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PRICE 25 CENTS

THE PRIZE ESSAY or "Boy Wanted"



A
Comedy
in Two Acts

BECKLEY-CARDY COMPANY
Chicago

THE PRIZE ESSAY

OR, "BOY WANTED"

A COMEDY FOR GIRLS

IN TWO ACTS

BY

EDITH F. A. U. PAINTON
"



BECKLEY-CARDY COMPANY

CHICAGO

[1916]

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A28 P75
1916

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no. 1.

CHARACTERS

KATE.....	<i>A Student at Blankville High School</i>
ORA.....	<i>Her Sister</i>
HESTER.....	<i>Rival of Kate</i>
JOY.....	<i>Ora's Chum</i>
CARRIE.....	<i>A Gypsy Pro-temporary</i>
SUSAN.....	<i>Maid at the Home of Kate and Ora</i>
MARIE	}..... <i>Just Students</i>
CLARA	
ELLA	

PLACE: *Blankville*

TIME: *Near Commencement*

TIME OF PLAYING: *About One Hour*

SYNOPSIS

ACT I—In the Wood. Afternoon. *The Mischief on foot.*

ACT II—Parlor at the home of Kate and Ora. Evening. *The mischief underfoot.*

COSTUMES

STUDENTS: Act I—School costumes, to suit. Act II—Dainty evening dress.

CARRIE: Disguised as gypsy, faded calico wrapper, old-fashioned shawl, mask. Hobbles about on cane, speaks in high, cracked, trembling falsetto tone.

SYNOPSIS FOR PROGRAM

ACT I. Hester meets her conscience,—also Carolina,—and a plot unfolds. The girls bewail their lack of boys, and have their fortunes told. Kate and Susan search for the lost essay. Kate is given a false clew, and Susan accuses the gypsy of kidnaping. “Stolen!”

ACT II. A class reception with a missing hostess. “Boy Wanted!” Kate learns where her essay is hidden, and both Carrie and Hester repent, confess, and are forgiven. A forecast of the future. “Come right in, boys!”

STORY OF THE PLAY

Hester, through jealousy, secretes the essay Kate has written to submit in a prize contest, under a rug in her room, and persuades Carrie, disguised as a gypsy, to send her out on a false search until too late to enter the paper in the contest. The plan works well until Carrie's conscience impels her to confession, when Hester repents, and all is forgiven and forgotten.

Susan, the maid, who has no taste for grammar, but a decided taste for boys, furnishes the comedy.

PROPERTIES

Handkerchief and book for Hester; basket of pink roses and watch, for Ora; cane, shawl, small twig for Carrie; apron, cap, small mirror, dust-cloth, and sign, "Boy Wanted" for Susan.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

R. means right of stage; *C.*, center; *R. C.*, right center; *L.*, left. The actor is supposed to be facing the audience.

THE PRIZE ESSAY

ACT I

SCENE: *A wood. Log near back.*

HESTER, *discovered, pacing back and forth, looking anxiously and nervously in all directions.*

Hester. Why doesn't she come? She said she would be sure to be here early, and it seems as though I have been waiting for hours already. But I suppose I haven't. [*Pause, still walking back and forth uneasily*] Dear me! how my heart beats! It's the hardest work in the world to be really downright wicked! I'm almost tempted to back out even now! If it wasn't that Kate is *always* winning all the honors of the class, I'd run and dig up her old essay this very minute, and clear my skirts of the whole deal before it is too late! But—[*Sets teeth firmly together*] I won't! I just won't! If it wasn't for her, I'd win at least "Honorable Mention" now and then, and I'm going to, too, this time! So, there, Mr. Conscience, just you "get thee behind me!" But O! what would the teachers say if they knew what a wicked, wicked girl they are harboring here at Blankville High School? But they shan't know! No, sir! [*Walks to R.*]

CARRIE *enters L., hobbling in on cane, follows Hester stealthily to R., lays hand on arm, speaks in cracked voice.*

Carrie. Not so fast, my pretty little lady!

Hester [*screams*]. O-o-o-o-h! [*Carrie laughs a mocking laugh in her cracked voice. Hester slowly recovers*] How

you did frighten me, Carrie—or—I mean—Carolina!
You're great!

Carrie. So you think I'll do, eh?

Hester. Do? You're simply perfect! Now don't forget your part!

Carrie. Trust me for that.

Hester. Remember, now, she must be sent far enough away to keep her from getting back home in time to find her essay,—right, of course, where she herself left it, you understand,—[*Carrie nods wisely*] in time to hand it in before the time is up.

Carrie [after uneasy pause]. I wish—

Hester [sharply]. Wish what?

Carrie [hesitatingly]. Wish—you—had somebody else to—to—do your dirty work.

Hester. Dirty work? Why, it's only a little fun!

Carrie. Fun?

