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The Unexpected Guest

BY

EDNA I. MAC KENZIE

Author of

"That Awful Letter," "The Country Cousin Speaks Her Mind,"
"Susan Gets Ready for Church," "As Our Washwoman Sees It,"
"The Ouija Board."

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THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

CHARACTERS

MRS. ROSS.

RUTH—Mrs. Ross' Elder Daughter.

BETH—Ruth's Younger Sister.

AUNT JANE—Mrs. Ross' Sister.

MADGE—Ruth's Dearest Friend.

NORMA—Madge's Younger Sister.

TIME OF PLAYING—*About Forty-five Minutes.*



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MAY 20 1920

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

Scene—Nicely furnished sitting-room in the home of Mrs. Ross. In the most conspicuous place on the wall is an ugly oil painting in an old frame. Ruth is unwrapping a parcel at the table. Madge enters.

RUTH—Oh, Madge, you are just in time to help me choose the best place to hang this picture that I have bought for mother's anniversary present. She has been married twenty years to-day. (*holds up a pretty scene.*) How do you like it?

MADGE—(*clasping her hands together in delight*) Oh, isn't it the dearest, sweetest, cutest thing out! She'll be tickled to death to get it or I'll miss my guess. When are you going to give it to her?

RUTH—I'm not going to give it to her at all. I'm just going to hang it up somewhere and let her discover it. It will be worth a circus to watch the look on her face when she sees it. You know she's perfectly crazy about lovely pictures. If only dad could be here, too.

MADGE—Why, is he away?

RUTH—Yes, he's been dreadfully worried over some money matters. I don't know anything about his business but I heard him telling mother that if he couldn't raise five thousand dollars right away, we would lose everything we— Oh, dear, if I haven't gone and told a family secret and mother always says —.

MADGE—Never mind, Ruth, me darlin', it will be as safe as the grave with me. I'll not breathe it to a soul, cross my heart, sure tō die. (*Goes through motion.*) But I do hope he gets it.

RUTH—So do I, but he says money's so tight now, that there's very little chance. But I'm not going to worry until I have to. And now where's the best place to hang this picture?

MADGE—(*carefully looking around the walls*) I think the best and only place for it is where that ugly old oil-painting

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hangs. I've often wondered why your mother keeps it there when she's so fond of *nice* pictures. It clashes with everything else in the room.

RUTH—I know, but mother won't —.

MADGE—(*interrupting*) I'll tell you a good scheme. We had a couple—they were worse than that, and mother wouldn't part with them because they were wedding presents. You bet I wouldn't put up with them one minute, presents or no presents. When I get married I'm going to exchange every single thing that doesn't suit me for—

RUTH—But what's the scheme you were—

MADGE—Oh, yes, I'm coming to that. Well, one day when mother was away, I gave the two priceless works of art to our washwoman and she was tickled all to pieces with them.

RUTH—And your mother?

MADGE—Oh, she made a dickens of a row when she found out. Had to, you know, for appearances' sake, but deep down in her heart I'm sure there's an eternal gratitude to—

RUTH—But I wouldn't dare give this one away for it has a certain romantic history about it that—

MADGE—(*gushing*) Oh, do tell me about it; for if there's anything I adore, it's romantic stories. I've just finished "Love's Sweet Path", and it's the grandest story—the hero and the heroine are so lovely and mushy. He kisses her in nearly every page. I'll lend—

RUTH—Oh, its history isn't quite so lovey-dovey as your story. But it seems that years and years and years ago a young fellow who thought he could paint made love to my Aunt Jane. She's mother's only sister, quite a bit older than mother. If you saw her now, you'd wonder how he ever did it. When mother got married—to father you know, he painted that picture for her for a wedding present.

MADGE—And just like mother she can't bear to part with it.

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RUTH—I do wish you wouldn't interrupt, Madge. It isn't the same at all. After wishing that picture on her, if he didn't go and take the measles the day after the wedding and die!

MADGE—Good gracious, Ruth, not of the measles! No one ever thinks of dying from measles.

RUTH—Well, he did. If you don't get them before you're grown up, you do, often. Anyway he did, and I wish that he had waited a few months or so longer for Aunt Jane got a little batty over it—she thought an awful lot of him, you see, and she got it into her head that that picture would have a ben—ben—

MADGE—Beneficent?

RUTH—Yes, that's it. Would have a beneficent influence over any one it looked down upon because he was so near the pearly gates when he painted it and—

MADGE—But it was painted before the wedding, wasn't it?

