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SPARKS DIVINE

A Comedy in One Act

BY

BESSIE SPRINGER BREENE

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In the order of their appearance)

JANE WOODS, the housekeeper.

PATIENCE HENDERSON, afflicted of the Lord.

MINNIE JENKS, } like the brook.

JENNIE JENKS, }

MRS. J. F. MILES-HOMER, nee Smith.

SYLVIA BRANSCOME, still looking 'em over.

SUSAN TOMKINS, the militant.

MRS. JOHN ROSCOE, who wields the social sceptre.

MRS. MONTROSE MONTGOMERY, grass or sod.

ANN PRESCOTT LARKING, from Hinckley.

DEC -1 1920

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Sparks Divine

SCENE. *Sitting-room in the rectory at Hustling Corners, Iowa. 9.00 P. M. A room plainly furnished, with tan walls. At L. and R., windows, neatly curtained. In back at C. a fireplace. On the mantel above is a picture of Daniel in the lions' den, or some such kindred subject, a clock and a pair of vases. At L. of fireplace a door leading to hall. In front of window L. a flat-top desk, with a student lamp and an ink-well of ancient appearance. A chair in front of the desk. Before the fireplace two chairs, one a morris chair, and the other wicker. In the corner R. near the window, an upright piano. (Note. If an old square piano can be obtained so much the better.) Old "tidies" are on each chair. Near the piano another armchair. At C. near footlights a marble-top walnut table, with a large Bible and Hymnal on it and another lamp, also brass, like the student lamp, and with a yellow glass shade. A worn carpet covers the floor, with a rug at the fireplace. On the curtain, the fire is laid, but not lighted, the furniture is covered with sheets, and the stage is completely darkened, except the moonlight that comes in at the windows. Under the door L.C. there is a thread of light, and when this door is opened, there is a light, but not a bright one, out in the hall. Directly opposite the door in the hall is an old style walnut hat and umbrella rack.*

As the curtain rises, enter at once L.C. JANE WOODS. Plump, capable, in a washable house dress and an apron, and followed by PATIENCE HENDERSON, wearing an old-fashioned dark dress and with a shawl over her head, which she drops down on her shoulders, and gathers around her with dignity. She has a slow, resigned way of talking, and heaves frequent sighs. She is in marked contrast to the hustling, crisp-speaking JANE. They enter talking.

JANE. (*Fussily*) Dear me, dear me. Why didn't they give a body notice? Here am I, with not a dirty room in this house clean.

PATIENCE. (*Melancholy tone*) No doubt it was the hand of Providence. Yes, I'm sure it was. (*Sits at R. of table at c.*) If I had not heard that telephone ring——

JANE. (*Lighting the lamps. Lights up*) It's a mercy that there fire's laid. (*Each interrupts the other continually*)

PATIENCE. (*Gathering the shawl around her*) I was just dozing off, after readin' a chapter in Job. I always read Job, before I go to sleep. It keeps so clear in my mind, Job does, that life is short, and time is fleetin', and that we are ALL but flesh——

JANE. Guess I might as well light up that fire, and git the place warmed up. (*Kneels down and lights the fire*)

PATIENCE. (*Rising and crossing to morris chair at fire, where she sits funereally*) I was just dozin' off as I says, thinkin' of that verse in Job I had been readin', mebbe you know it, it's a great favorite of mine. (*Quotes in a sepulchral voice*) "My bones are pinched in me, in the night season, and my sinews take no rest." (*JANE, who is paying no*

attention, rises after lighting the fire, and exits L.C. and returns with the carpetsweeper, which she runs vigorously) I was lyin' there, thinkin' how apt, how very apt that there verse was to my own conditions. I've had the worst pain in my shoulder these last three days.

JANE. (*Running the sweeper*) I'll just give this room a lick and a promise, and to-morrow I'll get it real clean.

PATIENCE. (*As though JANE had not spoken*) When the telephone rang, and I—— (*JANE whips covers off furniture*)

JANE. (*Running sweeper*) It's no way fer the committee to do. Why, we didn't even know they had decided on the new minister, and now you get a telegram, a telegram, mind you, sayin' he's comin' on the night train. (*Runs the sweeper under PATIENCE'S legs*)

PATIENCE. My FEET are under there, Jane Woods.

