' 'em fairly turned green, they wus so far gone. But, sir, I jest ups and makes a pot full o' swamroot tea, and then I lines 'em all up and makes 'em march by me, and I give each one o' 'em a dipper full o' thet tea, and would ye believe it, it wus so good that in less than an hour we wus on the march again, and some o' 'em wus fairly runnin' they felt so good. Fact!

Enter NELL., R., with tea things, which she sets on the table.

AMANDA. Come, now, Mrs. Strutt. And you, too, Colonel. I'm sure ye must be hungry.

MRS. S. Hungry? Of course he is. He's allers hungry.

COL. Crawling Codwoppers! Ye don't call wot I eat bein' hungry, now do ye? Why, when I wus in Timbucktoo——

Enter SQUIRE HARCOURT, D. F.

JOS. (*rising*). Good-afternoon, Hank.

MRS. S. Howdy, Squire Harcourt? How's yer shoats makin' out this year? I heerd ye had bad luck with the yearlings last fall. Law me, but it's terrible when yer pork goes back on ye. But we're doin' right well with our chickens. Gittin' as many as forty eggs a day, now. Have ye set any yit? I s'pose yer wife is well? I didn't see her at the Ladies' Aid meetin' last week. "More'n likely, she's ailin'," sez I. But it do look like a good year fur fruits, and you've got some fine peach stock on yer place, Squire Harcourt.

JOS. I s'pose ye cum to see me about the mortgage?

SQUIRE. Yes, it comes due to-morrow, you know. I thought I would drop in and let you know. You will have the interest ready, I suppose?

JOS. Yes, and the principal, too.

SQUIRE. The principal, eh? I really did not think you could have saved four thousand dollars so soon. But no matter. If you have, so much the better.

Enter LAURA, R. ; she remains up R. C.

JOS. Wal, I'll 'low I didn't save it, Squire, but I've got the wherewithal to pay ye, nevertheless. Ye remember Grandmother Baird's pearl necklace, don't ye?

SQUIRE. Oh, yes. A very fine affair it was. And worth considerable, too, I understand.

JOS. Worth more'n five thousand dollars, Squire. (*LAURA starts.*) She willed it to Mandy when she died.

SQUIRE. Yes, I know she did.

JOS. Wal, we've decided—Mandy and me—to give ye that in payment for the mortgage.

SQUIRE. The heirloom?

JOS. Yep, the heirloom. We want to be quit o' thet mortgage, Mandy and me.

SQUIRE (*to AMANDA*). Do you agree to this, Amanda?

AMANDA. I do, Hank. Anything I've got belongs to

Josiah, and I will gladly give it for his sake. He has shared everything he has with me all through our life, and I will do the same.

SQUIRE. Well, so be it, then. I will take the necklace in full settlement of the mortgage. Shall I come over to-morrow and fix up the affair?

JOS. D'ye happen to have the mortgage by ye now?

SQUIRE (*taking a legal document from his pocket*). Yes.

JOS. Then we might as well settle it now, fust as last. (*Goes to clock, opens it and discovers that the necklace is gone.*) My God! (*Staggers down stage.*) Mandy, the necklace is gone!

AMANDA. Gone? No, no, it can't be, Josiah.

(*She rushes to clock and searches hurriedly.*)

JOS. It is, it is, I tell ye.

AMANDA (*slowly*). Yes, it is gone. We have been robbed.

JOS. And by whom? It wus thar not half an hour ago, fur I put it thar myself. Who hez been here since? Thar's Colonel Strutt —

COL. (*indignantly*). Crawling Codwollopers, Josiah Armstrong, ye surely wouldn't go fur to say thet I —

JOS. (*interrupting*). No, no, Colonel. Neither you nur yer wife knew it wus thar. Neither did Junior, nur Jonah, fur that matter. Who else hez been here? Mandy.

AMANDA. But, Josiah —

JOS. No, no, my little gal, I know it wusn't you. Laura?

LAURA (*in an injured tone*). Why, father, do you think I would steal it when you yourself have often told me that one day it was to be mine?

JOS. Of course ye wouldn't, Laura. Who else? (*Looks about and discovers NELL.*) Ah! Nell. Nell. The gal that wants to be a play-actor. Who has jest defied her old dad. (*Points an accusing finger at her and speaks decidedly.*) You. You are the thief!

NELL. (*aghast*). What! Oh, no, no, father. (*Falls on her knees before him.*) You don't mean that? You—you—cannot mean that you think I would rob you?

(*Buries her face in her hands.*)

JOS. Don't I? Didn't I tell ye that all play-actors wus rogues and villains, and—yes, and thieves? And ye want to be one too. Want to be so bad that ye will dare defy yer own

father and go against him. That is enough. Ye are the thief.

NELL. (*sobbing*). No, no. (*Turns to AMANDA, who has sunk in chair left of table.*) Mother, have you no word for me? Surely you do not believe —

AMANDA. Confess, my gal, and then mebbe —

NELL. Confess? My God! To what? I cannot confess. I did not take it.

JOS. Ye see? All o' ye bear witness. She not only robs her poor old father and mother of the means to clear themselves of debt, but she brazenly denies it.

NELL. No, no, father —

(*Catches his hand, but he flings her off.*)

JOS. Go 'way. Don't touch me. Ye are accursed. Ye play-actor. Ye thief. Go. Go with the rest o' the filth o' the earth. That's where ye belong now.

(*Situations :—AMANDA in chair left of table, her face buried in her hands. COL. and MRS. S. are up L., near fireplace. SQUIRE up R., near window. LAURA L. C., near door. JOS. stands R. C., near NELL., who is C., on her knees.*)

NELL. (*holding out her hands appealingly*). Father!

JOS. Don't call me that again. Ye're no longer a child o' mine. (*He goes to R. wall and turns a picture.*) Thar! I've turned yer picture to the wall. Ye're dead to this house forever. Go.

(*Points to D. F. Music pianissimo to end of act.*)

NELL. (*sobbing, rises slowly to her feet. Once more holds out her hands to JOS., who turns his back on her. She crosses slowly to R., stopping a moment by the side of AMANDA'S chair. Speaks brokenly between her sobs*). Good-bye—mother. (*Goes slowly up stage. Gets her hat and a shawl. Goes to D. F., where she pauses and speaks solemnly.*) May a just God forgive you all the wrong you have done me this day.

(*Goes slowly out at D. F. as curtain falls.*)

ACT II

SCENE.—*The exterior of Red Acre Farmhouse, in summer. At back is a drop representing woods or fields, and in front of it, leaving room for entrance from either side, runs a stone wall with an opening at C. At R. is a set cottage with a practicable door from above which projects a sign legible from the front bearing the legend "Boarders." At the lower corner of the house, at R. 1 E., stands a bench with a wash-tub standing on it. A clothes-line is stretched near it in any convenient fashion. Opposite L. 3 E., a little left of C., is a well-curb with a winch and bucket. The well is trapped so that a man can descend into it out of sight. A rustic seat stands across L. 1 E. JUN. discovered at rise, washing at a tub down R. and hanging up the clothes on a line stretched across the stage. She may be singing a song as she works.*

Enter JONAH, R. U.E., with a pail, brush and some theatrical posters.

JONAH (*coming down*). Howdy, June? Wotcher doin' here?

JUN. (*who has not noticed him*). Land sakes, Jonah, how ye scared me. Wot am I doin'? Wot d'ye s'pose I'm doin'? D'ye think I'm dressin' fur a ball er gittin' ready to take a ride in one o' them new-fangled things thet go a-whizzin' by here without no horses? Wot am I doin' here? Huh! Hain't ye got no eyes? Why, I'm helpin' Mrs. Armstrong with her wash.

JONAH. I got a job too.

JUN. Yes? Wot is it?

JONAH. Puttin' up these air pitchers fur the great show wot's a-cummin' down ter Pine Valley to-night. Greatest show that ever struck the place. That's wot the pitchers say, and that's wot the feller said that give 'em to me to stick up; so I reckon it must be so.

JUN. Oh, Jonah, air ye goin'?

JONAH. Yep, and I'm a-goin' ter take you, too.

JUN. Me? (*Claps her hands.*) Honest?

JONAH. Honest.

JUN. But whar'll ye git the money?

JONAH. Money? Huh! Why, ye see, I reckon I know a thing er two, I do. When thet air feller met me down at Willis's store and asked me ef I knew anybody who would put up their pitchers, I said: "If thar's two tickets fur the show in it, I'll do it myself."

JUN. And wot did he say?

JONAH. He said: "Ye're on."

JUN. Wot did he mean?

JONAH (*confused*). Why—er—er—he meant that it wus—wus—O. K., I reckon. Lestwise, he give me the pitchers and this pail and brush and told me ter go ahead and stick 'em up. And by gosh, I have. Thar's a trail o' pitchers all the way frum Pine Valley to here; and I jest got one left. (*Looks about.*) Let's see. I reckon I'll jest stick that up here on the well-curb.

