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DRAMA AND THEATRE

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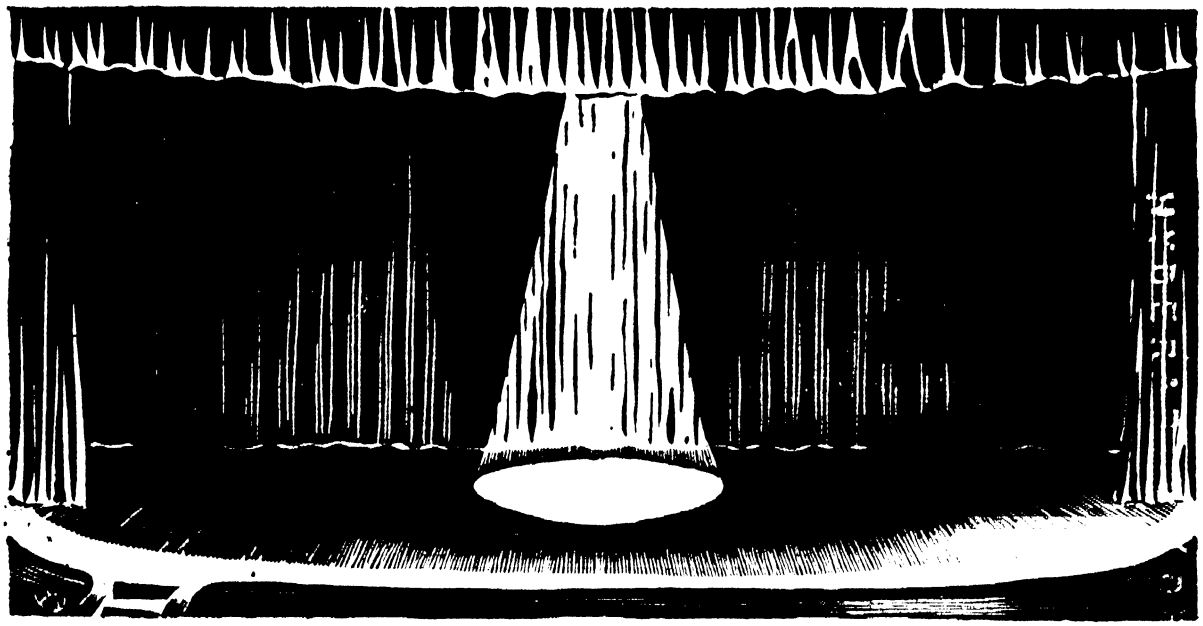

A. R. FULTON

Purdue University

DRAWINGS BY RICHARD SMITH

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY NEW YORK

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To My Father

Preface

THE PLAYWRIGHT is the most dependent of artists. The novelist, for example, needs only the services of the printer to make his story available to readers. The painter, provided with paint and canvas, is self-sufficient. Even the composer, who depends on an orchestra together with all its varied instruments to transpose his score into heard music, is not so dependent as the playwright. For to present his play to an audience, the playwright depends on the complex media of the theatre—staging, actors, costumes and make-up, settings, lighting and, not infrequently, music too.

Dependent on the theatre, the playwright has always been influenced by the theatre of his time. The huge outdoor Greek theatre with its single stage and permanent scenery and the cothurnus-shod, heavily masked actors not only determined the unified way in which the Greek playwright constructed his plays but affected his style. The Elizabethan stage, made flexible by curtains and several acting areas, allowed Shakespeare to violate the unities which the rigidity of the Greek theatre had imposed, while the bareness of that platform stage restricted him in other ways. After the Restoration, when the theatre was enclosed, the playwright adapted himself to a stage artificially lighted, set with movable painted scenery and trod, for the first time, by actresses.

Down to the present the theatre has continued to influence the playwright. "I do not select my methods," says Bernard Shaw; "they are imposed upon me." The theatre influences the playwright because plays are written to be played. The script of the play is incomplete as a play in the same way that a musical score is incomplete as a symphony. This does not imply that the only way to study the drama is to go to the theatre. It implies, though, that to study the drama through reading plays, the student should become familiar with the differences between the text of a play and the

play as the playwright visualized it—produced on the stage. The purpose of this book is to show how modern playwrights, British and American, have adapted their plays to the staging possibilities of their time.

Designed for the student beginning a study of the drama, the book takes little for granted. The first chapter, for example, sketches the state of the drama at the time Pinero wrote *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and, with this significant play for illustration, discusses realism, a comparatively simple type. Following chapters take up variations on this type and introduce more complex ones. The names of the types are comparatively unimportant—some of them overlap —but they are suggestive of various trends in the drama. Terms common to the literature of the drama and to the theatre are defined—and italicized—as they first occur, and indexed at the end of the text. Chapters are arranged chronologically according to the plays in illustration.

Richard Smith's drawings should be helpful. As graphic complements to the playwrights' descriptions of settings, the drawings illustrate techniques in scene designing, which vary according to type of drama and the period in which the plays were originally produced. Whether or not one agrees with Gordon Craig that to learn the essentials of stage scenery is to learn the essentials of drama, the drawings at least emphasize the importance of staging to the meaning of the plays.

In stressing staging, the book does not minimize the texts of the plays. It shows rather various ways in which playwrights express their ideas and explains the important relationship between the ideas and the means of presenting them in terms of the theatre.

I am grateful to John Howard Lawson not only for giving me permission to include the text of *Roger Bloomer* but for preparing and providing me with detailed notes on the original production of the play, to Mrs. John R. Lindsay for correction of proofs, and to my colleagues Richard Cordell, John R. Lindsay, and W. S. Hastings for their helpful criticisms of the manuscript.

A. R. F.

Contents

PREFACE vii

I. REALISM: Arthur Wing Pinero 1

The Second Mrs. Tanqueray 12

II. THE ONE-ACT PLAY: J. M. Barrie 83

A Well-Remembered Voice 89

III. TRAGEDY: Eugene O'Neill 108

Beyond the Horizon 123

IV. EXPRESSIONISM: John Howard Lawson 200

Roger Bloomer 210

V. NATURALISM: Elmer Rice 296

Street Scene 304

VI. THE MORALITY PLAY: Thornton Wilder 390

Our Town 397

VII. COMEDY: Noel Coward 456

Blithe Spirit 465

Index of Terms Common to the Literature of the Drama and to the Theatre 555

DRAMA AND THEATRE

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I. Realism

ARTHUR WING PINERO

ON A MAY EVENING in 1893 a fashionable audience had gathered at the St. James Theatre in London to see a new play. The audience had no reason to believe that the play would be very different from any its author had written before, would, in fact, be very different from the hundreds of plays, all much alike, that London audiences had been seeing for a long time. For the nineteenth-century play was written according to a formula which had become so fixed that plays were called *well-made*. The well-made play was a stage piece abounding in stilted theatric conventions, empty rhetoric, overheard conversations, asides, characters arbitrarily on stage when needed and off when not, and ending with a neat solution to a complication that had been artificial from the beginning. Since the 1860's, however, there had been a tendency to represent life as the dramatists observed it, an attempt which resulted in a new kind of staging. For plays came to be mounted in box sets, which are more natural than the old painted flats. This was a slight tendency toward what is called naturalism, that is, representation as detailed and accurate as possible—a photographic realism. But still the plays did not represent life, because the ideas expressed in them were as far removed from reality as the hollow technique out of which they were fashioned.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the audience at the St. James was unprepared for what it was about to see. As the curtain went down on the first act, though, they broke into cheers, and they cheered again after the second and the third. After the final curtain

there was a silence; then the cheering broke out again, and still louder upon the appearance of the author before the curtain. But although, as one critic said, it was certainly one of the most sensational first nights within living memory, no one in the theatre could have realized that they had just witnessed the first modern English play. The name of the play was *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,* and the author was Arthur Wing Pinero.

Like many playwrights Pinero was a man of the theatre. He was born in London in 1855, the son of a lawyer. He intended to be a lawyer himself, but after reading law with his father he gave it up, at the age of nineteen, to go on the stage. His first engagement was in Edinburgh with an acting troupe headed by the R. H. Wyndhams. Then, after five years in the company of the great London actor-manager Henry Irving and a season with the Bancrofts at the Haymarket, he probably became convinced that he was not destined to become famous as an actor and left the stage to devote himself to writing. He had already written several plays, which Irving produced at the Globe. Although as an actor Pinero had been merely competent, acting had contributed significantly to his technique as a writer: his plays show that he never forgot the stage and that as he wrote, he wrote for the actors. Precise as his technique is, Pinero's claim to distinction does not rest on that alone. The well-made play had perfected technique. Pinero realized that technique must be combined with ideas, and he effected that combination in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.*

An important event in Pinero's life occurred in 1891, when he saw the first London production of Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts.* Twelve years before, Ibsen had written a play called *A Doll's House,* in which the heroine, for reasons contrary to conventions and beliefs of the time, dares to leave her husband and her children. The sound of the door shutting as Nora walked out of the house at the end of the play is said to have reverberated through Europe. Two years later, as if to emphasize the idea he had advanced in *A Doll's House,* Ibsen wrote *Ghosts,* in which tragedy is the result of a woman's fear and consequent failure to leave a husband whom she should have left. Produced under the aegis of the Independent Theatre Society, the play was banned from the London stage but Pinero saw it before it was stopped by the censor. Today *Ghosts* seems innocent, and its treatment of social ideas as well as the medical analysis in it appears "dated." But like *A Doll's House* it was still revolutionary fifty years ago.

Pinero was impressed by Ibsen's use of the drama to present a social problem; and bringing to bear all the skill in dramatic technique he had acquired, from the well-made play and from his own experience in successful playwriting, he wrote *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.* But instead of giving the public just another play that would satisfy the popular taste for shallow amusement and thereby take in money at the box office, Pinero dared to offer for production on the English stage a play presenting a problem that Victorian England did not want discussed, at least not on the stage—the problem of "the woman with a past." Like *Ghosts* the play caused a protest. It was decried as the most immoral production that ever disgraced the English stage. On the other hand, it was hailed as the greatest play of the century. Within two years Pinero could write, "At the present moment the English people appear to be inclined to grant to the English dramatist the utmost freedom to deal with questions which have long been thought to be outside the province of the stage." Plays like *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* came to be called *problem plays* and were classified as *social drama,* because they dramatize social problems.

Pinero had written *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* more for his own satisfaction than out of a belief that it was what the public wanted. The popularity of his previous plays and the fortune they had brought him made it easier now to write as he chose. But the unexpected success of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* must have encouraged him to write others like it. His next one was *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith,* a serious treatment of free love. Pinero told Clayton Hamilton that of all the plays he had written, this was his favorite.

It was Pinero's method, as it was Ibsen's, to write biographies of his characters, "unpublished facts" about them, and thus put down more than could be directly revealed in the play. Although he disliked appearing in public, and seldom did so, even at the premières of his own plays, he delivered a lecture in 1903 on "Robert Louis Stevenson: the Dramatist," a lecture in which he defined dramatic talent:

> What is dramatic talent? Is it not the power to project characters, and to cause them to tell an interesting story through the medium of dialogue? This is *dramatic* talent; and dramatic talent, if I may so express it, is the raw material of *theatrical* talent. Dramatic, like poetic, talent is born, not made; if it is to achieve success on the stage, it must be developed into theatrical talent by hard study, and generally by long practice. For theatrical talent consists in the power of making your characters not only

tell a story by means of dialogue, but to tell it in such skillfully devised form and order as shall, within the limits of an ordinary theatrical representation, give rise to the greatest possible amount of that peculiar kind of emotional effect the production of which is the one great function of the theatre.

Pinero continued to write for the theatre almost up to the time of his death, in 1934. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was only the first of a number of social dramas, among the best being *The Thunderbolt,* which presents a provincial family who have suddenly come into possession of wealth they do not deserve, and in which, incidentally, Pinero makes good use of his training in the law. Of his comedies *The Gay Lord Quex* was particularly successful. *Mid-Channel,* first produced in 1909, in London, ran for over a year in the United States, with Ethel Barrymore in the title role, but was less successful when revived in 1922. His play *The Enchanted Cottage* (1922) was made into a moving picture in 1924 and was filmed again in 1945. In the course of his long life in the theatre the drama overtook, and passed, Pinero; other dramatists, following his lead, wrote problem plays greater than his. But in writing *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* in 1893, he gave the English stage something new, refreshing, and important.

The interesting story which the characters in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* tell is what happens when Aubrey Tanqueray, a middle-aged widower, marries the beautiful young Paula Ray in the belief that their marriage will erase the facts in Paula's life, unacceptable to the fashionable, respectable society of which Aubrey is a member. The play has been said to mean that such a marriage will fail. But it means more than that. Pinero is not saying merely that misfortune results when a man who is a member of respectable society marries a woman who is not; he is saying that tragedy springs from the characters themselves. It is not merely that Aubrey and Paula cannot get away from the past by moving to the country. Aubrey's way of life is too well set, after more than forty years, to be adaptable to any other; and although Paula has changed into a good woman, her real nature is too strong to change too. She is jealous, suspicious, strong-willed, and not a little vulgar. Her marriage to a gentleman has made her honest, but it cannot make her a lady. To complicate the situation, Aubrey's daughter Ellean, who has been in a convent and at nineteen is about to take vows, suddenly returns to live with her father. It is as much the conflict between this girl and her stepmother as the incompatibility of Aubrey and the second

Mrs. Tanqueray that brings on the tragedy. The final line of the play is Ellean's: "I helped to kill her. If I'd only been merciful!"

Pinero's problem in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is to present in two hours or so the story of these people, not only of the marriage and its unhappy course leading to the climax but the circumstances which bring the marriage about, and to let the audience know, without breaking the continuity of the play, certain facts about their past. But obviously the dramatist cannot make the story completely real, that is, make it an exact imitation of real life, for if he did, he would have to include everything. His problem is to tell in two hours what happens, for example, in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* in twenty years. He selects, therefore, only certain incidents in the story, intending that these incidents shall represent the whole story. This kind of selection, necessary because of the limitations a stage production places on the dramatist, is admissible in realism provided that the selected parts truly represent the whole story, for *realism* in the drama, as in other arts, is the representation of life by adherence to fact.

Pinero begins his play on the eve of the wedding and selects some dozen characters to dramatize the story. The typical play of the nineteenth century devoted the first scene to *exposition,* that is, information necessary to the audience's understanding the action to follow. Although much of Act I of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* includes exposition, the men and women of the play reveal their characters as the act progresses, so that while facts about their past are transpiring, the action of the play is moving forward. The amount of exposition, in any play, depends of course on how far back in the story about the characters the play goes. This place is called the *point of attack.* In *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* the point of attack is late, since Pinero picks up his characters comparatively late in the story he has to tell about them. The story begins with Aubrey's first marriage twenty years before and includes the birth of his daughter Ellean, the mother's sending Ellean away to a convent, the death of the first Mrs. Tanqueray, Aubrey's failure to get Ellean back, and finally his engagement to Paula Ray. The story also includes incidents in Paula's past. Information about what has happened in those twenty years and which must be communicated to the audience indirectly, not acted out, constitutes the exposition.

Two of the characters who appear in Act I—Jayne and Misquith—do not appear again in the play—a fact which prompted Bernard Shaw to object that "two whole actors are wasted on sham

parts." Mr. Shaw might have said "three whole actors," since Aubrey's servant Morse disappears after the first act too. Although it is true that these characters help with the exposition, their disappearance thereafter is not only natural but significant. Aubrey remarks to his guests that after a man is married, his old friendships cool. In fact, the dinner party with which the play opens is Aubrey's farewell to his former life. After the opening act the scene of the play, too, is shifted, to Aubrey's country house in Surrey. The apartment at the Albany together with his friends and even the servants represents a society from which he cuts himself off when he marries.

Paula's entrance toward the end of the first act is further evidence that Pinero was a man of the theatre. The problem is not only to build up an entrance for the star but to motivate it. *Motivation* in the theatre means making action on the stage probable. It would, for example, be improbable—at least in Victorian London—that a lady would call on a gentleman at the Albany late at night. But the talk about Paula through the first part of the act having revealed that she is no lady has prepared us for this entrance, which is in keeping with her impulsive, unconventional behavior. We are prepared for it but have not been led to expect it. Thus the entrance comes as a skillfully designed surprise.

Shaw also objected to Aubrey's being compelled "at his own dinner party . . . to get up and go ignominiously into the next room to write some letters, when something has to be said behind his back." Here again, though, the action is motivated, for Aubrey is going out with his friends and has a couple of notes to scribble first. It must be remembered that most plays up to this time utilized the creaky device of the *aside,* whereby remarks were made which a character a few feet away from the speaker was not supposed to hear and yet of course had to be spoken loud enough to reach the top gallery. Aubrey's leaving the room obviates many asides. Pinero does use the aside—but with modifications. Asides in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* are marked by such stage directions as "in a whisper," "in an undertone," or "between his teeth," and while they are spoken, the characters not supposed to hear are otherwise engaged—Aubrey, for example, with his letter writing, at first, or Paula at the piano while Aubrey talks about her to Ellean. Paula speaks "in an undertone to Aubrey" about Mrs. Cortelyon, while the latter is engaged in another conversation.

But Pinero's craftsmanship is nowhere better evidenced than in

the opening of Act II. It is spring, the time of Act I having been the preceding November. Aubrey and Paula have returned from a honeymoon on the Continent and are now settled down at the Tanqueray country house in Surrey. Ellean has come to live with them. Not only does Pinero in six short lines give us all of this information but he makes the lines reveal that Paula is bored, that she is jealous of Ellean, and that, in short, the marriage has not been a success. Such selection of significant detail is realism at its best. Pinero got more from Ibsen than ideas. The opening of this act is simple evidence that Pinero could follow his own formula for emotional dramatic effectiveness: "the power of making your characters not only tell a story by means of dialogue, but to tell it in . . . skillfully devised form and order."

An effective dramatic device is the appeal to *recognition,* an appeal closely allied to realism and based on the fact that we get particular pleasure in recognizing in the theatre scenes or incidents familiar to us in real life. Although Pinero did not originate this kind of realism, he brought it to perfection. The setting for Act I of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is not just Aubrey Tanqueray's rooms, but Aubrey Tanqueray's rooms in the Albany, a well-known, fashionable apartment house in London. It is even No. 2 x, the Albany. Pinero is said to have visited the apartment to get the setting just right. The scene for the rest of the play is a country house Pinero knew in Surrey.

A character in many plays is the *raisonneur.* Often a middle-aged, cynical, crusty, likable individual, he stands, as it were, between the characters and the audience as a kind of philosopher or commentator comparable to the chorus in the Greek drama. He may very likely be a mouthpiece for the author. In *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* he is Cayley Drummle, the only one of Aubrey's farewell-dinner guests remaining in the play after the first act. His is an interesting part to follow in a study of Pinero's technique. He not only serves as a link between Aubrey's past and the action that follows but is important to the plot.

The climax of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is not reached until the end of the play. It is the death of Paula. The *climax* of a play is the point of highest emotional intensity. In some plays the climax is reached before the end, after which there is a falling off in the action, called the *denouement.* The climax may be said to be the result of the *crisis,* that point in the play at which a decision is made

or an action taken that determines the outcome. At the time it occurs, the crisis may not be obvious to the characters in the play or even to the audience. In *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,* for example, the crisis might be said to be the return of Ellean to live with her father and stepmother. Although Aubrey is visibly disturbed when he receives the letter announcing his daughter's wish to leave the convent and come home, the full significance of the incident is not grasped until later.

Originally intended merely for a special matinee performance—since it was not thought to be popular enough to be risked as a regular run—*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was suddenly billed at the St. James only because a comedy by R. C. Carton had just failed there. Another shift was made at the last minute, too. It was decided that the actress who had been rehearsing the part of Paula had not been well cast, and an unknown actress from the provinces was substituted. The unknown actress was Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who not only made the part of Paula famous but in doing so began her own famous and long career in the theatre. Henry Arthur Jones said, "God created Mrs. Pat Campbell for the part of the second Mrs. Tanqueray."

To visualize the play as originally staged, one should know something of staging conditions in the nineties. In the first place, the London theatres were large—larger than most theatres of today, although they were not so large as the London theatres built at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Drury Lane seated 3,200 spectators and Covent Garden 3,013. The electric light having recently been invented, electricity had replaced gas in the theatre, but as the new lighting had not yet undergone much experimentation, it did not admit of the subtle effects we take for granted in stage lighting now. Footlights, which today are used sparingly, were an important part of the equipment at the St. James, although already it had been observed that light from overhead is to be preferred to light from below, not only because footlights cast shadows on the actors' faces but also because overhead light is more natural. The great improvement which marked the staging of the time was of course the *box set.* In keeping with the tendency toward realism, the box set, representing the three walls of a room with the fourth wall removed, had replaced the absurdly unrealistic painted flats of the earlier part of the century. The old style of staging

presented the action *against* the scene and therefore gave it a two-dimensional quality, whereas the box set presented the action *within* the scene and gave it three dimensions. But the great size of the theatres and the arbitrary lighting still conspired to make the drama rhetorical. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* has been criticized for its stiltedness; however the lack of broken lines we associate with plays written for a more intimate theatre is understandable when we consider the traditions of the theatre affecting the drama of the nineties.

It was Pinero's practice to have his plays privately printed so that each actor might have a copy of the entire play. He drew exact floor plans to indicate not only the shape and size of the sets but the positions of doors, windows, and even furniture, and he made sketches of the sets for the scene painter. This detail is suggested in the stage directions he wrote for *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. *Stage directions* are the part of the printed text of the play exclusive of the lines the characters speak. Usually set off by brackets and italics, they not only include descriptions of the sets but indicate *stage movement,* that is, how or where the actors move about on the stage, as for example, *"Misquith quietly leaves his chair and sits nearer to Jayne,"* or *"Aubrey looks after her for a moment, then he walks up to the fire and stands warming his feet at the bars."* Stage directions also include *stage business,* that is, detail with which an actor may busy himself, as for example, *"She selects some flowers from a vase on the table, cuts and arranges them, and fastens them in her bodice."* They include, too, manner of speaking, as *"In a low voice"* or *"After a slight pause, with a forced laugh."* Equally realistic are Pinero's stage directions for his settings, described at the beginning of each of the first three acts. Some dramatists write stage directions in terms of the stage instead of the scene, as for example, *upstage* and *downstage, upstage* meaning away from the audience and *downstage,* nearer the audience. *Stage right,* abbreviated *R.,* and *stage left, L.,* usually mean to the right and left of the actor as he faces downstage. *D. R.* therefore indicates downstage right; *U. L.,* upstage left; *U. C.,* upstage center; etc.

Pinero himself directed the production of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. Although he was precise and minute in describing the sets and in planning stage movement, stage business, gesture, and even intonation, Pinero permitted Mrs. Campbell freedom in developing the part of Paula. It is reported, for example, that when he wanted Mrs. Campbell to show anger by sweeping ornaments and photo-

graphs off the piano onto the floor—"That they were there," Hamilton Fyfe said, "illustrates the darkness of the age."—the actress objected because, she pointed out, Paula would not be rough and ugly with her hands, however angry she was. And Pinero agreed. Of Mrs. Campbell's acting in Act III when Paula looks at herself in the mirror, Maurice Brown wrote, "When she looked in the glass and realized that when she lost her looks she would lose all, she looked suddenly and for a second fifty years older, and one felt that the act of suicide with which the play ends was not improbable—whatever else it might be—was, in fact, inevitable." Aubrey Tanqueray was played by the actor-manager at the St. James, George Alexander. According to William Archer, who was in that first-night audience, Alexander played the part "with his unfailing tact, elegance, and self-restraint." Archer wrote afterward, "Not once were the tears anywhere near my eyes. Yes, once—when Mr. Pinero came before the curtain, and the house rose to him. Then I felt a thrill of genuine emotion to think that here at last, in spite of all the depressing and stunting influences of our English theatrical world, was a man who had the will and the talent to emancipate himself and give the artist within him free play—to take care of his soul, and let his pocket, for the nonce, take care of itself."