JANE. Well, git' 'em out of the way. I ain't got no time fer chewin' the rag. Did you call up the rest of the women——?

PATIENCE. (*Stiffly*) I trust I know——

JANE. If you ain't called 'em, do it right off. My land, they're the committee, ain't they, and even if 'tis nine o'clock at night, I'm goin' to need help to git this house ready for the new minister. What time's he goin' to get in?

PATIENCE. 'Bout ten o'clock, the telegram said.

JANE. Dear me, there it is, only an hour. Call up the women——

PATIENCE. I have already notified the members of the Ladies' Aid. My part is done, my labor is over, and now I trust I may rest, as well as anybody can in this weary world. (*Sighs*)

JANE. (*Dropping sweeper handle*) Why didn't

you say so in the first place? As fer restin' though, you're in the wrong place, so get a move on, and help me git this place cleaned. (*Bell rings*) There's somebody now. (*Exits hurriedly L.C. Voices off, and re-enter JANE, followed by JENNIE and MINNIE JENKS. Both are dressed alike in a dark skirt, and shirtwaist, with a white collar. They wear coats and scarfs over their heads. They divest themselves of the coats and scarfs during what follows, and put them on the chair near piano. They are both fussily quick in their movements, and speak very fast. In fact their words pour out in a never-ceasing stream, one taking the words literally out of the other's mouth, so that no sentence is complete without both talking. They talk loudly, and pause for breath which is taken audibly. Both carry bundles*)

JENNIE. (*Fast and shrill*) For goodness' sake, what on earth is up?

MINNIE. I heard that telephone ring, and I said to Jennie——

JENNIE. —There's the telephone a-ringing, Minnie says to me. Well, answer it. I says——

MINNIE. I hate to get out on the——

JENNIE. Cold floor.

JANE. (*Same business with sweeper*) Was you in bed?

PATIENCE. It was nearly nine o'clock when I telephoned. Certainly they were in bed. At a late hour like that, they *would* have retired. Of course, Mrs. Montgomery was up——

MINNIE. That woman's always up——

JENNIE. I see that light of hers a-goin' all hours——

PATIENCE. She is a widow, I understand——

MINNIE. But what I want to know is: is she a tombstone widow, or——

JENNIE. One of them that man has put asunder——?

JANE. Well, get your things off, and get to work——

JENNIE. Minnie, I says, get up and answer that phone, mebbe somebody's dead—so she—— (JANE exits and returns with mop)

MINNIE. I got up and answered and Miss Henderson says to——

JENNIE. —come right over to the rectory, the new——

MINNIE. —minister's comin', and here——
(Sits on piano stool. JANE runs mop around)

JENNIE. —we are. (Bell rings. JANE drops mop and exits. Voices in hall, and enter MRS. J. T. MILES-HOMER, well dressed in a dark silk dress, an elaborate hat, much jewelry, and a fur coat. She wears gloves which she draws off carefully and places with her coat on top of piano. She has a lorgnette which she makes frequent use of, and has a much affected and what is meant to be a society air, as she imagines it to be. She has a great deal of acquired dignity, but a dignity very different from that of PATIENCE)

MRS. HOMER. (Gazing through lorgnette at JANE) Now, let me—ah, get this straight. (Turns, as JANE is behind her, and then turning again, sees the others) Ah, good evening, ah, Mrs. Henderson. Miss Jenks. (Bows to both in a condescending manner. PATIENCE, still sitting, bows in return, the girls nod. JENNIE rises) This is rather a hasty call, is it not? (JANE, getting more hurried, runs the mop) I trust you have not failed to notify our dear Mrs. Roscoe? (Is taking off her wraps)

PATIENCE. (Stiffly) I notified every one on the committee, Mrs. Homer. I always do my duty, no matter how painful.

MRS. HOMER. (*Lorgnette business*) Quite so, quite so. (*Sits at L. of table down c.*)

MINNIE. (*From the piano stool*) Will there be a reception committee at——

JENNIE. (*On edge of chair near piano where their wraps are*) —the depot? (*Bell rings. JANE throws down the mop and exits. Voices in the hall*) Somebody's comin'.