RUTH—Just finished the night before. But you don't know Aunt Jane. If she gets a notion into her head, nothing—

MADGE—But your mother doesn't believe such rot, does she?

RUTH—(*indignantly*) No. I should say not. But Aunt Jane had made her solemnly promise that she would hang it in this room where we spend most of our time and mother wouldn't break her promise for the world. Besides you never know when she'll come popping in and—

MADGE—Well, why couldn't you keep it out of sight until she does come and then—

RUTH—(*in a resolute tone*) I'm going to. Come what, come may, that picture's going away. (*She takes it down.*)

MADGE—Goodness child, you must be feeling pretty strong about it when it inspires you to poetry.

RUTH—I'll put it in mother's room and it can shed its ben—beneficent influence over her blessed head—

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MADGE—(*sarcastically*) There you go again, Ruth; some poetess!

RUTH—(*indignantly*) I'm not making poetry. But I hope to goodness no bad luck will follow on the heels of this rash act. (*Exit Ruth.*)

MADGE—I believe Ruth is as superstitious as you make them. I'll hang this (*taking new picture*) up in it's place. It's some improvement, believe me. Thanks be that eyesore is gone. I hope we'll never see it again. (*Ruth enters.*) Don't you think this looks better, Ruth?

RUTH—(*admiringly*) A thousand times. (*Enter Beth and Norma dressed alike in middy suits and with books under their arms. Beth has sheet of paper in her hand.*)

BETH—Oh, Ruth, if this isn't the biggest joke! You know that Jimmy Crow I've told you about—

NORMA—Who sits right behind me in school?

BETH—Yes, and has such mooney eyes. Well, if he hasn't gone and written a poem to us. (*Throws her books on a chair.*)

RUTH—For goodness sake, Beth, are you ever going to learn to be tidy? *Do* put your books where they belong.

BETH—(*putting them on a table*) Oh, there you go again. Just because you're two years and three days older than me and have a beau you think you can order me around like a four year old. I'll not stand for it, you—

NORMA—Oh, don't pay any attention to her. Madge is just the same, but it doesn't bother me any.

MADGE—I should say it doesn't, but you should see her room. It looks as though a hurricane had struck it.

(*Madge and Ruth get their fancy work and begin working.*)

NORMA—It doesn't, I tidy it every night before I get into bed and—

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MADGE—But you girls are altogether too young to have boys writing poems to you. I'll have to tell mother.

NORMA—Oh, go ahead, tattle-tale, and I'll tell her what I saw last Sunday when you and George Marshall were sitting in the parlor and he had his arm—

MADGE—(*hastily*) Norma, you're making that up, he never—

NORMA—Don't interrupt, darling one, he had his arm on the back of the sofa and he was saying —

MADGE—Never mind that, let's hear your poem.

BETH—Oh, no, we can't do that. It's for our eyes alone. Jimmy wouldn't like it.

RUTH—But we'll never tell, will we, Madge?

MADGE—Of course not.

BETH—Cross your heart and sure to die?

RUTH and MADGE—*Yes, yes. (Do so.)*

NORMA—Then read it, Beth, It's addressed to "The Heavenly Twins."

MADGE—How little he knows you!

BETH—(*giggling, reads*)

TO THE HEAVENLY TWINS

With eyes so rapt, I gaze on thee,

Sweet heavenly twins,

You both look mighty good to me.

With your cute grins.

(*Madge and Ruth laugh.*)

RUTH—Some poetry!

MADGE—Yes, it has yours beaten all to pieces, Ruth. Go on, Beth.

NORMA—(*severely*) Its rude to interrupt, don't you know that?

BETH—(*sarcastically*) They're grown up: they don't have to know manners any more. (*Reads.*)

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Between you, 'twould be hard to choose,
Oh, darling twins,
And through the night my sleep I lose,
To know which wins.

RUTH—Not a bit conceited, is he?

BETH—There you go, butting in again. (*Reads.*)
Since both of you I cannot wed,
Desirable twins,
From single life I'll ne'er be led,
My vow begins.

MADGE—Such utter nonsense! Whatever have you two been doing to make him write such drivel as that?

NORMA—(*indignantly*) We haven't done a thing, have we Beth?