The pocket took care of itself well. The London run was extended to July 28th, and after a tour in the provinces the production was brought back to London and played from November until the next April, for a total of nearly three hundred performances in London alone. Many famous actresses besides Mrs. Campbell have played the title role. Mrs. Kendal, Eleanora Duse, Olga Nethersole, Ethel Barrymore, Gladys Cooper, and Tallulah Bankhead have contributed to the long and successful stage history of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.*

When the play is revived now, it should be staged in sets and costumes not unlike those of the original production. For it is a *costume play;* that is, so much of it pertains to the past, in ideas, as for example, rigid etiquette, as well as in details, that the spirit of the time in which it was written and first produced can be caught in the staging. In fact, to stage such a play in a modern setting and in modern costume would disturb a discriminating audience by anachronisms.

Described in 1893 as "the most immoral production that ever disgraced the English stage" and praised as "the greatest play of the

century," *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* now seems comparatively innocuous. As for its immorality, it is indeed one of the most painfully moral plays of its time. But as the first modern English drama, it still has strong claim to being the most significant play of the century.

The Second Mrs. Tanqueray

by

ARTHUR WING PINERO

Originally produced by George Alexander at the St. James Theatre, London, on Saturday evening, May 27, 1893, with the following cast:

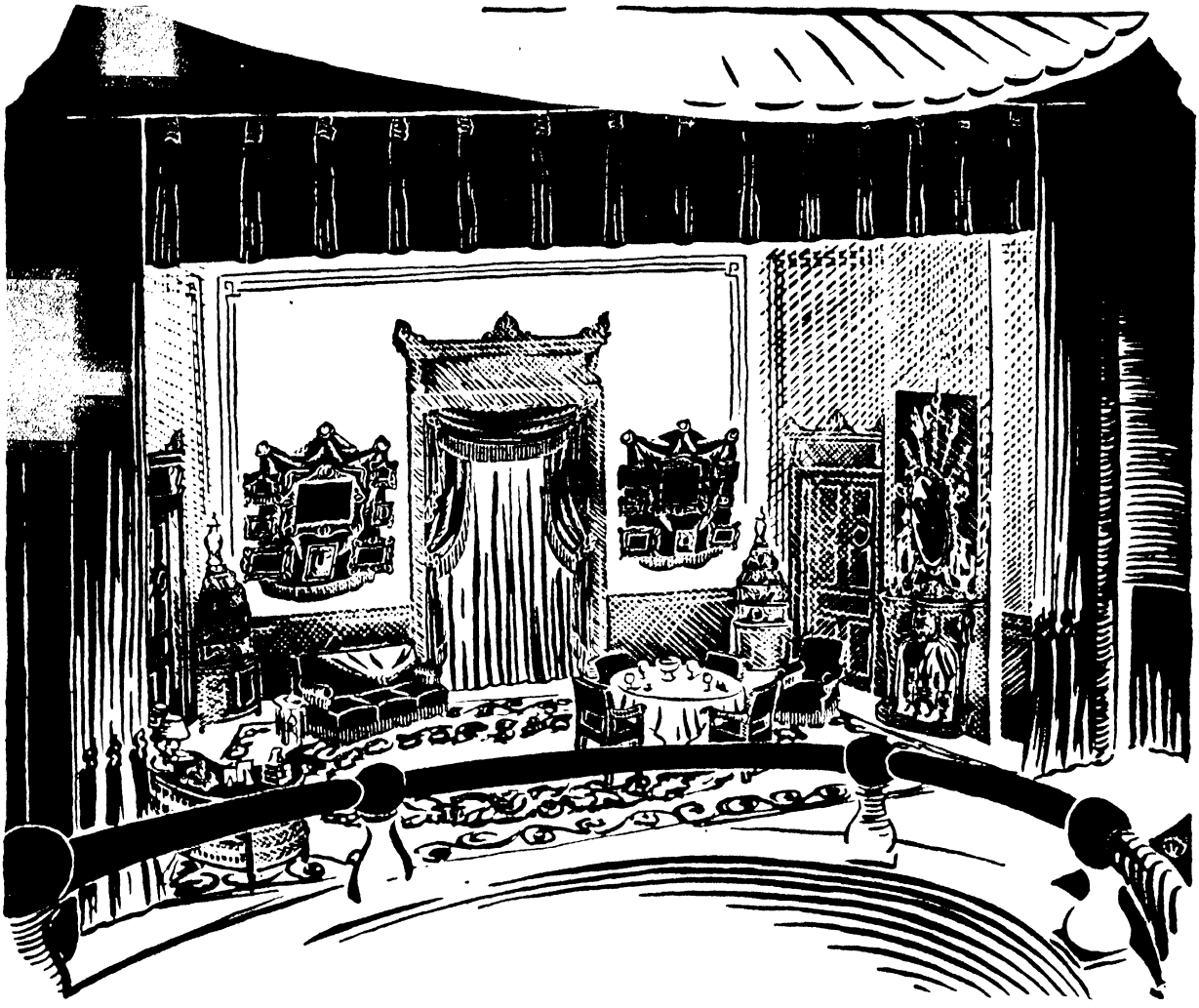
Aubrey Tanqueray	Mr. George Alexander
Frank Misquith, Q.C., M.P.	Mr. N. Gould
Gordon Jayne, M.D.	Mr. M. Hathorn
Morse	Mr. Alfred Holles
Cayley Drummle	Mr. Cyril Maude
Paula	Mrs. Patrick Campbell
Ellean	Miss Maude Millett
Mrs. Alice Cortelyon	Miss Amy Roselle
Lady Orreyed	Miss Edith Chester
Sir George Orreyed	Mr. A. Vane-Tempest
Captain Hugh Ardale	Mr. Ben Webster

The present day

The Scene of the First Act is laid at Mr. Tanqueray's rooms, No. 2 x, the Albany, in the month of November; the occurrences of the succeeding Acts take place at his house, "Highercoombe," near Willowmere, Surrey, during the early part of the following year.

The Second Mrs. Tanqueray

THE FIRST ACT



AUBREY TANQUERAY'S *Chambers in the Albany—a richly and tastefully-decorated room, elegantly and luxuriously furnished: on the right a large pair of doors opening into another room, on the left at the further end of the room a small door leading to a bed-chamber. A circular table is laid for a dinner for four persons, which has now reached the stage of dessert and coffee. Everything in the apartment suggests wealth and refinement. The fire is burning brightly.*

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AUBREY TANQUERAY, MISQUITH, *and* JAYNE *are seated at the dinner-table.* AUBREY *is forty-two, handsome, winning in manner, his speech and bearing retaining some of the qualities of young-manhood.* MISQUITH *is about forty-seven, genial and portly.* JAYNE *is a year or two* MISQUITH'S *senior; soft-speaking and precise—in appearance a type of the prosperous town physician.* MORSE, AUBREY'S *servant, places a little cabinet of cigars and the spirit-lamp on the table beside* AUBREY *and goes out.*

Misquith: Aubrey, it is a pleasant yet dreadful fact to contemplate, but it's nearly fifteen years since I first dined with you. You lodged in Piccadilly in those days, over a hat-shop. Jayne, I met you at that dinner, and Cayley Drummle.

Jayne: Yes, yes. What a pity it is that Cayley isn't here tonight.

Aubrey: Confound the old gossip! His empty chair has been staring us in the face all through dinner. I ought to have told Morse to take it away.

Misquith: Odd, his sending no excuse.

Aubrey: I'll walk round to his lodgings later on and ask after him.

Misquith: I'll go with you.

Jayne: So will I.

Aubrey [*opening the cigar-cabinet*]: Doctor, it's useless to tempt you, I know. Frank— [MISQUITH *and* AUBREY *smoke.*] I particularly wished Cayley Drummle to be one of us tonight. You two fellows and Cayley are my closest, my best friends—

Misquith: My dear Aubrey!

Jayne: I rejoice to hear you say so.

Aubrey: And I wanted to see the three of you round this table. You can't guess the reason.

Misquith: You desired to give us a most excellent dinner.

Jayne: Obviously.

Aubrey [*hesitatingly*]: Well—I—[*glancing at the clock*]—Cayley won't turn up now.

Jayne: H'm, hardly.

Aubrey: Then you two shall hear it. Doctor, Frank, this is the last time we are to meet in these rooms.

Jayne: The last time?

Misquith: You're going to leave the Albany?

Aubrey: Yes. You've heard me speak of a house I built in the country years ago, haven't you?

Misquith: In Surrey.

Aubrey: Well, when my wife died I cleared out of that house and let it. I think of trying the place again.

Misquith: But you'll go raving mad if ever you find yourself down there alone.

Aubrey: Ah, but I sha'n't be alone, and that's what I wanted to tell you. I'm going to be married.

Jayne: Going to be married?

Misquith: Married?

Aubrey: Yes—tomorrow.

Jayne: Tomorrow?

Misquith: You take my breath away! My dear fellow, I—I—of course, I congratulate you.

Jayne: And—and—so do I—heartily.

Aubrey: Thanks—thanks. [*There is a moment or two of embarrassment.*]

Misquith: Er—ah—this is an excellent cigar.

Jayne: Ah—um—your coffee is remarkable.

Aubrey: Look here; I dare say you two old friends think this treatment very strange, very unkind. So I want you to understand me. You know a marriage often cools friendships. What's the usual course of things? A man's engagement is given out, he is congratulated, complimented upon his choice; the church is filled with troops of friends, and he goes away happily to a chorus of good wishes. He comes back, sets up house in town or country, and thinks to resume the old associations, the old companionships. My dear Frank, my dear good doctor, it's very seldom that it can be done. Generally, a worm has begun to eat its way into those hearty, unreserved, prenuptial friendships; a damnable constraint sets in and acts like a wasting disease; and so, believe me, in nine cases out of ten a man's marriage severs for him more close ties than it forms.

Misquith: Well, my dear Aubrey, I earnestly hope—

Aubrey: I know what you're going to say, Frank. I hope so, too. In the meantime let's face dangers. I've reminded you of the ***usual*** course of things, but my marriage isn't even the conventional sort of marriage likely to satisfy society. Now, Cayley's a bachelor, but you two men have wives. By-the-by, my love to Mrs. Misquith and to Mrs. Jayne when you get home—don't forget that. Well, your wives may not—like—the lady I'm going to marry.

Jayne: Aubrey, forgive me for suggesting that the lady you are going to marry may not like our wives—mine at least; I beg your pardon, Frank.

Aubrey: Quite so; then I must go the way my wife goes.

Misquith: Come, come, pray don't let us anticipate that either side will be called upon to make such a sacrifice.

Aubrey: Yes, yes, let us anticipate it. And let us make up our minds to have no slow bleeding-to-death of our friendship. We'll end a pleasant chapter here tonight, and after tonight start afresh. When my wife and I settle down at Willowmere it's possible that we shall all come together. But if this isn't to be, for Heaven's sake let us recognize that it is simply because it *can't* be, and not wear hypocritical faces and suffer and be wretched. Doctor, Frank—[*holding out his hands, one to* MISQUITH, *the other to* JAYNE]—good luck to all of us!

Misquith: But—but—do I understand we are to ask nothing? Not even the lady's name, Aubrey?

Aubrey: The lady, my dear Frank, belongs to the next chapter, and in that her name is Mrs. Aubrey Tanqueray.

Jayne [*raising his coffee-cup*]: Then, in an old-fashioned way, I propose a toast. Aubrey, Frank, I give you "The Next Chapter!" [*They drink the toast, saying, "The Next Chapter!"*]

Aubrey: Doctor, find a comfortable chair; Frank, you too. As we're going to turn out by-and-by, let me scribble a couple of notes now while I think of them.

Misquith and Jayne: Certainly—yes, yes.

Aubrey: It might slip my memory when I get back. [AUBREY *sits at a writing-table at the other end of the room, and writes.*]

Jayne [*to* MISQUITH *in a whisper*]: Frank— [MISQUITH *quietly leaves his chair, and sits nearer to* JAYNE.] What is all this? Simply a morbid crank of Aubrey's with regard to ante-nuptial acquaintances?

Misquith: H'm! Did you notice *one* expression he used?

Jayne: Let me think—

Misquith: "My marriage is not even the conventional sort of marriage likely to satisfy society."

Jayne: Bless me, yes! What does that suggest?

Misquith: That he has a particular rather than a general reason for anticipating estrangement from his friends, I'm afraid.

Jayne: A horrible *mésalliance!* A dairymaid who has given him a glass of milk during a day's hunting, or a little anemic shopgirl! Frank, I'm utterly wretched!

Misquith: My dear Jayne, speaking in absolute confidence, I have never been more profoundly depressed in my life. [MORSE *enters.*]

Morse [*announcing*]: Mr. Drummle. [CAYLEY DRUMMLE *enters briskly. He is a neat little man of about five-and-forty, in manner bright, airy, debonair, but with an undercurrent of seriousness.* MORSE *retires.*]

Drummle: I'm in disgrace; nobody realizes that more thoroughly than I do. Where's my host?

Aubrey [*who has risen*]: Cayley.

Drummle [*shaking hands with him*]: Don't speak to me till I have tendered my explanation. A harsh word from anybody would unman me. [MISQUITH *and* JAYNE *shake hands with* DRUMMLE.]

Aubrey: Have you dined?

Drummle: No—unless you call a bit of fish, a cutlet, and a pancake dining.

Aubrey: Cayley, this is disgraceful.

Jayne: Fish, a cutlet, and a pancake will require a great deal of explanation.

Misquith: Especially the pancake. My dear friend, your case looks miserably weak.

Drummle: Hear me! hear me!

Jayne: Now then!

Misquith: Come!

Aubrey: Well!

Drummle: It so happens that tonight I was exceptionally early in dressing for dinner.

Misquith: For which dinner—the fish and cutlet?

Drummle: For *this* dinner, of course—really, Frank! At a quarter to eight, in fact, I found myself trimming my nails, with ten minutes to spare. Just then enter my man with a note—would I hasten, as fast as cab could carry me, to old Lady Orreyed in Bruton Street? —"sad trouble." Now, recollect, please, I had ten minutes on my hands, old Lady Orreyed was a very dear friend of my mother's, and was in some distress.

Aubrey: Cayley, come to the fish and cutlet!

Misquith and Jayne: Yes, yes, and the pancake!

Drummle: Upon my word! Well, the scene in Bruton Street beggars description; the women servants looked scared, the men drunk; and there was poor old Lady Orreyed on the floor of her boudoir like Queen Bess among her pillows.

Aubrey: What's the matter?

Drummle [*to everybody*]: You know George Orreyed?

Misquith: Yes.

Jayne: I've met him.

Drummle: Well, he's a thing of the past.

Aubrey: Not dead!

Drummle: Certainly, in the worst sense. He's married Mabel Hervey.

Misquith: What!

Drummle: It's true—this morning. The poor mother showed me his letter—a dozen curt words, and some of those ill-spelt.

Misquith [*walking up to the fireplace*]: I'm very sorry.

Jayne: Pardon my ignorance—who *was* Mabel Hervey?

Drummle: You don't—? Oh, of course not. Miss Hervey—Lady Orreyed, as she now is—was a lady who would have been, perhaps has been, described in the reports of the Police or the Divorce Court as an actress. Had she belonged to a lower stratum of our advanced civilization she would, in the event of judicial inquiry, have defined her calling with equal justification as that of a dressmaker. To do her justice, she is a type of a class which is immortal. Physically, by the strange caprice of creation, curiously beautiful; mentally, she lacks even the strength of deliberate viciousness. Paint her portrait, it would symbolize a creature perfectly patrician; lance a vein of her superbly modeled arm, you would get the poorest *vin ordinaire!* Her affections, emotions, impulses, her very existence—a burlesque! Flaxen, five-and-twenty, and feebly frolicsome; anybody's, in less gentle society I should say everybody's, property! That, doctor, was Miss Hervey who is the new Lady Orreyed. Dost thou like the picture?

Misquith: Very good, Cayley! Bravo!

Aubrey [*laying his hand on* DRUMMLE'S *shoulder*]: You'd scarcely believe it, Jayne, but none of us really know anything about this lady, our gay young friend here, I suspect, least of all.

Drummle: Aubrey, I applaud your chivalry.

Aubrey: And perhaps you'll let me finish a couple of letters which Frank and Jayne have given me leave to write. [*Returning to the writing-table*] Ring for what you want, like a good fellow! [AUBREY *resumes his writing.*]

Misquith [*to* DRUMMLE]: Still, the fish and cutlet remain unexplained.

Drummle: Oh, the poor old woman was so weak that I insisted upon her taking some food, and felt there was nothing for it but to sit down opposite her. The fool! the blackguard!

Misquith: Poor Orreyed! Well, he's gone under for a time.

Drummle: For a time! My dear Frank, I tell you he has absolutely ceased to be. [AUBREY, *who has been writing busily, turns his head towards the speakers and listens. His lips are set, and there is a frown upon his face.*] For all practical purposes you may regard him as the late George Orreyed. Tomorrow the very characteristics of his speech, as we remember them, will have become obsolete.

Jayne: But surely, in the course of years, he and his wife will outlive—

Drummle: No, no, doctor, don't try to upset one of my settled beliefs. You may dive into many waters, but there is *one* social Dead Sea—!

Jayne: Perhaps you're right.

Drummle: Right! Good God! I wish you could prove me otherwise! Why, for years I've been sitting, and watching and waiting.

Misquith: You're in form tonight, Cayley. May we ask where you've been in the habit of squandering your useful leisure?

Drummle: Where? On the shore of that same sea.

Misquith: And, pray, what have you been waiting for?

Drummle: For some of my best friends *to come up.* [AUBREY *utters a half-stifled exclamation of impatience; then he hurriedly gathers up his papers from the writing-table. The three men turn to him.*] Eh?

Aubrey: Oh, I—I'll finish my letters in the other room if you'll excuse me for five minutes. Tell Cayley the news. [*He goes out.*]

Drummle [*hurrying to the door*]: My dear fellow, my jabbering has disturbed you! I'll never talk again as long as I live!

Misquith: Close the door, Cayley. [DRUMMLE *shuts the door.*]

Jayne: Cayley—

Drummle [*advancing to the dinner table*]: A smoke, a smoke, or I perish! [*Selects a cigar from the little cabinet.*]

Jayne: Cayley, marriages are in the air.

Drummle: Are they? Discover the bacillus, doctor, and destroy it.

Jayne: I mean, among our friends.

Drummle: Oh, Nugent Warrinder's engagement to Lady Alice Tring. I've heard of that. They're not to be married till the spring.

Jayne: Another marriage that concerns us a little takes place tomorrow.

Drummle: Whose marriage?

Jayne: Aubrey's.

Drummle: Aub—! [*Looking towards* MISQUITH] Is it a joke?

Misquith: No.

Drummle [*looking from* MISQUITH *to* JAYNE]: To whom?

Misquith: He doesn't tell us.

Jayne. We three were asked here tonight to receive the announcement. Aubrey has some theory that marriage is likely to alienate a man from his friends, and it seems to me he has taken the precaution to wish us good-by.

Misquith: No, no.

Jayne: Practically, surely.

Drummle [*thoughtfully*]: Marriage in general, does he mean, or *this* marriage?

Jayne: That's the point. Frank says—

Misquith: No, no, no; I feared it suggested—

Jayne: Well, well. [*To* DRUMMLE] What do you think of it?

Drummle [*after a slight pause*]: Is there a light there? [*Lighting his cigar*] He—wraps the lady—in mystery—you say?

Misquith: Most modestly.

Drummle: Aubrey's—not—a very—young man.

Jayne: Forty-three.

Drummle: Ah! *L'age critique!*

Misquith: A dangerous age—yes, yes.

Drummle: When you two fellows go home, do you mind leaving me behind here?

Misquith: Not at all.

Jayne: By all means.

Drummle: All right. [*Anxiously*] Deuce take it, the man's second marriage mustn't be another mistake! [*With his head bent he walks up to the fireplace.*]

Jayne: You knew him in his short married life, Cayley. Terribly unsatisfactory, wasn't it?

Drummle: Well— [*Looking at the door*] I quite closed that door?

Misquith: Yes. [*Settles himself on the sofa;* JAYNE *is seated in an arm-chair.*]

Drummle [*smoking with his back to the fire*]: He married a Miss Herriott; that was in the year eighteen—confound dates—twenty years ago. She was a lovely creature—by Jove, she was; by religion a Roman Catholic. She was one of your cold sort, you know—all marble arms and black velvet. I remember her with painful distinctness as the only woman who ever made me nervous.

Misquith: Ha, ha!

Drummle: He loved her—to distraction, as they say. Jupiter, how fervently that poor devil courted her! But I don't believe she

allowed him even to squeeze her fingers. She *was* an iceberg! As for kissing, the mere contact would have given him chapped lips. However, he married her and took her away, the latter greatly to my relief.

Jayne: Abroad, you mean?

Drummle: Eh? Yes. I imagine he gratified her by renting a villa in Lapland, but I don't know. After a while they returned, and then I saw how woefully Aubrey had miscalculated results.

Jayne: Miscalculated—?

Drummle: He had reckoned, poor wretch, that in the early days of marriage she would thaw. But she didn't. I used to picture him closing his doors and making up the fire in the hope of seeing her features relax. Bless her, the thaw never set in! I believe she kept a thermometer in her stays and always registered ten degrees below zero. However, in time a child came—a daughter.

Jayne: Didn't that—?

Drummle: Not a bit of it; it made matters worse. Frightened at her failure to stir up in him some sympathetic religious belief, she determined upon strong measures with regard to the child. He opposed her for a miserable year or so, but she wore him down, and the insensible little brat was placed in a convent, first in France, then in Ireland. Not long afterwards the mother died, strangely enough, of fever, the only warmth, I believe, that ever came to that woman's body.

Misquith: Don't, Cayley!

Jayne: The child is living, we know.

Drummle: Yes, if you choose to call it living. Miss Tanqueray—a young woman of nineteen now—is in the Loretto convent at Armagh. She professes to have found her true vocation in a religious life, and within a month or two will take final vows.

Misquith: He ought to have removed his daughter from the convent when the mother died.

Drummle: Yes, yes, but absolutely at the end there was reconciliation between husband and wife, and she won his promise that the child should complete her conventual education. He reaped his reward. When he attempted to gain his girl's confidence and affection he was too late; he found he was dealing with the spirit of the mother. You remember his visit to Ireland last month?

Jayne: Yes.

Drummle: That was to wish his girl good-by.

Misquith: Poor fellow!

Drummle: He sent for me when he came back. I think he must have had a lingering hope that the girl would relent—would come to life, as it were—at the last moment, for, for an hour or so, in this room, he was terribly shaken. I'm sure he'd clung to that hope from the persistent way in which he kept breaking off in his talk to repeat one dismal word, as if he couldn't realize his position without dinning this damned word into his head.

Jayne: What word was that?

Drummle: Alone—alone. [AUBREY *enters.*]

Aubrey: A thousand apologies!

Drummle [*gaily*]: We are talking about you, my dear Aubrey. [*During the telling of the story,* MISQUITH *has risen and gone to the fire, and* DRUMMLE *has thrown himself full-length on the sofa.* AUBREY *now joins* MISQUITH *and* JAYNE.]

Aubrey: Well, Cayley, are you surprised?

Drummle: Surp—! I haven't been surprised for twenty years.

Aubrey: And you're not angry with me?

Drummle: Angry! [*Rising*] Because you considerately withhold the name of a lady with whom it is now the object of my life to become acquainted? My dear fellow, you pique my curiosity, you give zest to my existence! And as for a wedding, who on earth wants to attend that familiar and probably draughty function? Ugh! My cigar's out.

Aubrey: Let's talk about something else.

Misquith [*looking at his watch*]: Not tonight, Aubrey.

Aubrey: My dear Frank!

Misquith: I go up to Scotland tomorrow, and there are some little matters—

Jayne: I am off too.

Aubrey: No, no.

Jayne: I must: I have to give a look to a case in Clifford Street on my way home.

Aubrey [*going to the door*]: Well! [MISQUITH *and* JAYNE *exchange looks with* DRUMMLE. *Opening the door and calling*] Morse, hats and coats! I shall write to you all next week from Genoa or Florence. Now, doctor, Frank, remember, my love to Mrs. Misquith and to Mrs. Jayne! [MORSE *enters with hats and coats.*]

Misquith and Jayne: Yes, yes—yes, yes.

Aubrey: And your young people! [*As* MISQUITH *and* JAYNE *put on their coats there is the clatter of careless talk.*]

Jayne: Cayley, I meet you at dinner on Sunday.

Drummle: At the Stratfields'. That's very pleasant.

Misquith [*putting on his coat with* AUBREY'S *aid*]: Ah-h!

Aubrey: What's wrong?

Misquith: A twinge. Why didn't I go to Aix in August?