JUN. Oh, lordy, no, Jonah; ye mustn't do that.

JONAH. Why not?

JUN. Why, ye know how sot old Josiah is agin shows and play-actors. And he's been worse than ever since Nellie wanted to be one, and stole the heirloom, and ———

JONAH. Now ye jest hold on thar, June. I'll be danged ef I think Nell ever tuk that air necklace.

JUN. Well, who did then? Josiah himself says she did.

JONAH. Oh, shucks! That don't signify more'n a hill o' beans. Josiah says I'm a blockhead, but that don't make it so. No more does his sayin' that Nell tuk that air necklace.

JUN. Well, she went away, anyway, and nobody has heard er seen hide nur hair o' her sense. And old Josiah is more sot agin play-actors than ever.

JONAH. That don't matter. Why, by gosh, I pasted one o' them air pitchers on Parson Brown's horse-block, and another on the side o' the meetin'-house.

JUN. (*shocked*). Land sakes, Jonah, why thet's—thet's—sac-re-lig-us.

JONAH. Wal, I hain't goin' no further; so thar.

(*He proceeds to paste the poster on the well-curb.*)

Enter AMANDA, from house.

AMANDA. Air ye nearly through, Junior?

JUN. Almost, Mrs. Armstrong.

AMANDA (*noticing JONAH*). Fur the land sakes, Jonah; wot is that?

JONAH. Why—why—it's—it's —— (*Stops.*)

Enter JOS., L. U. E.

AMANDA. It's a show pitcher, that's wot it is.

JOS. A wot? (*Comes down through gate and examines the poster.*) Ye contemptible varmit! Wot d'ye mean by postin' that air vile picture on my property? (*Catches JONAH by the neck.*) Answer me afore I throw ye down the well.

JUN. Oh, don't do it, Josiah, it—it might spile the water.

JOS. (*shaking JONAH*). Answer me, d'ye hear?

JONAH. Wal, I only wanted ter put some money in yer pocket, that's all.

JOS. (*puzzled*). Put some money inter my pocket? Wot d'ye mean?

JONAH. Jest wot I said. Ye see when thet air feller give me the pitchers and told me ter stick 'em up, he asked me ef I knew of a good place whar his troop—wotever that means—but anyway, it's folks wot wanter eat and sleep. Wal, I thought o' you right away, and I tried ter tell him. But he wus thick, like all o' them air city chaps. So I says: "Wal, you jest tell thet air troop ter foller the pitchers and they'll fetch up at the right place." And then I began, and I kept on stickin' 'em up 'til I got here.

AMANDA. Don't scold him, Josiah. I 'low he thought he wus doin' us a good turn. And I reckon he wus. We need all we kin git, and these folks will help add to our savin's.

JOS. I know it, Mandy, but ——

AMANDA. Thar, thar. It's like a gift frum Providence, and we won't go agin that.

JOS. (*after a pause*). No, I s'pose we hadn't oughter do that. But curse 'em all, it goes agin the grain to take a cent frum such as they be —— (*Going.*) It certainly does go agin the grain. [*Exit, in house.*]

JONAH. Shell I let it stay thar, Mrs. Armstrong?

AMANDA. Yes, Jonah, let it stay.

(*Crosses; sits on rustic seat, and wipes her eyes.*)

JONAH. Wal, then, I'll jest take this air pail down to the horse trough and wash it out.

[*Exit, with pail and brush, L.*]

JUN. Why, Mrs. Armstrong, ye're cryin'. (*Goes to her.*) And it's all on account o' thet air fool Jonah and his pitchers.

AMANDA. No, no, don't blame him, Junior. I was only thinkin'.

JUN. Yes, I know. 'Thinkin' o' Nellie.

AMANDA (*sighing*). Ah, poor gal, I wonder whar she is to-day? Oh, I wonder if she is —

Enter MRS. S., R. U. E.

MRS. S. Howdy, Mandy? It's a fine day, isn't it? Lordy me, but that hot spell we did have wus suthin' awful. I nearly roasted alive. And with all them air cherries to do up, too. I got nearly forty cans o' oxhearts frum them two trees down back o' the barn. But did ye hear about Martha Wolley goin' with that air chap that's a-stayin' at her dad's fur the summer? Folks do say that she's a-carryin' on something scand'lous. I'm glad she hain't no gal o' mine. And old Mrs. Penny, down at the Corners, has had a stroke. She's been laid up fur two weeks now. How's Josiah? I saw 'Lige Randall yesterday. Lordy me; he's gittin' grouter than ever sense Dick went to the bad.

AMANDA. Went to the bad?

MRS. S. Wal, he went to New York fur to be a play-actor, and that's about the same thing, I reckon. Have ye ever heard o' Nell, sense she —

(AMANDA *cries.*)

JUN. (*coming down, speaking angrily*). Land o' Goshen, Mrs. Strutt. Hain't ye got no feelin's? Now ye've made her cry. Can't ye talk about something cheerful?

MRS. S. Why, of course. So I will. Come on, Mandy. (*Puts arm about AMANDA'S waist, and they rise and walk toward house.*) Come on in the kitchen, and I'll tell ye all about the Widder Hunter's funeral. Law me, but it wus a grand affair. They had a real huse, and four carriages, and —

(*They both exeunt in house.*)

JUN. (*angrily*). Oh, but I'd jest like to slap this wet towel right across her mouth. Then mebbe she'd know enough to shut up fur a while.

(*Twilight. Stage gradually grows dark during the following.*)

Enter LAURA, L. U. E. Looks cautiously about. Discovers JUN.

LAURA. Aren't you finished with the wash yet, Junior?

JUN. Oh, yes, I'm through. Is that why ye turned up? I notice you allers do show yerself arter all the work's done.

LAURA. Don't get saucy, girl. If you have finished, go in the house and set the table for supper.

JUN. I won't. Who air you thet has the right to boss me around? I jest won't do anything you tell me to.

LAURA (*crossing and sitting on rustic seat*). Oh, very well. Stay here, then.

JUN. I won't do that, nuther. I won't do it jest 'cause you say so. I'll go down to the barn.

LAURA (*sarcastic*). No, don't do it.

JUN. Yes, I will, I tell ye.

(*She picks up tub and exits with comic dignity, L. As soon as she is gone, LAURA rises, goes quickly up stage, and waves her handkerchief off L., then returns to rustic seat.*)

Enter HAR., L. U. E. He comes down stage.

HAR. Laura! Here at last.

(*Seats himself beside her on rustic seat.*)

LAURA. Have you made all the arrangements?

HAR. Everything is planned, my dear. I will meet you here as soon as it is dark enough for us to escape detection. We will go down to Pine Valley and take the train for New York.

LAURA. Oh, Harry. And once there, we will be married?

HAR. Of course. And we will take our fill of pleasure. We will see all there is to see in the greatest city in the world.

LAURA. And—and—then we will return?

HAR. If you really wish it.

LAURA. No, no. I want to stay away forever. I never want to see this place again. (*Rises.*) I have always loathed it, and—and—since——

HAR. (*rising*). Yes?

LAURA. I mean, for the last few months, it—it—has been a place of torment to me. A veritable hell.

HAR. Then we will not come back.

LAURA. No, no. Let us leave it forever. (*Draws wallet from her pocket and hands it to HAR.*) Take this. I want to buy some good clothes when once we get to New York. Something that will make you see how well I can look. Something that will make you proud of me.

HAR. Why, where did you get all of this money?

LAURA. I—I—(*turning away*) I saved it. (*Pause.*) You had better go now. Some one may be coming. But, remember, I will be ready as soon as it is dark. I cannot leave this place too quickly. [*Exit hurriedly in house.*]

HAR. (*looking at purse, whistling, counting money*). One hundred dollars. And she saved it? (*Laughs.*) Why, she never did five dollars' worth of work in her whole life. And I am mighty sure that old Josiah Armstrong never gave her that much. He couldn't if he would, and he wouldn't if he could. Hm! I have always had my doubts as to who really did steal that necklace. Now I begin to suspect — (*Laughs.*) But no matter. If she is indeed the guilty party, it will be but an additional whip for me to use when the proper time comes. We will go to New York? Of course we will. She will get some good clothes? I guess not. (*Puts wallet in his pocket.*) Not with this money. I can use it myself in a better way than to buy finery to put on her back. And then we will get married? Perhaps. If she insists. I suppose I shall have to accept the inevitable. But once I tire of her (*gesture*), well, she can play the rôle of a deserted wife. (*Laughs.*) I am glad she did not want to come back here. It would have been mighty unpleasant for me. But in a big city like New York it is an easy matter to lose a person you want to lose—or even get rid of one of whom you are tired. Oh, yes, we will have our lark, and after that—I will return and swear that I know nothing of her. They will not be able to prove anything against me, and they will not dare to insinuate anything against the son of Squire Harcourt. Once she is left alone in New York and knows that she has been deserted, she will not have courage enough to come back here and face the gossips, whose tongues are sharper than double-edged swords. No, she will just drop out of sight in the great metropolis, like a pebble dropped in the ocean, and that will be the end of it.