BETH—Nothing except eat some of his conversation lozenges and borrow his algebra questions when we haven't ours done and—

NORMA—Oh, I have a good idea, Beth. You know Frank Broadfoot sells photos of important cathedrals and things that he took when he went to the coast. He has a beautiful one of the Mormon temple. Let's buy it and write on the back, "Why don't you change your religion?" and give it to Jimmy.

BETH—Oh, that's great! How much is it?

NORMA—Twenty-five cents.

BETH—Nothing doing. I haven't a quarter to squander on that softy when all he's given us is conversation lozenges.

RUTH—And you certainly won't do it anyway. Mother wouldn't allow it.

BETH—Oh, she wouldn't, would she? Well, how's she ever going to know? If you tell, I'll tell her about that red stuff for your face you gave me a nickel to buy for you, because you wouldn't ask for it yourself.

RUTH—I would, too, I mean I didn't get you to—Oh, dear, why was I ever inflicted with such a younger sister.

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BETH—Yes, two years and three—(*notices new picture.*) Oh, what a duck of a picture! Where did you get it and what did you do with the other?

RUTH—I took it down.

BETH—*You* took it down! I can't believe it. Aren't you afraid your fellow will go back on you or something else dreadful will happen?

RUTH—Don't be silly!

BETH—What did you do with the family infliction?

RUTH—I put it up in the attic. But we may have to bring it down again.

BETH—Not with my consent.

RUTH—I'm afraid your consent won't be asked for, my dear.

BETH—Oh, yes. I'm not consulted about anything just because I'm two years and—

MADGE—(*interrupting*) We've heard that interesting fact before, Beth.

NORMA—(*stretching her gum*) See, she sticks up for Ruth because they're two of a kind.

MADGE—For goodness sake, Norma, sling that gum away. It's dreadfully unladylike to chew.

NORMA—(*putting it back into her mouth*) Well, I'm not the only one that chews gum for there was a big hunk left on the back of the sofa Sunday night after George—

MADGE—(*rushing toward her*) Norma, do go home and keep quiet. (*Pushes her towards door.*)

NORMA—Come on, Beth, let's clear out. We're not wanted here with these two old maids. (*Exit.*)

MADGE—(*gathering up her work*) Aren't they awful? And I must go, too, Ruth, but I'll come over after tea to see how your mother likes her picture and shoulder some of the blame for the dethroning of the heirloom.

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RUTH—Oh, do stay for tea, Madge, and then you'll be here when she comes home.

MADGE—Well, since you insist, why—

RUTH—And come on out and talk to me while I get supper ready. (*Exit girls.*)

(*Enter Beth and Norma with oil-painting.*)

BETH—I'll just let her see if I have any say in the family or not. This picture is going to make a bonfire.

NORMA—Oh, Beth, what will your mother say?

BETH—Well, I'm too old to be licked and hard words can't kill, so I don't care. But if I don't destroy it, I know as well as I am standing here that Ruth and mother will both have that atro—atrocity up again. They're too much afraid of Aunt Jane not to. It's a good thing somebody has a backbone in this family even if I am two years and three—

NORMA (*hastily*) Oh, yes, I know. But it's a waste to burn it. Let's sell it to our washwoman.

BETH—Sell it to her! Why, no one would take it as a gift, let alone buy it.

NORMA—Well, she will. She has a perfect mania for ugly pictures. The uglier the better. I bet she'd give us a quarter for it. Let's try anyway. She's over at our place now.

BETH—A quarter! Then we can buy that photo for daffy Jimmy.

NORMA—Sure thing, but we'll have to hurry, for she has just finished. (*Beth idly opens book and telegram falls to floor.*)

BETH—Good-night! I'm done for now!

NORMA—Gracious, a telegram! When did you get it?

BETH—At dinner time. The boy met me at the corner. I stuck it in my French grammar, but I was so worried over that old algebra exam that I forgot all about it.

NORMA—You certainly have gone and done it. Telegrams

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are dreadfully serious. You never get one unless someone's coming to visit or is dead or is being born or something.

BETH—I know. I hope it isn't anybody dead, unless it's Aunt Jane and she's left us some money. I wouldn't wish even her that only dad is needing money most awfully bad just now. But I can't deliver it now. Ruth would use it against me foreverafter. What shall I do?

NORMA—I tell you. Give it to me. (*Takes it*). Now run over and sell that picture and I'll fix it up somehow. You see I'm not Ruth's sister so she can't take *my* head off.

BETH—Oh, Norma, you're the dearest—

NORMA—Hustle or she'll be gone. (*Exit Beth. Norma raises her voice.*) Oh, Ruth, where are you?