Hester. Of course. Isn't it as much fun to play gypsy as it was to act darky in—

Carrie [looking around apprehensively]. 'Sh!

Hester. O pshaw! There's nobody anywhere near, and the trees have no ears. Of course it's just a joke.

Carrie. Humph! Well, I only hope the rest will see the joke.

Hester. They will.—when it's over. I tell you it doesn't amount to anything. I've just got a little grudge toward Kate, and I want to get even with her. See?

Carrie. Wish you could do it alone!

Hester. Well, I can't, and I need you.

Carrie. But—

Hester [sharply]. You're not thinking of backing out, are you?

Carrie [hesitatingly]. N-o-o-o-o!—only—

Hester. Because I wouldn't advise you to, you know. If I should tell Miss Norton how I saw you hiding down in the hall after she had sent you—

Carrie [looking around uneasily, as if afraid some one would hear]. Don't, Hester! I'll do the best I can. I like a

joke as well as anyone, but it seems to me this might be carrying it a little too far, and I wouldn't really hurt Kate for the world.

Hester. Of course not. Neither would I.

Carrie [*pointedly*]. Are you *sure*?

Hester. Sure.

Carrie. But what's the great hurry about it?

Hester. Well, the teachers are very particular about the time, and refuse to allow one extra minute after nine-thirty to-night. [*Carrie nods*] We're all so inclined to put off doing everything until the very last minute that they are determined to cure us of the habit this time, once and for all.

Carrie. I see. [*Pause*] Well,—I'll fix her.

Hester. And, Carolina, if you ever dare to tell—

Carrie. Tell? Me tell?

Hester. Somebody might scare you into it. [*Walks L., listens*]

Carrie [*laughs harshly*]. 'Twould be easier to scare me out of it. [*Laughter out L. Carrie starts and looks out L., apprehensively*] I'd be too much afraid of everybody and everything to squeal on you, when it would only mean giving myself away the cheapest. [*Laughter out L., nearer*]

Hester [*uneasily*]. Here comes somebody,—right this way, too. You'd better hide for a little while. It's too light yet for you to show yourself to advantage.

Carrie [*mockingly*]. Yes, lady. [*Hobbles off R.*]

Hester. O dear! I wonder who it is. I hope they won't see how guilty I feel. [*Rubs cheeks with handkerchief*] Am I blushing, I wonder? My cheeks feel so hot. O dear, dear me! I don't like to feel so—so—so uncomfortable. If I ever get out of this scrape, I'll—I'll—I'll—well, I'll try to be good. [*Laughter off L. again*] There! they're surely coming. I'll just sit down and pretend to be studying. [*Sits on log, opens book, reads*]

ORA enters L., with large basket of pink roses.

Ora. Hurry up, Joy, here's a nice place to sit. If we don't hurry, we won't get our wreaths all made before the reception to-night.

Joy enters.

Joy. I know. Aren't you glad that we've chosen the pink rose for our class flower? Why, here's Hester!

Ora. Hello, Hester. What are you doing?

Hester [*sarcastically*]. Playing the piano. Can't you see?
[*Girls laugh*]

Joy. You seem to have an unusually industrious streak, Hester.

Ora. Yes, and good-natured one, too! Better hippety-hop to the candy shop, and get something to sweeten yourself up. [*Sits on log, sorting roses for wreath*] You must have been feasting on pickles or sauerkraut this afternoon.

Hester. Humph!

Joy. If you stay here, you can help us make these wreaths.
[*Sits by Ora and begins to work*]

Hester [*sarcastically*]. Thanks! So kind of you!

Ora. Oh, no charge!—if you'll be careful not to spoil them.

Joy. Have you handed in your essay for the contest, yet, Hester?

Hester. Of course. Haven't you?

Joy. Oh, yes. But, of course, we girls don't stand any kind of show with you and Kate!

Hester [*scornfully*]. Kate? I don't see why she always has to take every prize.

Ora. She doesn't *have* to,—but she almost always does. Dear old sis! As Susan says, "She don't seem to know nothing about failing, noway."

Joy [*laughing*]. Will you never teach that maid of yours to speak correctly?

Ora. I'm afraid not! She has a weakness for grammar. But she's great fun.

Hester. Well, I, for one, will be glad when school is over, and we won't any of us have to worry about our language and deportment, and all that.

Ora and Joy. Why, Hester!

Hester. Won't you?

Ora. Not I!

Joy. Nor I! I want to enjoy every minute of it while I can.

Ora. I do wish we weren't such a "hen party" of a class, though. [*Sighs*] If we only had "just one boy!"

Joy and Hester. O, Ora!

Ora. Well, don't you?

Joy [*bashfully*]. Well—maybe—a little.

Ora. Thought so! A boy would add such distinction,—and be such a protection,—and—and—all that, you know. Susan's always bewailing our lack of boys. "You ain't never going to do nothing big, noways, without no boys!" she says.