MINNIE. (*Listening*) It's that Sylvia Branscome——

(*Enter SYLVIA, carrying a paper of flowers. She wears a coat and hat, and furs. High white shoes, white gloves and a fur neck-piece. She has a certain vivacity of manner, and has an air of thinking very well of herself indeed. She is not young, neither is she old, but appears to be older than her manner of dressing would indicate, at a first glance*)

SYLVIA. (*Entering kittenishly*) Isn't this perfectly thrilling! A new minister at last. Hello, everybody. (*Underscored words are as she speaks them, all in italics*)

MRS. HOMER. Good evening, Miss Branscome.

MINNIE. (*Eagerly*) The minister—he isn't married——

JENNIE. He's single. When that telephone rang, I says——

MINNIE. I asked right away, didn't I, Miss Henderson?

JENNIE. I heard Minnie say, "A new minister, when's he comin'?"

MINNIE. Miss Henderson says, "He'll be in to-night——"

JENNIE. Deacon Brown sent a telegram——

MINNIE. And it said—— (*JANE enters and begins again with mop*)

PATIENCE. Seein' as *I* got the message, I might as well tell what did happen——

JENNIE. (*Unheeding*) And then Minnie sez, "Is he married?"

MINNIE. Is he married, I sez. (*JANE pokes mop under MRS. HOMER*)

MRS. HOMER. (*Lifting her feet hastily*) My good woman, be more careful——

JANE. (*Sullenly*) I ain't no good woman——

MRS. HOMER. (*Putting her in her place with the lorgnette*) I certainly trust you are not a bad one. (*Leans back in seat. JANE glares. Bell rings to interrupt her reply, and she exits with mop. Voices off*)

SYLVIA. (*Who has been removing her wraps and puts them on seat near piano*) It's going to lend a real zest to church work having a bachelor minister. (*Giggles, and then fully conscious of the impression she is creating, she removes her coat to disclose a very dizzy silk dress of a vivid pink. This she smoothes down complacently, while the Misses Jenks look awestruck*)

(*Enter SUSAN, self-reliant, mannish manner. Wears plain dark skirt and coat, and a man's style shirt with a stiff collar and black bow tie. Hair plain, severe hat, horn-rim glasses. Capable-looking handbag, and heavy gloves that she is stuffing into pockets. JANE follows with duster, and dusts furiously, pushing everyone aside*)

SUSAN. (*Stamping in*) Well, what's doing? I couldn't make head or tail of that old Henderson's cackling over the phone. (*PATIENCE, full of of-*

fence, rises) Oh, excuse me, Mrs. Henderson, I didn't see you. (*Sits on arm of chair at grate*) What's up?

SYLVIA. (*Eagerly*) There's a new minister, Susan——

JENNIE. —and he's coming——

MINNIE. —to-night. Deacon——

JENNIE. —Brown telegraphed——

MINNIE. —Mrs. Henderson——

SYLVIA AND JENNIE. (*Together*) He isn't married—he's single.

MINNIE. And he's——

SYLVIA (*Stamping her foot a little*) For goodness' sakes, let me get a word in, will you?

JENNIE. (*Unheeding*) We know all about it, because——

MINNIE. —Miss Henderson told us——

JENNIE. And he's—(*MINNIE joins on last word*) —Single.

SUSAN. Is his single-blessedness his only qualification?

PATIENCE. (*Who has sat stiffly at R. of table*) He is in the Lord's hands.

SUSAN. He needs to be, in this old maids' roost.

SYLVIA. (*Cuttingly*) Please do not put me in your own class, dear.

SUSAN. I'm not, darling. (*SYLVIA flounces to piano*) So this hurry-up call is——

MRS. HOMER. (*With more dignity than ever*) If I might be allowed to get a word in edgewise, the situation is this—the committee, headed by Deacon Brown, went——

JENNIE. —to Hinckley Falls——

MINNIE. —to hear him preach.