Jayne [*shaking hands with* DRUMMLE]: Good night, Cayley.

Drummle: Good night, my dear doctor!

Misquith [*shaking hands with* DRUMMLE]: Cayley, are you in town for long?

Drummle: Dear friend, I'm nowhere for long. Good night.

Misquith: Good night. [AUBREY, JAYNE, *and* MISQUITH *go out, followed by* MORSE; *the hum of talk is continued outside.*]

Aubrey: A cigar, Frank?

Misquith: No, thank you.

Aubrey: Going to walk, doctor?

Jayne: If Frank will.

Misquith: By all means.

Aubrey: It's a cold night. [*The door is closed.* DRUMMLE *remains standing with his coat on his arm and his hat in his hand.*]

Drummle [*to himself, thoughtfully*]: Now then! What the devil!— [AUBREY *returns.*]

Aubrey [*eyeing* DRUMMLE *a little awkwardly*]: Well, Cayley?

Drummle: Well, Aubrey? [AUBREY *walks up to the fire and stands looking into it.*]

Aubrey: You're not going, old chap?

Drummle [*sitting*]: No.

Aubrey [*after a slight pause, with a forced laugh*]: Hah! Cayley, I never thought I should feel—shy—with you.

Drummle: Why do you?

Aubrey: Never mind.

Drummle: Now, I can quite understand a man wishing to be married in the dark, as it were.

Aubrey: You can?

Drummle: In your place I should very likely adopt the same course.

Aubrey: You think so?

Drummle: And if I intended marrying a lady not prominently in society, as I presume you do—as I presume you do—

Aubrey: Well?

Drummle: As I presume you do, I'm not sure that *I* should tender her for preliminary dissection at afternoon tea-tables.

Aubrey: No?

Drummle: In fact, there is probably only one person—were I in your position tonight—with whom I should care to chat the matter over.

Aubrey: Who's that?

Drummle: Yourself, of course. [*Going to* AUBREY *and standing beside him*] Of course, yourself, old friend.

Aubrey [*after a pause*]: I must seem a brute to you, Cayley. But here are some acts which are hard to explain, hard to defend—

Drummle: To defend—

Aubrey: Some acts which one must trust to time to put right. DRUMMLE *watches him for a moment, then takes up his hat and coat.*]

Drummle: Well, I'll be moving.

Aubrey: Cayley! Confound you and your old friendship! Do you think I forget it? Put your coat down! Why did you stay behind here? Cayley, the lady I am going to marry is the lady—who is known as—Mrs. Jarman. [*There is a pause.*]

Drummle [*in a low voice*]: Mrs. Jarman! Are you serious? [*He walks up to the fireplace, where he leans upon the mantelpiece uttering something like a groan.*]

Aubrey: As you've got this out of me I give you leave to say all you care to say. Come, we'll be plain with each other. You know Mrs. Jarman?

Drummle: I first met her at—what does it matter?

Aubrey: Yes, yes, everything! Come!

Drummle: I met her at Homburg, two—three seasons ago.

Aubrey: Not as Mrs. Jarman?

Drummle: No.

Aubrey: She was then—?

Drummle: Mrs. Dartry.

Aubrey: Yes. She has also seen you in London, she says.

Drummle: Certainly.

Aubrey: In Alford Street. Go on.

Drummle: Please!

Aubrey: I insist.

Drummle [*with a slight shrug of the shoulders*]: Some time last year I was asked by a man to sup at his house, one night after the theatre.

Aubrey: Mr. Selwyn Ethurst—a bachelor.

Drummle: Yes.

Aubrey: You were surprised therefore to find Mr. Ethurst aided in his cursed hospitality by a lady.

Drummle: I was unprepared.

Aubrey: The lady you had known as Mrs. Dartry? [DRUMMLE *inclines his head silently.*] There is something of a yachting cruise in the Mediterranean too, is there not?

Drummle: I joined Peter Jarman's yacht at Marseilles, in the spring, a month before he died.

Aubrey: Mrs. Jarman was on board?

Drummle: She was a kind hostess.

Aubrey: And an old acquaintance?

Drummle: Yes.

Aubrey: You have told your story.

Drummle: With your assistance.

Aubrey: I have put you to the pain of telling it to show you that this is not the case of a blind man entrapped by an artful woman. Let me add that Mrs. Jarman has no legal right to that name; that she is simply Miss Ray—Miss Paula Ray.

Drummle [*after a pause*]: I should like to express my regret, Aubrey, for the way in which I spoke of George Orreyed's marriage.

Aubrey: You mean you compare Lady Orreyed with Miss Ray? [DRUMMLE *is silent.*] Oh, of course! To you, Cayley, all women who have been roughly treated, and who dare to survive by borrowing a little of our philosophy, are alike. You see in the crowd of the ill-used only one pattern; you can't detect the shades of goodness, intelligence, even nobility there. Well, how should you? The crowd is dimly lighted! And, besides, yours is the way of the world.

Drummle: My dear Aubrey, I *live* in the world.

Aubrey: The name we give our little parish of St. James's.

Drummle [*laying a hand on* AUBREY'S *shoulder*]: And you are quite prepared, my friend, to forfeit the esteem of your little parish?

Aubrey: I avoid mortification by shifting from one parish to another. I give up Pall Mall for the Surrey hills; leave off varnishing my boots, and double the thickness of the soles.

Drummle: And your skin—do you double the thickness of that also?

Aubrey: I know you think me a fool, Cayley—you needn't infer that I'm a coward into the bargain. No! I know what I'm doing, and I do it deliberately, defiantly. I'm alone: I injure no living soul by the step I'm going to take; and so you can't urge the one argument which might restrain me. Of course, I don't expect you to

think compassionately, fairly even, of the woman whom I—whom I am drawn to—

Drummle: My dear Aubrey, I assure you I consider Mrs.—Miss Jarman—Mrs. Ray—Miss Ray—delightful. But I confess there is a form of chivalry which I gravely distrust, especially in a man of—our age.

Aubrey: Thanks. I've heard you say that from forty till fifty a man is at heart either a stoic or a satyr.

Drummle [*protestingly*]: Ah! now—

Aubrey: I am neither. I have a temperate, honorable affection for Mrs. Jarman. She has never met a man who has treated her well—I intend to treat her well. That's all. And in a few years, Cayley, if you've not quite forsaken me, I'll prove to you that it's possible to rear a life of happiness, of good repute, on a—miserable foundation.

Drummle [*offering his hand*]: Do prove it!

Aubrey [*taking his hand*]: We have spoken too freely of—of Mrs. Jarman. I was excited—angry. Please forget it!

Drummle: My dear Aubrey, when we next meet I shall remember nothing but my respect for the lady who bears your name. [MORSE *enters, closing the door behind him carefully.*]

Aubrey: What is it?

Morse [*hesitatingly*]: May I speak to you, sir? [*In an undertone*] Mrs. Jarman, sir.

Aubrey [*softly to* MORSE]: Mrs. Jarman! Do you mean she is at the lodge in her carriage?

Morse: No, sir—here. [AUBREY *looks towards* DRUMMLE, *perplexed.*] There's a nice fire in your—in that room, sir. [*Glancing in the direction of the door leading to the bedroom*]

Aubrey [*between his teeth, angrily*]: Very well. [MORSE *retires.*]

Drummle [*looking at his watch*]: A quarter to eleven—horrible! [*Taking up his hat and coat*] Must get to bed—up late every night this week. [AUBREY *assists* DRUMMLE *with his coat.*] Thank you. Well, good night, Aubrey. I feel I've been deuced serious, quite out of keeping with myself; pray overlook it.

Aubrey [*kindly*]: Ah, Cayley!

Drummle [*putting on a neck-handkerchief*]: And remember that, after all, I'm merely a spectator in life; nothing more than a man at a play, in fact; only, like the old-fashioned playgoer, I love to see certain characters happy and comfortable at the finish. You understand?

Aubrey: I think I do.

Drummle: Then, for as long as you can, old friend, will you—keep a stall for me?

Aubrey: Yes, Cayley.

Drummle [*gaily*]: Ah, ha! Good night! [*Bustling to the door*] Don't bother! I'll let myself out! Good night! God bless yer! [*He goes out;* AUBREY *follows him.* MORSE *enters by the other door, carrying some unopened letters, which after a little consideration he places on the mantelpiece against the clock.* AUBREY *returns.*]

Aubrey: Yes?

Morse: You hadn't seen your letters that came by the nine o'clock post, sir; I've put 'em where they'll catch your eye by-and-by.

Aubrey: Thank you.

Morse [*hesitatingly*]: Gunter's cook and waiter have gone, sir. Would you prefer me to go to bed?

Aubrey [*frowning*]: Certainly not.

Morse: Very well, sir. [*He goes out.*]

Aubrey [*opening the upper door*]: Paula! Paula! [PAULA *enters and throws her arms round his neck. She is a young woman of about twenty-seven: beautiful, fresh, innocent-looking. She is in superb evening dress.*]

Paula: Dearest!

Aubrey: Why have you come here?

Paula: Angry?

Aubrey: Yes—no. But it's eleven o'clock.

Paula [*laughing*]: I know.

Aubrey: What on earth will Morse think?

Paula: Do you trouble yourself about what servants *think?*

Aubrey: Of course.

Paula: Goose! They're only machines made to wait upon people—and to give evidence in the Divorce Court. [*Looking round*] Oh, indeed! A snug little dinner!

Aubrey: Three men.

Paula [*suspiciously*]: Men?

Aubrey: Men.

Paula [*penitently*]: Ah! [*Sitting at the table*] I'm so hungry.

Aubrey: Let me get you some game pie, or some—

Paula: No, no, hungry for this. What beautiful fruit! I love fruit when it's expensive. [*He clears a space on the table, places a plate before her, and helps her to fruit.*] I haven't dined, Aubrey dear.

Aubrey: My poor girl! Why?

Paula: In the first place, I forgot to order any dinner, and my cook, who has always loathed me, thought he'd pay me out before he departed.

Aubrey: The beast!

Paula: That's precisely what I—

Aubrey: No, Paula!

Paula: What I told my maid to call him. What next will you think of me?

Aubrey: Forgive me. You must be starved.

Paula [*eating fruit*]: *I* didn't care. As there was nothing to eat, I sat in my best frock, with my toes on the dining-room fender, and dreamt, oh, such a lovely dinner party.

Aubrey: Dear lonely little woman!

Paula: It was perfect. I saw you at the end of a very long table, opposite me, and we exchanged sly glances now and again over the flowers. We were host and hostess, Aubrey, and had been married about five years.

Aubrey [*kissing her hand*]: Five years.

Paula: And on each side of us was the nicest set imaginable—you know, dearest, the sort of men and women that can't be imitated.

Aubrey: Yes, yes. Eat some more fruit.

Paula: But I haven't told you the best part of my dream.

Aubrey: Tell me.

Paula: Well, although we had been married only such a few years, I seemed to know by the look on their faces that none of our guests had ever heard anything—anything—anything peculiar about the fascinating hostess.

Aubrey: That's just how it will be, Paula. The world moves so quickly. That's just how it will be.

Paula [*with a little grimace*]: I wonder! [*Glancing at the fire*] Ugh! Do throw another log on.

Aubrey [*mending the fire*]: There. But you mustn't be here long.

Paula: Hospitable wretch! I've something important to tell you. No, stay where you are. [*Turning from him, her face averted*] Look here, that was my dream, Aubrey; but the fire went out while I was dozing, and I woke up with a regular fit of the shivers. And the result of it all was that I ran upstairs and scribbled you a letter.

Aubrey: Dear baby!

Paula: Remain where you are. [*Taking a letter from her pocket*] This is it. I've given you an account of myself, furnished you with a list of my adventures since I—you know. [*Weighing the letter in*

her hand] I wonder if it would go for a penny. Most of it you're acquainted with; *I've* told you a good deal, haven't I?

Aubrey: Oh, Paula!

Paula: What I haven't told you I dare say you've heard from others. But in case they've omitted anything—the dears—it's all here.

Aubrey: In Heaven's name, why must you talk like this tonight?

Paula: It may save discussion by-and-by, don't you think? [*Holding out the letter*] There you are.

Aubrey: No, dear, no.

Paula: Take it. [*He takes the letter.*] Read it through after I've gone, and then—read it again, and turn the matter over in your mind finally. And if, even at the very last moment, you feel you—oughtn't to go to church with me, send a messenger to Pont Street, any time before eleven tomorrow, telling me that you're afraid, and I—I'll take the blow.

Aubrey: Why, what—what do you think I am?

Paula: That's it. It's because I know you're such a dear good fellow that I want to save you the chance of ever feeling sorry you married me. I really love you so much, Aubrey, that to save you that, I'd rather you treated me as—as the others have done.

Aubrey [*turning from her with a cry*]: Oh!

Paula [*after a slight pause*]: I suppose I've shocked you. I can't help it if I have. [*She sits, with assumed languor and indifference. He turns to her, advances, and kneels by her.*]

Aubrey: My dearest, you don't understand me. I—I can't bear to hear you always talking about—what's done with. I tell you I'll never remember it; Paula, can't you dismiss it? Try. Darling, if we promise each other to forget, to forget, we're bound to be happy. After all, it's a mechanical matter; the moment a wretched thought enters your head, you quickly think of something bright—it depends on one's will. Shall I burn this, dear? [*Referring to the letter he holds in his hand*] Let me, let me!

Paula [*with a shrug of the shoulders*]: I don't suppose there's much that's new to you in it,—just as you like. [*He goes to the fire and burns the letter.*]

Aubrey: There's an end of it. [*Returning to her*] What's the matter?

Paula [*rising, coldly*]: Oh, nothing! I'll go and put my cloak on.

Aubrey [*detaining her*]: What *is* the matter?

Paula: Well, I think you might have said, "You're very generous,

Paula," or at least, "Thank you, dear," when I offered to set you free.

Aubrey [*catching her in his arms*]: Ah!

Paula: Ah! ah! Ha! ha! It's all very well, but you don't know what it cost me to make such an offer. I do so want to be married.

Aubrey: But you never imagined—?

Paula: Perhaps not. And yet I *did* think of what I'd do at the end of our acquaintance if you had preferred to behave like the rest. [*Taking a flower from her bodice*]

Aubrey: Hush!

Paula: Oh, I forgot!

Aubrey: What would you have done when we parted?

Paula: Why, killed myself.

Aubrey: Paula, dear!

Paula: It's true. [*Putting the flower in his buttonhole*] Do you know, I feel certain I should make away with myself if anything serious happened to me.

Aubrey: Anything serious! What, has nothing ever been serious to you, Paula?

Paula: Not lately; not since a long while ago. I made up my mind then to have done with taking things seriously. If I hadn't, I—However, we won't talk about that.

Aubrey: But now, now, life will be different to you, won't it—quite different? Eh, dear?

Paula: Oh, yes, now. Only, Aubrey, mind you keep me always happy.

Aubrey: I will try to.

Paula: I know I couldn't swallow a second big dose of misery. I know that if ever I felt wretched again—truly wretched—I should take a leaf out of Connie Tirlemont's book. You remember? They found her— [*With a look of horror*]

Aubrey: For God's sake, don't let your thoughts run on such things!

Paula [*laughing*]: Ha, ha, how scared you look! There, think of the time! Dearest, what will my coachman say? My cloak! [*She runs off, gaily, by the upper door.* AUBREY *looks after her for a moment, then he walks up to the fire and stands warming his feet at the bars. As he does so he raises his head and observes the letters upon the mantelpiece. He takes one down quickly.*]

Aubrey: Ah! Ellean! [*Opening the letter and reading*] "My dear father,—A great change has come over me. I believe my mother in

Heaven has spoken to me, and counseled me to turn to you in your loneliness. At any rate, your words have reached my heart, and I no longer feel fitted for this solemn life. I am ready to take my place by you. Dear father, will you receive me?—ELLEAN." [PAULA *re-enters, dressed in a handsome cloak. He stares at her as if he hardly realized her presence.*]

Paula: What are you staring at? Don't you admire my cloak?

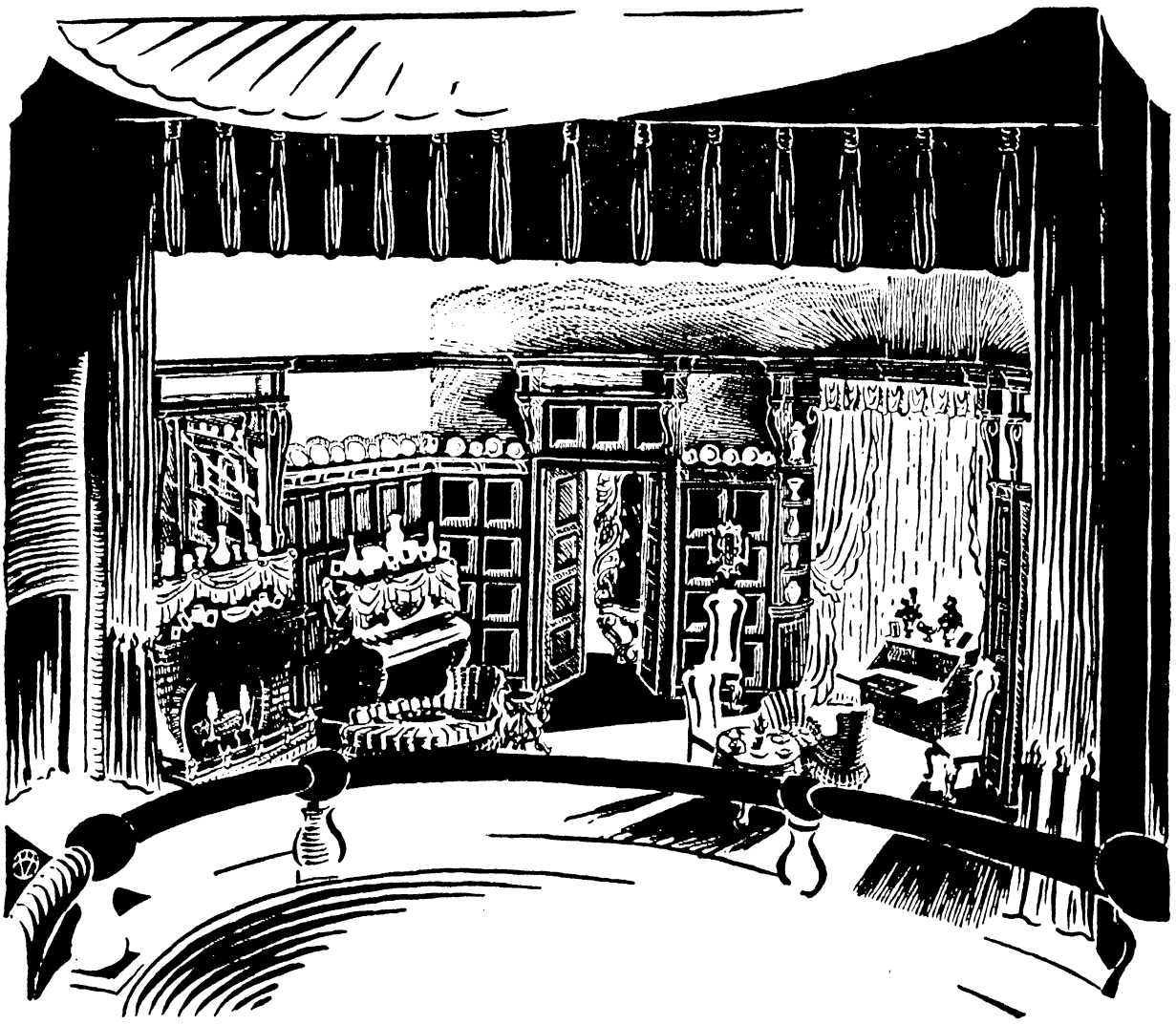
Aubrey: Yes.

Paula: Couldn't you wait till I'd gone before reading your letters?

Aubrey [*putting the letter away*]: I beg your pardon.

Paula: Take me downstairs to the carriage. [*Slipping her arm through his*] How I tease you! Tomorrow! I'm so happy! [*They go out.*]

THE SECOND ACT



A morning-room in AUBREY TANQUERAY'S *house, "Highercoombe," near Willowmere, Surrey—a bright and prettily furnished apartment of irregular shape, with double doors opening into a small hall at the back, another door on the left, and a large recessed window through which is obtained a view of extensive grounds. Everything about the room is charming and graceful. The fire is burning in the grate, and a small table is tastefully laid for breakfast. It is a morning in early spring, and the sun is streaming in through the window.*

AUBREY *and* PAULA *are seated at breakfast, and* AUBREY *is silently reading his letters. Two servants, a man and a woman, hand dishes and then retire. After a little while* AUBREY *puts his letters aside and looks across to the window.*

Aubrey: Sunshine! Spring!

Paula [*glancing at the clock*]: Exactly six minutes.

Aubrey: Six minutes?

Paula: Six minutes, Aubrey dear, since you made your last remark.

Aubrey: I beg your pardon: I was reading my letters. Have you seen Ellean this morning?

Paula [*coldly*]: Your last observation but one was about Ellean.

Aubrey: Dearest, what shall I talk about?

Paula: Ellean breakfasted two hours ago, Morgan tells me, and then went out walking with her dog.

Aubrey: She wraps up warmly, I hope; this sunshine is deceptive.

Paula: I ran about the lawn last night, after dinner, in satin shoes. Were you anxious about me?

Aubrey: Certainly.

Paula [*melting*]: Really?

Aubrey: You make me wretchedly anxious; you delight in doing incautious things. You are incurable.

Paula: Ah, what a beast I am! [*Going to him and kissing him, then glancing at the letters by his side*] A letter from Cayley?

Aubrey: He is staying very near here, with Mrs. ——. Very near here.

Paula: With the lady whose chimneys we have the honor of contemplating from our windows?

Aubrey: With Mrs. Cortelyon—yes.

Paula: Mrs. Cortelyon! The woman who might have set the example of calling on me when we first threw out roots in this deadly-lively soil! Deuce take Mrs. Cortelyon!

Aubrey: Hush! my dear girl!

Paula [*returning to her seat*]: Oh, I know she's an old acquaintance of yours—and of the first Mrs. Tanqueray. And she joins the rest of 'em in slapping the second Mrs. Tanqueray in the face. However, I have my revenge—she's six-and-forty, and I wish nothing worse to happen to any woman.

Aubrey: Well, she's going to town, Cayley says here, and his visit's at an end. He's coming over this morning to call on you. Shall we ask him to transfer himself to us? Do say yes.

Paula: Yes.

Aubrey [*gladly*]: Ah, ha! old Cayley.

Paula [*coldly*]: He'll amuse *you*.

Aubrey: And you too.

Paula: Because you find a companion, shall I be boisterously hilarious?

Aubrey: Come, come! He talks London, and you know you like that.

Paula: London! London or Heaven! which is farther from me!

Aubrey: Paula!

Paula: Oh! Oh, I am so bored, Aubrey!

Aubrey [*gathering up his letters and going to her, leaning over her shoulder*]: Baby, what can I do for you?

Paula: I suppose, nothing. You have done all you can for me.

Aubrey: What do you mean?

Paula: You have married me. [*He walks away from her thoughtfully, to the writing table. As he places his letters on the table he sees an addressed letter, stamped for the post, lying on the blotting-book; he picks it up.*]

Aubrey [*in an altered tone*]: You've been writing this morning before breakfast?

Paula [*looking at him quickly, then away again*]: Er—that letter.

Aubrey [*with the letter in his hand*]: To Lady Orreyed. Why?

Paula: Why not? Mabel's an old friend of mine.

Aubrey: Are you—corresponding?

Paula: I heard from her yesterday. They've just returned from the Riviera. She seems happy.

Aubrey [*sarcastically*]: That's good news.

Paula: Why are you always so cutting about Mabel? She's a kind-hearted girl. Everything's altered; she even thinks of letting her hair go back to brown. She's Lady Orreyed. She's married to George. What's the matter with her?

Aubrey [*turning away*]: Oh!

Paula: You drive me mad sometimes with the tone you take about things! Great goodness, if you come to that, George Orreyed's wife isn't a bit worse than yours! [*He faces her suddenly.*] I suppose I needn't have made that observation.

Aubrey: No, there was scarcely a necessity. [*He throws the letter on to the table, and takes up the newspaper.*]

Paula: I am very sorry.

Aubrey: All right, dear.