Hester [*sarcastically*]. And I suppose your maid runs the house!

Ora. Oh well, she helps a lot. We could hardly get along without Susan!

Joy. But I think our not having any boys is a strong argument for the superiority of women. It shows how much smarter we girls are than the boys, you see. We graduate,—they "quituate."

Ora [*laughing*]. That's good! I must tell Susan about that.

Hester [*scornfully*]. Susan! Humph!

CARRIE hobbles back in R.

Carrie. Pretty ladies, let the old gypsy tell your fortunes.

Girls [*jumping up*]. O-o-o-h!

Hester [*turns away*]. Mercy.

Carrie. Don't be afraid. The old gypsy likes pretty little ladies.

Ora. And can you really tell fortunes?

Carrie. Try me.

Joy. But we have no money.

Carrie. Then give me just a rose. Nobody ever gives old Carolina any roses now. Once, when she was young and

- pretty like you, many roses fell in her path. Now,—
[Pauses, shakes head sadly]
- Ora* [*while selecting rose*]. You poor soul! Of course you shall have a rose. These pink roses are the emblem of our class at school, you know, and they mean a great deal to us, because they express our motto,—“Noblesse oblige!”
[Pins rose on Carrie] “Nobility brings obligations,” you know! [*Stands back to admire effect of rose*] See! what a pretty one!
- Carrie* [*repeats slowly, with air of guilt, glancing uneasily over shoulder at Hester*]. “Nobility—brings obligations!”
- Joy*. Yes, isn’t that a splendid motto? It is to that one purpose that our lives are to be given. But do tell our fortunes, now.
- Carrie*. Give me your hand. [*Studies it silently. Hester starts off L.*]
- Ora*. Where are you going, Hester?
- Hester*. To school. I have to study once in a while,—if you don’t! [*Exit L.*]
- Ora*. Wonder what’s gone wrong with Hester to-day! It’s not a bit like her to be so cross and—and—disagreeable.
- Joy*. Oh, she probably feels out of sorts about the essay contest. She’s always jealous of Kate, you know.
- Ora*. Well, she ought to be. Kate is sure to get the prize. She’s the smartest girl in all the state,—if I do say it!
- Carrie* [*tracing lines of Joy’s hand with little twig*]. I see you in a big crowd,—soon,—very soon,—much noise,—much laugh,—many girls,—no boys.
- Ora*. Humph! Must be the reception to-night.
- Carrie*. Much worry,—ugh!—tears, too!—many tears from pretty eyes,—some storm,—then many smiles,—and much joy!
- Ora*. Great time you’re in for, Joy!
- Joy*. Do keep still, Ora. Let her go on.
- Carrie*. Much eat, too!
- Ora* [*smacking lips*]. Of course. There’s always “much eat” when the girls get a chance at divinity and fudge.

Carrie. You study much—do work, much work—don't much like figures, and them funny criss-cross lines, and round circles.

Ora. Geometry, Joy!

Joy [to Ora]. Now, how do you suppose she found that out? I was just hoping that Miss Norton would forget about the problems to-night.

Ora. She read your mind, Joy. Isn't she wonderful?

Joy [to Carrie]. Go on, please.

Carrie. I see in the far future much sun,—much riches,—great things. A nice little home,—a big, brave, handsome husband,—much joy. Yes? That's all for the pretty lady.

Joy. Thank you.

Ora. It's certainly enough for one pretty lady. [*Extends hand to Carrie*] What do you see for me, please?

Carrie. Big place,—school,—much noise,—many children,—girls,—boys, too,—you teacher. Yes?

Ora. Perhaps.

Carrie. You have a sister,—beauty,—good,—wise,—trouble coming,—black clouds.

Ora. To Kate! Oh, surely not to Kate!

Carrie. Much tears,—something lost,—something white,—make many worries!

Ora [drawing hand away]. I—guess—that will do. Let's go home, Joy, right away. She frightens me. What could happen to Kate? Dear old Kate! Hurry. [*Runs off R.*]

Joy [to Carrie]. What made you tell her that?

Carrie [shaking head mysteriously]. The old gypsy has to tell what she sees.

Joy. O dear! O dear! [*Calls R.*] Wait for me, Ora. I'm coming! I'll never have my fortune told again, never, never, never. [*Exits R.*]

Carrie. Poor girls! I wish I hadn't frightened them. I let my tongue get away from me that time. But why did I let Hester work me into this business anyway? I never felt so mean in my life,—never! But if I back out now,

she'll tell Miss Norton about—hist! somebody coming!
[Sits on log with back to audience, and mutters to herself, marking on ground with cane and cautiously looking to see what is going on]

KATE enters R.

Kate. Hurry up, Susan. We must find that essay. I would rather lose almost anything else I have in the world.