(*Laughs and exits, L. 1 E.*)

Enter JONAH, L. 2 E.

JONAH. I reckon I'd better git a lantern and hang it up here somewhere, so's that air troop kin see the sign when they cum along, er they might miss the place in the dark.

(Exits in house and returns with a lighted lantern, which he hangs near the sign and exits L.)

Enter TOM, R. U. E.; he peers about, notices sign, and motions off stage.

TOM. Come on. I've found the place at last. This is it.

Enter NELL. and DICK. Both come down stage. NELL. is staggering. TOM busy at the well.

DICK. What is it, Nellie?

NELL. I—I—oh, Dick, I cannot stay here.

TOM *(crossing to them)*. Hum! This place looks familiar to me.

DICK. Familiar to you?

TOM. Yes. I once—but that is another story. Shall I ring for the hotel clerk?

DICK. We will attend to that. Go back and see to getting our grips from the station to the hall. We will be down as soon as we get something to eat.

TOM. All right. But don't be too long about it. I predict that we are going to have a big house to-night.

[Exit, R. U. E.]

NELL. Let us go also, Dick. I—I—dare not stay.

DICK. No, no. Who knows but that their hearts may have softened ere this. Surely your father must have reconsidered his harsh determination. Let us go in.

NELL. No, no. At least, not yet. Let me sit here a while. Perhaps I shall gain courage to brave their possible anger.

DICK *(leading her to rustic seat and seating her on it)*. Very well. I will look about the place and see if I can find any one who will tell me just how things stand and what kind of a reception we are likely to receive. *[Exit, R. U. E.]*

NELL. Home again. And after only three months. Why, it seems as many years at least since I passed out of yonder door. Passed out dishonored, disgraced. With my father's curse upon my head. Oh, God! And all for what? What had I done to deserve it? Nothing. And will he receive me now? Ah, I fear not. I come back to him as the wife of a man he

always detested, and am, in very truth, that most depraved of creatures—at least to his bigoted imagination—an actress.

Enter HAR., L.

HAR. (*coming toward her*). Laura, are you ready at last?

NELL. (*rising*). Sir!

HAR. What! (*Strikes a match and peers into her face.*) Why, if it is not Nellie. So the prodigal has returned at last, eh? And what are you doing out here? Waiting for them to kill the fatted calf?

NELL. (*coldly*). I have not even seen my parents as yet.

HAR. Then let me be your herald.

NELL. No, no.

HAR. And advocate, as well. I warn you, you will need one. Josiah Armstrong has not forgotten the theft of that precious heirloom.

NELL. But I did not take it. God knows I did not.

HAR. Perhaps He does. But your father does not, and he has a very unpleasant way of sticking to his opinions, once he has decided on them. Come, let me go in and see him. I will promise to set matters right and bring both him and your mother out here to sue for your forgiveness for the wrong they may have done you.

NELL. Do you really think you can do it? (*Speaks eagerly.*)

HAR. I am sure of it.

NELL. I shall be in your debt forever.

HAR. Oh, of course I should expect my reward.

NELL. And what is that, pray?

HAR. Well, say a kiss to start with, and the promise that you will treat me a little better in the future than you have been wont to do in the past.

NELL. (*sternly*). Harry Harcourt, I barely tolerated you in the past. After the proposal which you now make, I can only hate you in the future. I yearn to see my parents and be forgiven. My very heart and soul cries out for their embrace; but rather than promise to treat you with civility—rather than have your polluted lips touch so much as the tips of my fingers—I'll go on my way, cursed by my parents—forever. Go. Your place is far more agreeable to me than your company.

HAR. Bravo! It only needed a speech like that to prove to me that you have at last attained your heart's desire—a place behind the footlights. Tell me, is that speech part of some scene in one of the plays you are acting in?

NELL. Will you leave me?

HAR. Why, no. I could not think of quitting your charming company so soon. I want to hear some more of your theatricals.

NELL. Then I will go.

[*Exit, R. U. E.*

HAR. (*laughing*). Well, well. To think of her returning. And at such a time. How charming she looked in her anger. Oh, if she would only consent to be my wife, I'd marry her in earnest, and use every penny I possess to make her famous in her chosen profession. By heavens! Since she is here once more I will try. But there is Laura, and we had planned to elope to-night. (*Laughs.*) Oh, well, I can take that silly girl to New York, leave her, and return in time to get some trace of Nell. Yes, she shall be mine. She shall be mine.

[*Exit, L.*

Enter JUN. and JONAH, L. U. E.

JUN. But I really must go now, Jonah. Lordy me, Mrs. Strutt will have a conniption fit if I don't turn up purty quick. I 'low it is nigh supper time. And then thar's the chickens to feed.

JONAH. Oh, darn the chickens. Sit down; I got suthin' ter say to ye.

JUN. (*sitting on rustic seat*). Well, hurry up. (*JONAH gets out a large bandanna handkerchief, lays it carefully on the ground, then drops awkwardly on one knee before her.*) For the land sakes, Jonah, wot air ye going to do?

JONAH. Don't ye say a word 'til I git through. D'ye hear? Ef ye do, ye'll put me all out. (*Takes a small book from his pocket, glances at it, then stretches out his arm toward her, and begins.*) Mehitabel Junior Strutt. Light o' my life; fairest flower wot blooms in the exquisite garden o' rare exotics, that—that — (*Glances hurriedly at book.*)

JUN. Law me, Jonah, I don't understand —

JONAH. Shut up, I tell ye. (*Business as before.*) I cum ter ye on my bended knee, knowin' my unworthiness to so much as kiss the hem o' yer garment —

(*Catches hold of her dress.*)

JUN. (*springing to her feet*). Go 'way, Jonah Jones. Wot-ever d'ye want ter kiss the hem o' my dress fur? Have ye taken leave o' yer senses? Lordy, but I'm ashamed o' ye.

(She tries to get away, but he has hold of her dress.)

JONAH. Come back and sit down. I—I—— Let's see. *(Consults book.)* Oh, hang it all, now I've lost the place. Darn the old book, anyway. *(Rises, throws the book down, and speaks rapidly.)* Junior, I love ye. Love ye better than pun'kin pie; and that's sayin' a heap. Will ye marry me? *(Sighs.)* Thar, now I've got it off my chest.

JUN. Wal, Jonah Jones.

JONAH. Come on, answer me, afore I bust. D'ye love me?

JUN. Sure I do.

JONAH. And will ye marry me?

JUN. Of course I will.

JONAH. Junior!

JUN. Jonah!

(They embrace with a pronounced kiss.)

Enter COL., R. U. E.

COL. Eh! What! Eh! What! Hem! *(Comes quickly down stage. JUN. and JONAH quickly step apart.)* Mehitabel Junior Strutt!

JUN. *(embarrassed).* Y-e-e-s, s-i-i-r.

COL. Jonah Jones!

JONAH *(same business).* Y-e-e-s, s-i-i-r!

COL. Answer me, did I see ye a-carryin' on with thet air gal?

JONAH *(much frightened and confused).* Wal—I—I—wus—wus—only—only——

COL. Ye wus a-huggin' her and a-kissin' her. Out here. All alone. Jonah Jones! *(Speaks very loudly. JONAH jumps in fright.)* I'll cane ye fur this, within an inch o' yer life. Come here, ye varmit.

(He starts after JONAH. Business of running about stage. At last JONAH runs off at L. 2 E. In trying to follow him, COL. stumbles against the well-curb, and disappears, with a cry for help.)

JONAH *(peering cautiously in on the stage).* Is he gone?

JUN. *(down L.).* Yep.

JONAH *(near well).* Whar?

JUN. I dunno. Didn't he foller you?

JONAH. Nop.

COL. (*calling faintly*). Help! Help!

JONAH (*after looking about*). Wal, by gosh, June, ef the old fool hasn't fell down the well.

JUN. Land sakes! I'll go and call Josiah.

(*Starts for house, but stops when JONAH speaks.*)

JONAH. Not yit. Wait 'til I have a peek at him. (*Gets lantern and peers down the well. JUN. joins him.*) Air ye down thar, Colonel?

COL. Crawling Codwollopers, of course I am. Run in the house, and tell Josiah ter cum and bring a rope; and pull me out afore I friz ter death.

JONAH. I say, Colonel, I love Junior.

COL. I don't care a —

JUN. (*interrupting*). What!

COL. Git me out o' this, I tell ye.

JONAH. And, Colonel, Junior loves me.

COL. Ef ye don't hurry up and git Josiah, I'll whale the livin' lights out o' ye when I git up thar.

JONAH. And we wanter git married.