MRS. HOMER. (*Louder*) Having heard him, and found him satisfactory, they gave him a call——

JENNIE. —they invited him to come——

MINNIE. —to this church. (MRS. HOMER *raises her lorgnette and gives up the job in disgust*)

SYLVIA. He accepted, of course——

JENNIE. —and he's comin'——

MINNIE. —to-night——

JENNIE. And he isn't——

MINNIE. —he isn't——

SUSAN. (*Laughing*) —married. (JANE, *who has been dusting vigorously, has pushed MRS. HOMER aside, who glares at her, knocked into MRS. HENDERSON; who looks afflicted, and slams down the hymnals on the table, now pauses, hands on hips*)

JANE. He's comin' to-night, and I got the whole house to clean, and an almighty short time to do it in.

MRS. HENDERSON. Is it possible that I hear you taking the name of the Lord in vain? (*Bell rings. JANE flings down the duster and exits. Voices R. Re-enter JANE, this time showing in MRS. ROSCOE, toward whom her manner is most respectful. MRS. ROSCOE enters very briskly, and business-like. She is here to accomplish something. She wears a silk dress, a fur coat, and a very fancy scarf over her hair, which scarf she at once unwinds, MRS. HOMER, who has risen, springing to help her. MRS. ROSCOE is aware of her importance, and shows it, yet while she has lots of dignity, it is not the over-exaggerated sort that MRS. HOMER exhibits. MRS. HOMER is decidedly off her high horse now. SYLVIA is at the desk, MINNIE on piano stool, JENNIE beside her, SUSAN on arm of chair at fire. PATIENCE at R. of table C.*)

MRS. ROSCOE. (*With the cordiality of her unassailable social position*) Good evening, ladies.

MRS. HOMER. (*Helping her with the scarf*) Let ME help you. (MRS. ROSCOE *murmurs "Thanks"*)

I trust, dear Mrs. Roscoe, that you have not been unduly disturbed by this sudden call——

MRS. ROSCOE. (*Graciously*) Oh, no, no——
(*Puts scarf on fireplace*)

MRS. HOMER. (*Pulling forward the morris chair at fire*) Sit here, dear Mrs. Roscoe, and rest——

MRS. ROSCOE. (*Sinking grandly into it*) Thank you, Mrs. Homer. (*Leans forward*) Now, Mrs. Henderson, from the message that my maid took from you over the telephone, I gather that the committee, headed by Mr. Brown, has not only decided upon a minister, but——

JENNIE. He's on the way——

MINNIE. —here, now.

MRS. HOMER. (*Waving them into silence, with horror at their temerity*) Exactly, Mrs. Roscoe.

JANE. (*Who has been standing at the door, fidgeting*) He'll be here any time now, and the house ain't cleaned, or——

MRS. ROSCOE. (*Rising*) Then we must take charge here, at once, and——

MRS. HOMER. (*Eagerly*) We are at your service, Mrs. Roscoe, for we know that you, always in the lead, in these matters, as well as in all things social——

MRS. ROSCOE. (*Cutting her short by turning to JANE*) What has been done toward getting the house in readiness?

JANE. I'VE done all I could, ma'am, but there's a lot as has set around, workin' their jaws, and that's about all.

SYLVIA. (*Simpering, as she crosses energetically to piano*) I have brought some flowers. (*Unwraps them, and discloses an assorted bouquet that is somewhat wilted*) If you will get me some vases, Jane, we will dispose them about the room. (MRS.

ROSCOE *inspects room with a comprehensive glance and sweeps out, followed by* MRS. HOMER)

SUSAN. (*Swings her foot*) They're kinda wilted seems to me, but they'll pass.

SYLVIA. (*Angrily*) Wilted? They are fresh every morning. Every morning my unknown admirer——

SUSAN. What do you mean "unknown"?

SYLVIA. Unknown to all except myself——

SUSAN. Oh, I see—— (*Is amused*)

JENNIE. (*With a sarcastic laugh*) I guess that's right. She sends them to herself, I'll bet.

MINNIE. Sure——

SYLVIA. (*Sharply*) What's that?