SUSAN enters.

Susan. Yes, Miss Kate. I ain't so slow now, be I?

Kate. O Susan! Susan! Such language! You must say, "I am not so slow now, am I?"

Susan. Well, I did say, "I ain't so slow now, be I?"—didn't I, Miss Kate?

Kate. Dear me, yes! That's just exactly what you did say, Susan, and what I don't want you to say.

Susan *[innocently]*. Why, come now, Miss Kate, didn't you not say, just this very minute, that I should ought to say it that way?

Kate. Well, never mind. I must find that paper, whether you learn to talk properly or not.

Susan. In course, Miss Kate. You can't never make nothing out of me, nohow, but just plain Susan.

Kate *[searching ground]*. I must have lost it on the way home from school. It couldn't have got out of my composition book any other way.

Susan *[helping her search]*. I shouldn't ought to be so far from home, no ways, with but just my cap and apron on. *[Pauses, taking small mirror from pocket of apron and looking at reflection, smiles with satisfaction]*

Kate. O you're all right, Susan. You're not apt to meet Pete on this street anyway.

Susan *[protesting archly]*. O Miss Kate!

Kate. And if you do, he likes your cap and apron,—with you inside it.

Susan. O Miss Kate!

Kate. If Mamma wasn't so sick that it would be such a shock to her if I didn't win the prize,—Dr. Erwin said she mustn't be shocked or grieved in any way, you know,—and if Papa hadn't promised me that trip to the beach this summer if I did win,—why,—why,—well, I don't think I'd care so much, but as it is—

Susan. Of course, Miss Kate, you wouldn't never care nothing about it, then.

Kate [*points L.*]. You go over there, Susan, and hunt everywhere. I'll see if I can't find some sign of it here.

Susan. All right, Miss Kate.

Kate. Don't overlook it.

Susan. No, I won't never do that, nohow, Miss Kate. [*Starts L., turns back at entrance*] The idee, anyway, of a class that ain't got no boys in it to protect 'em, and wait on 'em! They might o' knowed they couldn't do nothing, nohow, without no boys! [*Exits L.*]

Kate. And on the subject of our class motto, too,—“*Noblesse oblige.*” And now to have it lost! to have it not even have a chance to do any good,—to have all the teachers think that I was disobedient in not writing it, or else careless in losing it,—how can I stand it? [*Sits near front, weeping*]

Carrie [*has kept her head bowed almost to the ground in order to keep out of sight. Now looks back over shoulder at Kate, shaking head guiltily, and muttering to herself*] “Nobility—brings—obligations!”

Kate. When we chose the blue and white for our colors,—the blue for truth, and the white for purity, we meant that every one of us should live ever and always to the one end as voiced in our motto, realizing to the full the obligations nobility always brings.

Carrie [*as before*]. “Nobility—brings—obligations!”

Kate. I have tried! I have tried! [*After pause, rises*] But I have no time to waste in tears. I must find it. [*Goes to log by Carrie to look for it*] I must! I must!

Carrie [*rising and facing Kate*]. Is the pretty lady in trouble?

Kate. O-o-o-o-h!

Carrie. Don't be afraid of me, pretty lady. I'm a good gypsy, and I tell people their fortunes, and help them out of their troubles, like all good gypsies do. Can't I help you, pretty lady?

Kate. Oh, I wonder if you could! If you only, only could!

Carrie. I am sure I could. Let me see what is in your hand. [*Looks at hand*] I see trouble,—a white paper,—much writing,—pretty writing,—lost,—yes,—lost on the way to the big brick store.

Kate [*eagerly*]. Oh, I had forgotten. I did go to that store before I went home. I did! I did!

Carrie. Wait! I see it lying,—all folded up so nice, with its pretty black writing,—right down between two stones, near where the water flows,—trickle,—trickle,—trickle,—trickle,—

Kate. Oh, if it should get wet! I must hurry! [*Tries to pull hand away*]

Carrie. No, no! It will lie very still and quiet so nobody else will see it till the pretty lady comes,—for it loves the pretty lady, and is going to win for her a prize,—O lovely prize!—

Kate [*all excitement*]. Oh! Oh! Let me go! Let me go! Quick! [*Runs off R.*]

Carrie. She's safe now,—for hours!

Susan [*comes in L. hastily*]. Did you call, Miss Kate?

Carrie. Ugh!

Susan. Oh! Oh! Oh! Who are you? and where is Miss Kate?

Carrie. I am a gypsy, of course,—where are your eyes? [*Susan puts fingers to eyes*] And what do I know about your Miss Kate?

Susan. You've just gone and stealed her, so you have! I've hear'd what you gypsies be always up to doing. And I'll just have you arrested, and locked up in a jail, so I will. Help! Help! Help!