COL. I don't care wot ye want. I wanter git out o' here.

JONAH. Will ye give yer consent?

COL. Consarn ye, no!

JONAH. Then cum on, Junior. We'll let the pestiferous old crank drown, like a rat.

(*Starts to move away with the lantern.*)

COL. Oh, oh, help! help! Jonah! Jonah Jones. Come back. Come back. I beg of ye.

(*JONAH returns and again peers down the well.*)

JONAH. Wal, wotcher got ter say, Colonel?

COL. Crawling Codwollopers! When I wus in Timbucktoo —

JONAH. We don't wanter hear nuthin' about Timbucktoo jest now. Hurry up and tell us ef ye consent to our marriage. Fur ef ye don't, we'll run away and git married anyway, and mebbe you won't be found fur a week. (*COL. groans loudly.*) Fur the last time, Colonel; wot air ye goin' ter say?

COL. (*after a pause*). All right, darn ye. I'll agree. Now git a rope, and be dang quick about it. Crawling Codwollopers, but it's cold down here. I'm frizzing, and the dang frogs and snails is all over me. Ouch!

JONAH (*tearing off a piece of the poster*). Here's a bit o' paper, Colonel. I'm a-goin' ter let it down by the well-rope. Ye jest put down thar that ye agree to our marriage. Thar's nuthin' like being sure o' things.

(*Lets the lantern and bit of paper down the well.*)

JUN. (*aside to JONAH*). Lordy, Jonah, hain't ye afraid he'll drown?

JONAH. Naw. Thar hain't over five foot o' water in the well. But I want ye, June. I want ye bad; and he's gotter give his consent, darn him, and give it so's thar won't be no backin' out.

COL. I won't sign this.

JONAH. Ye won't, hey? Ef ye don't, I'll drop the bucket on yer head. Here she goes. One, two —

COL. (*in great fear*). Oh, help, help. Murder! Hold on thar. Ouch! Junior, Junior, fur the love o' heaven, stop him. I'll sign. I'll sign. (*Pause.*) Thar. See ef that suits ye.

(*JONAH pulls lantern and paper up, and looks at it.*)

JONAH. You read it, June.

JUN. (*reading*). "This is to certify that I agree to the marriage of my adopted daughter, Mehitabel Junior Strutt, to Jonah Jones. Signed, Colonel Barnaby Strutt."

JONAH. Good. That's O. K. You keep it, June, while I go and git a rope. [*Exit behind house.*]

COL. (*calling*). Wal, wal, hain't ye satisfied yit?

JUN. Yes, yes, he's a-comin'.

Enter JONAH with a rope which he lets down the well, and he and JUN. pull the COL. to the top. Pause.

JONAH. Thankee, Colonel, fur yer consent to our marriage.

COL. Oh, go to the devil, both o' ye.

Enter MRS. S., from house.

MRS. S. Land sakes, Junior, air ye really here at last? I've been waitin' fur ye nigh onter — (*Suddenly discovers COL., and goes to him.*) Wal, Barnaby Strutt, whar hev ye been?

COL. (*stammering*). Why—why—why —

JUN. Ef ye please; he fell down the well, and me and Jonah pulled him out.

JONAH. And he wus so tickled over it, thet he's agreed ter let us git married.

MRS. S. What! Barnaby Strutt, hãve ye suddenly taken leave o' yer seven senses?

COL. (*expostulating*). Now, Mehitabel ——

MRS. S. But ye don't mean that, do ye?

COL. (*hesitating*). Wal—er—of course ef ——

JONAH. Yep, he does. He even signed a paper, sayin' he wus willin'.

MRS. S. Did ye do that, Barnaby Strutt?

COL. Now, Mehitabel ——

MRS. S. Answer me!

COL. Crawling Codwollopers, woman. I'll not be catechised by no wife o' mine. I'll do jest as I like. Yep, I did sign it, and I only hope they'll worry each other to death, dang me ef I don't. I'm goin' hum. [*Exit, R. U. E.*]

MRS. S. Wal, ef thet man don't beat all creation. Junior, ye cum hum with me right away.

JONAH. Hold on thar, Junior. Kiss yer husband ter be afore ye go.

MRS. S. What!

JUN. Corse I will. (*They have a fervent embrace.*)

MRS. S. (*shocked*). Law me, but I'm scandalized. Perfectly scandalized.

(*Exits hurriedly, R. U. E., followed more leisurely by JUN., with many a backward glance at JONAH.*)

JONAH (*hanging lantern in its place, going to door of house, pausing and laughing*). Old Josiah do say thet I'm a block-head, but I reckon I do know a thing er two.

[*Exit in house, laughing.*]

Enter DICK and NELL., R. U. E.

DICK. Yes, my dear, I insist. Who knows but that your fears are all phantoms? At least we will try. They can no more than refuse to see us; and that is no worse than they have already done. But somehow, I have hopes ——

NELL. (*shaking her head sadly*). I have none. Some ill omen seemed from the very first to warn me against returning, Dick; and now, since Mr. Harcourt ——

DICK (*interrupting*). Don't mention him. I hope, for his own good fortune, that he does not cross my path while we are here. Come.

NELL. No, no, I—I—am afraid. Let me look about and call fond remembrance to my aid. The old well, where I so often drank the pure, cool water. The bench? Ah, it seems but yesterday since I sat on that rustic seat and dreamed day-dreams of the future. Dear old house, so full of happy memories of my childhood. Oh, how I wish I might throw my arms about you, dear old home, and gather you to my heart in a loving embrace. (*Cries.*) Leave me for a few moments, Dick. I want to be alone—all alone with the past.

(DICK *exits*, L. NELL. *goes slowly about the stage, examining the various things.*)

Enter LAURA from house. She is dressed for traveling and carries a grip. She is slowly crossing stage without noticing NELL., who is up near well. NELL. turns suddenly, discovers her, and coming to her side at C., catches her arm.

NELL. Laura!

LAURA. Eh?

NELL. Don't you know me?

LAURA. You? You back again, and at this of all moments?

NELL. Yes, it is I, Laura. But why—at this moment? What has happened? What do you mean? Where are you going?

LAURA. That is none of your business. Let me go.

NELL. No, no. Something tells me that all is not right. I will not let you go unless you tell me where you are going.

LAURA (*struggling unsuccessfully to get away*). If you do not let me go at once, I will call *my* father, and have you put off the farm.

NELL. Call him, then. (*Pause.*) Why don't you call him? Shall I do it for you?

LAURA (*speaking fearfully*). No, no. Don't.

NELL. Ah, then it is true. You fear him as much as I do. (*Puts an arm about her.*) Tell me, Laura, what is the matter? Has he been unkind to you?

LAURA (*after a pause*). No, no. Let me go.

NELL. Then why are you stealing off in this manner, like a thief in the night? You have your clothing with you too. Are you leaving home?

LAURA (*pausing*). Yes.

NELL. Alone?

LAURA (*pausing*). Oh, let me go. You are no longer one of us. You have no right to question me.

NELL. (*quietly*). I was driven from home, Laura. Driven out into the world to battle with all its sin and wickedness—alone. I have learned much in the last few months. And—I am still your—sister. I begin to see light. (*Turns her about, lays a hand on either shoulder, and looks into her face.*) Tell me, tell me truthfully, were you not going away with Harry Harcourt?

LAURA (*starting*). How did you know?

NELL. I did not know. I only guessed. Am I not right?

LAURA (*pausing; she bows her head*). Yes.

NELL. Don't do it, dear. You will regret it.

LAURA. What do you know of it? You tried to win him and failed. And now ———

NELL. You mistake, Laura. I never loved him. I even sent him away from me.

LAURA. And now he loves me, and ———

NELL. If he loves you as you say, why does he not court you openly, as any honorable man would?

LAURA (*hesitating*). I—I—— (*Pause.*)

NELL. You do not know? It is because he is wicked, Laura. He does not love you. You are but the toy of the moment to him. He would take you to New York, and there, after he had tired of you, he would cast you adrift. (*Enter HAR., L.*) No, no, dear. Don't go with him. Stay here, here under the care and protection of your parents, until some worthy man comes to you and offers you his heart, openly and honorably.

HAR. Eh?

LAURA. Oh, Harry!

HAR. (*to NELL.*). What, you back again?

NELL. Yes, I thank God. Back in time to save my sister.

HAR. Nonsense. Come, Laura.

NELL. No, she shall not go with you. She stays here.

Enter DICK, L.

HAR. (*coming toward her threateningly*). Let her go, I say, or I'll ———

DICK (*springing between them and hurling HAR. L.*). What will you do?

HAR. Once for all, Laura, will you come with me, or stay here at the behest of that ———

DICK. Take care.

HAR. Oh, pardon me. I forgot she is your ——

DICK. Wife? Yes.

HAR. Laura?

NELL. Tell him, dear. Make your decision.

LAURA (*after a pause*). I—I—will stay here.