RUTH—(*entering*) Here. What do you want?

NORMA—Here's a telegram. It was just handed to me this minute.

RUTH—(*reading it*) Oh, oh, oh, it's from Aunt Jane, saying she will be here on the 5:20 train, and it's more than that now. Why, she must be on her way. (*Suspiciously*) Where has it been all this time, I'd like to know? It was sent at 12:05.

NORMA—All I know is that it was handed to me just now. I happened to be the only one who was there to receive it so I took it. Beth has run over to our house to speak to Mrs. Johnson before she got away. Shouldn't I have taken it?

RUTH—Oh, yes, of course, but it's funny that—

NORMA—I must hike. (*Aside*) I didn't think it would be so easy and I didn't even have to tell a lie. (*Exit.*)

RUTH—Oh, Madge, here's a telegram from Aunt Jane saying she's coming to visit us. I should have gotten it at noon. Why, she must be on her way from the station now. That messenger boy should be reported for—

MADGE—I know, they're awfully careless. When mother's

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brother died, she didn't get the message until after the funeral.

RUTH—And Aunt Jane will be as mad as a hatter because there was no one to meet her. And oh, that picture! I'll have to bring it back again and that one does look so darling there. (*Exit.*)

MADGE—(*taking down picture*) Aunt or no aunt, I'd be jiggered if I'd have that atrocity back again. It should be a criminal offense to keep such ugly—

RUTH—(*rushing in*) Oh, Madge, it isn't there!

MADGE—What isn't?

RUTH—That picture! (*Excitedly.*) Someone's stolen it. There must be something in Aunt Jane's belief, for bad luck's been following me ever since I've taken it down; first her coming, then the telegram being delayed, and now—

MADGE—Oh, Ruth, don't be such a goose! She started to come before you ever dreamed of taking the picture down, and the telegram boy was on the way with the pesky thing while we were in the act of doing the foul deed.

RUTH—(*excitedly*) But I can't find it. It's gone. What am I going to do?

MADGE—It must be around somewhere. No one would ever dream of stealing it, you can bank on that, and it can't have walked away. Anyway, I wouldn't worry about the old thing. She can't kill you, can she?

RUTH—But you don't know Aunt Jane. She's awfully peculiar and we have to be dreadfully careful to please her or she'll leave us out of her will. If she finds that picture gone, she'll be so mad, she'll cut us off without a cent. (*Wailing.*) Oh, mother, mother, it's all my fault.

MADGE—Perhaps she won't be half bad about it. You never can tell. (*Bell rings.*)

RUTH—There she is now. What shall I do?

MADGE—Go and make a fuss over the dear sweet thing. (*Exit Ruth.*) Shall I put this up again? (*holds picture in*

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hand.) No, the contrast would be too noticeable. That Hubbard fellow was right when he said, "The devil gave us our relations, but thank the Lord, we can choose our own friends." (*She stands picture against the wall.*) (*Ruth comes in with Aunt Jane dressed very severely.*)

AUNT JANE—(*sitting down slowly*) Times are coming to a queer pass when an elderly lady can come to a strange town alone and not a soul to meet her and her only sister not at home and—

RUTH—(*voice slightly raised*) But, Auntie, I told you we just got the telegram a few minutes ago. It was too late to meet you, then. This is my friend, Madge Oakley, Auntie. (*Aside to Madge.*) Speak kind of loud, Madge, she's slightly deaf and sometimes she can't hear very well, unless it is something you don't want her to hear.

MADGE—(*aside*) Oh, dear, I never can make deaf people hear. (*Taking Aunt Jane's hand.*) How do you do, Miss McNeil. Isn't it a lovely day?

AUNT JANE—Eh!

MADGE—A lovely day. (*Louder.*) Nice day!

AUNT JANE—(*testily*) Goodness, child, don't yell like that. A person would think I was deaf. You wouldn't think it was so nice if you had been riding in a stuffy coach all day and nobody to meet you at your journey's end. (*Looking around*) Why, the oil painting is gone. Whatever have you done with it?

RUTH—(*aside to Madge*) There, didn't I tell you! What shall I say?

MADGE—(*aside to Ruth*) Tell her—oh, tell her you sent it to be reframed.

RUTH—Why, Auntie, the old frame looked so shabby that I sent it to the furniture dealers just this afternoon to get it reframed.