Class [off *L.*, yelling]. What's the fuss?
 U—s—Us!
 Blankville High School—
 That's the fuss.

CARRIE tries to run.

Susan [catching hold of her]. No, you don't, old woman, noways!—not never till you tell me where Miss Kate be gone to.

MARIE, CLARA, and ELLA enter *L.*

Marie. }
Clara. } What's the fuss?
Ella. }

Ella. Susan.

Marie. What is it?

Clara. What's wrong?

Susan. Miss Kate is stolen by gypsies!

Marie. Kate?

Clara. Stolen?

Ella. Gypsies?

Susan. Yes, stole by gypsies. She was right here just a minute ago to look for her paper, and now she just ain't nowhere.

Ella. Her paper?

Marie. What paper?

Clara. Looking for what?

Susan. Why, her essay.

All. What?

Susan. Her prize essay that was—

HESTER runs in *L.*

Hester. What's all this fuss about? Quarreling?

ORA runs in *R.*, followed by *JOY.*

ORA. O Kate! Kate! [*Looks all around group in surprise*]
 Why, isn't Kate here?

Susan. No, Miss Ora, she just ain't nowhere.

Joy. What? Isn't anywhere?

Susan. She's just been and got stole by gypsies, Miss Ora, and here is one of the wretched thieves now.

Girls [together, in horror]. Stolen!

All gather around Carrie in amazement and curiosity. Carrie suddenly raises head and points an accusing finger at Hester, who drops head and turns guiltily away. Hold pose for curtain.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: *Parlor at the home of Kate and Ora.*

SUSAN *discovered alone, dusting furniture. After business, pauses, standing with hands on hips, surveying the room critically.*

Susan. There! I reckon this room is plenty clean enough to suit them young ladies now. It'll look like a cyclone had struck it anyway, before the blowout's over, with all the monkey-shines they be forever cutting up! The idee, anyways, of a reception without no boys to it! I've jest got a good sound notion to get some boys to come in anyways. But how? [*Thinks*] I know. I'll jest get that sign Mr. Brown had up to his office window, and I'll stick it right up here. That'll bring 'em. It brung him an office boy quick enough, and it'll bring boys to these here doings, sure. [*Gets sign, "Boy Wanted," and hangs in window, then stands back, surveying it proudly*] That looks like business, it do, for a fact. It's just alike on both sides, too, so everybody outside can tell what it says. [*Sighs*] If Miss Kate was only found! It's her what's worrying me, most of everything. If there was just one boy in the class, I'd send him in a jiffy to look her up. But—[*Sighs*]—O dear! If that old gypsy hadn't got away so slick, I'd o' known where she'd been an' gone to. But she swore nobody hadn't been stealing Miss Kate nowadays. She said if we'd jest wait, she'd be coming home all right. and so, like plumb idjits, we let her get away. And no Miss Kate yet! O dear! O dear!

ORA enters C.

Ora. Hasn't Miss Kate come home yet, Susan?

Susan. No, Miss Ora. I ain't saw no signs of her nowhere.

Ora. You meant to say, "I haven't seen any sign of her anywhere," didn't you, Susan?

Susan. Well, ain't that what I said?—"I ain't saw no signs of her nowhere."

Ora. But that isn't what I said. I said—

Susan. Never you mind, Miss Ora. You jest can't never learn me no grammar, nowadays. I wasn't never meant for no educated young lady. I jest got to talk 'Nited States like it's spoke by common folks. [*Looks at Ora admiringly*] My! how sweet you be in them fine togs o' yourn!

Ora [*bows low*]. Thank you, Susan.

Susan. Well, I must jest run upstairs now, and see if the bedrooms be in good fix for them girls to lay their duds off in. [*Exits R.*]

Ora. Dear me! That Susan! She never will learn to speak properly. [*Sees sign*] Well, I declare! If Papa hasn't got his sign up here! Wonder what in the world he wants with a boy here at home. [*Sighs*] I do wish Kate would come home. She was so anxious to have the class reception here. If she doesn't hurry, she won't have time to dress before the other girls get here. [*Loud ring of bell at L.*] Dear me! There they come now. [*Laughter out L.*] If Kate was only here!

Enters SUSAN, ushering in HESTER, JOY, MARIE, CLARA and ELLA, all laughing, L.

Susan. Here be the bunch, Miss Ora. [*Exits L.*]

Ora. Quite a Susanie announcement, girls. But I'm very glad to welcome you.

Joy. Why, where is Kate?

Ora. Not home yet.

All [*in amazement*]. What? [*Ora shakes head. All look at one another in consternation*] Oh, dear!

Hester drops head, and walks about room, examining things and acting abstracted and ill at ease, during all of following dialogue.