SUSAN. (*Rising*) Well, this isn't getting this place clean. What can I do, Jane? (*JANE, who has been setting chairs to rights, and arranging curtains, comes to c.*)

JANE. You can run that mop around out in the hall, Miss Tomkins——

SUSAN. (*Dramatically*) Give ME the mop—— (*Seizes mop and exits*)

SYLVIA. Where are the vases? These won't do. Get me something.

JANE. They's some out in the kitchen. Git 'em yourself. I ain't no waitress—— (*To* MRS. HENDERSON) And say, if you ain't growed to that spot, YOU might do something, Patience Henderson. (*SYLVIA, tossing her head, exits*)

PATIENCE. (*Rising, and in a resigned tone*) I see my duty, as always. The Lord hath laid a heavy burden upon me——

JANE. I'm goin' to get out some clean sheets for the minister's bed, and you kin make it up. (*Exit briskly, and* PATIENCE *follows wearily. Bell rings. Voices. JENNIE runs to door and returns*)

JENNIE. That's that flip widow——

MINNIE. Where did she come from anyhow?

JENNIE. (*On piano stool*) What's she livin' on, I'd like to know, all dressed up all the time?

MINNIE. The question I'M asking is: is she grass or sod? (*SYLVIA and MRS. MONTGOMERY meet at door of hall, SYLVIA carrying vases, MRS. MONTGOMERY a plate covered with a napkin*)

SYLVIA. (*Stiffly, and entering*) Good evening.

(*MRS. MONTGOMERY enters, bearing the plate carefully. She is all dressed in black, with white collars and cuffs, and has on a coat sweater also black, and no hat. Her hair is artfully arranged, and she is rouged noticeably*)

MRS. MONTGOMERY. (*Who has caught the stiffness in SYLVIA'S manner and tone*) Howdy do, Miss Branscome. It IS MISS Branscome still, is it not? (*Sweetly*) And here are the MISSES Jenks—well, this is quite a gathering. (*SYLVIA flounces to piano, where she has laid the flowers and begins arranging them in a vase. MRS. MONTGOMERY comes to table c. and places the covered plate on the table carefully at R. of fire. JANE is seen to run back and forth in hall, during what follows*)

SUSAN. (*Appearing at door, wiping her brow, and holding her mop*) Phew, and they say woman's place is in the home——

JENNIE. (*Who has been arranging things on desk*) And where else (*MINNIE joining on last word*) is it——?

SUSAN. (*As though a red rag had been waved at a bull, and entering with mop, which she brandishes*) This is the slavery that will next be abolished. This tying women to the juggernaut of housework——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. (*Sweetly*) One is not tied to the juggernaut, my dear, one is thrown under it——

SUSAN. Piffle. Think of the energy that I have wasted, right here, for instance, pushing this mop around that hall. Energy enough has been consumed to make a speech, and a corking good one at that—for the cause.

MRS. MONTGOMERY. What cause is that? (*Polishes nails*)

SUSAN. (*Belligerently*) Don't you believe in women having the vote?

MRS. MONTGOMERY. Oh, certainly.

SUSAN. I am proud to say that I was one of the martyrs who went to prison for that cause. I went to prison for picketing the White House. For my principles, I willingly went to jail——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. But, my dear, going to jail is so ordinary. Everybody's doing that.

JENNIE and MINNIE. (*MINNIE at piano, JENNIE at desk*) Doing what? (*SYLVIA, who is arranging flowers in vases, puts one on table and views the effect, and then does the same with the other vaseful, putting that on piano*)

MRS. MONTGOMERY. Going to jail for one's principles——

SUSAN. And how do you make that out?

MRS. MONTGOMERY. Well, you women went to jail for your principles, and burglars go to jail for theirs, and the Reds go to jail for theirs. The only difference is that the women want the vote, and the burglar wants your watch, and the Reds want the earth, so there you are.

SUSAN. You have never felt the exhilaration of a martyr, then. You have never felt the blood course madly through your veins, as you sat in your gloomy cell——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. (*With a shudder*) I should say not. I'd a lot rather feel the hot water coursing madly through the furnace pipes, in my own little flat. Jails are chilly—— (*To SYLVIA*) The effect is charming, my dear, I'm sure, but he will never see those flowers.