AUNT JANE—(*excitedly*) To get it reframed. Good gracious, child, you should never have done a thing like that.

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I told your mother that frame must never be removed, or—

RUTH—But Auntie, the old one looked so shabby that—

AUNT JANE—Never mind talking, hurry and get it back. Perhaps he hasn't touched it yet. I tell you, you will be sorry if he has. That frame was never meant to be taken off by strangers. Of all the ill luck this is the worst that could have happened. (*Pushes her chair so that she can't see entrance.*)

MADGE—(*aside to Ruth*) Good gracious, Ruth, she's clean cracked. She should be in an asylum.

RUTH—(*aside to Madge*) I know I'll soon be in one. What shall I do! Oh, where's that picture?

(*Beth and Norma rush in. They don't see Aunt Jane.*)

BETH—(*holding up quarter*) Oh, Ruth, see what we've got. Twenty-five cents! We sold that old picture to Mrs. Johnson for a quarter and now we can buy—

RUTH—What picture?

(*Madge hastily picks up snap-shot album and goes over to sit beside Aunt Jane.*)

MADGE—Oh, Miss McNeal, you must see the latest snaps of the Ross family. They're too dear for anything. (*Talks on in low tone.*)

BETH—What picture? Why can't you guess? It will never disfigure that wall again. (*Points dramatically to vacant place.*)

RUTH—For goodness sake! Now you've gone and done it! Run and get it as fast as you can. Run, run, run!

BETH—(*determinedly*) I'll not budge one step to get the old thing back. I'm not afraid of Aunt—

RUTH—You don't understand. Aunt Jane's here. Turn around and speak to her and then hurry.

BETH—(*wheeling suddenly*) Aunt Jane! Why I didn't know you were here. (*Goes to her; kisses her.*) When did you come?

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AUNT JANE—(*turning around*) So this is Anne's youngest. Well, you're not much on looks, I must say. (*Beth makes a face.*) I heard someone mention a picture. What picture were you talking about?

BETH—(*aside*) I wonder how much she's heard. Thank goodness she's kind of deaf. (*Aloud*) Picture, Aunt Jane? Why, Norma and I. This is Norma, Madge's sister, you know. (*Norma goes over and shakes hands with Aunt Jane.*)

NORMA—How do you do, Miss—Miss—What's her name, Beth?

BETH—McNeal.

NORMA—*How do you do, Miss McNeil.*

AUNT JANE—What do I do? Why, its none of your—

NORMA—(*hastily*) How (*louder*) how do you do?

AUNT JANE—Mercy, everybody here seems to think I'm deaf. I'm not doing well at all, but nobody cares for a poor, old woman any more. What with telegrams going astray and nobody to meet me, times are coming to a queer pass, I must say. And what were you saying about a picture?

BETH—Oh, Norma and I have a quarter and we're going to buy one and—and—

MADGE—(*quickly*) Oh, Miss McNeil, how do you like this center-piece I'm making? (*Engages her attention.*)

RUTH—Hurry, Norma, and get that picture.

NORMA—I won't, not for all the Aunt Janes in the world. Its a crime to—

RUTH—(*pleading*) You might do that much for mother's sake, at least. Aunt Jane's bound to have that picture back and if we don't get it she'll be dreadfully angry and that will be a pretty serious thing for us. She might disinherit mother, then you'd be sorry.

BETH—You're right. I never thought of that. Come on, Norma. (*Exit.*)

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AUNT JANE—(*sharply*) Ruth, aren't you going for that picture? That man will have the frame all off by this time.

RUTH—I sent Beth, Auntie. She can hurry faster than I can. Come and have supper now. You must be hungry and there's no use waiting for mother. Goodness knows how long she will be.

AUNT JANE—Times are coming to a queer pass when people are out gadding when they should be at home. But your mother was always a hand at visiting. You don't suppose I can eat my supper without getting washed up when I've had a long railway journey, do you?

RUTH—(*in penitent tone*) Oh, Aunt Jane, do forgive me, I never thought of asking you if you'd like—

AUNT JANE—Never mind, young things aren't expected to remember everything. But I must say a cup of tea will be real refreshing after all I've come through to-day, no one to meet me, your mother out and that pict—

MADGE—(*hastily*) I'll play something for you while you're getting freshened up, Miss McNeil. (*Exit Ruth and Aunt Jane.*) I guess it had better be a lullaby. (*Turning over some music.*) It will soothe my feelings even if it doesn't Aunt Jane's. Oh, dear, she's the limit. (*Plays. Beth enters as she finishes.*)

BETH—Say, Madge, where's Ruth?