Joy. Where can she be? [*Sits*]

Ella. Was she stolen, Ora? [*Sits*]

Marie. Could she have been? [*Sits*]

Clara. What do you honestly think, Ora? [*Sits*]

Ora. Oh, I don't know! I don't know! I've almost stopped trying to think. [*Sits*]

All. Dear old Kate!

Ora. Where's Carrie?

All. I don't know.

Clara. I haven't seen her to-day.

Ella. She'll probably be along after a while.

Joy. It's a habit of hers to be late, you know.

Ora. Why don't you sit down, Hester?

Hester. Oh, I don't know. Been sitting around pretty nearly all day. Thought I'd rather use my feet a little.

Ora [*looks at watch*]. Almost eight o'clock! I do wish Kate would come. Let's go into the sitting-room, and practice our class song a little.

All [*rising*]. Good!

Ora leads off R. and all but Hester follow.

Hester [*alone*]. Eight o'clock, she says! Only an hour and a half more, and the contest will be closed. And Kate is still out—looking—looking—looking—for what she never will find out there! And the prize will be mine this time,—all mine! [*Pause*] I wonder why it doesn't make me feel any happier than it does!

Ora [*off R.*]. Coming, Hester?

Hester. Yes. [*Exits R.—In a moment, prelude of song begins softly off R.*]

SUSAN enters L.

Susan. Eight o'clock and not no Miss Kate yet, nowhere! And not no boys, neither, what them girls would care none

to see! There should ought to be at least one boy in this here class. I'm jest going to use that talk-'phone, a little, and scare some of them up. I'll get hold of some of them nice boys what go to High School. The girls like them there fellows, 'cause they know how to behave nice, like boys should ought to act. I'll go right now while the girls be singing. [*Exits L.*]

Class Song, or any preferred chorus is sung off R.

KATE enters during singing of last chorus.

Kate. The girls here already, and singing! It must be later than I thought. And my essay! Oh, my essay! It is lost!—lost!—lost! [*Sinks in seat. Dramatic pause*] Well, I won't let it spoil my evening. No, I won't! I will just have faith to believe whyever and however it happened, it must work out for the best, some way. I must bear my loss with honor, remembering how nobility obliges those of us who are of high rank to manifest our own greatness. I wonder who'll win the prize! Hester, probably! Well, I sincerely hope it will make her happy, and do the good I would have tried to have had it do for me if I had won it.

Susan [*off L. angrily*]. I tell you, you can't never come in noways. You jest ain't never a-going to see them girls!

Carrie [*off L.*]. But I must, I say!

Kate [*rising eagerly*]. The gypsy!

Carrie [*still off L.*]. I tell you I have something important to tell the young lady who just came in.

Susan. Miss Kate? You shan't see her!

Carrie. I must! I shall! I followed her for blocks, but she hurried so fast, I could not catch her.

Susan. She shan't be stole again, noways.

Carrie. Stole? She was never stolen! You're crazy! I just want to tell her something she will want so bad to hear. It won't take me but a moment.

Susan. But I say you can't never—

Kate [*runs to door*]. Do let her come, Susan! Oh, do let her come! Maybe she knows—

CARRIE enters L.

Carrie. Yes, I do know, Miss. Up in your room, behind the bed, under the edge of the rug,—run!—look!—quick!

Kate. What? My room? Bed? Rug? Oh, let me see! Let me see! [*Runs out C.*]

Susan [*grimly*]. I'm a-going to stay right straight here and keep an eye on you, that you ain't a-stealing nothing, noways.

Carrie. I don't know as I blame you, but I don't want a single one of your pretty things.

Susan. O dear! If there was only jest one boy in this here class! But I've jest been 'phoning for some, and they'll be right over. Then I guess you'll get a move on yourself!

Carrie. Can't I see the young ladies and tell their fortunes?

Susan. No, sir, you can't! You—

Kate [*off C. calls*]. O Susan! Susan!

Susan. Yes, Miss Kate. [*Exits C.*]

Kate [*still off C.*]. Run to the school, quick, and give this to Miss Norton. She'll be in the office till half past nine. But you must be sure and be there before then, or it will be too late. Get your cloak, and run!—run!—run!

Susan. I'll get there if I run my two feet plumb off, Miss Kate.

Kate [*still off C.*]. And now I must change my dress for the reception.

HESTER enters R.

Hester. Why! You here? Like this?

Carrie. Yes, I didn't want to miss all the fun. I followed Kate till too late to get with the crowd, and—

Hester [*looking apprehensively R.*]. 'Sh!

Carrie. I tell you, Hester, I'm mighty sorry I got into this, and—

Hester [*as before*]. 'Sh! Do keep your mouth shut! Your croaking makes me sick.

Carrie [*scornfully*]. Humph! Better 'phone to a doctor right

away. It might be dangerous. That kind of disease is apt to strike in. And I just—

Hester [as before]. 'Sh! They're coming. Now, for goodness sake,—and my sake,—be careful what you say, and get out of here as soon as you can!