SYLVIA. Why not?

MRS. MONTGOMERY. Men hate flowers around.

JENNIE. (*Exchanging glances with MINNIE, and crossing to the piano, where she takes down the parcel she has brought*) Well, we've brought—— (*MINNIE takes down her parcel*)

MINNIE. We have——

SYLVIA. (*With sarcasm*) I dare say YOU are posted.

MRS. MONTGOMERY. (*Loftily*) I know all about it.

SYLVIA. Indeed. I suppose your husband didn't happen to like flowers and so——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. He was very fond of one kind——

SYLVIA. And those were—— (*SUSAN sits on arm of chair L.*)

MRS. MONTGOMERY. (*Sweetly*) Cauliflower, dear one.

SYLVIA. (*Going to desk with a toss of her head*) You think you're very funny, don't you?

MINNIE. (*Unwrapping parcel*) We have a little offering here——

JENNIE. (*Opening her parcel*) We made them ourselves—— (*She produces a knitted scarf, MINNIE a pair of wristlets*)

SUSAN. Gadzooks. (*Laughs*)

SYLVIA. What is it? A scarf and wristlets? How very plebeian.

MRS. MONTGOMERY. You're closer than dear Miss Branscome, at that.

SYLVIA. In what way, Mrs. Montgomery? (*Rising inflection*)

MRS. MONTGOMERY. (*Uncovering her dish*) But I'm the closest yet in bringing what will please the gentleman. (*Discloses a pie*) There. Feed the brute. whether he be coal-heaver or minister: they ALL like to eat. (*Sits at table L. of C.*)

SYLVIA. Not at all. You are mistaken. The type of man YOU doubtless have known may have had only one thought and——

SUSAN. (*With a chuckle*) —that was: "When do we eat?"

SYLVIA. But in my wide experience with men—in my WIDE experience, as I have said, I have found——

MINNIE. Wide—tee hee—— (*Sits on piano stool*)

JENNIE. Well, if that druggist clerk, and that grocery boy——

MINNIE. If they was wide experiences——

JENNIE. And both of 'em got away——

SYLVIA. I'd like to know who ever called on either one of you?

SUSAN. There's another thing we women are going to fix, when we get in power. We're going to put an end to this haggling that goes on over the men. Why, you sound like a couple of dogs fighting over a bone, the way you are going on about this poor, defenseless divinity student. Talk about Daniel entering the lions' den, it isn't in it.

MRS. MONTGOMERY. I quite agree with you, Miss Tomkins. (*Lip stick*)

JENNIE. Is that so——?

MINNIE. What's it to do with you? (*To Mrs. Montgomery*)

SYLVIA. You've had one husband——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. (*Having her little joke*)

TWO, TWO, my dears. (*Knocks note on piano*)

SYLVIA, MINNIE and JENNIE. TWO!

SUSAN. That's not doing so worse—

MRS. MONTGOMERY. And now I have selected the minister for the third—

SYLVIA, MINNIE and JENNIE. The third!

MRS. MONTGOMERY. Why, certainly. It is my theory that one must have at least three husbands before one can have an ideal married life—with the last one, of course. In the first husband a woman expects to have a combination soul-mate, ladies' maid, matinee idol, and bank-roll. In number two, she will dispense with everything but the bank-roll; in number three she will take the soul-mate, the intellectual companion, and live happily ever after. Therefore I am now after the soul-mate, alias the new divine. Behold the first shot from my heavy artillery, guaranteed to bring him low at the first broadside—this luscious, succulent pie.

(*Enter MRS. ROSCOE, which puts a stop to the heated protests about to begin from the JENKS and SYLVIA. MRS. HOMER now wearing an apron, and followed by PATIENCE, also arrayed with a similar badge of labor*)

MRS. ROSCOE. (*Looking about*) Everything is in good order now, I think, except this room. If you ladies will set it to rights— Is it dusted?

JENNIE. I'll dust—

MINNIE. (*Indicates vases on the mantel*) Those vases need rubbin' up—

(*JANE enters*)

MRS. ROSCOE. Is this room dusted?