MADGE—And where's the picture?

BETH—I didn't get it.

MADGE—Didn't get it? (*Calls*) Ruth! (*Ruth enters.*)

RUTH—Oh, Beth, what did you do with the picture?

BETH—I didn't get it.

RUTH—Why didn't you? Go back and get it at once. Offer her anything, *anything* for it.

BETH—But she hasn't got it.

RUTH—(*groaning*) Then, where is it?

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

BETH—Why, she said a woman came to get her to wash at her place, and when she saw the picture hanging on the wall—she had just finished putting it there—nothing would do but she must have it. She gave her five dollars for it. Can you imagine it?

MADGE—Good night! The whole world's going crazy. Five dollars! Five cents would be a nickel too much.

RUTH—(*excitedly*) Who's the woman? Go and get it from her. Pay her anything—ten, twenty, a hundred, but get that picture.

MADGE—Now, Ruth, hold your horses. Beth, just explain to her that it's an heirloom of your family and ask her how much she'll take for it. Like as not, she's found out by this time that she has been fooled and will be so disgusted she'll give it to you for nothing.

BETH—But I don't know who she is—

RUTH—Oh, you stupid, stupid girl. Why didn't you ask? Run at once and—

BETH—You needn't call me names. If she was so crazy over it that she'd pay five dollars, it isn't likely that—

MADGE—Well, there's no harm in asking her. Try anyway.

AUNT JANE—(*entering*) Times are coming to a queer pass when your niece runs off and leaves her old aunt to do for herself. Oh, here's the child back. Did you get the picture?

BETH—(*indignantly*) I'm not a child and—

MADGE—(*interrupting*) The store was locked up (*louder*) locked up. He's gone home to supper (*louder*) to supper.

AUNT JANE—Locked up, eh! Well, go to his house and tell him to go down and get it at once. He mightn't be honest, like as not, he isn't, and if he has taken that frame off—(*Mrs. Ross enters and lays parcel on the table.*)

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

MRS. ROSS—(*rushing over to Aunt Jane*) Why, Jane, this is a pleasant surprise. Why didn't you let me know you were coming?

AUNT JANE—Just listen to the woman. Of course I did, but Ruth says you didn't get the word in time. And here I came with no one to meet me and you out and that picture—

MRS. ROSS—(*noticing blank space*) It is, it is. I knew it the moment I saw it—But how in the world did it get there?

MADGE—(*aside*) This is a lunatic asylum I've broken into.

RUTH—Mother, what are you talking about?

MRS. ROSS—(*taking off hat*) Why, I went to hunt up a new washwoman. Ours has rheumatism, you know. And as soon as she opened the door, I saw hanging above her cupboard—

MADGE—(*behind Aunt Jane, shakes her head and whispers*) For heaven's sake, Mrs. Ross, shut up!

MRS. ROSS—(*bewildered*) Why, why, what—

AUNT JANE—What are you acting so queer about, Anne? Go on, what was hanging above the cupboard?

MRS. ROSS—(*confusedly*) Nothing, Aunt Jane, nothing.

AUNT JANE—Well, of all the idiotic—

BETH—(*rushing in*) She doesn't know the lady's name; she couldn't wash for her so—

RUTH—(*who has been unwrapping parcel, holds up oil painting*) Oh, oh, here's the picture! Mother, you're a darling!

BETH—Why, it was mother who was the lady. Isn't that a joke, paying five dollars for her own—

RUTH—(*putting her hand over Beth's mouth*) Keep quiet. Haven't you any sense?

BETH—(*mumbling*) Here, let go. I have got as much as you have any day.

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

AUNT JANE—Are you sure the frame hasn't been touched?

MRS. ROSS—Of course not, whatever made you think it had?

MADGE—(*aside to Beth*) Run out and ring the bell as hard as you can and then tell your mother she's wanted at the door.

BETH—What for?

MADGE—You're awfully dense. Can't you catch on?

BETH—Oh, I see. Sure thing. (*Exit.*)

AUNT JANE—(*with asperity*) Didn't you send it down to the furniture store to get it framed?

MRS. ROSS—The furniture store? I don't understand.

AUNT JANE—Well, of all—

MADGE—(*hastily*) Oh, Miss McNeil, Ruth sent it down. Mrs. Ross didn't know a thing about it.