Carrie. Yes, yes, I understand perfectly. I can do your dirty work for you, and lose my fun at the reception, while you can dress up in all your finery, and—[*Girls laugh off R.*]

Hester [very nervously]. Oh, do hush!

Carrie turns away, muttering to herself, as girls re-enter R.

Joy. Oh, here is the gypsy!

Ora. Good! Now the rest of you can have your fortunes told.

All. Good! Good!

Carrie [glancing uneasily at *Hester*]. But I was just going—

Marie. Oh, not till you tell our fortunes, please, good gypsy.

Ella. We are going to graduate, you know, and we want to know our future so badly.

All [crowding around *Carrie*]. So badly!

Carrie. Well, just a minute, then. [*Takes Marie's hand*]

You, little lady, I see in a big office,—much business,—good work,—very busy all day.

Ella [extending her hand]. And me?

Carrie. You, I see,—a nurse,—with little children who love you,—many children,—much love. You not strong, little lady,—frail,—delicate,—need much love. Then you get strong,—O very strong.—yes?

Ella. I hope so, I'm sure.

Clara. And now, what for me?

Carrie. You, too, I see in big office,—much write, write, write,—figure, figure, figure,—busy, busy, busy,—many letters,—many books.

Clara. Come on, *Hester*, you're next!

Hester. No, *Clara*, I don't think I want mine told.

All. Oh, come on.

Hester. But I don't want—

Carrie. Oh, better let me see your hand, lady. It won't take but a minute. [*Hester reluctantly gives hand*] Ah! I fear you will come to some bad end. I see—
Hester [*snatching hand away*]. That will do. The idea of you girls listening to such nonsense!

KATE enters C.

Kate. O girls, I am so happy!
Hester [*aside in consternation*]. Happy!
All [*crowding around her*]. O Kate! Kate!
Ora. But where have you been, Kate?
Kate. Looking for my essay.
Joy. And did you find it?
Kate. I did.
Hester [*in ill-concealed chagrin*]. You did?
Kate. Sure, I did. And Susan went to take it to Miss Morton quite a little while ago.
All [*except Hester*]. I'm so glad!
Ora. But where did you find it, Kate?
Kate. Well, sir, in my very own room, under the rug.
Hester. But how did you ever think to look there?
Kate. Why, this dear old gypsy told me—
All [*except Hester*]. What?
Hester [*to Carrie*]. You? You traitor!
Carrie. Yes,—I! [*Throwing off disguise, disclosing ordinary school dress*]. I told her!
All [*astonished*]. CARRIE!
Carrie. Yes, Carrie! And I told her.
Kate. But Carrie, how did you know?
Ora. And how in the world did it get there?
Carrie [*pointing to Hester*]. Ask her.
All [*looking at Hester, who hangs head*]. Hester? [*Carrie nods*]
Kate [*gently*]. What did you know about it, Hester?
Hester [*after painful pause*]. I—I—O Kate, I wanted the prize so much,—I—I—I hid your essay when I was in your room this morning, and you left me alone while you

went to the telephone,—don't you remember? [*Kate nods slowly*] And I scared poor Carrie into sending you off on that wild-goose chase, so you'd be gone from home too late to get your paper to Miss Norton on time even if you could find it.

All [*reproachfully*]. O Hester!

Hester. Probably you won't believe me, Kate,—nor any of you,—but I'm ever so sorry. I've been sorry ever so many times to-day, but I was too stubborn to give it up when I got started, and—and—O Kate—I do really hope you will get the prize. I wouldn't accept it if thy offered it, now. Won't you forgive me?

Kate. Why, of course, Hester. I don't blame you a bit for wanting the prize. Surely, I forgive you.

Carrie. And me too, Kate?

Hester. Yes, Kate, please. Carrie didn't want to help me a bit. I just had to scare her into it after she found out that it wasn't to be just a joke. At first, I made her think that it was only a little fun.

Kate. Of course I forgive you, Carrie. You helped me to find my essay, and I can never be grateful enough to you for that.

Joy. And all the rest of us will forgive you too, Carrie, for we had the fun of having our fortunes told by a real live gypsy. [*All laugh*] Well, didn't we, girls?

All. Sure.

Kate. Well, girls, I don't need to have my fortune told. I have to-day definitely decided what my future is to be.

All [*eagerly*]. What?

Kate. I'm going to be an author.

All. An author?

Kate. Yes,—perhaps a poet. Anyway, I shall write books.

Ora. O Kate, how lovely!

Joy. Isn't it?

Ella. Won't she write perfectly lovely stories!

Clara. And won't she just do a whole lot of good!

Marie. And won't everybody love her!