Paula [*trifling with the letter*]: I—I'd better tell you what I've written. I meant to do so, of course. I—I've asked the Orreyeds to come and stay with us. [*He looks at her, and lets the paper fall to*

the ground in a helpless way.] George was a great friend of Cayley's; I'm sure *he* would be delighted to meet them here.

Aubrey [*laughing mirthlessly*]: Ha, ha, ha! They say Orreyed has taken to tippling at dinner. Heavens above!

Paula: Oh! I've no patience with you! You'll kill me with this life! [*She selects some flowers from a vase on the table, cuts and arranges them, and fastens them in her bodice.*] What is my existence, Sunday to Saturday? In the morning, a drive down to the village, with the groom, to give my orders to the tradespeople. At lunch, you and Ellean. In the afternoon, a novel, the newspapers: if fine, another drive—*if* fine! Tea—you and Ellean. Then two hours of dusk; then dinner—you and Ellean. Then a game of Bésique, you and I, while Ellean reads a religious book in a dull corner. Then a yawn from me, another from you, a sigh from Ellean; three figures suddenly rise—"Good night, good night, good night!" [*Imitating a kiss*] "God bless you!" Ah!

Aubrey: Yes, yes, Paula—yes, dearest—that's what it is *now.* But, by-and-by, if people begin to come round us—

Paula: Hah! That's where we've made the mistake, my friend Aubrey! [*Pointing to the window*] Do you believe these people will *ever* come round us? Your former crony, Mrs. Cortelyon? Or the grim old vicar, or that wife of his whose huge nose is positively indecent? Or the Ullathornes, or the Gollans, or Lady William Petres? I know better! And when the young ones gradually take the place of the old, there will still remain the sacred tradition that the dreadful person who lives at the top of the hill is never, under any circumstances, to be called upon! And so we shall go on here, year in and year out, until the sap is run out of our lives, and we're stale and dry and withered from sheer, solitary respectability. Upon my word, I wonder we didn't see that we should have been far happier if we'd gone in for the devil-may-care, *café*-living sort of life in town! After all, *I* have a set, and you might have joined it. It's true, I did want, dearly, dearly, to be a married woman, but where's the pride in being a married woman among married women who are—married! If—[*seeing that* AUBREY'S *head has sunk into his hands*] Aubrey! My dear boy! You're not—crying? [*He looks up, with a flushed face.* ELLEAN *enters, dressed very simply for walking. She is a low-voiced, grave girl of about nineteen, with a face somewhat resembling a Madonna. Towards* PAULA *her manner is cold and distant.*]

Aubrey [*in an undertone*]: Ellean!

Ellean: Good morning, papa. Good morning, Paula. [PAULA *puts her arms round* ELLEAN *and kisses her.* ELLEAN *makes little response.*]

Paula: Good morning. [*Brightly*] We've been breakfasting this side of the house, to get the sun. [*She sits at the piano and rattles at a gay melody. Seeing that* PAULA'S *back is turned to them,* ELLEAN *goes to* AUBREY *and kisses him; he returns the kiss almost furtively. As they separate, the servants re-enter, and proceed to carry out the breakfast table.*]

Aubrey [*to* ELLEAN]: I guess where you've been: there's some gorse clinging to your frock.

Ellean [*removing a sprig of gorse from her skirt*]: Rover and I walked nearly as far as Black Moor. The poor fellow has a thorn in his pad; I am going upstairs for my tweezers.

Aubrey: Ellean! [*She returns to him.*] Paula is a little depressed —out of sorts. She complains that she has no companion.

Ellean: I am with Paula nearly all the day, papa.

Aubrey: Ah, but you're such a little mouse. Paula likes cheerful people about her.

Ellean: I'm afraid I am naturally rather silent; and it's so difficult to seem to be what one is not.

Aubrey: I don't wish that, Ellean.

Ellean: I will offer to go down to the village with Paula this morning—shall I?

Aubrey [*touching her hand gently*]: Thank you—do.

Ellean: When I've looked after Rover, I'll come back to her. [*She goes out;* PAULA *ceases playing, and turns on the music-stool, looking at* AUBREY.]

Paula: Well, have you and Ellean had your little confidence?

Aubrey: Confidence?

Paula: Do you think I couldn't feel it, like a pain between my shoulders?

Aubrey: Ellean is coming back in a few minutes to be with you. [*Bending over her*] Paula, Paula dear, is this how you keep your promise?

Paula: Oh! [*Rising impatiently, and crossing swiftly to the settee, where she sits, moving restlessly*] I *can't* keep my promise; I *am* jealous; it won't be smothered. I see you looking at her, watching her; your voice drops when you speak to her. I know how fond you are of that girl, Aubrey.

Aubrey: What would you have? I've no other home for her. She is my daughter.

Paula: She is your saint. Saint Ellean!

Aubrey: You have often told me how good and sweet you think her.

Paula: Good!—yes! Do you imagine *that* makes me less jealous? [*Going to him and clinging to his arm*] Aubrey, there are two sorts of affection—the love for a woman you respect, and the love for the woman you—love. She gets the first from you: I never can.

Aubrey: Hush, hush! you don't realize what you say.

Paula: If Ellean cared for me only a little, it would be different. I shouldn't be jealous then. Why doesn't she care for me?

Aubrey: She—she—she will, in time.

Paula: You can't say that without stuttering.

Aubrey: Her disposition seems a little unresponsive; she resembles her mother in many ways; I can see it every day.

Paula: She's marble. It's a shame. There's not the slightest excuse; for all she knows, I'm as much a saint as she—only married. Dearest, help me to win her over!

Aubrey: Help you?

Paula: You can. Teach her that it is her duty to love me; she hangs on to every word you speak. I'm sure, Aubrey, that the love of a nice woman who believed me to be like herself would do me a world of good. You'd get the benefit of it as well as I. It would soothe me; it would make me less horribly restless; it would take this—this—mischievous feeling from me. [*Coaxingly*] Aubrey!

Aubrey: Have patience; everything will come right.

Paula: Yes, if you help me.

Aubrey: In the meantime you will tear up your letter to Lady Orreyed, won't you?

Paula [*kissing his hand*]: Of course I will—anything!

Aubrey: Ah, thank you, dearest! [*Laughing*] Why, good gracious!—ha, ha!—just imagine "Saint Ellean" and that woman side by side!

Paula [*going back with a cry*]: Ah!

Aubrey: What?

Paula [*passionately*]: It's Ellean you're considering, not me? It's all Ellean with you! Ellean! Ellean! [ELLEAN *re-enters.*]

Ellean: Did you call me, Paula? [*Clenching his hands,* AUBREY *turns away and goes out.*] Is papa angry?

Paula: I drive him distracted sometimes. There, I confess it!

Ellean: Do you? Oh, why do you?

Paula: Because I—because I'm jealous.

Ellean: Jealous?

Paula: Yes—of you. [ELLEAN *is silent.*] Well, what do you think of that?

Ellean: I knew it; I've seen it. It hurts me dreadfully. What do you wish me to do? Go away?

Paula: Leave us! [*Beckoning her with a motion of the head*] Look here! [ELLEAN *goes to* PAULA *slowly and unresponsively.*] You could cure me of my jealousy very easily. Why don't you—like me?

Ellean: What do you mean by—like you? I don't understand.

Paula: Love me.

Ellean: Love is not a feeling that is under one's control. I shall alter as time goes on, perhaps. I didn't begin to love my father deeply till a few months ago, and then I obeyed my mother.

Paula: Ah, yes, you dream things, don't you—see them in your sleep? You fancy your mother speaks to you?

Ellean: When you have lost your mother it is a comfort to believe that she is dead only to this life, that she still watches over her child. I do believe that of my mother.

Paula: Well, and so you haven't been bidden to love *me?*

Ellean [*after a pause, almost inaudibly*]: No.

Paula: Dreams are only a hash-up of one's day-thoughts, I suppose you know. Think intently of anything, and it's bound to come back to you at night. I don't cultivate dreams myself.

Ellean: Ah, I knew you would only sneer!

Paula: I'm not sneering; I'm speaking the truth. I say that if you cared for me in the daytime I should soon make friends with those nightmares of yours. Ellean, why don't you try to look on me as your second mother? Of course there are not many years between us, but I'm ever so much older than you—in experience. I shall have no children of my own, I know that; it would be a real comfort to me if you would make me feel we belonged to each other. Won't you? Perhaps you think I'm odd—not nice. Well, the fact is I've two sides to my nature, and I've let the one almost smother the other. A few years ago I went through some trouble, and since then I haven't shed a tear. I believe if you put your arms round me just once I should run upstairs and have a good cry. There, I've talked to you as I've never talked to a woman in my life. Ellean, you seem to fear me. Don't! Kiss me! [*With a cry,*

almost of despair, ELLEAN *turns from* PAULA *and sinks on to the settee, covering her face with her hands.*]

Paula [*indignantly*]: Oh! Why is it! How dare you treat me like this? What do you mean by it? What do you mean? [*A* SERVANT *enters.*]

Servant: Mr. Drummle, ma'am. [CAYLEY DRUMMLE, *in riding-dress, enters briskly. The* SERVANT *retires.*]

Paula [*recovering herself*]: Well, Cayley!

Drummle [*shaking hands with her cordially*]: How are you? [*Shaking hands with* ELLEAN, *who rises*] I saw you in the distance an hour ago, in the gorse near Stapleton's.

Ellean: I didn't see you, Mr. Drummle.

Drummle: My dear Ellean, it is my experience that no charming young lady of nineteen ever does see a man of forty-five. [*Laughing*] Ha, Ha!

Ellean [*going to the door*]: Paula, papa wishes me to drive down to the village with you this morning. Do you care to take me?

Paula [*coldly*]: Oh, by all means. Pray tell Watts to balance the cart for three. [ELLEAN *goes out.*]

Drummle: How's Aubrey?

Paula: Very well—when Ellean's about the house.

Drummle: And you? I needn't ask.

Paula [*walking away to the window*]: Oh, a dog's life, my dear Cayley, mine.

Drummle: Eh?

Paula: Doesn't that define a happy marriage? I'm sleek, well-kept, well-fed, never without a bone to gnaw and fresh straw to lie upon. [*Gazing out of the window*] Oh, dear me!

Drummle: H'm! Well, I heartily congratulate you on your kennel. The view from the terrace here is superb.

Paula: Yes; I can see London.

Drummle: London! Not quite so far, surely?

Paula: I can. Also the Mediterranean, on a fine day. I wonder what Algiers looks like this morning from the sea! [*Impulsively*] Oh, Cayley, do you remember those jolly times on board Peter Jarman's yacht when we lay off—? [*Stopping suddenly, seeing* DRUMMLE *staring at her*] Good gracious! What are we talking about! [AUBREY *enters.*]

Aubrey [*to* DRUMMLE]: Dear old chap! Has Paula asked you?

Paula: Not yet.

Aubrey: We want you to come to us, now that you're leaving

Mrs. Cortelyon—at once, today. Stay a month, as long as you please —eh, Paula?

Paula: As long as you can possibly endure it—do, Cayley.

Drummle [*looking at* AUBREY]: Delighted. [*To* PAULA] Charming of you to have me.

Paula: My dear man, you're a blessing. I must telegraph to London for more fish! A strange appetite to cater for! Something to do, to do, to do! [*She goes out in a mood of almost childish delight.*]

Drummle [*eyeing* AUBREY]: Well?

Aubrey [*with a wearied anxious look*]: Well, Cayley?

Drummle: How are you getting on?

Aubrey: My position doesn't grow less difficult. I told you, when I met you last week, of this feverish, jealous attachment of Paula's for Ellean?

Drummle: Yes. I hardly know why, but I came to the conclusion that you don't consider it an altogether fortunate attachment.

Aubrey: Ellean doesn't respond to it.

Drummle: These are early days. Ellean will warm towards your wife by-and-by.

Aubrey: Ah, but there's the question, Cayley!

Drummle: What question?

Aubrey: The question which positively distracts me. Ellean is so different from—most women; I don't believe a purer creature exists out of heaven. And I—I ask myself, am I doing right in exposing her to the influence of poor Paula's light, careless nature?

Drummle: My dear Aubrey!

Aubrey: That shocks you! So it does me. I assure you I long to urge my girl to break down the reserve which keeps her apart from Paula, but somehow I can't do it—well, I don't do it. How can I make you understand? But when you come to us you'll understand quickly enough. Cayley, there's hardly a subject you can broach on which poor Paula hasn't some strange, out-of-the-way thought to give utterance to; some curious, warped notion. They are not mere worldly thoughts—unless, good God! they belong to the little hellish world which our blackguardism has created: no, her ideas have too little calculation in them to be called worldly. But it makes it the more dreadful that such thoughts should be ready, spontaneous; that expressing them has become a perfectly natural process; that her words, acts even, have almost lost their proper significance for her, and seem beyond her control. Ah, and the pain

of listening to it all from the woman one loves, the woman one hoped to make happy and contented, who is really and truly a good woman, as it were, maimed! Well, this is my burden, and I shouldn't speak to you of it but for my anxiety about Ellean. Ellean! What is to be her future? It is in my hands; what am I to do? Cayley, when I remember how Ellean comes to me, from another world I always think,—when I realize the charge that's laid on me, I find myself wishing, in a sort of terror, that my child were safe under the ground!

Drummle: My dear Aubrey, aren't you making a mistake?

Aubrey: Very likely. What is it?

Drummle: A mistake, not in regarding your Ellean as an angel, but in believing that, under any circumstances, it would be possible for her to go through life without getting her white robe—shall we say, a little dusty at the hem? Don't take me for a cynic. I am sure there are many women upon earth who are almost divinely innocent; but being on earth, they must send their robes to the laundry occasionally. Ah, and it's right that they should have to do so, for what can they learn from the checking of their little washing-bills but lessons of charity? Now I see but two courses open to you for the disposal of your angel.

Aubrey: Yes?

Drummle: You must either restrict her to a paradise which is, like every earthly paradise, necessarily somewhat imperfect, or treat her as an ordinary flesh-and-blood young woman, and give her the advantages of that society to which she properly belongs.

Aubrey: Advantages?

Drummle: My dear Aubrey, of all forms of innocence mere ignorance is the least admirable. Take my advice, let her walk and talk and suffer and be healed with the great crowd. Do it, and hope that she'll some day meet a good, honest fellow who'll make her life complete, happy, secure. Now you see what I'm driving at.

Aubrey: A sanguine program, my dear Cayley! Oh, I'm not pooh-poohing it. Putting sentiment aside, of course I know that a fortunate marriage for Ellean would be the best—perhaps the only—solution of my difficulty. But you forget the danger of the course you suggest.

Drummle: Danger?

Aubrey: If Ellean goes among men and women, how can she escape from learning, sooner or later, the history of—poor Paula's—old life?

Drummle: H'm! You remember the episode of the Jeweler's Son in the Arabian Nights? Of course you don't. Well, if your daughter lives, she *can't* escape—what you're afraid of. [AUBREY *gives a half-stifled exclamation of pain.*] And when she does hear the story, surely it would be better that she should have some knowledge of the world to help her to understand it.

Aubrey: To understand!

Drummle: To understand, to—philosophize.

Aubrey: To philosophize?

Drummle: Philosophy is toleration, and it is only one step from toleration to forgiveness.

Aubrey: You're right, Cayley; I believe you always are. Yes, yes. But, even if I had the courage to attempt to solve the problem of Ellean's future in this way, I—I'm helpless.

Drummle: How?

Aubrey: What means have I now of placing my daughter in the world I've left?

Drummle: Oh, some friend—some woman friend.

Aubrey: I have none; they're gone.

Drummle: You're wrong there; I know one—

Aubrey [*listening*]: That's Paula's cart. Let's discuss this again.

Drummle [*going up to the window and looking out*]: It isn't the dog-cart. [*Turning to* AUBREY] I hope you'll forgive me, old chap.

Aubrey: What for?

Drummle: Whose wheels do you think have been cutting ruts in your immaculate drive? [*A* SERVANT *enters.*]

Servant [*to* AUBREY]: Mrs. Cortelyon, sir.

Aubrey: Mrs. Cortelyon! [*After a short pause*] Very well. [*The* SERVANT *withdraws.*] What on earth is the meaning of this?

Drummle: Ahem! While I've been our old friend's guest, Aubrey, we have very naturally talked a good deal about you and yours.

Aubrey: Indeed, have you?

Drummle: Yes; and Alice Cortelyon has arrived at the conclusion that it would have been far kinder had she called on Mrs. Tanqueray long ago. She's going abroad for Easter before settling down in London for the season, and I believe she has come over this morning to ask for Ellean's companionship.

Aubrey: Oh, I see! [*Frowning*] Quite a friendly little conspiracy, my dear Cayley!

Drummle: Conspiracy! Not at all, I assure you. [*Laughing*] Ha,

ha! [ELLEAN *enters from the hall with* MRS. CORTELYON, *a handsome, good-humored, spirited woman of about forty-five.*]

Ellean: Papa—

Mrs. Cortelyon [*to* AUBREY, *shaking hands with him heartily*]: Well, Aubrey, how are you? I've just been telling this great girl of yours that I knew her when she was a sad-faced, pale baby. How is Mrs. Tanqueray? I have been a bad neighbor, and I'm here to beg forgiveness. Is she indoors?

Aubrey: She's upstairs putting on a hat, I believe.

Mrs. Cortelyon [*sitting comfortably*]: Ah! [*She looks round:* DRUMMLE *and* ELLEAN *are talking together in the hall.*] We used to be very frank with each other, Aubrey. I suppose the old footing is no longer possible, eh?

Aubrey: If so, I'm not entirely to blame, Mrs. Cortelyon.

Mrs. Cortelyon: Mrs. Cortelyon? H'm! No, I admit it. But you must make some little allowance for me, *Mr. Tanqueray.* Your first wife and I, as girls, were like two cherries on one stalk, and then I was the confidential friend of your married life. That post, perhaps, wasn't altogether a sinecure. And now—well, when a woman gets to my age I suppose she's a stupid, prejudiced, conventional creature. However, I've got over it and—[*giving him her hand*]—I hope you'll be enormously happy and let me be a friend once more.

Aubrey: Thank you, Alice.

Mrs. Cortelyon: That's right. I feel more cheerful than I've done for weeks. But I suppose it would serve me right if the second Mrs. Tanqueray showed me the door. Do you think she will?

Aubrey [*listening*]: Here is my wife. [MRS. CORTELYON *rises, and* PAULA *enters, dressed for driving; she stops abruptly on seeing* MRS. CORTELYON.] Paula, dear, Mrs. Cortelyon has called to see you. [PAULA *starts, looks at* MRS. CORTELYON *irresolutely, then after a slight pause barely touches* MRS. CORTELYON'S *extended hand.*]

Paula [*whose manner now alternates between deliberate insolence and assumed sweetness*]: Mrs. ——? What name, Aubrey?

Aubrey: Mrs. Cortelyon.

Paula: Cortelyon? Oh, yes. Cortelyon.

Mrs. Cortelyon [*carefully guarding herself throughout against any expression of resentment*]: Aubrey ought to have told you that Alice Cortelyon and he are very old friends.

Paula: Oh, very likely he has mentioned the circumstance. I have quite a wretched memory.

Mrs. Cortelyon: You know we are neighbors, Mrs. Tanqueray.

Paula: Neighbors? Are we really? Won't you sit down? [*They both sit.*] Neighbors! That's most interesting!

Mrs. Cortelyon: Very near neighbors. You can see my roof from your windows.

Paula: I fancy I *have* observed a roof. But you have been away from home; you have only just returned.

Mrs. Cortelyon: I? What makes you think that?

Paula: Why, because it is two months since we came to Hillercoombe, and I don't remember your having called.

Mrs. Cortelyon: Your memory is now terribly accurate. No, I've not been away from home, and it is to explain my neglect that I am here, rather unceremoniously, this morning.

Paula: Oh, to explain—quite so. [*With mock solicitude*] Ah, you've been very ill; I ought to have seen that before.

Mrs. Cortelyon: Ill!

Paula: You look dreadfully pulled down. We poor women show illness so plainly in our faces, don't we?

Aubrey [*anxiously*]: Paula dear, Mrs. Cortelyon is the picture of health.

Mrs. Cortelyon [*with some asperity*]: I have never *felt* better in my life.

Paula [*looking round innocently*]: Have I said anything awkward? Aubrey, tell Mrs. Cortelyon how stupid and thoughtless I always am!

Mrs. Cortelyon [*to* DRUMMLE, *who is now standing close to her*]: Really, Cayley—! [*He soothes her with a nod and smile and a motion of his finger to his lip.*] Mrs. Tanqueray, I am afraid my explanation will not be quite so satisfactory as either of those you have just helped me to. You may have heard—but, if you have heard, you have doubtless forgotten—that twenty years ago, when your husband first lived here, I was a constant visitor at Hillercoombe.

Paula: Twenty years ago—fancy! I was a naughty little child then.

Mrs. Cortelyon: Possibly. Well, at that time, and till the end of her life, my affections were centered upon the lady of this house.

Paula: Were they? That was very sweet of you. [ELLEAN *approaches* MRS. CORTELYON, *listening intently to her.*]

Mrs. Cortelyon: I will say no more on that score, but I must add this: when, two months ago, you came here, I realized, perhaps for

the first time, that I was a middle-aged woman, and that it had become impossible for me to accept without some effort a breaking-in upon many tender associations. There, Mrs. Tanqueray, that is my confession. Will you try to understand it and pardon me?

Paula [*watching* ELLEAN,—*sneeringly*]: Ellean dear, you appear to be very interested in Mrs. Cortelyon's reminiscences; I don't think I can do better than make you my mouthpiece—there is such sympathy between us. What do you say—can we bring ourselves to forgive Mrs. Cortelyon for neglecting us for two weary months?

Mrs. Cortelyon [*to* ELLEAN, *pleasantly*]: Well, Ellean? [*With a little cry of tenderness* ELLEAN *impulsively sits beside* MRS. CORTELYON *and takes her hand.*] My dear child!

Paula [*in an undertone to* AUBREY]: Ellean isn't so very slow in taking to Mrs. Cortelyon!

Mrs. Cortelyon [*to* PAULA *and* AUBREY]: Come, this encourages me to broach my scheme. Mrs. Tanqueray, it strikes me that you two good people are just now excellent company for each other, while Ellean would perhaps be glad of a little peep into the world you are anxious to avoid. Now, I'm going to Paris tomorrow for a week or two before settling down in Chester Square, so—don't gasp, both of you!—if this girl is willing, and you have made no other arrangements for her, will you let her come with me to Paris, and afterwards remain with me in town during the season? [ELLEAN *utters an exclamation of surprise.* PAULA *is silent.*] What do you say?

Aubrey: Paula—Paula dear. [*Hesitatingly*] My dear Mrs. Cortelyon, this is wonderfully kind of you; I am really at a loss to—eh, Cayley?

Drummle [*watching* PAULA *apprehensively*]: Kind! Now I must say I don't think so! I begged Alice to take *me* to Paris, and she declined. I am thrown over for Ellean! Ha! ha!

Mrs. Cortelyon [*laughing*]: What nonsense you talk, Cayley! [*The laughter dies out.* PAULA *remains quite still.*]

Aubrey: Paula dear.

Paula [*slowly collecting herself*]: One moment. I—I don't quite— [*To* MRS. CORTELYON] You propose that Ellean leaves Highercoombe almost at once, and remains with you some months?

Mrs. Cortelyon: It would be a mercy to me. You can afford to be generous to a desolate old widow. Come, Mrs. Tanqueray, won't you spare her?

Paula: Won't *I* spare her? [*Suspiciously*] Have you mentioned your plan to Aubrey—before I came in?

Mrs. Cortelyon: No; I had no opportunity.

Paula: Nor to Ellean?

Mrs. Cortelyon: Oh, no.

Paula [*looking about her in suppressed excitement*]: This hasn't been discussed at all, behind my back?

Mrs. Cortelyon: My dear Mrs. Tanqueray!

Paula: Ellean, let us hear your voice in the matter!

Ellean: I should like to go with Mrs. Cortelyon—

Paula: Ah!

Ellean: That is, if—if—

Paula: If—what?

Ellean [*looking towards* AUBREY, *appealingly*]: Papa!

Paula [*in a hard voice*]: Oh, of course—I forgot. [*To* AUBREY] My dear Aubrey, it rests with you, naturally, whether I am—to lose—Ellean.