RUTH—Why, ye—es, of course I did.

MADGE—(*gushing*) Why, Mrs. Ross, it was Providence that sent you into that store. (*Aside*) Oh, why doesn't Beth hurry. (*Bell rings outside.*)

MRS. ROSS—(*bewildered*) What—(*Beth rushes in.*)

BETH—You're wanted a minute mother—at the door. (*Exit Mrs. Ross and Beth.*)

MADGE—If Ruth had only inherited her mother's artistic qualities and didn't have such abominable taste—

RUTH—Well I like that!

MADGE—(*fiercely, aside to Ruth*) Keep out of this. (*Aside.*) The Lord helps those who help their friends. (*To Aunt Jane.*) She'd know that a new frame would be entirely out of harmony with a valuable heirloom like this! Let's put it back! (*Starts to do so.*)

AUNT JANE—(*jumping up excitedly*) No, no, it must never hang there again, never, never! (*Enter Mrs. Ross and Beth.*)

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

MRS. ROSS AND RUTH—Not hang there again? Why, Aunt Jane?

AUNT JANE—No, it's been there long enough. Let's see, Anne, how many years is it since you were married?

MRS. ROSS—Twenty years to-day.

AUNT JANE—Well, it's been there just twenty years too long. I—

MRS. ROSS—Jane, are you crazy? It was you yourself that—

AUNT JANE—I know, I know, and I can never forgive myself. But I didn't know then what I do now. As soon as I found out, I came right away.

MADGE—(*aside*) *More* mystery.

AUNT JANE—You see, I thought the whole world of Absolom Shawley and when he died with that painting still wet from his hands, I thought, I thought—(*Puts handkerchief to eyes and sobs.*)

MRS. ROSS—(*gently*) Yes, Jane, we know.

MADGE—(*aside*) Yes, they know all right—to their sorrow.

AUNT JANE—But I just found out yesterday—after all those long, lonely years that I've remained true to his memory. (*Sobbing.*) Oh, my poor wasted life, why didn't I know then! After all these years, Oh, Oh. (*sobs.*)

RUTH—(*putting her arms around her aunt*) Never mind, Aunt Jane, don't tell us about it when it causes you so much sorrow.

AUNT JANE—I'm an old fool to feel so badly, but I can't help it. All these years of single loneliness when I might have—But there, it's past and gone, now.

RUTH—And what is it you have just found out, Auntie?

AUNT JANE—I was visiting an old school-mate of mine, Sarah Perkins, Mrs. Neimiah Henshot she is now, and her with six children, four boys and two girls, all doing for—

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

RUTH—Yes, Auntie, and Sarah—?

AUNT JANE—Sarah had a few friends in for tea while I was there and we got talking about our young days and there was a woman there, her name's Mrs. Daniel Smithers. She was thin and scrawny with a yellowish complexion and drab hair and—

RUTH—What about her, Aunt Jane?

AUNT JANE—(*testily*) What are you always interrupting for? Times are coming to a queer pass when a woman can't speak half a dozen words without being interrupted by the younger generation. Well the conversation got around to beaux, somehow, and that woman was telling all about a love affair she had had once. I wasn't paying much attention to her because the woman at my right was weeping on my shoulder, being a widow and having sad memories on that account, when all at once that woman spoke his name out real loud and it was—(*Sobs*) *it was*—

BETH—(*jumping around excitedly*) Oh, I know. Absalom Shawley!

AUNT JANE—(*glaring*) Anne, you should teach your children better manners. Times are coming to a queer—

BETH—But wasn't it, Aunt Jane?

AUNT JANE—Yes, it was, but you needn't be hollering it out in that indecent manner.

MRS. ROSS—Oh, Jane, I can't believe it.

AUNT JANE—It was an awful shock, a terrible shock and all these years I have been treasuring his memory, and was happy in believing he had loved me alone. Oh, the falseness of men!

MRS. ROSS—But Jane, he may have been just a friend of hers and she'd exaggerated it. You know some women believe that if a man even looks at them he's in love with them. Perhaps she—

AUNT JANE—I wish I could believe that, but it's true, sister, only too true, for I went to her place the next day

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

and she showed me all the love letters she had gotten from him. She said they were so beautiful and poetic that she had kept them in memory of him, him dying so tragic and all, and—and— (*Sobs.*)

RUTH—And—

AUNT JANE—They were word for word, line for line, exactly the same as those reposing in the bottom of my hair-cloth trunk this very minute—even the dates are the same.