NELL. Bravely spoken.

HAR. (*angrily*). Will you? Then stay. But by heaven, they shall not. (*Crosses quickly to door of house and calls loudly.*) Mr. Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong.

Enter JOS. and AMANDA, from house.

JOS. Why, it is Harry Harcourt. And who air them folks?

HAR. One is your daughter, Laura. The other two are only traveling actors. You may have heard of them before. Dick Randall and Nell Armstrong.

AMANDA. Nellie, my ——

JOS. (*stopping her as she would go toward NELL.*). What! She here? Stand back, Mandy. Don't ye go near her. (*To NELL. and DICK.*) What air you two doin' here?

HAR. They came to take your only daughter from you. And they almost succeeded. See, she has her clothes packed.

JOS. What? (*Sternly.*) Laura?

NELL. No, no.

DICK. 'Tis a lie.

HAR. 'Tis not a lie. Ask her if she was not going with them?

JOS. Speak up, my gal.

LAURA (*pausing, while HAR. looks at her keenly. She catches his eye and slowly answers*). Yes!

NELL. (*shocked*). What, Laura? Oh, my God!

JOS. Mandy, take our daughter in the house with ye. (*As she hesitates.*) D'ye hear me?

NELL. (*appealingly*). Mother!

JOS. (*waving her back*). Stand back thar, you. (*To AMANDA.*) Mandy. (*AMANDA slowly exits in house with LAURA.*) And now you go. I sent you from this house once.

NELL. (*brokenly*). Father, forgive ——

JOS. No, no, gal. Look at me. Forced ter stoop to takin' in boarders to try and make a livin' fur myself and my poor old wife. And all on your account. On your account, gal. Ef ye hadn't stole thet necklace, all this trouble wouldn't a-cum upon me.

NELL. But, father, I didn't ——

JOS. (*interrupting, sternly*). Go!

DICK (*facing JOS.*). Mr. Armstrong, I'd give this right hand to have the years roll backward and make you a young man, just for a few minutes.

JOS. Ye fool! (*To HAR.*) Harry, show them folks the way to the road. We need the money, but we hain't got no accommodations fur actors and thieves.

DICK (*as HAR. steps forward*). Don't. Don't you dare lay a finger on me or mine. You are my equal in youth and strength. And after the injustice we have had to suffer this night—there is murder in my heart.

NELL. (*quickly laying an arm about his neck, and a hand on his arm*). No, no, Dick. Don't talk like that. Come—we—we—will go.

(*They slowly retire up stage as curtain falls.*)

ACT III

SCENE.—*Same as Act I. AMANDA sits knitting by the fire. A lamp is burning on the table.*

Enter JOS. at rise, D. F. He shakes snow from his hat and clothing.

AMANDA. It is a wild night out, Josiah.

JOS. 'Deed it is, Mandy. Thank the good Lord thet we are snug and warm here.

AMANDA. And may He take care of all the poor souls that is out in the bitter storm, with no place ter go.

JOS. (*removing his outer garments*). Amen ter that, Mandy. Amen ter that. (*Sits by the fire warming his hands.*)

AMANDA. Have ye saved enough ter pay the interest on the mortgage? Ye know it cums due ter-morrer?

JOS. I know it. Lord, how slow the days do drag sometimes, but how fast it do travel when it's interest yer thinkin' of. Wal, no, Mandy, I hain't got quite enough. But thar's old Dolly, the sorrel mare. I saw Ben Davis to-day, and he 'lowed he'd give me twenty dollars fur her.

AMANDA. Oh, ye won't go fur ter sell dear, old Dolly; will ye?

JOS. I gotter do it, Mandy. Thet air twenty will jest about fix the interest up.

AMANDA. But jest think how long she's been with us. Why, ye bought her when she warn't more'n six months old. It wus jest arter—arter Laura wus born.

JOS. (*sighing*). Hum, hum! Yes, I remember. (*AMANDA cries. JOS. notices, and leaning forward puts an arm about her.*) Don't cry, Mandy, it'll all cum right in the end. Don't the Bible say thet the Lord will provide?

AMANDA. I wusn't a-thinkin' o' Dolly.

JOS. Ye wus a-thinkin' o' Laura, then? (*AMANDA nods.*) Poor gal, I wonder whar she is to-night. God knows, I tried hard enough ter find her. And spent a pretty penny, too. We caught 'em the fust time they tried to take her frum us. But it warn't a month later afore she wus gone. Gone! And

I'm sure they must have coaxed her away. Harry Harcourt said so, and he wus in New York about the same time. He told me when he cum back thet he tried ter git her to return with him, but it wasn't no use. (*Pause.*) May ill-luck foller Dick Randall and Nell Armstrong all their lives fur the ruin they have brought upon us.

AMANDA. Don't curse 'em, Josiah. Sometimes I see Nellie's sweet face in my dreams, and seem to hear her voice, low and pleading. And when I wake up, I lay and wonder. Wonder ef she really did take that heirloom, or—or—wus it all a terrible mistake?

JOS. Ef she didn't take it, who did? Answer me that, and I'll think we made a mistake.

AMANDA. I don't know, Josiah. I can't tell ye, only ——— Oh, I only wish I knew fur sure. Think what an awful crime we've committed, if—if—we drove her away without just cause.

(*Jos. rises and nervously paces the floor.*)

JOS. Don't talk thet way, Mandy. Don't talk thet way.

AMANDA. But she had allers been a truthful gal, and she allers gave us all she made. (*Pause.*) It's never been the same here at hum since—since she left.

JOS. I—I know it. But she's gone, and that settles it. We haven't chick nur child now. We're all alone in our old age. (*Sighs.*) Ah, the Lord acts mighty strange with His children, sometimes.

AMANDA. But s'pose all this trouble and all this lonesomeness is only our punishment fur ———

JOS. Mandy, stop! Don't let us talk about it any more.

AMANDA (*bowing her head*). All right, Josiah. (*Jos. goes up to clock and winds it, then goes silently to window, and stands looking out with his hands clasped behind him. Sound of sleigh-bells heard without. AMANDA rises.*) Who's thet?

JOS. (*peering from window*). It looks like Jonah and Junior. He tuk the sleigh just arter supper, and 'lowed thet he had ter go down to the village. I 'spose he's met Junior and is a-seein' her hum.

Enter JONAH and JUN., D. F.

JUN. Good-evening, Mrs. Armstrong. Howdy, Josiah. I

thought, bein's it wus such a bad night, thet I'd run over and spend the evening, and cheer ye up a bit.

AMANDA. That's kind o' ye, Junior.

JONAH. And me too.

JUN. (*aside to JONAH*). Hurry up and git him out o' here.

JONAH. Er—I say, Josiah. Would ye mind jest takin' the horse to the barn while I warm my fingers? Gosh! but I'm nearly frizzed, a-drivin' all the way frum Strutt's place in the teeth o' this storm. It's a-snowin' worse than all possessed; and wind? Phew! it's a-blowin' worse than forty wildcats.

JOS. I don't see why ye didn't drive right to the barn in the fust place, instid o' stoppin' here. But I'll put her in. I gotter keep old Dolly fit now until arter I git the money fur her frum Ben Davis.

(*Puts on his outer garments and exits D. F.*)

JONAH (*aside to JUN.*). I've done my part. Now ye git her out o' the room.

JUN. (*crossing to AMANDA, who is near fireplace*). Lordy, but it's colder than Greenland's icy mountains ter-night, hain't it?

AMANDA. I reckon it is bitter.

JUN. Ye don't happen to have a spare cup o' tea, now do ye?

AMANDA. Why, yes, I reckon the teapot is still on the stove in the kitchen. I'll go and see. Mebbe ef I put a pinch more o' tea in, I kin make ye a cup.

JUN. All right; it's very kind o' ye, I'm sure. (*AMANDA going.*) Ye needn't bring it in here. Jest you git it ready, and pour it out, and let it stay right thar. I'll be out in a minute ter keep ye company. (*AMANDA exits, R.*) Now, Jonah, you jest git a move on ye and help me tidy up this air room. (*Looks off L.*) The parlor's all right. That room allers is. I don't reckon anybody ever goes in thar since the gals left. But it's cold. Here, ye take some wood and start a fire in the grate. (*JONAH gets wood from near fireplace and starts to go.*) But mind that ye don't make one teeny, tiny bit o' noise or I—I'll—I won't kiss ye fur a week. Thar!

JONAH. Lordy, June, I'll be as quiet as a little mouse.

(*Drops wood with a loud noise.*)

JUN. Thar! Thar! Thar! Oh, ye clumsy ijit. (*Tip-toes to door, R., and listens.*) I reckon she didn't hear it.

And it's a wonder, too; fur ef that wusn't enough ter wake the dead. Now, Jonah, please—do—try—and—be—quiet.