Aubrey: Lose Ellean! [*Advancing to* PAULA] There is no question of losing Ellean. You would see Ellean in town constantly when she returned from Paris; isn't that so, Mrs. Cortelyon?

Mrs. Cortelyon: Certainly.

Paula [*laughing softly*]: Oh, I didn't know I should be allowed that privilege.

Mrs. Cortelyon: Privilege, my dear Mrs. Tanqueray!

Paula: Ha, ha! that makes all the difference, doesn't it?

Aubrey [*with assumed gaiety*]: All the difference? I should think so! [*To* ELLEAN, *laying his hand upon her head tenderly*] And you are quite certain you wish to see what the world is like on the other side of Black Moor!

Ellean: If you are willing, papa, I am quite certain.

Aubrey [*looking at* PAULA *irresolutely, then speaking with an effort*]: Then I—I am willing.

Paula [*rising and striking the table lightly with her clenched hand*]: That decides it! [*There is a general movement. Excitedly to* MRS. CORTELYON, *who advances towards her*] When do you want her?

Mrs. Cortelyon: We go to town this afternoon at five o'clock, and sleep tonight at Bayliss's. There is barely time for her to make her preparations.

Paula: I will undertake that she is ready.

Mrs. Cortelyon: I've a great deal to scramble through at home too, as you may guess. Good-by!

Paula [*turning away*]: Mrs. Cortelyon is going. [PAULA *stands looking out of the window, with her back to those in the room.*]

Mrs. Cortelyon [*to* DRUMMLE]: Cayley—

Drummle [*to her*]: Eh?

Mrs. Cortelyon: I've gone through it, for the sake of Aubrey and his child, but I—I feel a hundred. Is that a mad-woman?

Drummle: Of course; all jealous women are mad. [*He goes out with* AUBREY.]

Mrs. Cortelyon [*hesitatingly, to* PAULA]: Good-by, Mrs. Tanqueray. [PAULA *inclines her head with the slightest possible movement, then resumes her former position.* ELLEAN *comes from the hall and takes* MRS. CORTELYON *out of the room. After a brief silence,* PAULA *turns with a fierce cry, and hurriedly takes off her coat and hat, and tosses them upon the settee.*]

Paula: Who's that? Oh! Oh! Oh! [*She drops into the chair as* AUBREY *returns; he stands looking at her.*]

Aubrey: I—you have altered your mind about going out?

Paula: Yes. Please to ring the bell.

Aubrey [*touching the bell*]: You are angry about Mrs. Cortelyon and Ellean. Let me try to explain my reasons—

Paula: Be careful what you say to me just now! I have never felt like this—except once—in my life. Be careful what you say to me! [*A* SERVANT *enters.*]

Paula [*rising*]: Is Watts at the door with the cart?

Servant: Yes, ma'am.

Paula: Tell him to drive down to the post-office directly with this. [*Picking up the letter which has been lying upon the table*]

Aubrey: With that?

Paula: Yes. My letter to Lady Orreyed. [*Giving the letter to the* SERVANT, *who goes out*]

Aubrey: Surely you don't wish me to countermand any order of yours to a servant? Call the man back—take the letter from him!

Paula: I have not the slightest intention of doing so.

Aubrey: I must, then. [*Going to the door.* PAULA *snatches up her hat and coat and follows him.*] What are you going to do?

Paula: If you stop that letter, I walk out of the house. [*He hesitates, then leaves the door.*]

Aubrey: I am right in believing that to be the letter inviting George Orreyed and his wife to stay here, am I not?

Paula: Oh, yes—quite right.

Aubrey: Let it go; I'll write to him by-and-by.

Paula [*facing him*]: You dare!

Aubrey: Hush, Paula!

Paula: Insult me again and, upon my word, I'll go straight out of the house!

Aubrey: Insult you?

Paula: Insult me! What else is it? My God! what else is it? What do you mean by taking Ellean from me?

Aubrey: Listen—!

Paula: Listen to *me!* And how do you take her? You pack her off in the care of a woman who has deliberately held aloof from me, who's thrown mud at me! Yet this Cortelyon creature has only to put foot here once to be entrusted with the charge of the girl you know I dearly want to keep near me!

Aubrey: Paula dear! hear me—!

Paula: Ah! of course, of course! I can't be so useful to your daughter as such people as this; and so I'm to be given the go-by for any town friend of yours who turns up and chooses to patronize us! Hah! Very well, at any rate, as you take Ellean from me you justify my looking for companions where I can most readily find 'em.

Aubrey: You wish me to fully appreciate your reason for sending that letter to Lady Orreyed?

Paula: Precisely—I do.

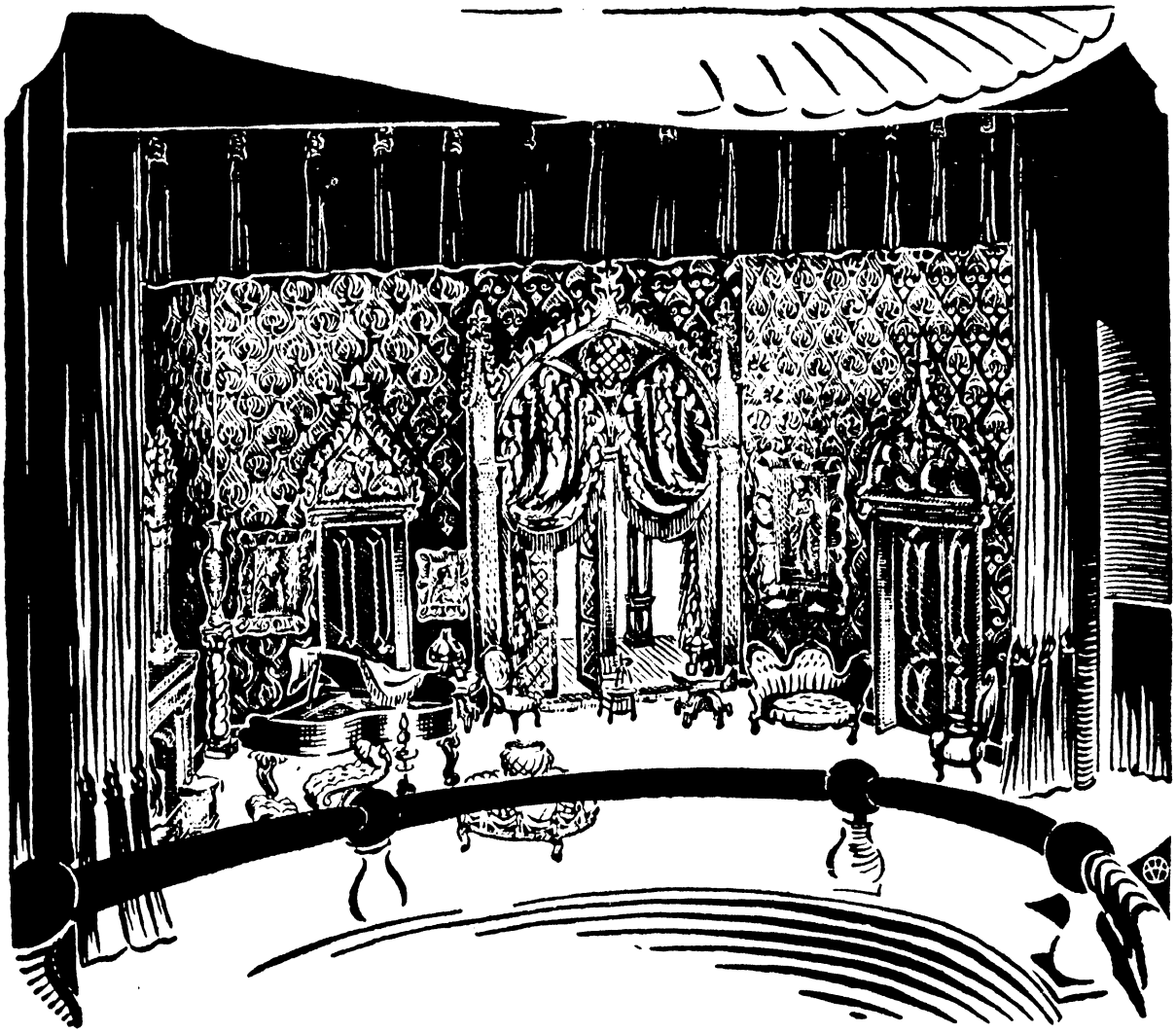
Aubrey: And could you, after all, go back to associates of that order? It's not possible!

Paula [*mockingly*]: What, not after the refining influence of these intensely respectable surroundings? [*Going to the door*] We'll see!

Aubrey: Paula!

Paula [*violently*]: We'll see! [*She goes out. He stands still looking after her.*]

THE THIRD ACT



The drawing room at "Highercoombe." Facing the spectator are two large French windows, sheltered by a veranda, leading into the garden; on the right is a door opening into a small hall. The fireplace, with a large mirror above it, is on the left-hand side of the room, and higher up in the same wall are double doors recessed. The room is richly furnished, and everything betokens taste and luxury. The windows are open, and there is moonlight in the garden.

LADY ORREYED, *a pretty, affected doll of a woman, with a mincing voice and flaxen hair, is sitting on the ottoman, her head resting against the drum, and her eyes closed.* PAULA, *looking pale, worn, and thoroughly unhappy, is sitting at a table. Both are in sumptuous dinner-gowns.*

Lady Orreyed [*opening her eyes*]: Well, I never! I dropped off! [*Feeling her hair*] Just fancy! Where are the men?

Paula [*icily*]: Outside, smoking. [*A* SERVANT *enters with coffee, which he hands to* LADY ORREYED. SIR GEORGE ORREYED *comes in by the window. He is a man of about thirty-five, with a low forehead, a receding chin, a vacuous expression, and an ominous redness about the nose.*]

Lady Orreyed [*taking coffee*]: Here's Dodo.

Sir George: I say, the flies under the veranda make you swear. [*The* SERVANT *hands coffee to* PAULA, *who declines it, then to* SIR GEORGE, *who takes a cup.*] Hi! wait a bit! [*He looks at the tray searchingly, then puts back his cup.*] Never mind. [*Quietly to* LADY ORREYED] I say, they're dooced sparin' with their liqueur, ain't they? [*The* SERVANT *goes out at window.*]

Paula [*to* SIR GEORGE]: Won't you take coffee, George?

Sir George: No, thanks. It's gettin' near time for a whiskey and potass. [*Approaching* PAULA, *regarding* LADY ORREYED *admiringly*] I say, Birdie looks rippin' tonight, don't she?

Paula: Your wife?

Sir George: Yaas—Birdie.

Paula: Rippin'?

Sir George: Yaas.

Paula: Quite—quite rippin'. [*He moves round to the settee.* PAULA *watches him with distaste, then rises and walks away.* SIR GEORGE *falls asleep on the settee.*]

Lady Orreyed: Paula love, I fancied you and Aubrey were a little more friendly at dinner. You haven't made it up, have you?

Paula: We? Oh, no. We speak before others, that's all.

Lady Orreyed: And how long do you intend to carry on this game, dear?

Paula [*turning away impatiently*]: I really can't tell you.

Lady Orreyed: Sit down, old girl; don't be so fidgety. [PAULA *sits on the upper seat of the ottoman, with her back to* LADY ORREYED.] Of course, it's my duty, as an old friend, to give you a good talking-to—[PAULA *glares at her suddenly and fiercely*]—but really I've found one gets so many smacks in the face through interfering in matrimonial squabbles that I've determined to drop it.

Paula: I think you're wise.

Lady Orreyed: However, I must say that I do wish you'd look at marriage in a more solemn light—just as I do, in fact. It is such a beautiful thing—marriage, and if people in our position don't

respect it, and set a good example by living happily with their husbands, what can you expect from the middle classes? When did this sad state of affairs between you and Aubrey actually begin?

Paula: Actually, a fortnight and three days ago; I haven't calculated the minutes.

Lady Orreyed: A day or two before Dodo and I turned up—arrived.

Paula: Yes. One always remembers one thing by another; we left off speaking to each other the morning I wrote asking you to visit us.

Lady Orreyed: Lucky for you I was able to pop down, wasn't it, dear?

Paula [*glaring at her again*]: Most fortunate.

Lady Orreyed: A serious split with your husband without a pal on the premises—I should say, without a friend in the house—would be most unpleasant.

Paula [*turning to her abruptly*]: This place must be horribly doleful for you and George just now. At least you ought to consider him before me. Why didn't you leave me to my difficulties?

Lady Orreyed: Oh, we're quite comfortable, dear, thank you—both of us. George and me are so wrapped up in each other, it doesn't matter where we are. I don't want to crow over you, old girl, but I've got a perfect husband. [SIR GEORGE *is now fast asleep, his head thrown back and his mouth open, looking hideous.*]

Paula [*glancing at* SIR GEORGE]: So you've given me to understand.

Lady Orreyed: Not that we don't have our little differences. Why, we fell out only this very morning. You remember the diamond and ruby tiara Charley Prestwick gave poor dear Connie Tirlemont years ago, don't you?

Paula: No, I do not.

Lady Orreyed: No? Well, it's in the market. Benjamin of Piccadilly has got it in his shop window, and I've set my heart on it.

Paula: You consider it quite necessary?

Lady Orreyed: Yes; because what I say to Dodo is this—a lady of my station must smother herself with hair ornaments. It's different with you, love—people don't look for so much blaze from you, but I've got rank to keep up; haven't I?

Paula: Yes.

Lady Orreyed: Well, that was the cause of the little set-to between I and Dodo this morning. He broke two chairs, he was in such a rage. I forgot they're your chairs; do you mind?

Paula: No.

Lady Orreyed: You know, poor Dodo can't lose his temper without smashing something; if it isn't a chair, it's a mirror; if it isn't that, it's china—a bit of Dresden for choice. Dear old pet! he loves a bit of Dresden when he's furious. He doesn't really throw things *at* me, dear; he simply lifts them up and drops them, like a gentleman. I expect our room upstairs will look rather wrecky before I get that tiara.

Paula: Excuse the suggestion; perhaps your husband can't afford it.

Lady Orreyed: Oh, how dreadfully changed you are, Paula! Dodo can always mortgage something, or borrow of his ma. What *is* coming to you!

Paula: Ah! [*She sits at the piano and touches the keys.*]

Lady Orreyed: Oh, yes, do play! That's the one thing I envy you for.

Paula: What shall I play?

Lady Orreyed: What was that heavenly piece you gave us last night, dear?

Paula: A bit of Schubert. Would you like to hear it again?

Lady Orreyed: You don't know any comic songs, do you?

Paula: I'm afraid not.

Lady Orreyed: I leave it to you. [PAULA *plays.* AUBREY *and* CAYLEY DRUMMLE *appear outside the window; they look into the room.*]

Aubrey [*to* DRUMMLE]: You can see her face in that mirror. Poor girl, how ill and wretched she looks.

Drummle: When are the Orreyeds going?

Aubrey: Heaven knows! [*Entering the room*]

Drummle: But *you're* entertaining them; what's it to do with heaven? [*Following* AUBREY]

Aubrey: Do you know, Cayley, that even the Orreyeds serve a useful purpose? My wife actually speaks to me before our guests—think of that! I've come to rejoice at the presence of the Orreyeds!

Drummle: I dare say; we're taught that beetles are sent for a benign end.

Aubrey: Cayley, talk to Paula again tonight.

Drummle: Certainly, if I get the chance.

Aubrey: Let's contrive it. George is asleep; perhaps I can get that doll out of the way. [*As they advance into the room,* PAULA *abruptly ceases playing and finds interest in a volume of music.* SIR

GEORGE *is now nodding and snoring apoplectically.*] Lady Orreyed, whenever you feel inclined for a game of billiards I'm at your service.

Lady Orreyed [*jumping up*]: Charmed, I'm sure! I really thought you'd forgotten poor little me. Oh, look at Dodo!

Aubrey: No, no, don't wake him; he's tired.

Lady Orreyed: I must, he looks so plain. [*Rousing* SIR GEORGE] Dodo! Dodo!

Sir George [*stupidly*]: 'Ullo!

Lady Orreyed: Dodo dear, you were snoring.

Sir George: Oh, I say, you could 'a told me that by-and-by.

Aubrey: You want a cigar, George; come into the billiard room. [*Giving his arm to* LADY ORREYED] Cayley, bring Paula. [AUBREY *and* LADY ORREYED *go out.*]

Sir George [*rising*]: Hey, what! Billiard room! [*Looking at his watch*] How goes the—? Phew! 'Ullo, 'Ullo! Whiskey and potass! [*He goes rapidly after* AUBREY *and* LADY ORREYED. PAULA *resumes playing.*]

Paula [*after a pause*]: Don't moon about after me, Cayley; follow the others.

Drummle: Thanks, by-and-by. [*Sitting*] That's pretty.

Paula [*after another pause, still playing*]: I wish you wouldn't stare so.

Drummle: Was I staring? I'm sorry. [*She plays a little longer, then stops suddenly, rises, and goes to the window, where she stands looking out.* DRUMMLE *moves from the ottoman to the settee.*] A lovely night.

Paula [*startled*]: Oh! [*Without turning to him*] Why do you hop about like a monkey?

Drummle: Hot rooms play the deuce with the nerves. Now, it would have done you good to have walked in the garden with us after dinner and made merry. Why didn't you?

Paula: You know why.

Drummle: Ah, you're thinking of the—difference between you and Aubrey?

Paula: Yes, I *am* thinking of it.

Drummle: Well, so am I. How long—?

Paula: Getting on for three weeks.

Drummle: Bless me, it must be! And this would have been such a night to have healed it! Moonlight, the stars, the scent of flowers; and yet enough darkness to enable a kind woman to rest her hand

for an instant on the arm of a good fellow who loves her. Ah, ha! It's a wonderful power, dear Mrs. Aubrey, the power of an offended woman! Only realize it! Just that one touch—the mere tips of her fingers—and, for herself and another, she changes the color of the whole world.

Paula [*turning to him calmly*]: Cayley, my dear man, you talk exactly like a very romantic old lady. [*She leaves the window and sits playing with the knick-knacks on the table.*]

Drummle [*to himself*]: H'm, that hasn't done it! Well—ha, ha!—I accept the suggestion. An old woman, eh?

Paula: Oh, I didn't intend—

Drummle: But why not? I've every qualification—well, almost. And I confess it would have given this withered bosom a throb of grandmotherly satisfaction if I could have seen you and Aubrey at peace before I take my leave tomorrow.

Paula: Tomorrow, Cayley!

Drummle: I must.

Paula: Oh, this house is becoming unendurable.

Drummle: You're very kind. But you've got the Orreyeds.

Paula [*fiercely*]: The Orreyeds! I—I hate the Orreyeds! I lie awake at night, hating them!

Drummle: Pardon me, I've understood that their visit is, in some degree, owing to—hem—your suggestion.

Paula: Heavens! that doesn't make me like them better. Somehow or another, I—I've outgrown these people. This woman—I used to think her "jolly!"—sickens me. I can't breathe when she's near me: the whiff of her handkerchief turns me faint! And she patronizes me by the hour, until I—I feel my nails growing longer with every word she speaks!

Drummle: My dear lady, why on earth don't you say all this to Aubrey?

Paula: Oh, I've been such an utter fool, Cayley!

Drummle [*soothingly*]: Well, well, mention it to Aubrey!

Paula: No, no, you don't understand. What do you think I've done?

Drummle: Done! What, *since* you invited the Orreyeds?

Paula: Yes; I must tell you—

Drummle: Perhaps you'd better not.

Paula: Look here! I've intercepted some letters from Mrs. Cortelyon and Ellean to—him. [*Producing three unopened letters from*

the bodice of her dress] There are the accursed things! From Paris —two from the Cortelyon woman, the other from Ellean!

Drummle: But why—why?

Paula: I don't know. Yes, I do! I saw letters coming from Ellean to her father; not a line to me—not a line. And one morning it happened I was downstairs before he was, and I spied this one lying with his heap on the breakfast-table, and I slipped it into my pocket —out of malice, Cayley, pure deviltry! And a day or two afterwards I met Elwes the postman at the Lodge, and took the letters from him, and found these others amongst 'em. I felt simply fiendish when I saw them—fiendish! [*Returning the letters to her bodice*] And now I carry them about with me, and they're scorching me like a mustard plaster!

Drummle: Oh, this accounts for Aubrey not hearing from Paris lately!

Paula: That's an ingenious conclusion to arrive at! Of course it does! [*With an hysterical laugh*] Ha, ha!

Drummle: Well, well! [*Laughing*] Ha, ha, ha!

Paula [*turning upon him*]: I suppose it *is* amusing!

Drummle: I beg pardon.

Paula: Heaven knows I've little enough to brag about! I'm a bad lot, but not in mean tricks of this sort. In all my life this is the most caddish thing I've done. How am I to get rid of these letters—that's what I want to know? How am I to get rid of them?

Drummle: If I were you I should take Aubrey aside and put them into his hands as soon as possible.

Paula: What! and tell him to his face that I—! No, thank you. I suppose *you* wouldn't like to—

Drummle: No, no; I won't touch 'em!

Paula: And you call yourself my friend?

Drummle [*good-humoredly*]: No, I don't!

Paula: Perhaps I'll tie them together and give them to his man in the morning.

Drummle: That won't avoid an explanation.

Paula [*recklessly*]: Oh, then he must miss them—

Drummle: And trace them.

Paula [*throwing herself upon the ottoman*]: I don't care!

Drummle: I know you don't; but let me send him to you now, may I?

Paula: Now! What do you think a woman's made of? I couldn't

stand it, Cayley. I haven't slept for nights; and last night there was thunder, too! I believe I've got the horrors.

Drummle [*taking the little hand-mirror from the table*]: You'll sleep well enough when you deliver those letters. Come, come, Mrs. Aubrey—a good night's rest! [*Holding the mirror before her face*] It's quite time. [*She looks at herself for a moment, then snatches the mirror from him.*]

Paula: You brute, Cayley, to show me that!

Drummle: Then—may I? Be guided by a fr— a poor old woman! May I?

Paula: You'll kill me, amongst you!

Drummle: What do you say?

Paula [*after a pause*]: Very well. [*He nods his head and goes out rapidly. She looks after him for a moment, and calls "Cayley! Cayley!" Then she again produces the letters, deliberately, one by one, fingering them with aversion. Suddenly she starts, turning her head towards the door.*] Ah! [AUBREY *enters quickly.*]

Aubrey: Paula!

Paula [*handing him the letters, her face averted*]: There! [*He examines the letters, puzzled, and looks at her enquiringly.*] They are many days old. I stole them, I suppose to make you anxious and unhappy. [*He looks at the letters again, then lays them aside on the table.*]

Aubrey [*gently*]: Paula, dear, it doesn't matter.

Paula [*after a short pause*]: Why—why do you take it like this?

Aubrey: What did you expect?

Paula: Oh, but I suppose silent reproaches are really the severest. And then, naturally, you are itching to open your letters. [*She crosses the room as if to go.*]

Aubrey: Paula! [*She pauses.*] Surely, surely, it's all over now?

Paula: All over! [*Mockingly*] Has my step-daughter returned then? When did she arrive? I haven't heard of it!

Aubrey: You can be very cruel.

Paula: That word's always on a man's lips; he uses it if his soup's cold. [*With another movement as if to go*] Need we—

Aubrey: I know I've wounded you, Paula. But isn't there any way out of this?

Paula: When does Ellean return? Tomorrow? Next week?

Aubrey [*wearily*]: Oh! Why should we grudge Ellean the little pleasure she is likely to find in Paris and in London.

Paula: I grudge her nothing, if that's a hit at me. But with that woman—?

Aubrey: It must be that woman or another. You know that at present we are unable to give Ellean the opportunity of—of—

Paula: Of mixing with respectable people.

Aubrey: The opportunity of gaining friends, experience, ordinary knowledge of the world. If you are interested in Ellean, can't you see how useful Mrs. Cortelyon's good offices are?

Paula: May I put one question? At the end of the London season, when Mrs. Cortelyon has done with Ellean, is it quite understood that the girl comes back to us? [AUBREY *is silent.*] Is it? Is it?

Aubrey: Let us wait till the end of the season—

Paula: Oh! I knew it. You're only fooling me; you put me off with any trash. I believe you've sent Ellean away, not for the reasons you give, but because you don't consider me a decent companion for her, because you're afraid she might get a little of her innocence rubbed off in my company? Come, isn't that the truth? Be honest! Isn't that it?