JANE. Nöt all, ma'am.

MRS. ROSCOE. Then get a duster, get a couple of dusters—— (JANE hands duster she carries to JENNIE, who begins to dust, flicking the duster in all directions. JANE pulls another cloth from apron and gives it to MINNIE, who attacks the vases on mantel. SYLVIA restraightens desk. MRS. HOMER, at door, raises lorgnette. PATIENCE places hymnals on piano and straightens Bible with a reverent hand. Exit JANE)

MRS. HOMER. Dear Mrs. Roscoe, your wonderful executive ability has, as usual, brought order out of chaos.

MRS. ROSCOE. (*Indicating*) What is that article? (*Sees MRS. MONTGOMERY*) Ah, Mrs.—er——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. Montgomery, Mrs. Montrose Montgomery.

MRS. ROSCOE. Ah, yes, quite so. And this——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. My humble offering to the new minister—— (JANE runs by door with sweeper)

MRS. HOMER. (*Lorgnette*) Indeed?

SUSAN. Well, I hope he will see the lines out for him soon enough to nibble a little of the bait before he's hooked.

PATIENCE. Lines? Nibbles? Are you aware that you are speaking of our new Divine——

SUSAN. Piffle—he's out for the cash like everybody else.

MRS. ROSCOE. Surely, Miss Tomkins—— (JANE enters with a table cover) Ah, Jane, yes, the cloth. I thought we had a little luncheon laid out, here before the fire——

MRS. HOMER. So thoughtful of you, dear Mrs. Roscoe.

SYLVIA. (*Taking cloth from JANE*) I'll set the

table—— (*Pushes pie aside, but MRS. MONTGOMERY rescues it and stands holding it at fire. SUSAN still on arm of chair. As soon as SYLVIA lays the cloth MRS. MONTGOMERY puts the pie back on the table. JANE exits. MRS. ROSCOE pushes chairs about, but MRS. HOMER intervenes*)

MRS. HOMER. Dear Mrs. Roscoe, do not exert yourself. Let ME do that——

PATIENCE. (*At piano, and beginning to sing from hymnal*) Ye shall walk and not be weary, ye shall toil and not faint—— (*MRS. HOMER and MRS. ROSCOE talk*)

MRS. ROSCOE. That's all right, Mrs. Homer, it's quite all right.

MINNIE. (*To JENNIE and SUSAN, at fire*) Ain't it sickenin' the way that Mrs. Homer toadies up to Mrs. Roscoe?

JENNIE. Just because she's got money——

SUSAN. The startlingly rapid depreciation of the circulating medium, in other words, cash, compels us common people's grudging respect for those who are able to amass a fortune of fifteen cents, or, and make it last over night even——therefore—— (*JANE enters with a tray on which is a cup and saucer, plate, knife and fork, spoon, napkin, and sugar and creamer. She brings them to the table. MINNIE drops duster, JENNIE ditto. MRS. MONTGOMERY runs forward, SYLVIA does the same, and they meet with a collision at c. MINNIE and JENNIE, coming down at the same time, run into them*)

JENNIE. (*As she comes*) Let me set the table—— Minnie, I'll set it.

MRS. MONTGOMERY. I insist upon doing it—— (*All together. MRS. HOMER raises lorgnette*)

PATIENCE. (*Horried and sitting on piano stool*) The Lord have mercy on their souls.

MRS. MONTGOMERY. (*Trying to drag tray from*

JANE) Give me the tray—— (MRS. ROSCOE *looks up*)

JENNIE. (*Same business*) I can set the table——

MINNIE. No, sir, Jennie Jenks, I'm goin' to——

JANE. (*Rescuing the tray*) Are you all lunatics?

MRS. ROSCOE. What seems to be the trouble? (MRS. ROSCOE *is at L. well down*, MRS. HOMER *back of her*)

SUSAN. (*Coming down R.C.*) They're all after the minister.

MRS. MONTGOMERY. (*At c. back of table*) You haven't a chance——

SYLVIA. (*L. of table*) Who hasn't?