JONAH. All right, June. I will, so help me jiminy crickets.
[*Exit L., with wood.*]

JUN. (*starting tidying room*). It's plain ter be seen that things has gone wrong in this house. I kin remember the time when Mrs. Armstrong would a-had a conniption fit ef her place wus as upsot as this room is. But law me, since the gals left she don't seem to care fur nuthin'. Nur Josiah nuther. Hum, hum. I do hope my gals, ef I have any, won't run off like that. (*Pause.*) I won't have no gals. No, sir. I'll have boys. Ye kin make 'em work on the farm, and earn some money fur ye. Yep, boys is better'n gals, so I'll jest have boys. (*Enter JONAH, L.*) Wal, is the fire started?

JONAH. Yep.

JUN. And I've got this room lookin' kinder tidy like. It's a shame the way things hez gone ter rack and ruin around here since them gals left. I've made up my mind thet I won't have no gals when we're married.

JONAH (*staring at her then slowly crossing to her*). Ye—won't—have—no—gals? Huh! D'ye s'pose I want a lot o' blockhead boys a-hangin' around the house? No, siree. It's gals we'll have, and don't ye furgit it.

JUN. (*spiritedly*). No we won't, nuther.

JONAH. Now see here, June. Jest look at this thing reasonable. Look wot it costs ter keep a boy. He's allers a-runnin' out his boots and gittin' in trouble and tearin' his britches. And think how much more a boy eats than a gal. I know. Wusn't I a boy once? Now a gal hain't like that. They stay in the house and wash the dishes and mend the clothes, and don't go a-gallivantin' all over the county a-gittin' inter all the trouble they kin find. And they don't eat hardly anything. And jest see how much more it costs ter keep a boy in clothes. Why ye can't git a good suit fur a boy, arter he's got any size ter him, fur less than three dollars. But a gal! Gosh! ye kin dress her in gingham and calikers that don't cost hardly anything down at Willis's store.

JUN. Yes, and when they grow up they'll run away and git married, and like as not never cum ter see ef their old father and mother air alive er dead. No, I don't care nuthin' about it. I jest won't have any gals.

JONAH. And I say we will.

JUN. We won't.

JONAH. We will!

JUN. Jonah Jones, ef ye don't agree ter have boys, we won't have any.

JONAH. Thet's jest wot I say about gals.

JUN. Yer jest too hateful fur anything, so thar!

JONAH. And yer an old cat, so thar!

JUN. I'd jest like ter scratch yer eyes out, I would.

JONAH. Wal, ye jest try it, and I'll give ye the biggest wallop in' ye ever had in yer life.

JUN. Ye will, will ye?

JONAH. Yes I will, will I. (JUN. *grabs him by the hair and shakes him viciously. He yells.*) Ouch! Lemme go!

Enter AMANDA, R. JOS., D. F.

AMANDA. Lord bless me, wotever is the matter?

JONAH } (*speaking together* Why, June says she won't —
JUN. } (*excitedly*). Why, Jonah says he won't —

JOS. (*interrupting*). Hold on thar. One at a time.

JUN. } (*both beginning together again*). Wal, he —
JONAH } Wal, she —

JOS. (*catching JUN. by the arm and turning her about*). Now see here, Junior, wot's the matter?

JUN. Why, he said we won't have no boys when we git married, and —

JONAH. Yep, and she said we won't have no gals.

AMANDA. Wal, ye air a pair o' silly children yerselves.

JOS. (*crossing to sofa*). I reckon ye'd better quit yer fightin' 'til arter yer married, and leave the rest ter Providence. (*Looks about.*) Whar's my slippers?

AMANDA. Why, they wus right thar by the sofy.

JOS. Wal, they hain't thar now.

AMANDA (*looking about*). Junior, did you er Jonah see anything o' Josiah's slippers?

JUN. (*hesitating*). Why—er — (*Bells heard outside.*)

JONAH (*at window*). Here they cum! Here they cum!

JUN. (*clapping her hands and dancing about*). Goody! Yep, I seen them air slippers, and I jest put 'em away when I tidied up the room fur ye. Thar's a surprise party a-cumin', and here they be now.

(JONAH *runs to D. F. ; opens it.*)

Enter MRS. S., followed by villagers.

MRS. S. S'prise, Josiah. And yew too, Mandy. S'prise. We 'lowed thet yew two needed cheerin' up a bit, so we all met over ter Holcomb's and hev cum over ter do it.

JONAH. And the parlor is all ready. Fire made and everything.

MRS. S. Then everybody take yer vittals inter the kitchen, and put 'em on the table. Leave yer hats and things out thar too, and Junior kin hang 'em up by the stove, so's they'll git dry by the time ye want ter go hum. Lordy, but it shore is a terrible night out.

[*Exeunt villagers, R., followed by JUN. and JONAH.*]

JOS. But whar's the Colonel?

MRS. S. (*mysteriously*). Sh! That's a s'prise, too. On everybody. But I'll tell ye all about it. Barnaby made it all up hisself, and told me about it, and I went ter Holcomb's alone; and when the folks all asked whar he wus, I told 'em he wus ter hum, sick abed. But he hain't. No, siree. Arter I left, he fixed hisself up as Santy Claus, and he's a-cumin' here, and git up on the ruff, by way o' the back porch, and cum down the chimbly, and s'prise all the folks.

JOS. Ummmm. Wal, I reckon it'll be a tight squeeze fur him.

MRS. S. Oh, he'll do it. Barnaby Strutt kin do anything, he kin. And nobody'll guess who he is. Not in the wide world. Hush! Here they cum now, and I 'low it's nigh time thet Barnaby wus here, too. Ye see, I'm ter tell 'em a story, and while I'm a-tellin' it, Barnaby he'll cum right down the chimbly.

Enter JONAH and JUN., R., followed by the villagers.

JUN. Now we kin all go in the parlor and have some singin' and play some games.

JONAH. Yep, kissin' ring, fur instance. Ummmmmm!

JUN. Go 'long, you, Jonah. And we kin have a dance, too.

MRS. S. Wait a minute. Sit down, everybody. I wanter tell ye all a story. (*All sit.*) Now, I 'low thet most o' ye hev got over the days when ye looked fur old Santy Claus ter cum down the chimbly and bring ye goodies and toys. But he's a-cumin' here to-night. (*Ejaculations.*) Yep, he is. I reckon he's on the ruff now, and fust thing ye know he'll cum right down thet air chimbly.

JONAH. Gosh all hemlock! (*Runs to chimney and peers up.*) Why, yep, folks, I do see suthin' thet looks mighty like

a pair o' legs. (*Calls up.*) Cum on down, ye old Santy Claus. Cum on down. (*Legs appear and then stop and begin kicking about.*) Why don't ye cum on? Gosh, I kinder reckon the old feller hez got stuck. Cum on.

(*Pulls frantically at the legs, and gradually gets COL., who is comically disguised as Santa Claus, out of the chimney.*)

MRS. S. Thar he is, folks. And I'll bet thar hain't one o' ye as kin guess who old Santy Claus is.

COL. (*in a disguised voice*). Crawling Codwollopers, but thet wus the tightest place I wus ever in since I wus in Timbucktoo.

OMNES. Oh, it is Colonel Strutt. (*All laugh.*)

MRS. S. Thar, I knew it. (*Disgustedly pulls off his false beard.*) I 'lowed as ye'd give the hull thing away.

COL. Why, how'd I give it away? Wusn't I fixed up good?

MRS. S. Yes, but —

COL. And didn't I change my voice?

MRS. S. Yes, I reckon ye did change yer voice. But whoever says, "Crawling Codwollopers," in Pine Valley, er who's ever been in Timbucktoo but you? Oh, I'm clar disgusted with you, Barnaby Strutt.

COL. Wal, folks, I guess ye air too smart fur me this time.

JUN. Can't we all go inter the parlor, now?

MRS. S. Yep, I s'pose we kin.

COL. Come on, and I'll sing ye a song.

OMNES. Good. All right, etc.

COL. Yes, I will. The fust time I sung thet air song wus when I wus in Timbucktoo. One night I got up in my sleep and walked about a hundred miles frum the camp. Fact! And I s'pose I might a-been walkin' in my sleep yit, only I wus woke up by hearin' a growl, and thar! Crawling Codwollopers, ef I hadn't jest walked right inter a den o' roarin' lions and tigers. Why, thar wus as many as five hundred and one o' 'em. And they growled and snarled at me, and jest as I cum out o' my sleep, about a hundred o' 'em crawled about me in a ring like, and jest squatted down, the way they do afore they spring at ye. Wal, I saw thet the only chance fur me wus ter use stragety. So I jest kept a-watchin' 'em, and all of a sudden one sprung at me frum this side, and anuther sprung at me frum thet side. Wal, as the critters sprung, I jumped out o' the way, and I'll be danged—they had their mouths open so wide thet each one o' 'em swallered t'other.