Aubrey: Yes. [*There is a moment's silence on both sides.*]

Paula [*with uplifted hands as if to strike him*]: Oh!

Aubrey [*taking her by the wrists*]: Sit down. Sit down. [*He puts her into a chair; she shakes herself free with a cry.*] Now listen to me. Fond as you are, Paula, of harking back to your past, there's one chapter of it you always let alone. I've never asked you to speak of it; you've never offered to speak of it. I mean the chapter that relates to the time when you were—like Ellean. [*She attempts to rise; he restrains her.*] No, no.

Paula: I don't choose to talk about that time. I won't satisfy your curiosity.

Aubrey: My dear Paula, I have no curiosity—I know what you were at Ellean's age. I'll tell you. You hadn't a thought that wasn't a wholesome one, you hadn't an impulse that didn't tend towards good, you never harbored a notion you couldn't have gossiped about to a parcel of children. [*She makes another effort to rise; he lays his hand lightly on her shoulder.*] And this was a very few years back—there are days now when you look like a school girl—but think of the difference between the two Paulas. You'll have to think hard, because after a cruel life, one's perceptions grow a thick skin. But, for God's sake, do think till you get these two images clearly in your mind, and then ask yourself what sort of a friend such a

woman as you are today would have been for the girl of seven or eight years ago.

Paula [*rising*]: How dare you? I could be almost as good a friend to Ellean as her own mother would have been had she lived. I know what you mean. How dare you?

Aubrey: You say that; very likely you believe it. But you're blind, Paula; you're blind. You! Every belief that a young, pure-minded girl holds sacred—that you once held sacred—you now make a target for a jest, a sneer, a paltry cynicism. I tell you, you're not mistress any longer of your thoughts or your tongue. Why, how often, sitting between you and Ellean, have I seen her cheeks turn scarlet as you've rattled off some tale that belongs by right to the club or the smoking room! Have you noticed the blush? If you have, has the cause of it ever struck you? And this is the girl you say you love, I admit that you *do* love, whose love you expect in return! Oh, Paula, I make the best, the only, excuse for you when I tell you you're blind!

Paula: Ellean—Ellean blushes easily.

Aubrey: You blushed as easily a few years ago.

Paula [*after a short pause*]: Well! Have you finished your sermon?

Aubrey [*with a gesture of despair*]: Oh, Paula! [*Going up to the window, and standing with his back to the room*]

Paula [*to herself*]: A few—years ago! [*She walks slowly towards the door, then suddenly drops upon the ottoman in a paroxysm of weeping.*] O God! A few years ago!

Aubrey [*going to her*]: Paula!

Paula [*sobbing*]: Oh, don't touch me!

Aubrey: Paula!

Paula: Oh, go away from me! [*He goes back a few steps, and after a little while she becomes calmer and rises unsteadily; then in an altered tone*] Look here—! [*He advances a step; she checks him with a quick gesture.*] Look here! Get rid of these people—Mabel and her husband—as soon as possible! I—I've done with them!

Aubrey [*in a whisper*]: Paula!

Paula: And then—then—when the time comes for Ellean to leave Mrs. Cortelyon, give me—give me another chance! [*He advances again, but she shrinks away.*] No, no! [*She goes out by the door on the right. He sinks on to the settee, covering his eyes with his hands. There is a brief silence, then a* SERVANT *enters.*]

Servant: Mrs. Cortelyon, sir, with Miss Ellean. [AUBREY *rises to meet* MRS. CORTELYON, *who enters, followed by* ELLEAN, *both being in traveling dresses. The* SERVANT *withdraws.*]

Mrs. Cortelyon [*shaking hands with* AUBREY]: Oh, my dear Aubrey!

Aubrey: Mrs. Cortelyon! [*Kissing* ELLEAN] Ellean dear!

Ellean: Papa, is all well at home?

Mrs. Cortelyon: We're shockingly anxious.

Aubrey: Yes, yes, all's well. This is quite unexpected. [*To* MRS. CORTELYON] You've found Paris insufferably hot?

Mrs. Cortelyon: Insufferably hot! Paris is pleasant enough. We've had no letter from you!

Aubrey: I wrote to Ellean a week ago.

Mrs. Cortelyon: Without alluding to the subject I had written to you upon.

Aubrey [*thinking*]: Ah, of course—

Mrs. Cortelyon: And since then we've both written, and you've been absolutely silent. Oh, it's too bad!

Aubrey [*picking up the letters from the table*]: It isn't altogether my fault. Here are the letters—

Ellean: Papa!

Mrs. Cortelyon: They're unopened.

Aubrey: An accident delayed their reaching me till this evening. I'm afraid this has upset you very much.

Mrs. Cortelyon: Upset me!

Ellean [*in an undertone to* MRS. CORTELYON]: Never mind. Not now, dear—not tonight.

Aubrey: Eh?

Mrs. Cortelyon [*to* ELLEAN, *aloud*]: Child, run away and take your things off. She doesn't look as if she'd journeyed from Paris today.

Aubrey: I've never seen her with such a color. [*Taking* ELLEAN'S *hands*]

Ellean [*to* AUBREY, *in a faint voice*]: Papa, Mrs. Cortelyon has been so very, very kind to me, but I—I have come home. [*She goes out.*]

Aubrey: Come home! [*To* MRS. CORTELYON] Ellean returns to us then?

Mrs. Cortelyon: That's the very point I put to you in my letters, and you oblige me to travel from Paris to Willowmere on a warm day to settle it. I think perhaps it's right that Ellean should be with

you just now, although I— My dear friend, circumstances are a little altered.

Aubrey: Alice, you're in some trouble.

Mrs. Cortelyon: Well—yes, I *am* in trouble. You remember pretty little Mrs. Brereton who was once Caroline Ardale?

Aubrey: Quite well.

Mrs. Cortelyon: She's a widow now, poor thing. She has the *entresol* of the house where we've been lodging in the Avenue de Friedland. Caroline's a dear chum of mine; she formed a great liking for Ellean.

Aubrey: I'm very glad.

Mrs. Cortelyon: Yes, it's nice for her to meet her mother's friends. Er—that young Hugh Ardale the papers were full of some time ago —he's Caroline Brereton's brother, you know.

Aubrey: No, I didn't know. What did he do? I forget.

Mrs. Cortelyon: Checked one of those horrid mutinies at some far-away station in India. Marched down with a handful of his men and a few faithful natives, and held the place until he was relieved. They gave him his company and a V.C. for it.

Aubrey: And he's Mrs. Brereton's brother?

Mrs. Cortelyon: Yes. He's with his sister—*was*, rather—in Paris. He's home—invalided. Good gracious, Aubrey, why don't you help me out? Can't you guess what has occurred?

Aubrey: Alice!

Mrs. Cortelyon: Young Ardale—Ellean!

Aubrey: An attachment?

Mrs. Cortelyon: Yes, Aubrey. [*After a little pause*] Well, I suppose I've got myself into sad disgrace. But really I didn't foresee anything of this kind. A serious, reserved child like Ellean, and a boyish, high-spirited soldier—it never struck me as being likely. [AUBREY *paces to and fro thoughtfully.*] I did all I could directly Captain Ardale spoke—wrote to you at once. Why on earth don't you receive your letters promptly, and when you do get them why can't you open them? I endured the anxiety till last night, and then made up my mind—home! Of course, it has worried me terribly. My head's bursting. Are there any salts about? [AUBREY *fetches a bottle from the cabinet and hands it to her.*] We've had one of those hateful smooth crossings that won't let you be properly indisposed.

Aubrey: My dear Alice, I assure you I've no thought of blaming you.

Mrs. Cortelyon: That statement always precedes a quarrel.

Aubrey: I don't know whether this is the worst or the best luck. How will my wife regard it? Is Captain Ardale a good fellow?

Mrs. Cortelyon: My dear Aubrey, you'd better read up the accounts of his wonderful heroism. Face to face with death for a whole week; always with a smile and a cheering word for the poor helpless souls depending on him! Of course it's that that has stirred the depths of your child's nature. I've watched her while we've been dragging the story out of him, and if angels look different from Ellean at that moment, I don't desire to meet any, that's all!

Aubrey: If you were in my position—? But you can't judge.

Mrs. Cortelyon: Why, if I had a marriageable daughter of my own, and Captain Ardale proposed for her, naturally I should cry my eyes out all night—but I should thank Heaven in the morning.

Aubrey: You believe so thoroughly in him?

Mrs. Cortelyon: Do you think I should have only a headache at this minute if I didn't! Look here, you've got to see me down the lane; that's the least you can do, my friend. Come into my house for a moment and shake hands with Hugh.

Aubrey: What, is he here?

Mrs. Cortelyon: He came through with us, to present himself formally tomorrow. Where are my gloves? [AUBREY *fetches them from the ottoman.*] Make my apologies to Mrs. Tanqueray, please. She's well, I hope? [*Going towards the door*] I can't feel sorry she hasn't seen me in this condition. [ELLEAN *enters.*]

Ellean [*to* MRS. CORTELYON]: I've been waiting to wish you good night. I was afraid I'd missed you.

Mrs. Cortelyon: Good night, Ellean.

Ellean [*in a low voice, embracing* MRS. CORTELYON]: I can't thank you. Dear Mrs. Cortelyon!

Mrs. Cortelyon [*her arms round* ELLEAN, *in a whisper to* AUBREY]: Speak a word to her. [MRS. CORTELYON *goes out.*]

Aubrey [*to* ELLEAN]: Ellean, I'm going to see Mrs. Cortelyon home. Tell Paula where I am; explain, dear. [*Going to the door*]

Ellean [*her head drooping*]: Yes. [*Quickly*] Father! You are angry with me—disappointed?

Aubrey: Angry? No.

Ellean: Disappointed?

Aubrey [*smiling and going to her and taking her hand*]: If so, it's only because you've shaken my belief in my discernment. I thought you took after your poor mother a little, Ellean; but there's

a look on your face tonight, dear, that I never saw on hers—never, never.

Ellean [*leaning her head on his shoulder*]: Perhaps I ought not to have gone away.

Aubrey: Hush! You're quite happy?

Ellean: Yes.

Aubrey: That's right. Then, as you are quite happy, there is something I particularly want you to do for me, Ellean.

Ellean: What is that?

Aubrey: Be very gentle with Paula. Will you?

Ellean: You think I have been unkind.

Aubrey [*kissing her upon the forehead*]: Be very gentle with Paula. [*He goes out, and she stands looking after him; then, as she turns thoughtfully from the door, a rose is thrown through the window and falls at her feet. She picks up the flower wonderingly and goes to the window.*]

Ellean [*starting back*]: Hugh! [HUGH ARDALE, *a handsome young man of about seven-and-twenty, with a boyish face and manner, appears outside the window.*]

Hugh: Nelly! Nelly dear!

Ellean: What's the matter?

Hugh: Hush! Nothing. It's only fun. [*Laughing*] Ha, ha, ha! I've found out that Mrs. Cortelyon's meadow runs up to your father's plantation; I've come through a gap in the hedge.

Ellean: Why, Hugh?

Hugh: I'm miserable at The Warren: it's so different from the Avenue de Friedland. Don't look like that! Upon my word I meant just to peep at your home and go back, but I saw figures moving about here, and came nearer, hoping to get a glimpse of you. Was that your father? [*Entering the room*]

Ellean: Yes.

Hugh: Isn't this fun! A rabbit ran across my foot while I was hiding behind that old yew.

Ellean: You must go away; it's not right for you to be here like this.

Hugh: But it's only fun, I tell you. You take everything so seriously. Do wish me good night.

Ellean: We have said good night.

Hugh: In the hall at The Warren, before Mrs. Cortelyon and a man-servant. Oh, it's so different from the Avenue de Friedland!

Ellean [*giving him her hand hastily*]: Good night, Hugh.

Hugh: Is that all? We might be the merest acquaintances. [*He momentarily embraces her, but she releases herself.*]

Ellean: It's when you're like this that you make me feel utterly miserable. [*Throwing the rose from her angrily*] Oh!

Hugh: I've offended you now, I suppose?

Ellean: Yes.

Hugh: Forgive me, Nelly. Come into the garden for five minutes; we'll stroll down to the plantation.

Ellean: No, no.

Hugh: For two minutes—to tell me you forgive me.

Ellean: I forgive you.

Hugh: Evidently. I sha'n't sleep a wink tonight after this. What a fool I am! Come down to the plantation. Make it up with me.

Ellean: There is somebody coming into this room. Do you wish to be seen here?

Hugh: I shall wait for you behind that yew tree. You must speak to me. Nelly! [*He disappears.* PAULA *enters.*]

Paula: Ellean!

Ellean: You—you are very surprised to see me, Paula, of course.

Paula: Why are you here? Why aren't you with—your friend?

Ellean: I've come home—if you'll have me. We left Paris this morning; Mrs. Cortelyon brought me back. She was here a minute or two ago; papa has just gone with her to The Warren. He asked me to tell you.

Paula: There are some people staying with us that I'd rather you didn't meet. It was hardly worth your while to return for a few hours.

Ellean: A few hours?

Paula: Well, when do you go to London?

Ellean: I don't think I go to London, after all.

Paula [*eagerly*]: You—you've quarreled with her?

Ellean: No, no, no, not that; but—Paula! [*In an altered tone*] Paula!

Paula [*startled*]: Eh? [ELLEAN *goes deliberately to* PAULA *and kisses her.*] Ellean!

Ellean: Kiss me.

Paula: What—what's come to you?

Ellean: I want to behave differently to you in the future. Is it too late?

Paula: Too—late! [*Impulsively kissing* ELLEAN *and crying*] No—no—no! No—no!

Ellean: Paula, don't cry.

Paula [*wiping her eyes*]: I'm a little shaky; I haven't been sleeping. It's all right,—talk to me.

Ellean: There is something I want to tell you—

Paula: Is there—is there? [*They sit together on the ottoman,* PAULA *taking* ELLEAN'S *hand.*]

Ellean: Paula, in our house in the Avenue de Friedland, on the floor below us, there was a Mrs. Brereton. She used to be a friend of my mother's. Mrs. Cortelyon and I spent a great deal of our time with her.

Paula [*suspiciously*]: Oh! [*Letting* ELLEAN'S *hand fall*] Is this lady going to take you up in place of Mrs. Cortelyon?

Ellean: No, no. Her brother is staying with her—*was* staying with her. Her brother— [*Breaking off in confusion*]

Paula: Well?

Ellean [*almost inaudibly*]: Paula— [*She rises and walks away,* PAULA *following her.*]

Paula: Ellean! [*Taking hold of her*] You're not in love! [ELLEAN *looks at* PAULA *appealingly.*] Oh, *you* in love! You! Oh, this is why you've come home! Of course, you can make friends with me now! You'll leave us for good soon, I suppose; so it doesn't much matter being civil to me for a little while!

Ellean: Oh, Paula!

Paula: Why, how you have deceived us—all of us! We've taken you for a cold-blooded little saint. The fools you've made of us! Saint Ellean, Saint Ellean!

Ellean: Ah, I might have known you'd only mock me!

Paula [*her tone changing*]: Eh?

Ellean: I—I can't talk to you. [*Sitting on the settee*] You do nothing else but mock and sneer, nothing else.

Paula: Ellean dear! Ellean! I didn't mean it. I'm so horribly jealous, it's a sort of curse on me. [*Kneeling beside* ELLEAN *and embracing her*] My tongue runs away with me. I'm going to alter, I swear I am. I've made some good resolutions, and as God's above me, I'll keep them! If you are in love, if you do ever marry, that's no reason why we shouldn't be fond of each other. Come, you've kissed me of your own accord—you can't take it back. Now we're friends again, aren't we? Ellean dear! I want to know everything, everything. Ellean dear, Ellean!

Ellean: Paula, Hugh has done something that makes me very

angry. He came with us from Paris today, to see papa. He is staying with Mrs. Cortelyon and—I ought to tell you—

Paula: Yes, yes. What?

Ellean: He has found his way by The Warren meadow through the plantation up to this house. He is waiting to bid me good night. [*Glancing towards the garden*] He is—out there.

Paula: Oh!

Ellean: What shall I do?

Paula: Bring him in to see me! Will you?

Ellean: No, no.

Paula: But I'm dying to know him. Oh, yes, you must. I shall meet him before Aubrey does. [*Excitedly running her hands over her hair*] I'm so glad. [ELLEAN *goes out by the window.*] The mirror—mirror. What a fright I must look! [*Not finding the hand-glass on the table, she jumps on to the settee, and surveys herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece, then sits quietly down and waits.*] Ellean! Just fancy!-Ellean! [*After a pause* ELLEAN *enters by the window with* HUGH.]

Ellean: Paula, this is Captain Ardale—Mrs. Tanqueray. [PAULA *rises and turns, and she and* HUGH *stand staring blankly at each other for a moment or two; then* PAULA *advances and gives him her hand.*]

Paula [*in a strange voice, but calmly*]: How do you do?

Hugh: How do you do?

Paula [*to* ELLEAN]: Mr. Ardale and I have met in London, Ellean. Er—Captain Ardale now?

Hugh: Yes.

Ellean: In London?

Paula: They say the world's very small, don't they?

Hugh: Yes.

Paula: Ellean dear, I want to have a little talk about you to Mr. Ardale—Captain Ardale—alone. [*Putting her arms round* ELLEAN, *and leading her to the door*] Come back in a little while. [ELLEAN *nods to* PAULA *with a smile and goes out, while* PAULA *stands watching her at the open door.*] In a little while—in a little— [*Closing the door and then taking a seat facing* HUGH] Be quick! Mr. Tanqueray has only gone down to The Warren with Mrs. Cortelyon. What is to be done?

Hugh [*blankly*]: Done?

Paula: Done—done. Something must be done.

Hugh: I understood that Mr. Tanqueray had married a Mrs.—Mrs.—

Paula: Jarman?

Hugh: Yes.

Paula: I'd been going by that name. You didn't follow my doings after we separated.

Hugh: No.

Paula [*sneeringly*]: No.

Hugh: I went out to India.

Paula: What's to be done?

Hugh: Damn this chance!

Paula: Oh, my God!

Hugh: Your husband doesn't know, does he?

Paula: That you and I—?

Hugh: Yes.

Paula: No. He knows about others.

Hugh: Not about me. How long were we—?

Paula: I don't remember, exactly.

Hugh: Do you—do you think it matters?

Paula: His—his daughter. [*With a muttered exclamation he turns away, and sits with his head in his hands.*] What's to be done?

Hugh: I wish I could think.

Paula: Oh! Oh! What happened to that flat of ours in Ethelbert Street?

Hugh: I let it.

Paula: All that pretty furniture?

Hugh: Sold it.

Paula: I came across the key of the escritoire the other day in an old purse! [*Suddenly realizing the horror and hopelessness of her position, and starting to her feet with an hysterical cry of rage*] What am I maundering about?

Hugh: For God's sake, be quiet! Do let me think.

Paula: This will send me mad! [*Suddenly turning and standing over him*] You—you beast, to crop up in my life again like this!

Hugh: I always treated you fairly.

Paula [*weakly*]: Oh! I beg your pardon—I know you did—I—[*She sinks on to the settee crying hysterically.*]

Hugh: Hush!

Paula: She kissed me tonight! I'd won her over! I've had such a fight to make her love me! And now—just as she's beginning to love me, to bring this on her!

Hugh: Hush, hush! Don't break down!

Paula [*sobbing*]: You don't know! I—I haven't been getting on well in my marriage. It's been my fault. The life I used to lead spoilt me completely. But I'd made up my mind to turn over a new leaf from tonight. From tonight!

Hugh: Paula—

Paula: Don't you call me that!

Hugh: Mrs. Tanqueray, there is no cause for you to despair in this way. It's all right, I tell you—it *shall* be all right.

Paula [*shivering*]: What are we to do?

Hugh: Hold our tongues.

Paula: Eh? [*Staring vacantly*]

Hugh: The chances are a hundred to one against anyone ever turning up who knew us when we were together. Besides, no one would be such a brute as to split on us. If anybody did do such a thing we should have to lie! What are we upsetting ourselves like this for, when we've simply got to hold our tongues?

Paula: You're as mad as I am!

Hugh: Can you think of a better plan?

Paula: There's only one plan possible—let's come to our senses! —Mr. Tanqueray must be told.

Hugh: Your husband! What, and I lose Ellean! I lose Ellean!

Paula: You've got to lose her.

Hugh: I won't lose her; I can't lose her!

Paula: Didn't I read of your doing any number of brave things in India? Why, you seem to be an awful coward!

Hugh: That's another sort of pluck altogether; I haven't this sort of pluck.

Paula: Oh, I don't ask *you* to tell Mr. Tanqueray. That's my job.

Hugh [*standing over her*]: You—you—you'd better! You—

Paula [*rising*]: Don't bully me! I intend to.

Hugh [*taking hold of her; she wrenches herself free*]: Look here, Paula, I never treated you badly—you've owned it. Why should you want to pay me out like this? You don't know how I love Ellean!

Paula: Yes, that's just what I *do* know.

Hugh: I say you don't! She's as good as my own mother. I've been downright honest with her, too. I told her, in Paris, that I'd been a bit wild at one time, and, after a damned wretched day, she promised to forgive me because of what I'd done since in India. She's behaved like an angel to me! Surely I oughtn't to lose her,

after all, just because I've been like other fellows! No; I haven't been half as rackety as a hundred men we could think of. Paula, don't pay me out for nothing; be fair to me, there's a good girl—be fair to me!

Paula: Oh, I'm not considering you at all! I advise you not to stay here any longer: Mr. Tanqueray is sure to be back soon.

Hugh [*taking up his hat*]: What's the understanding between us, then? What have we arranged to do?

Paula: I don't know what you're going to do; I've got to tell Mr. Tanqueray.

Hugh: By God, you shall do nothing of the sort! [*Approaching her fiercely*]

Paula: You shocking coward!

Hugh: If you dare! [*Going up to the window*] Mind! If you dare!

Paula [*following him*]: Why, what would you do?

Hugh [*after a short pause, sullenly*]: Nothing. I'd shoot myself—that's nothing. Good night.

Paula: Good night. [*He disappears. She walks unsteadily to the ottoman, and sits; and as she does so her hand falls upon the little silver mirror, which she takes up, staring at her own reflection.*]

THE FOURTH ACT

The drawing room at "Highercoombe," the same evening.

PAULA *is still seated on the ottoman, looking vacantly before her, with the little mirror in her hand.* LADY ORREYED *enters.*

Lady Orreyed: There you are! You never came into the billiard room. Isn't it maddening—Cayley Drummle gives me sixty out of a hundred, and beats me. I must be out of form, because I know I play remarkably well for a lady. Only last month— [PAULA *rises.*] Whatever is the matter with you, old girl?

Paula: Why?

Lady Orreyed [*staring*]: It's the light, I suppose. [PAULA *replaces*

the mirror on the table.] By Aubrey's bolting from the billiard table in that fashion I thought perhaps—

Paula: Yes; it's all right.

Lady Orreyed: You've patched it up? [PAULA *nods.*] Oh, I am jolly glad—! I mean—

Paula: Yes, I know what you mean. Thanks, Mabel.

Lady Orreyed [*kissing* PAULA]: Now take my advice; for the future—

Paula: Mabel, if I've been disagreeable to you while you've been staying here, I—I beg your pardon. [*Walking away and sitting down*]

Lady Orreyed: You disagreeable, my dear? I haven't noticed it. Dodo and me both consider you make a first-class hostess; but then you've had such practice, haven't you? [*Dropping on to the ottoman and gaping*] Oh, talk about being sleepy—!

Paula: Why don't you—!

Lady Orreyed: Why, dear, I must hang about for Dodo. You may as well know it; he's in one of his moods.

Paula [*under her breath*]: Oh—!

Lady Orreyed: Now, it's not his fault; it was deadly dull for him while we were playing billiards. Cayley Drummle did ask him to mark, but I stopped that; it's so easy to make a gentleman look like a billiard marker. This is just how it always is; if poor old Dodo has nothing to do, he loses count, as you may say.

Paula: Hark! [SIR GEORGE ORREYED *enters, walking slowly and deliberately; he looks pale and watery-eyed.*]

Sir George [*with mournful indistinctness*]: I'm 'fraid we've lef' you a grea' deal to yourself tonight, Mrs. Tanqueray. Attra'tions of billiards. I apol'gize. I say, where's ol' Aubrey?

Paula: My husband has been obliged to go out to a neighbor's house.