Kate. But, O girls! Girls! It is not to be lovely and sweet, and to have everybody love me that I have made up my mind to this,—no,—not even to do just a lot of good; because we can do that, you know; in every walk of life, when we once resolve to follow the Golden Rule. I had a deeper reason than any of these,—

All [*eagerly*]. What?

Kate. To live up to our motto: to live my life every day—every hour—yes, every minute of it, demonstrating “Noblesse oblige”—putting into active use the nobility God has given me, and the teachers have worked so hard to develop in me.

Joy. But why you, more than others, Kate?

Kate [*gravely*]. We who are better equipped than others for the battle of life by either birth or breeding—yes, or even in brain or brawn—have a duty to our friends, and to the world that we are under obligations to fill. “Noblesse oblige!” This shall be my motto through life, and my mission to all humanity.

All. Dear Kate!

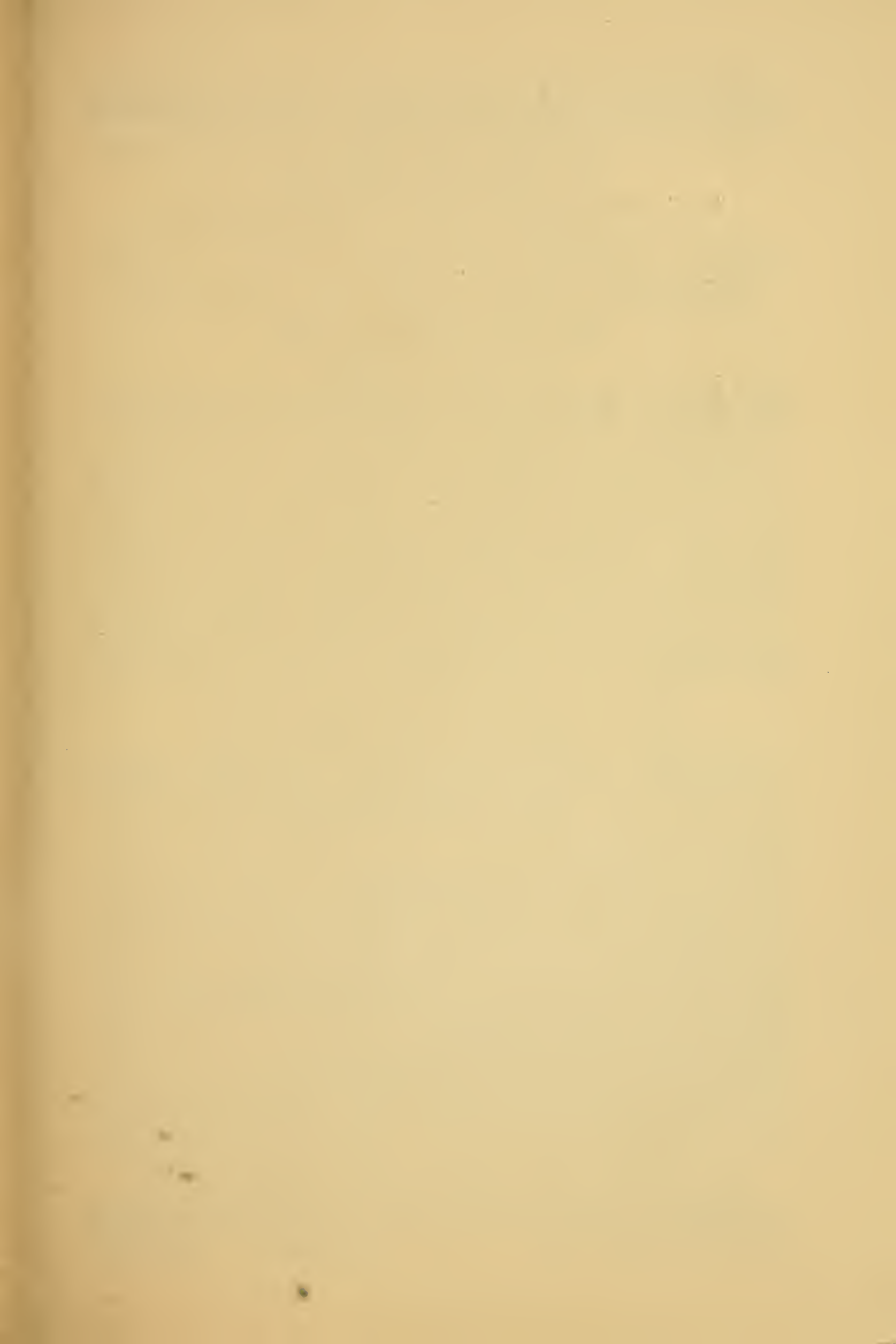
Kate. And now girls, let’s—

SUSAN enters suddenly L., holding door open, and looking back smiling.

Susan. Come right in, boys!

Girls jump up, and look toward door in surprise and expectation. Hold poses for—

QUICK CURTAIN



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