Thet wus what I kalkerlated. Then two more sprang at me, one on each side, and I did the trick ag'in; and I kept on doin' it 'til every dang one o' them air lions and tigers had swallered the other, and thar weren't one o' 'em left. Crawl- ing Codwollopers, but I wus glad. I wus so glad thet I made up a song; a-goin' back ter camp, and when we git in the parlor I'll sing it fur ye.

JOS. But I say, Colonel, ye said thar wus five hundred and one o' them air beasts. Ef they swallered each other by twos, what become o' thet air extra one?

COL. Crawling Codwollopers! I most furgot to tell ye about him. It wus this way. As I wus jest a-startin' fur the camp, I heard suthin' a-sneakin' up behind me; and when I looked back, thar wus thet air one lion, jest a-gittin' ready to spring at me. Wal, sir, I saw thar weren't no more left but him, so I jest pulled out a lookin'-glass thet I happened to have in my pocket, and held it up so's the feller could see in, and when he sprang at me, I'll be danged ef he didn't swaller hissself. Fact! Cum on in the parlor, and I'll sing thet air song fur ye.

[*Exit L., followed by JONAH, JUN. and villagers.*]

MRS. S. Cum on, Mandy, and you too, Josiah. We're here to cheer ye up a bit.

JOS. And I reckon ye have succeeded already. I kinder begin ter feel thet life is wuth livin' arter all.

MRS. S. Of course it is. [*Exit, L.*]

AMANDA. Oh, Josiah, they wus real good ter cum out on sich a night as this ter cheer us up, wusn't they?

JOS. 'Deed they wus, Mandy, and we won't furgit it. (*Knock heard.*) Hello, thar must be somebody thet got missed, I reckon. (*Goes to D. F. and opens it.*) Cum right in.

Enter SQUIRE and HAR.

SQUIRE. Good-evening, Josiah.

JOS. Why, ef it isn't Hank Harcourt.

SQUIRE. Yes, it is me.

JOS. Did ye cum ter the s'prise party, too?

SQUIRE. What surprise party?

JOS. Why, our friends hez cum over to s'prise Mandy and me, and cheer us up a bit.

SQUIRE. Hum! No, I knew nothing of it. And I am

afraid my mission is not so cheering. I have come about the mortgage.

JOS. Yes, I know. It is due to-morrer.

SQUIRE. Yes, it is due to-morrow.

JOS. Wal, Hank, I did try ter do my best, and scrape and skimp and save. But 'twaren't no use; I didn't even raise the interest.

SQUIRE. Indeed!

JOS. But I'll have it fur ye, never fear about thet. I've seen Ben Davis, and he 'lows he'll give me twenty dollars fur old Dolly, my sorrel mare. Thet will make enough ter pay the interest. Mebbe next spring times will change fur the better.

SQUIRE. I am sorry, Josiah, but I have got to have not only the interest, but the principal as well.

JOS. (*staggering back*). Now?

SQUIRE. By to-morrow.

JOS. But good God, Hank, I hain't got it.

SQUIRE. Then I will have to foreclose.

(JOS. *sinks into a chair and buries his face in his hands.*)

AMANDA. Oh, Hank, ye don't mean thet; surely ye don't. Ye'll be kind to us a little longer. Ye know we lost thet air heirloom, thet we had kalkerlated to pay it off with. And then times got so hard, and Laura ran away, and ——

HAR. (*turning away*). Oh, what is the use of going over all that?

AMANDA. I only wanted ter show the Squire jest how we've been placed. We spent a heap o' money a-trying ter find Laura, and ——

HAR. (*impatently*). And it was a useless expenditure of good coin. I told you when I came home that I had seen her, and that she had gone off with that Randall fellow and Nell. What was the use of trying to find her? Let her go, and think no more about it.

AMANDA (*kneeling to SQUIRE*). But, Hank, ye won't foreclose on us. Tell me ye won't. Why, we've got no place ter go. Would ye drive us out inter the storm?

SQUIRE. Ah, Amanda, if you had only listened to me forty years ago, you might have been spared all this trouble. I could have given you everything you wanted.

AMANDA (*rising slowly, going to JOS., and putting an arm about his neck*). No, ye couldn't, Hank Harcourt. Ye

couldn't give me Josiah Armstrong's love, and thet wus all I wanted.

SQUIRE (*shrugging his shoulders*). Well, you have made your own bed, and you will have to lay in it.

AMANDA. But ye surely won't drive us out, now. Give us 'til spring, anyway. Then mebbe Josiah kin git a job somewhere as a farmer's helper; and I kin try and do washin'.

HAR. We simply cannot wait. I have got to have the money.

JOS. (*looking up*). You?

SQUIRE. Yes, yes. You see, while my son was in New York some months ago, he—he—that is, he got into some financial difficulties, and was compelled to borrow a few thousand dollars on a note. That note comes due to-morrow, and I expect the man who holds it to demand his money. I have not enough of my own at liberty just now to meet the note. I will have to have the money that this place will bring in order that I may pay my own obligations. Do you understand?

JOS. (*sadly*). I see. Yes, I understand.

AMANDA. Oh, Josiah, wot shall we do?

JOS. (*rising*). Jest you go in the parlor, Hank. The folks air in thar enjoyin' themselves. Don't let 'em cum out here. I want to talk it over with Mandy.

SQUIRE. Very well.

[*Exit, L.*

HAR. But remember, it is the money in full, or we fore-close; and that is the end of it.

[*Exit, L.*

AMANDA (*coming to his side*). Oh, Josiah, wot shell we do?

JOS. I—I—don't know, Mandy. God help me. I don't care fur myself. But—but—you, Mandy, dear. Oh, Lord, ter think thet I have brought ye to beggary in yer old age. I—I—almost wish ye had married the Squire, forty years ago.

AMANDA. Don't talk like thet, Josiah. I'd ruther be with you, out in the cold and snow, then live in a palace with him.

JOS. God bless ye fur them words, Mandy. (*Pause.*) Out in the cold and snow. (*Wind heard.*) And thar's whar we gotter go.

AMANDA. Don't ye think we could git him ter wait a little longer?

JOS. No. Ye heard wot his son said? And I'd ruther starve, and die too, afore I'd ask a favor o' him.

AMANDA. Yer right, Josiah. (*Pause.*) And I don't s'pose thar's any o' our friends could loan us the money?

JOS. Four thousand dollars? I reckon not. Thar hain't one o' 'em but wot would do it gladly, ef they had it. But they're all poor, same as we are, Mandy. I 'low as thar hain't one o' 'em as could raise a quarter o' thet sum.

AMANDA. No, I don't s'pose they could. (*At door, L.*) And thar they are, a-singin' and playin' their games. (*Sighs.*) We'd better not say anything to them about it, Josiah. It wouldn't help us, and it would only make 'em feel bad. Let 'em have their evening's fun and frolic. 'Tain't their fault ef we hain't happy too.

JOS. Yes, I reckon thet will be best. (*A pause.*) Mandy, do ye love me?

AMANDA. Why, Josiah, wot a question to ask arter all these years. Ye know I do.

JOS. And ye will stand by me, "'til death do us part"?

AMANDA (*coming to him, C., and putting her arms about his neck*). Indeed I will. Didn't I promise ye that, nigh onto forty years ago?

JOS. So ye did, little gal. So ye did. Wal, then, git yer things. I reckon he won't object ef we take with us the clothes on our back.

AMANDA. No, I 'low he'll let us have that much, hard as he is. [*Exit, R.*]

JOS. (*glancing hurriedly about stage to assure himself that he is alone, then going quickly to chair and dropping on his knees*). Oh, Lord, Thou thet didst say ye would care fur the poor, care fur us now. We're all alone, Lord, and we're goin' out inter the storm, Mandy and me. We've tried to do wot wus about right, Lord, as fur as we knew; and ef we have failed sometimes, why please furgive us. And ef one of us must die, Lord, make it me. But do take care o' my poor Mandy, and see thet somebody keeps her arter I'm gone. (*Pause.*) Amen. (*Rises.*)

Enter AMANDA, R. She has a faded shawl thrown about her shoulders, and an old bonnet on her head. She carries JOS.'s hat in her hand.

AMANDA. Now I'm ready, Josiah. Here's yer hat.

(*Gives it to him.*)

JOS. Wait a minute, Mandy, dear.

(*He takes off his coat.*)

AMANDA. What air ye goin' ter do?

JOS. I kin stand the cold better'n you kin, Mandy. You take my coat. (*Offers it to her.*)

AMANDA. But you, Josiah? Wot, go out in this bitter night in yer shirt-sleeves? No, no, I——

JOS. (*interrupting*). Yes, ye will. It's my duty to protect ye. (*Puts coat about her shoulders, then with an arm about her, he leads her up stage.*) Now we are ready, Mandy. (*Looks about.*) It's hard ter leave the old place, whar I brought ye as a bride, and whar our children wus born. We've seen life together here, the bitter and the sweet; and I allers 'lowed thet we'd die here. But thar hain't anything belongs to us now. We'll go out inter the night and the storm, and may the good Lord, who watches over the sparrers, have mercy on us, His poor deserted creatures.