Sir George: I want his advice on a rather pressing matter connected with my family—my family. [*Sitting*] Tomorrow will do just as well.

Lady Orreyed [*to* PAULA]: This is the mood I hate so—driveling about his precious family.

Sir George: The fact is, Mrs. Tanqueray, I am not easy in my min' 'bout the way I am treatin' my poor ol' mother.

Lady Orreyed [*to* PAULA]: Do you hear that? That's ***his*** mother but *my* mother he won't so much as look at!

Sir George: I shall write to Bruton Street firs' thing in the morning.

Lady Orreyed [*to* PAULA]: Mamma has stuck to me through everything—well, you know!

Sir George: I'll get ol' Aubrey to figure out a letter. I'll drop line to Uncle Fitz too—dooced shame of the ol' feller to chuck me over in this manner. [*Wiping his eyes*] All my family have chucked me over.

Lady Orreyed [*rising*]: Dodo!

Sir George: Jus' because I've married beneath me, to be chucked over! Aunt Lydia, the General, Hooky Whitgrave, Lady Sugnall—my own dear sister!—all turn their backs on me. It's more than I can stan'!

Lady Orreyed [*approaching him with dignity*]: Sir George, wish Mrs. Tanqueray good night at once, and come upstairs. Do you hear me?

Sir George [*rising angrily*]: Wha—!

Lady Orreyed: Be quiet!

Sir George: You presoom to order me about!

Lady Orreyed: You're making an exhibition of yourself!

Sir George: Look 'ere—!

Lady Orreyed: Come along, I tell you! [*He hesitates, utters a few inarticulate sounds, then snatches up a fragile ornament from the table, and is about to dash it on the ground.* LADY ORREYED *retreats, and* PAULA *goes to him.*]

Paula: George! [*He replaces the ornament.*]

Sir George [*shaking* PAULA'S *hand*]: Good ni', Mrs. Tanqueray.

Lady Orreyed [*to* PAULA]: Good night, darling. Wish Aubrey good night for me. Now, Dodo? [*She goes out.*]

Sir George [*to* PAULA]: I say, are you goin' to sit up for ol' Aubrey?

Paula: Yes.

Sir George: Shall I keep you comp'ny?

Paula: No, thank you, George.

Sir George: Sure?

Paula: Yes, sure.

Sir George [*shaking hands*]: Good night again.

Paula: Good night. [*She turns away. He goes out, steadying himself carefully.* DRUMMLE *appears outside the window, smoking.*]

Drummle [*looking into the room and seeing* PAULA]: My last cigar. Where's Aubrey?

Paula: Gone down to The Warren, to see Mrs. Cortelyon home.

Drummle [*entering the room*]: Eh? Did you say Mrs. Cortelyon?

Paula: Yes. She has brought Ellean back.

Drummle: Bless my soul! Why?

Paula: I—I'm too tired to tell you, Cayley. If you stroll along the lane you'll meet Aubrey. Get the news from him.

Drummle [*going up to the window*]: Yes, yes. [*Returning to* PAULA] I don't want to bother you, only—the anxious old woman, you know. Are you and Aubrey—?

Paula: Good friends again?

Drummle [*nodding*]: Um.

Paula [*giving him her hand*]: Quite, Cayley, quite.

Drummle [*retaining her hand*]: That's capital. As I'm off so early tomorrow morning, let me say now—thank you for your hospitality. [*He bends over her hand gallantly, then goes out by the window.*]

Paula [*to herself*]: "Are you and Aubrey—?" "Good friends again?" "Yes." "Quite, Cayley, quite." [*There is a brief pause, then* AUBREY *enters hurriedly, wearing a light overcoat and carrying a cap.*]

Aubrey: Paula dear! Have you seen Ellean?

Paula: I found her here when I came down.

Aubrey: She—she's told you?

Paula: Yes, Aubrey.

Aubrey: It's extraordinary, isn't it! Not that somebody should fall in love with Ellean, or that Ellean herself should fall in love. All that's natural enough and was bound to happen, I suppose, sooner or later. But this young fellow! You know his history?

Paula: His history?

Aubrey: You remember the papers were full of his name a few months ago?

Paula: Oh, yes.

Aubrey: The man's as brave as a lion, there's no doubt about that; and, at the same time, he's like a big good-natured school boy, Mrs. Cortelyon says. Have you ever pictured the kind of man Ellean would marry some day?

Paula: I can't say that I have.

Aubrey: A grave, sedate fellow I've thought about—hah! She has fallen in love with the way in which Ardale practically laid down his life to save those poor people shut up in the Residency. [*Taking off his coat*] Well, I suppose if a man can do that sort of thing, one ought to be content. And yet— [*Throwing his coat on the settee*]

I should have met him tonight, but he'd gone out. Paula dear, tell me how you look upon this business.

Paula: Yes, I will—I must. To begin with, I—I've seen Mr. Ardale.

Aubrey: Captain Ardale?

Paula: Captain Ardale.

Aubrey: Seen him?

Paula: While you were away he came up here, through our grounds, to try to get a word with Ellean. I made her fetch him in and present him to me.

Aubrey [*frowning*]: Doesn't Captain Ardale know there's a lodge and a front door to this place? Never mind! What is your impression of him?

Paula: Aubrey, do you recollect my bringing you a letter—a letter giving you an account of myself—to the Albany late one night—the night before we got married?

Aubrey: A letter?

Paula: You burnt it; don't you know?

Aubrey: Yes; I know.

Paula: His name was in that letter.

Aubrey [*going back from her slowly, and staring at her*]: I don't understand.

Paula: Well—Ardale and I once kept house together. [*He remains silent, not moving.*] Why don't you strike me? Hit me in the face—I'd rather you did! Hurt me! hurt me!

Aubrey [*after a pause*]: What did you—and this man—say to each other—just now?

Paula: I—hardly—know.

Aubrey: Think!

Paula: The end of it all was that I—I told him I must inform you of—what had happened . . . he didn't want me to do that . . . I declared that I would . . . he dared me to. [*Breaking down*] Let me alone!—oh!

Aubrey: Where was my daughter while this went on?

Paula: I—I had sent her out of the room . . . that is all right.

Aubrey: Yes, yes—yes, yes. [*He turns his head towards the door.*]

Paula: Who's that? [*A* SERVANT *enters with a letter.*]

Servant: The coachman has just run up with this from The Warren, sir. [AUBREY *takes the letter.*] It's for Mrs. Tanqueray, sir; there's no answer. [*The* SERVANT *withdraws.* AUBREY *goes to*

PAULA *and drops the letter into her lap; she opens it with uncertain hands.*]

Paula [*reading it to herself*]: It's from—him. He's going away—or gone—I think. [*Rising in a weak way*] What does it say? I never could make out his writing. [*She gives the letter to* AUBREY, *and stands near him, looking at the letter over his shoulder as he reads.*]

Aubrey [*reading*]: "I shall be in Paris by tomorrow evening. Shall wait there, at Meurice's, for a week, ready to receive any communication you or your husband may address to me. Please invent some explanation to Ellean. Mrs. Tanqueray, for God's sake, do what you can for me." [PAULA *and* AUBREY *speak in low voices, both still looking at the letter.*]

Paula: Has he left The Warren, I wonder, already?

Aubrey: That doesn't matter.

Paula: No; but I can picture him going quietly off. Very likely he's walking on to Bridgeford or Cottering tonight, to get the first train in the morning. A pleasant stroll for him.

Aubrey: We'll reckon he's gone, that's enough.

Paula: That isn't to be answered in any way?

Aubrey: Silence will answer that.

Paula: He'll soon recover his spirits, I know.

Aubrey: You know. [*Offering her the letter*] You don't want this, I suppose?

Paula: No.

Aubrey: It's done with—done with. [*He tears the letter into small pieces. She has dropped the envelope; she searches for it, finds it, and gives it to him.*]

Paula: Here!

Aubrey [*looking at the remnants of the letter*]: This is no good; I must burn it.

Paula: Burn it in your room.

Aubrey: Yes.

Paula: Put it in your pocket for now.

Aubrey: Yes. [*He does so.* ELLEAN *enters, and they both turn, guiltily, and stare at her.*]

Ellean [*after a short silence, wonderingly*]: Papa—

Aubrey: What do you want, Ellean?

Ellean: I heard from Willis that you had come in; I only want to wish you good night. [PAULA *steals away, without looking back.*] What's the matter? Ah! Of course, Paula has told you about Captain Ardale?

Aubrey: Well?

Ellean: Have you and he met?

Aubrey: No.

Ellean: You are angry with him; so was I. But tomorrow when he calls and expresses his regret—tomorrow—

Aubrey: Ellean—Ellean!

Ellean: Yes, papa?

Aubrey: I—I can't let you see this man again. [*He walks away from her in a paroxysm of distress, then, after a moment or two, he returns to her and takes her to his arms.*] Ellean! my child!

Ellean [*releasing herself*]: What has happened, papa? What is it?

Aubrey [*thinking out his words deliberately*]: Something has occurred, something has come to my knowledge, in relation to Captain Ardale, which puts any further acquaintanceship between you two out of the question.

Ellean: Any further acquaintanceship . . . out of the question?

Aubrey: Yes. [*Advancing to her quickly, but she shrinks from him*]

Ellean: No, no—I am quite well. [*After a short pause*] It's not an hour ago since Mrs. Cortelyon left you and me together here; you had nothing to urge against Captain Ardale then.

Aubrey: No.

Ellean: You don't know each other; you haven't even seen him this evening. Father!

Aubrey: I have told you he and I have not met.

Ellean: Mrs. Cortelyon couldn't have spoken against him to you just now. No, no, no; she's too good a friend to both of us. Aren't you going to give me some explanation? You can't take this position towards me—towards Captain Ardale—without affording me the fullest explanation.

Aubrey: Ellean, there are circumstances connected with Captain Ardale's career which you had better remain ignorant of. It must be sufficient for you that I consider these circumstances render him unfit to be your husband.

Ellean: Father!

Aubrey: You must trust me, Ellean; you must try to understand the depth of my love for you and the—the agony it gives me to hurt you. You must trust me.

Ellean: I will, father; but you must trust me a little too. Circumstances connected with Captain Ardale's career?

Aubrey: Yes.

Ellean: When he presents himself here tomorrow of course you will see him and let him defend himself?

Aubrey: Captain Ardale will not be here tomorrow.

Ellean: Not! You have stopped his coming here?

Aubrey: Indirectly—yes.

Ellean: But just now he was talking to me at that window! Nothing had taken place then! And since then nothing can have—! Oh! Why—you have heard something against him from Paula.

Aubrey: From—Paula!

Ellean: She knows him.

Aubrey: She has told you so?

Ellean: When I introduced Captain Ardale to her she said she had met him in London. Of course! It is Paula who has done this!

Aubrey [*in a hard voice*]: I—I hope you—you'll refrain from rushing at conclusions. There's nothing to be gained by trying to avoid the main point, which is that you must drive Captain Ardale out of your thoughts. Understand that! You're able to obtain comfort from your religion, aren't you? I'm glad to think that's so. I talk to you in a harsh way, Ellean, but I feel your pain almost as acutely as you do. [*Going to the door*] I—I can't say anything more to you tonight.

Ellean: Father! [*He pauses at the door.*] Father, I'm obliged to ask you this; there's no help for it—I've no mother to go to. Does what you have heard about Captain Ardale concern the time when he led a wild, a dissolute life in London?

Aubrey [*returning to her slowly and staring at her*]: Explain yourself!

Ellean: He has been quite honest with me. One day—in Paris—he confessed to me—what a man's life is—what his life had been.

Aubrey [*under his breath*]: Oh!

Ellean: He offered to go away, not to approach me again.

Aubrey: And you—you accepted his view of what a man's life is?

Ellean: As far as *I* could forgive him, I forgave him.

Aubrey [*with a groan*]: Why, when was it you left us? It hasn't taken you long to get your robe "just a little dusty at the hem!"

Ellean: What do you mean?

Aubrey: Hah! A few weeks ago my one great desire was to keep you ignorant of evil.

Ellean: Father, it is impossible to be ignorant of evil. Instinct, common instinct, teaches us what is good and bad. Surely I am none the worse for knowing what is wicked and detesting it!

Aubrey: Detesting it! Why, you love this fellow!

Ellean: Ah, you don't understand! I have simply judged Captain Ardale as we all pray to be judged. I have lived in imagination through that one week in India when he deliberately offered his life back to God to save those wretched, desperate people. In his whole career I see now nothing but that one week; those few hours bring him nearer the saints, I believe, than fifty uneventful years of mere blamelessness would have done! And so, father, if Paula has reported anything to Captain Ardale's discredit—

Aubrey: Paula—!

Ellean: It must be Paula; it can't be anybody else.

Aubrey: You—you'll please keep Paula out of the question. Finally, Ellean, understand me—I have made up my mind. [*Again going to the door*]

Ellean: But wait—listen! I have made up my mind also.

Aubrey: Ah! I recognize your mother in you now!

Ellean: You need not speak against my mother because you are angry with me!

Aubrey: I—I hardly know what I'm saying to you. In the morning—in the morning— [*He goes out. She remains standing, and turns her head to listen. Then, after a moment's hesitation she goes softly to the window, and looks out under the veranda.*]

Ellean [*in a whisper*]: Paula! Paula! [PAULA *appears outside the window and steps into the room; her face is white and drawn, her hair is a little disordered.*]

Paula [*huskily*]: Well?

Ellean: Have you been under the veranda all the while—listening?

Paula: N—no.

Ellean: You *have* overheard us—I see you have. And it *is* you who have been speaking to my father against Captain Ardale. Isn't it? Paula, why don't you own it or deny it?

Paula: Oh, I—I don't mind owning it; why should I?

Ellean: Ah! You seem to have been very, very eager to tell your tale.

Paula: No, I wasn't eager, Ellean. I'd have given something not to have had to do it. I wasn't eager.

Ellean: Not! Oh, I think you might safely have spared us all for a little while.

Paula: But, Ellean, you forget I—I am your stepmother. It was my—my duty—to tell your father what I—what I knew—

Ellean: What you knew! Why, after all, what can you know? You can only speak from gossip, report, hearsay! How is it possible that you—! [*She stops abruptly. The two women stand staring at each other for a moment; then* ELLEAN *backs away from* PAULA *slowly.*] Paula!

Paula: What—what's the matter?

Ellean: You—you knew Captain Ardale in London!

Paula: Why—what do you mean?

Ellean: Oh! [*She makes for the door, but* PAULA *catches her by the wrist.*]

Paula: You shall tell me what you mean!

Ellean: Ah! [*Suddenly, looking fixedly into* PAULA'S *face*] You know what I mean.

Paula: You accuse me!

Ellean: It's in your face!

Paula [*hoarsely*]: You—you think I'm—that sort of creature, do you?

Ellean: Let me go!

Paula: Answer me! You've always hated me! [*Shaking her*] Out with it!

Ellean: You hurt me!

Paula: You've always hated me! You shall answer me!

Ellean: Well, then, I have always—always—

Paula: What?

Ellean: I have always known what you were!

Paula: Ah! Who—who told you?

Ellean: Nobody but yourself. From the first moment I saw you I knew you were altogether unlike the good women I'd left; directly I saw you I knew what my father had done. You've wondered why I've turned from you! There—that's the reason! Oh, but this is a horrible way for the truth to come home to everyone! Oh!

Paula: It's a lie! It's all a lie! [*Forcing* ELLEAN *down upon her knees*] You shall beg my pardon for it. [ELLEAN *utters a loud shriek of terror.*] Ellean, I'm a good woman! I swear I am! I've always been a good woman! You dare to say I've ever been anything else! It's a lie! [*Throwing her off violently.* AUBREY *re-enters.*]

Aubrey: Paula! [PAULA *staggers back as* AUBREY *advances. Raising* ELLEAN] What's this? What's this?

Ellean [*faintly*]: Nothing. It—it's my fault. Father, I—I don't wish to see Captain Ardale again. [*She goes out,* AUBREY *slowly following her to the door.*]

Paula: Aubrey, she—she guesses.

Aubrey: Guesses?

Paula: About me—and Ardale.

Aubrey: About you—and Ardale?

Paula: She says she suspected my character from the beginning . . . that's why she's always kept me at a distance . . . and now she sees through— [*She falters; he helps her to the ottoman, where she sits.*]

Aubrey [*bending over her*]: Paula, you must have said something —admitted something—

Paula: I don't think so. It—it's in my face.

Aubrey: What?

Paula: She tells me so. She's right! I'm tainted through and through; anybody can see it, anybody can find it out. You said much the same to me tonight.

Aubrey: If she has got this idea into her head we must drive it out, that's all. We must take steps to— What shall we do? We had better—better— What—what? [*Sitting and staring before him*]

Paula: Ellean! So meek, so demure! You've often said she reminded you of her mother. Yes, I know now what your first marriage was like.

Aubrey: We must drive this idea out of her head. We'll do something. What shall we do?

Paula: She's a regular woman too. She could forgive *him* easily enough—but *me!* That's just a woman!

Aubrey: What *can* we do?

Paula: Why, nothing! She'd have no difficulty in following up her suspicions. Suspicions! You should have seen how she looked at me! [*He buries his head in his hands. There is silence for a time, then she rises slowly, and goes and sits beside him.*] Aubrey.

Aubrey: Yes.

Paula: I'm very sorry. [*Without meeting her eyes, he lays his hand on her arm for a moment.*]

Aubrey: Well, we must look things straight in the face. [*Glancing around*] At any rate, we've done with this.

Paula: I suppose so. [*After a brief pause*] Of course, she and I can't live under the same roof any more. You know she kissed me tonight, of her own accord.

Aubrey: I asked her to alter towards you.

Paula: That was it, then.

Aubrey: I—I'm sorry I sent her away.

Paula: It was my fault; I made it necessary.

Aubrey: Perhaps now she'll propose to return to the convent,—well, she must.

Paula: Would you like to keep her with you and—and leave me?

Aubrey: Paula—!

Paula: You needn't be afraid I'd go back to—what I was. I couldn't.

Aubrey: S—sh, for God's sake! We—you and I—we'll get out of this place . . . what a fool I was to come here again!

Paula: You lived here with your first wife!

Aubrey: We'll get out of this place and go abroad again, and begin afresh.

Paula: Begin afresh?

Aubrey: There's no reason why the future shouldn't be happy for us—no reason that I can see—

Paula: Aubrey!

Aubrey: Yes?

Paula: You'll never forget this, you know.

Aubrey: This?

Paula: Tonight, and everything that's led up to it. Our coming here, Ellean, our quarrels—cat and dog!—Mrs. Cortelyon, the Orreyeds, this man! What an everlasting nightmare for you!

Aubrey: Oh, we can forget it, if we choose.

Paula: That was always your cry. How *can* one do it!

Aubrey: We'll make our calculations solely for the future, talk about the future, think about the future.

Paula: I believe the future is only the past again, entered through another gate.

Aubrey: That's an awful belief.

Paula: Tonight proves it. You must see now that, do what we will, go where we will, you'll be continually reminded of—what I was. I see it.

Aubrey: You're frightened tonight; meeting this man has frightened you. But that sort of thing isn't likely to recur. The world isn't quite so small as all that.

Paula: Isn't it! The only great distances it contains are those we carry within ourselves—the distances that separate husbands and wives, for instance. And so it'll be with us. You'll do your best—oh, I know that—you're a good fellow. But circumstances will be too strong for you in the end, mark my words.

Aubrey: Paula—!

Paula: Of course I'm pretty now—I'm pretty still—and a pretty woman, whatever else she may be, is always—well, endurable. But even now I notice that the lines of my face are getting deeper; so are the hollows about my eyes. Yes, my face is covered with little shadows that usen't to be there. Oh, I know I'm "going off." I hate paint and dye and those messes, but, by-and-by, I shall drift the way of the others; I sha'n't be able to help myself. And then, some day—perhaps very suddenly, under a queer, fantastic light at night or in the glare of the morning—that horrid, irresistible truth that physical repulsion forces on men and women will come to you, and you'll sicken at me.

Aubrey: I—!

Paula: You'll see me then, at last, with other people's eyes; you'll see me just as your daughter does now, as all wholesome folks see women like me. And I shall have no weapon to fight with—not one serviceable little bit of prettiness left me to defend myself with! A worn-out creature—broken up, very likely, some time before I ought to be—my hair bright, my eyes dull, my body too thin or too stout, my cheeks raddled and ruddled—a ghost, a wreck, a caricature, a candle that gutters, call such an end what you like! Oh, Aubrey, what shall I be able to say to you then? And this is the future you talk about! I know it—I know it! [*He is still sitting staring forward; she rocks herself to and fro as if in pain.*] Oh, Aubrey! Oh! Oh!

Aubrey: Paula—! [*Trying to comfort her*]

Paula: Oh, and I wanted so much to sleep tonight! [*Laying her head upon his shoulder. From the distance, in the garden, there comes the sound of* DRUMMLE'S *voice; he is singing as he approaches the house.*] That's Cayley, coming back from The Warren. [*Starting up*] He doesn't know, evidently. I—I won't see him! [*She goes out quickly.* DRUMMLE'S *voice comes nearer.* AUBREY *rouses himself and snatches up a book from the table, making a pretense of reading. After a moment or two,* DRUMMLE *appears at the window and looks in.*]

Drummle: Aha! my dear chap!

Aubrey: Cayley?

Drummle [*coming into the room*]: I went down to The Warren after you.

Aubrey: Yes?

Drummle: Missed you. Well—I've been gossiping with Mrs. Cortelyon. Confound you, I've heard the news!

Aubrey: What have you heard?

Drummle: What have I heard! Why—Ellean and young Ardale! [*Looking at* AUBREY *keenly*] My dear Aubrey! Alice is under the impression that you are inclined to look on the affair favorably.

Aubrey [*rising and advancing to* DRUMMLE]: You've not—met—Captain Ardale?

Drummle: No. Why do you ask? By-the-by, I don't know that I need tell you—but it's rather strange. He's not at The Warren tonight.

Aubrey: No?

Drummle: He left the house half an hour ago, to stroll about the lanes; just now a note came from him, a scribble in pencil, simply telling Alice that she would receive a letter from him tomorrow. What's the matter? There's nothing very wrong, is there? My dear chap, pray forgive me if I'm asking too much.

Aubrey: Cayley, you—you urged me to send her away!

Drummle: Ellean! Yes, yes. But—but—by all accounts this is quite an eligible young fellow. Alice has been giving me the history—

Aubrey: Curse him! [*Hurling his book to the floor*] Curse him! Yes, I do curse him—him and his class! Perhaps I curse myself too in doing it. He has only led "a man's life"—just as I, how many of us, have done! The misery he has brought on me and mine it's likely enough we, in our time, have helped to bring on others by this leading "a man's life"! But I do curse him for all that. My God, *I've* nothing more to fear—I've paid *my* fine! And so I can curse him in safety. Curse him! Curse him!

Drummle: In Heaven's name, tell me what's happened?

Aubrey [*gripping* DRUMMLE'S *arm*]: Paula! Paula!

Drummle: What?

Aubrey: They met tonight here. They—they—they're not strangers to each other.

Drummle: Aubrey!

Aubrey: Curse him! My poor, wretched wife! My poor, wretched wife! [*The door opens and* ELLEAN *appears. The two men turn to her. There is a moment's silence.*]

Ellean: Father . . . father . . . !

Aubrey: Ellean?

Ellean: I—I want you. [*He goes to her.*] Father . . . go to

Paula! [*He looks into her face, startled.*] Quickly—quickly! [*He passes her to go out; she seizes his arm, with a cry.*] No, no; don't go! [*He shakes her off and goes.* ELLEAN *staggers back towards* DRUMMLE.]

Drummle [*to* ELLEAN]: What do you mean? What do you mean?

Ellean: I—I went to her room—to tell her I was sorry for something I had said to her. And I *was* sorry—I *was* sorry. I heard the fall. I—I've seen her. It's horrible.

Drummle: She—she has—!