MRS. ROSS AND RUTH—(*in shocked voices*) Oh, Aunt Jane!

AUNT JANE—(*fiercely*) But the moment I get home, I'll make the biggest fire in the kitchen stove and burn every single one of them.

MRS. ROSS—I certainly would, Jane. The faithless wretch! (*Discovers new picture.*) Oh, oh, what a perfectly lovely scene. Where did it come from?

RUTH—Oh, mother, do you really and truly like it?

MRS. ROSS—Like it? I love it, it is beautiful, but—

RUTH—(*kissing her*) It's my present to the dearest little mother in the world on the twentieth anniversary of her wedding day.

MRS. ROSS—You dear, darling girl, to think of you remembering that! (*Norma comes in with photo in her hand.*)

MADGE—Why, Norma, I thought you had gone home long ago. Where have you been?

NORMA—I've been buying this photograph with the twenty-five cents we got for selling that pict—

MADGE—(*hastily*) Never mind; you'd better run along home, now; it's nearly tea-time.

NORMA—Nothing doing; Beth asked me to stay here for tea. Here's our photo, Beth.

BETH—I forgot all about your anniversary, mumsee, until the last moment, but Norma got me this photograph for you. (*Gives it to her.*)

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

NORMA—(*aside to Beth*) Well, say, I like your cheek! And now we can't play that trick on Jimmy boy.

MRS. ROSS—Its lovely of you to give me this, dear, but why a *Mormon* temple?

NORMA—(*hurriedly*) Its the first I came across, but please let me change it for you.

MRS. ROSS—Why, no, it is lovely.

NORMA—Oh, please, *please* let me, I'll get you one of Westminster or—or—anything you like.

MRS. ROSS—(*aside*) Now I wonder what she wants this one so badly for. (*Aloud*) Well, since you insist.

NORMA—(*taking it out of her hand*) Yes, yes. (*To Beth*) You can dig up another quarter now.

AUNT JANE—And so it is your wedding day. I had forgotten all about it. But wait, I—bring that oil-painting here, Beth.

BETH—Do we have to hang it up again?

AUNT JANE—Don't ask questions. Now, run and get the screwdriver. (*Exit Beth.*)

AUNT JANE—You girls will never believe it now, but when I was a young bit of a thing, I used to love reading detective stories and—(*Enter Beth; gives screwdriver to Aunt Jane.*)

BETH—Good for you, Aunt Jane, so do I but mother—

MRS. ROSS—That will do, Beth.

AUNT JANE—And I got the notion from a story I was reading to hide something in this frame that would be a great surprise to you and bring you the best of luck some day and—(*holding up some bills*) here it is, five thousand dollars.

NORMA—Five thousand dollars! And to think we sold it for twenty-five—

MADGE—(*putting hand over Norma's mouth*) Keep quiet. *Quiet.*

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

AUNT JANE—I didn't intend to tell you about it, but was going to have it put in my will; but since I've forced you to live with that hideous picture—

MRS. ROSS—Oh, Jane, don't say—

AUNT JANE—I will say it, Anne. It is hideous, although I never noticed it before. And as I said, since it was me who inflicted it on you for all of twenty years—

MRS. ROSS—Now, Jane, don't—

AUNT JANE—Don't interrupt, Anne. You know right well you never would have let it hang there all these years if it wasn't for me. But since you did, you have well earned this money, and perhaps you can make better use of it now, than you could when I'm dead. (*Gives notes to Mrs. Ross.*)

MRS. ROSS—(*bursting into tears*) Oh, Jane, Jane, if you only knew what this means to us. It means our business, our home, our everything.

AUNT JANE—(*patting her and wiping her own eyes*) There, there, Anne, don't take on so. Here, (*to Beth*) take this picture and make a bonfire and burn it up.

BETH—(*aside*) I sure will, for I'll never rest easy again until I know the old thing is safe—in ashes.

NORMA—I see where you will have to dig up fifty cents, Beth.

RUTH—(*to Aunt Jane*) Oh, Auntie, you're far too good to us, we—I don't deserve it. We can never repay you.

MRS. ROSS—No, never.

AUNT JANE—(*tartly*) Nonsense. Just bear with an old maid and her queer ways; that's all I ask.

Madge strikes up "For She's a Jolly Good Fellow," and all group themselves with Aunt Jane in center and sing.

CURTAIN.

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