AMANDA (*solemnly*). Amen. (*They near D. F. Enter, D. F., LAURA, followed by TOM, NELL., and DICK. Pause. Tableau.*) Laura!

LAURA. Yes, mother, home again.

AMANDA. And—and—Nellie!

JOS. Wot! Gal, how dare ye cross this threshold?

LAURA. Stop, father, you shall not touch her until you have heard the story I have to tell.

JOS. But, Laura, she——

AMANDA (*laying a hand on his arm*). Josiah, d'ye remember thet we wus jest about to go out inter the cold—forsaken and alone? And now the good Lord has seen fit to send our dear children back to us. Mebbe we did wrong before, Josiah, and the Lord is a-goin' ter give us another chance.

JOS. Mebbe yer right, Mandy.

LAURA. You *are* right, mother.

NELL. Sit down, sister, and let them hear your tale. Perhaps they will believe in me then. (*All seated.*)

JOS. (*pointing to TOM*). But who is this man, and wot right has Dick Randall ter be here?

LAURA. Patience, and hear me through. Six months ago we were a united family. Happy? No, I cannot say that. For we all had unsatisfied ambitions. You, father and mother, were worried over the mortgage, and anxious to see it paid. Nell had an ambition—to be a great player. I? Yes, I had an ambition too. The most unworthy one of you all. I wanted to be rich, to wear fine clothes, and enjoy myself. (*JOS. makes a gesture of protest.*) No, no, do not interrupt.

I am making my confession to you, and every word is the solemn truth. There was only one way that I could see of gaining that which I sought—through marriage. And there was but one man whom I knew from whom I could expect to reap the fulfilment of my ambition—Harry Harcourt.

AMANDA. Hush! Not so loud. He is in the parlor now.

DICK. He is?

(Starts toward L., but NELL. restrains him.)

NELL. No, no, Dick. Wait.

LAURA. I tried to win him but failed, because he was enamored with Nellie. But after she had refused to listen to his blandishments, he sought me, and I, poor weak fool that I was, fell an easy prey.

JOS. Prey? Prey? Gal, wot d'ye mean?

LAURA. Listen. I was wild at the thought of my conquest, and sought for some means to make myself more beautiful in his eyes. I must have better clothing than you could afford. How should I get it? Ah, the tempter pointed out the way. I listened, and—and—fell. It was I who stole the heirloom.

JOS. Wot! Wot! Wot air ye sayin', gal? You stole the necklace? Ye stole it, and let me drive Nellie frum the house? My curse——

AMANDA. Hush, Josiah.

NELL. No, no, father. Let us have no more curses. Go on, Laura.

LAURA. Yes, let me finish ere my strength gives out. Do you remember the night when you found me with my clothing packed?

JOS. Yes. Ye wus a-goin' away with——

LAURA. Not with Nell and Dick, as I said then. No, I was going away with Harry.

AMANDA. Oh, Laura!

LAURA. Hush, mother. I have sinned, but I have been grievously punished. You stopped me then—or, no, it was Nell, my sister, who saved me. Would God I had gone with her then. It would have been better—far better for me. But I did not. I remained, and after Nell and Dick were gone, the tempter returned, and left alone—I succumbed. It was with Harry Harcourt I fled.

JOS. Gal, ef wot ye say is true, I'll——

NELL. It is, father. Every word.

JOS. Then by heaven, I'll—— *(Starts L.)*

TOM (*standing in front of D. L.*). Go back, Mr. Armstrong. I will attend to him.

JOS. You?

TOM. Yes. Wait and you shall see.

LAURA. Why repeat the details of the days that followed? It is but the world-old story. It was not long before he tired of me; and deserted, with barely enough to buy bread, I—I—don't know what might have happened. I shudder now to think of the possibilities, had not my good angel—the sister whom I had driven from home—had she not come to my aid. She saved me from destruction, and made a good, a true woman of me.

AMANDA. Nellie, how we have wronged you.

LAURA. Yes, Nellie, who has already fought her way up the ladder, and is destined to become one of the greatest actresses our stage has ever seen.

NELL. Oh, tut, tut, Laura.

LAURA. It is true, father. Think of it, she is getting a hundred dollars a week now, and is well spoken of by the best critics in New York.

JOS. Lord bless me.

LAURA. And Dick—her husband ——

JOS. Husband? Oh!

LAURA. He is with her, also achieving great things. You will be proud of both of them when you know all. Let me tell you what yet remains. It is the happiest part of my whole sad story. While with them, I met a man. A man who, like myself, had sunk low, but who, like me, Dick and Nell had raised from the depths. It was the very man to whom I had sold the heirloom. A friendship, born of our mutual experiences, sprang up between us, which ripened into true affection; and last night, before we left for home, we were married. Father, mother. Let me present my husband. Mr. Busby.

JOS. And the heirloom? The necklace?

TOM. I never sold it, Mr. Armstrong. Somehow, I felt from the very first that all was not right about it, and I kept it, intending some day to find out the truth.

JOS. And wot did become o' it?

LAURA (*smiling*). Do you remember saying once that I might get it for a wedding present? Well, father, I did. Last night my husband gave it to me. Here it is.

(*Hands necklace to Jos.*)

JOS. No, no, you kin keep it.

LAURA. Not with the stain of theft upon it. Take it, father.

AMANDA. And praise the Lord, now we kin pay off the mortgage, Josiah.

JOS. Why so we kin, Mandy. Why, I feel like shoutin' fur joy.

Enter SQUIRE and HAR., L.

SQUIRE. I cannot stay any longer — Oh, I beg your pardon.

HAR. What? Laura?

LAURA. Yes.

JOS. Yes, Laura. The gal ye tried to lead to destruction. The gal —

SQUIRE. Let us have done with all this. If my son has done aught with which you are displeased, you have your recourse to the courts—after I have foreclosed the mortgage.

HAR. Yes, but a beggar may find it a hard matter to find a lawyer to take his case.

JOS. Ye won't foreclose on me, Hank Harcourt. 'Thar's the necklace. Grandmother Baird's heirloom. I've got it back at last, and it's yours ter pay off the mortgage.

SQUIRE (*taking the necklace*). Zounds! Oh, very well. It seems that at last luck has turned in your favor.

JOS. Don't say luck, Hank. It's Providence, thet's wot it is.

SQUIRE. Providence? Tush! Come, Harry.

TOM. Wait a moment, if you please.

HAR. What? Busby, too?

TOM. Yes, Busby, too. (*To SQUIRE.*) I have a note against your son for four thousand dollars. He got it from me while he was gambling in New York.

JOS. Gamblin'. The scoundrel!

TOM. It comes due to-morrow, and as you have very good collateral, you might as well pay it now. I'll take that necklace.

SQUIRE (*after a pause*). All right. Take it.

(Gives him the necklace.)

TOM. Ah, thank you. There is your son's note.

(Gives paper.)

SQUIRE. Come, Harry.

JOS. Yes, go, Hank Harcourt. I thank the good Lord thet I'm free frum yer clutches at last.

HAR. (*sneeringly*). And with two such daughters as ——

DICK (*threateningly*). Take care, sir. Do not forget that you are speaking of my wife.

TOM. And mine.

HAR. Eh?

TOM. Yes. I have righted the wrong. Your note is paid. So is Mr. Armstrong's mortgage. (*Points.*) There is the door. (*SQUIRE and HAR. exeunt, D. F.*) And now, Laura, my wife, I will make you another wedding present.

(*Gives her the necklace.*)

LAURA. Thank you. But I shall remain here with father and mother, and try to be a more dutiful daughter in the future than I was in the past. You remember you promised that we should become farmers.

TOM. And I agree. I will go anywhere, do anything for you.

LAURA. Then pearls would not befit a farmer's wife. They belong here.

(*She goes up and drops the necklace over NELL.'s neck.*)

NELL. Oh, Laura. (*They embrace.*)

Enter MRS. S., L.

MRS. S. Fur heaven's sake, Mandy, hain't ye never cumin'—— (*Discovers the others.*) Why—why—Laura back ag'in? And Nell—and Dick—and —— (*Turns and calls off L.*) Barnaby, Junior, Jonah, everybody, cum and see who's here.

Enter COL., JUN., JONAH and villagers, L.

JOS. Yes, friends. The prodigals hez returned and been forgiven. We're a happy, united family at last, and I'm so full o' joy thet I feel young ag'in. Come, Holcomb. Ye've got yer fiddle with ye. Strike up a reel, and Mandy and me'll show ye how we uster dance, forty years ago.

(*HOLCOMB strikes up a reel. JOS. and AMANDA take the first figure complete, the rest joining in. As the second couple begins, the curtain falls.*)

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