JENNIE. You're a mean old thing——

MINNIE. It's a shame—— (*All talk together, hauling at tray*)

MRS. ROSCOE. Why, this is disgraceful—disgraceful——

MRS. HOMER. I quite agree with you——

MRS. ROSCOE. I am astounded at such behavior over a young man——

PATIENCE. (*From piano stool*) And one of God's chosen——

SUSAN. (*Going up to fire*) Let us sing one verse of "Blest Be the Tie That Binds."

MRS. ROSCOE. (*Severely*) It had not been my intention to so announce it, but in view of the extraordinary shall I say enthusiasm over the arrival of this young man I feel it is wise to state, here and now, that this young man is intended for my daughter, Louise.

SYLVIA. Your daughter? That——

JENNIE. Dowdy——

MINNIE. Homely old thing——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. And with me here, she expects—— (*Laughs*)

MRS. ROSCOE. My daughter is quiet and studious, and home-loving, religious and——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. Homely——

MRS. ROSCOE. (*Apparently not hearing*) Just the wife for a minister.

MRS. HOMER. Certainly MOST suitable, dear Mrs. Roscoe.

SYLVIA. Well, she won't get him——

JENNIE. (*Beginning to sniff*) It ain't fair to have somebody all picked out for him——

MINNIE. (*Also beginning to sniff*) Before he gets here, too. (*Goes to piano*)

MRS. MONTGOMERY. No one will really have a look in after he sees me.

MRS. HOMER. A minister look at you——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. Why not?

MRS. ROSCOE. That is my final word——

MRS. HOMER. He is to marry Mrs. Roscoe's daughter, and it is most suitable——

PATIENCE. Very suitable——

SUSAN. How the young victim is being considered——

MRS. ROSCOE. I deem it a great favor for him to be allowed to marry my daughter——

PATIENCE. Oh, I do not agree with you. He is a man of God. She is the one to feel honored.

MRS. ROSCOE. (*Stiffly*) INDEED!

SYLVIA. I am going to marry him myself, provided he suits me. (*From now on all these speeches are taken together, very fast and at the top of their voices, with much crescendo*)

MRS. MONTGOMERY. Oh, no, you aren't——

MINNIE. (*Now crying in earnest*) It's a shame, I want him——

JENNIE. It's a darn shame.

MRS. MONTGOMERY. I have always intended to marry a minister.

SYLVIA. What show would you have——

MRS. ROSCOE. He is for Louise——

MRS. HOMER. For Louise, certainly——

PATIENCE. The Lord will protect His own.

SYLVIA. I'm going to marry him, do you hear?

JENNIE. I want him——

MINNIE. He's mine——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. I've got him cinched now.
(*Bell rings. No one hears but JANE, who, standing at door, is aghast at the proceedings. JANE exits, throwing up her hands*)

SYLVIA. You have not——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. He's already mine——

MINNIE. He ain't—— (*Stamps foot*)

PATIENCE. You're a menace to society——

JENNIE. (*Crying*) I want the minister—I've always wanted a minister.

MRS. ROSCOE. (*Sinking into chair at desk*) I am ill——

MRS. HOMER. (*Bending over her solicitously*) Dear Mrs. Roscoe——

JANE. (*Entering with a grin*) The minister has come—— (*PATIENCE rises. In a second the tumult dies down and in the sudden hush that follows, enter ANNA LARKINS, attired in a dark suit, sailor hat, and carrying a traveling bag*)

ANNA LARKINS. (*Bowing cordially*) Ladies, how do you do?

MINNIE AND JENNIE. What—what——

MRS. ROSCOE. Is this the minister?

MRS. HOMER. (*Lorgnette*) Gracious me——

PATIENCE. (*Sitting again suddenly as though overcome*) Dear me, dear me——

MRS. MONTGOMERY. Wouldn't that make you sick?

SYLVIA. (*Sinking into chair at table R.*) Oh, oh——

SUSAN. (*Clapping her hand to her forehead and sitting on arm of chair at fire*) Gadzooks! HE'S A WOMAN! (*JANE covers face with apron and exits. MRS. ROSCOE faints, MRS. HOMER bends over her. ANNA looks enquiringly at all*)

CURTAIN

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