Ellean: Killed—herself? Yes—yes. So everybody will say. But I know—I helped to kill her. If I'd only been merciful! [*She faints upon the ottoman. He pauses for a moment irresolutely—then he goes to the door, opens it, and stands looking out.*]

II. The One-Act Play

J. M. BARRIE

IT IS GENERALLY ASSUMED that the one-act play as a form of English drama emerged in the nineties. Actually the form is much earlier; it coincides, in fact, with the origin of the English drama itself. The trope was a one-act play. So, too, the mystery plays were one-act plays—a series of them, each dramatizing a single Bible story. It was not until the Renaissance that the play, under the influence of classical drama, came to be divided into acts, at first into five, then four, and finally three. The one-act form does not represent, though, merely a decreasing of the number from three to one. It goes back instead to the beginning, when drama was part of religious celebration. Even before it was expelled from the Church and taken over by the guilds, the drama had ceased to be entirely religious and had become secularized by comic elements interpolated for entertainment. It was as much for entertainment as for worship that many people attended those early plays. Thus from the beginning the theatre has been regarded as a place of amusement. Sometimes the amusement is set apart from the more serious forms of drama. For example, in the Elizabethan theatre the production of a tragedy was augmented by juggling acts, clowning, or trained-animal performances. In this way audiences came to expect that the price of admission to see a play included extra entertainment, just as today movie audiences expect shorts, newsreels, and animated cartoons in addition to the feature.

Gradually this extra entertainment took on a dramatic quality. Vaudeville-like skits opening a performance helped to get the audi-

ence into the mood for a play or at least took up time while latecomers were finding their seats. At first called *curtain-raisers,* these little plays established themselves so well in the theatre that serious attention was given to writing them. Pinero wrote curtain-raisers for Henry Irving's company. Sometimes they were performed *after* the main bill; then they were called *afterpieces.* Thus the one-act play established itself in the English drama.

It is customary to say that the one-act play is to the full-length play what the short story is to the novel. The one-act play is usually about as long as a single act of a three-act play, although the actual playing time is not what distinguishes it. Occasionally the one-act play is divided into more than one scene; usually, however, it calls for continuous acting in a single set. Its most significant characteristic is unity. Thus the mood must be quickly established, the cast must not be so large that the audience cannot at once become acquainted with the characters, and the plot must be simple. Too, the point of attack must usually be early; that is, the play must begin near the beginning of the story it has to tell so that little exposition is necessary. Or if the point of attack is late, the necessary exposition should be slight and thus readily effected.

Many dramatists have experimented with the one-act form. Pinero wrote many one-act plays, not only before but after he had mastered the technique of the long play. John Galsworthy, Bernard Shaw, and J. M. Barrie have contributed some excellent one-acts to dramatic repertoire. Noel Coward's *Tonight at 8:30,* a collection of nine one-act plays, has been successfully produced in three separate bills made up entirely of one-acts. The Irish theatre has been enriched by the one-act contributions of Lord Dunsany, John Millington Synge, and Lady Gregory. In this country there is Eugene O'Neill, who gained recognition as a serious playwright through his one-act plays of the sea, originally produced at Provincetown, and in 1940 made into the movie *The Long Voyage Home.* More recently among one-act plays by American playwrights have been the sensational *Bury the Dead,* by Irwin Shaw, and *Waiting for Lefty* and *Till the Day I Die,* by Clifford Odets. *The Fall of the City* and *Air Raid,* written for the radio by Archibald MacLeish, are one-act plays in verse. A particularly well-constructed one-act play is Barrie's *A Well-Remembered Voice.*

James Matthew Barrie was born in Kirriemuir, Forfarshire, Scotland, in 1860, the son of a weaver. As a child, when he saw his first play, a puppet show, Barrie decided that he wanted to be a drama-

tist. After attending Dumfries Academy he was enabled, at the age of eighteen, to enter Edinburgh University, his older brother Alexander providing the money for the younger Barrie's education. Before he was twenty-two, he was graduated with the degree of master of arts and took a position as columnist and editorial writer for the Nottingham *Journal.* Soon he was in London, writing for the *St. James Gazette.* His *Auld Licht Idylls,* published in 1888 and including material he had written for the *Gazette,* are significant for the clear style that later was to characterize the stage directions in his plays. The book also made him a recognized author before he became a playwright. In 1891 he wrote *The Little Minister,* a novel, and the following year *Walker, London,* a play. The latter was not so successful as *The Little Minister,* and William Archer tried to persuade the would-be playwright to content himself with being a successful novelist. But Barrie wrote *The Professor's Love Story,* another play. Then came the dramatization of *The Little Minister* and the establishment of Barrie's fame in the theatre.

Although Barrie had taken part in dramatic productions at Dumfries Academy and had written a play for the dramatic society, he had had no such experience in the theatre as Pinero. Having made himself wealthy from his novels, he indulged his love for the theatre by joining the producer Charles Frohman in opening a repertory season at the Duke of York's Theatre in London for the production of his own plays as well as others. Here were produced *The Admirable Crichton,* in 1903, and *Peter Pan,* in 1904. Here too, in 1905, with *Pantaloon* for a curtain-raiser, occurred the original production of *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire,* an interesting variation on the triangle theme and a satire on *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* kind of play. For a long time Barrie did not permit his plays to be published, because he believed that since they had been written for the theatre, they would lose by being reduced to print. In 1914 four of his one-act plays, including the well-known *The Twelve-Pound Look,* were published under the title *Half Hours,* and in 1918 appeared a similar collection, called *Echoes of the War,* which contains *A Well-Remembered Voice.* That Barrie was conscious of the vast difference between reading a play and seeing it is evidenced by his inimitable stage directions in the published versions. When his plays were produced, he attended rehearsals, sitting with the director to assist in working out stage movement to minutest detail. In 1920 he wrote *Mary Rose,* and two years later *Shall We Join the Ladies?,* which he called "the first act of an unfinished play." His last play

to be produced, *The Boy David* (1937), was not a success. Barrie died in 1937.

Barrie's mastery of stage technique is as great as Pinero's, if not greater. Although Barrie's plays are, in stage directions as well as in lines, distinguished by their style, they act even better than they read. In *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire* Barrie says that a play "must tell little that is not revealed by the spoken words; you must ferret out all you want to know from them, although of course now and then we may whisper a conjecture in brackets; there is no weather even in plays except in melodrama; the novelist can have sixteen chapters about the hero's grandparents, but there can be very little rummaging in the past for us; we are expected merely to present our characters as they toe the mark; then the handkerchief falls and off they go." This Barriesque statement is especially applicable to the one-act play. Not only did Barrie master the one-act form, but he is the first English dramatist to write one-act plays to be produced in groups for a complete evening's entertainment in the theatre.

It is customary to describe Barrie's style as whimsical, or fantastic, or sentimental, and to observe that situations in which he places his characters are often not true to life. *A Well-Remembered Voice* is, for example, a *fantasy,* that is, a play characterized by unreal or even supernatural situations and characters. But through his simplicity and directness Barrie succeeds in this play, as in his realistic dramas, in making us recognize his characters as very real people. It is this skillful characterization, more effective even than Pinero's, together with a frank but proper use of the theatric, that proves Barrie a master craftsman. Barrie's satire is not so brilliant as Shaw's—nor, except in *The Admirable Crichton* and *The Will,* so bitter—but it is no less impressive. The condescending attitude in Shaw's laughter is lacking in Barrie, who believes that we may laugh kindly and sympathetically, not loving any the less those we laugh at.

The satire in *A Well-Remembered Voice* is directed against spiritualistic devices to commune with one who, as Barrie would have Mrs. Don say, "has crossed the gulf." Particularly since World War I, death has been a popular subject for the drama, and such plays as *Outward Bound, The Miracle at Verdun, Post-Mortem,* and *Bury the Dead* attempt to present life after death. The subject, however, is an old one, going back to *Everyman.* In fact, the English drama began with a little play about the Resurrection. But the

theme of *A Well-Remembered Voice* is not communion with the dead but the affection of the strong for the weak. It is the theme of Bernard Shaw's *Candida,* with a more sentimental surface, through which, as always in Barrie, we must look for the implications. The play is a good example not only of how well Barrie can handle the one-act form but of how staging technique had developed since the production of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* a quarter of a century before.

The play opens on a darkened stage. In a few lines we are given the situation, as from the darkness come the voices of four people whose outlines can vaguely be made out as they sit in a séance about a small table; while in the chimney corner, his face lighted enough by the fire to show that he is not interested in the proceedings, sits a middle-aged man. Thus the ironic appearance of the son to the father instead of to the mother is built up, surprising to the audience as it may be. But surprise, if expertly handled, can be one of the most effective devices in the theatre. The dialogue is condensed, as it must usually be in the one-act play, but it is no less revealing of the true emotions of the characters than if it were more realistic. *Dramatic irony,* that device which, because something said or done by one character means the opposite to another character, heightens the situation, is effected again and again throughout the scene in which Dick's voice cannot be heard by anyone in the room but the father—and of course the audience. For example, Mrs. Don, who is quite unconscious of the presence of her son, reproaches her husband for laughing about the séance:

Mrs. Don: . . . Very well, laugh your fill—if you can. But if Dick were to appear before me tonight— [*In his distress* MR. DON *cries aloud to the figure by the fire.*]

Mr. Don: Dick, if you can appear to your mother, do it. [*There is a pause in which anything may happen, but nothing happens. Yes, something has happened:* DICK *has stuck to his father.*]

Mrs. Don: Really, Robert! [*Without a word of reproach, she goes away.* . . .]

After a series of minor climaxes the main climax, the most ironic fact of all, brings the play to an end.

The setting Barrie specifies for *A Well-Remembered Voice* and the use he makes of the setting show not only his mastery of theatre technique but the contribution of modern staging toward establishing the mood of the play. When the curtain goes up, the stage is in

darkness except for a limited space illuminated by firelight. Such light in the theatre is called *natural,* that is, light from a natural source, as a fireplace, a lamp on a table, a candle in the hand of an actor, etc., as contrasted with *arbitrary light,* supplied by arbitrary sources, as footlights, striplights, borderlights, etc. The light from the fire is sufficient to outline vaguely the figures about the table and to focus more distinctly on the man in the chimney corner. Thus the mood is established at once. Then before the audience might become restless—for a darkened stage can be disconcerting—one of the characters asks whether they can't have a little more light; accordingly a lamp is lit—natural lighting again, even though arbitrary light, from a hidden source, may augment the lamp—but not much, for the lamp casts shadows, illuminating the room enough to show that it is an artist's studio. When the séance is over and Mr. Don is left alone on the stage, the lights are slowly dimmed "as if the lamp, though still burning, was becoming unable to shed light. Through the grayness we see him very well beyond it in the glow of the fire." Thus in one stroke Barrie not only builds up the mood of his play but solves the very practical problem of centering attention on the father and at the same time creating an illusion of the presence of the son, whose lines of course must be read from the wings.

A Well-Remembered Voice

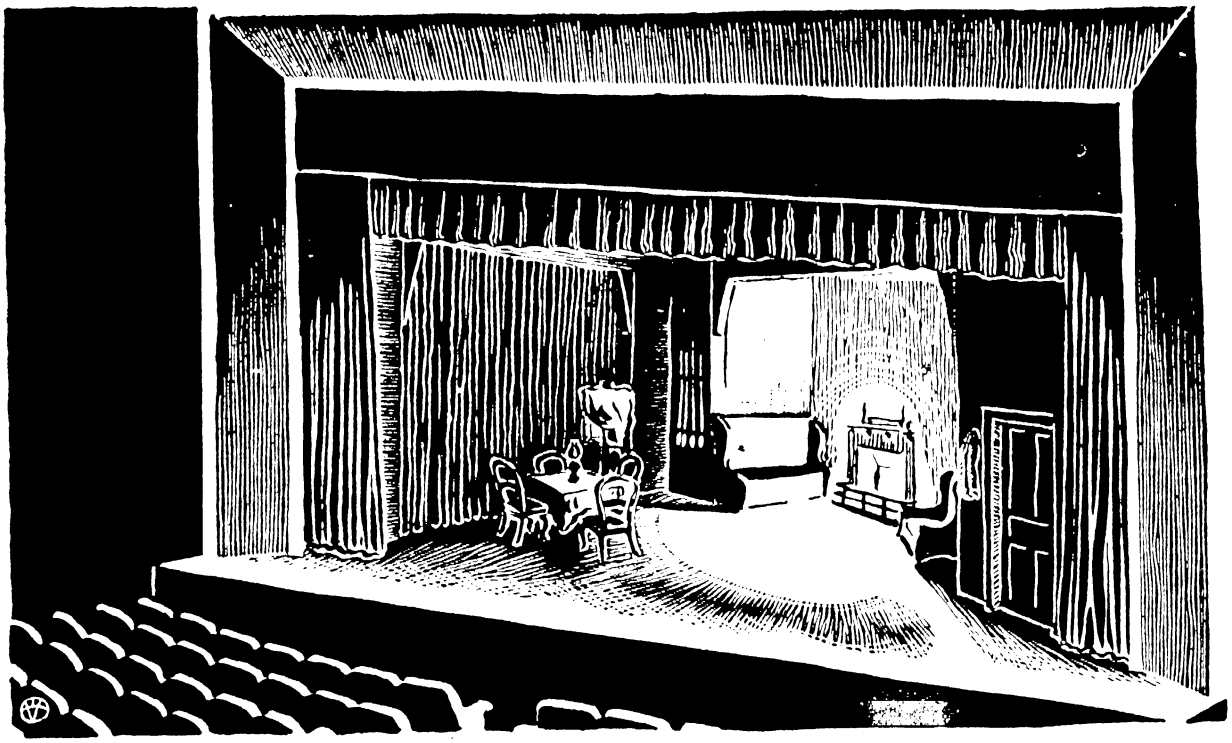
by

J. M. BARRIE

Originally produced in a special matinee performance at Wyndham's Theatre, London, on Friday, June 28, 1918, with the following cast:

Mr. Don	Forbes-Robertson
Mr. Ropers	H. V. Esmond
Major Armitage	Dawson Milward
Mrs. Don	Lilian Braithwaite
Laura Bell	Faith Celli
Another	Gerald du Maurier

A Well-Remembered Voice



Out of the darkness comes the voice of a woman speaking to her dead son.

"But that was against your wish, was it not? Was that against your wish? Would you prefer me not to ask that question?"

The room is so dark that we cannot see her. All we know is that she is one of four shapes gathered round a small table. Beyond the darkness is a great ingle-nook, in which is seated on a settle a man of fifty. Him we can discern fitfully by the light of the fire. It is not sufficiently bright to enable him to read, but an evening paper lies on his knee. He is paying no attention to the party round the table. When he hears their voices it is only as empty sounds.

The mother continues. "Perhaps I am putting the question in the wrong way. Are you not able to tell us any more?"

A man's voice breaks in. "There was a distinct movement that time, but it is so irregular."

"I thought so, but please don't talk. Do you want to tell us more?

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Is it that you can't hear me distinctly? He seems to want to tell us more, but something prevents him."

"In any case, Mrs. Don, it is extraordinary. This is the first séance I have ever taken part in, but I must believe now."

"Of course, Major, these are the simplest manifestations. They are only the first step. But if we are to go on, the less we talk the better. Shall we go on? It is not agitating you too much, Laura?"

A girl answers. "There was a moment when I—but I wish I was braver. I think it is partly the darkness. I suppose we can't have a little light?"

"Certainly we can, dear. Darkness is quite unnecessary, but I think it helps one to concentrate."

The MAJOR *lights a lamp, and though it casts shadows we see now that the room is an artist's studio. The silent figure in the ingle-nook is the artist.* MRS. DON *is his wife; the two men are* MAJOR ARMITAGE *and an older friend,* MR. ROGERS. *The girl is* LAURA BELL. *These four are sitting round the table, their hands touching: they are endeavoring to commune with one who has "crossed the gulf."*

The MAJOR *and* MR. ROGERS *are but passing shadows in the play, and even nice* LAURA *is only to flit across its few pages for a moment on her way to happier things. We scarcely notice those three in the presence of* MRS. DON, *the gracious, the beautiful, the sympathetic, whose magnetic force and charm are such that we wish to sit at her feet at once. She is intellectual, but with a disarming smile; religious, but so charitable; masterful, and yet loved of all. None is perfect, and there must be a flaw in her somewhere, but to find it would necessitate such a rummage among her many adornments as there is now no time for. Perhaps we may come upon it accidentally in the course of the play.*

She is younger than MR. DON, *who, despite her efforts for many years to cover his deficiencies, is a man of no great account in a household where the bigger personality of his wife swallows him like an Aaron's rod.* MR. DON'S *deficiencies! She used to try very hard, or fairly hard, to conceal them from* DICK; *but* DICK *knew. His mother was his chum. All the lovely things which happened in that house in the days when* DICK *was alive were between him and her; those two shut the door softly on old Don, always anxious not to hurt his feelings, and then ran into each other's arms.*

In the better light MR. DON *is now able to read his paper if he*

chooses. If he has forgotten the party at the table, they have equally forgotten him.

Mrs. Don: You have not gone away, have you? We must be patient. Are you still there?

Rogers: I think I felt a movement.

Mrs. Don: Don't talk, please. Are you still there? [*The table moves.*] Yes! It is your mother who is speaking; do you understand that? [*The table moves.*] Yes. What shall I ask him now?

Rogers: We leave it to you, Mrs. Don.

Mrs. Don: Have you any message you want to send us? Yes. Is it important? Yes. Are we to spell it out in the usual way? Yes. Is the first letter of the first word A? Is it B? [*She continues through the alphabet to L, when the table responds. Similarly she finds that the second letter is O.*] Is the word *Love?* Yes. But I don't understand that movement. You are not displeased with us, are you? No. Does the second word begin with A?—with B? Yes. [*The second word is spelt out* Bade *and the third* Me.] Love Bade Me— If it is a quotation, I believe I know it! Is the fourth word *Welcome?* Yes.

Laura: Love Bade Me Welcome.

Mrs. Don: That movement again! Don't you want me to go on?

Laura: Let us stop.

Mrs. Don: Not unless he wishes it. Why are those words so important? Does the message end there? Is anyone working against you? Someone antagonistic? Yes. Not one of ourselves, surely? No. Is it anyone we know? Yes. Can I get the name in the usual way? Yes. Is the first letter of this person's name A?—B?— [*It proves to be F. One begins to notice a quaint peculiarity of* Mrs. Don's. *She is so accustomed to homage that she expects a prompt response even from the shades.*] Is the second letter A? [*The tables moves.*] FA. Fa—? [*She is suddenly enlightened.*] Is the word *Father?* Yes. [*They all turn and look for the first time at* Mr. Don. *He has heard, and rises apologetically.*]

Mr. Don [*distressed*]: I had no intention— Should I go away, Grace? [*She answers sweetly without a trace of the annoyance she must surely feel.*]

Mrs. Don: Perhaps you had better, Robert.

Rogers: I suppose it is because he is an unbeliever? He is not openly antagonistic, is he?

Mrs. Don [*sadly enough*]: I am afraid he is. [*They tend to discuss the criminal as if he was not present.*]

Major: But he must admit that we do get messages.

Mrs. Don [*reluctantly*]: He says we think we do. He says they would not want to communicate with us if they had such trivial things to say.

Rogers: But we are only on the threshold, Don. This is just a beginning.

Laura: Didn't you hear, Mr. Don—"Love Bade Me Welcome"?

Mr. Don: Does that strike you as important, Laura?

Laura: He said it was.

Mrs. Don: It might be very important to him, though we don't understand why. [*She speaks gently, but there is an obstinacy in him, despite his meekness.*]

Mr. Don: I didn't mean to be antagonistic, Grace. I thought—I wasn't thinking of it at all.

Mrs. Don: Not thinking of Dick, Robert? And it was only five months ago!

Mr. Don [*who is somehow, without meaning it, always in the wrong*]: I'll go.

Rogers: A boy wouldn't turn his father out. Ask him.

Mr. Don [*forlornly*]: As to that—as to that—

Mrs. Don: I shall ask him if you wish me to, Robert.

Mr. Don: No, don't.

Rogers: It can't worry you as you are a disbeliever.

Mr. Don: No, but—I shouldn't like you to think that he sent me away.

Rogers: He won't. Will he, Mrs. Don?

Mr. Don [*knowing what her silence implies*]: You see, Dick and I were not very—no quarrel or anything of that sort—but I—I didn't much matter to Dick. I'm too old, perhaps.

Mrs. Don [*gently*]: I won't ask him, Robert, if you would prefer me not to.

Mr. Don: I'll go.

Mrs. Don: I'm afraid it is too late now. [*She turns away from earthly things.*] Do you want me to break off? [*The table moves.*] Yes. Do you send me your love, Dick? Yes. And to Laura? Yes. [*She raises her eyes to* DON, *and hesitates.*] Shall I ask him—?

Mr. Don: No, no, don't.

Rogers: It would be all right, Don.

Mr. Don: I don't know. [*They leave the table.*]

Laura [*a little agitated*]: May I go to my room, Mrs. Don? I feel I—should like to be alone.

Mrs. Don: Yes, yes, Laura dear. I shall come in and see you. [LAURA *bids them good night and goes. She likes* MR. DON, *she strokes his hand when he holds it out to her, but she can't help saying, "Oh, Mr. Don, how could you?"*]

Rogers: I think we must all want to be alone after such an evening. I shall say good night, Mrs. Don.

Major: Same here. I go your way, Rogers, but you will find me a silent companion. One doesn't want to talk ordinary things tonight. Rather not. Thanks, awfully.

Rogers: Good night, Don. It's a pity, you know; a bit hard on your wife.

Mr. Don: Good night, Rogers. Good night, Major. [*The husband and wife, left together, have not much to say to each other. He is depressed because he has spoilt things for her. She is not angry. She knows that he can't help being as he is, and that there are fine spaces in her mind where his thoughts can never walk with hers. But she would forgive him seventy times seven because he is her husband. She is standing looking at a case of fishing-rods against the wall. There is a Jock Scott still sticking in one of them.*]

Mr. Don [*as if somehow they were evidence against him*]: Dick's fishing-rods.

Mrs. Don [*forgivingly*]: I hope you don't mind my keeping them in the studio, Robert. They are sacred things to *me.*

Mr. Don: That's all right, Grace.

Mrs. Don: I think I shall go to Laura now.

Mr. Don [*in his inexpressive way*]: Yes.

Mrs. Don: Poor child!

Mr. Don: I'm afraid I hurt her.

Mrs. Don: Dick wouldn't have liked it—but Dick's gone. [*She looks a little wonderingly at him. After all these years, she can sometimes wonder a little still.*] I suppose you will resume your evening paper! [*He answers quietly, but with the noble doggedness which is the reason why we write this chapter in his life.*]

Mr. Don: Why not, Grace? [*She considers, for she is so sure that she must know the answer better than he.*]

Mrs. Don: I suppose it is just that a son is so much more to a mother than to a father.

Mr. Don: I dare say.

Mrs. Don [*a little gust of passion shaking her*]: How you can read about the war nowadays!

Mr. Don [*firmly to her—he has had to say it a good many times to himself*]: I'm not going to give in. [*Apologetically*] I am so sorry I was in the way, Grace. I wasn't scouting you, or anything of that sort. It is just that I can't believe in it.

Mrs. Don: Ah, Robert, you would believe if Dick had been to you what he was to me.

Mr. Don: I don't know.

Mrs. Don: In a sense you may be glad that you don't miss him in the way I do.

Mr. Don: Yes, perhaps.

Mrs. Don: Good night, Robert.

Mr. Don: Good night, dear. [*He is alone now. He stands fingering the fishing-rods, then wanders back into the ingle-nook. In the room we could scarcely see him, for it has gone slowly dark there, a gray darkness, as if the lamp, though still burning, was becoming unable to shed light. Through the grayness we see him very well beyond it in the glow of the fire. He sits on the settle and tries to read his paper. He fails. He is a very lonely man. In the silence something happens. A well-remembered voice says, "Father."* MR. DON *looks into the grayness from which this voice comes, and he sees his son. We see no one, but we are to understand that, to* MR. DON, DICK *is standing there in his habit as he lived. He goes to his boy.*]

Mr. Don: Dick!

Dick: I have come to sit with you for a bit, father. [*It is the gay, young, careless voice.*]

Mr. Don: It's you, Dick; it's you!

Dick: It's me all right, father. I say, don't be startled, or anything of that kind. We don't like that.

Mr. Don: My boy! [*Evidently* DICK *is the taller, for* MR. DON *has to look up to him. He puts his hands on the boy's shoulders.*]

Dick: How am I looking, father?

Mr. Don: You haven't altered, Dick.

Dick: Rather not. It's jolly to see the old studio again! [*In a cajoling voice*] I say, father, don't fuss. Let us be our ordinary selves, won't you?

Mr. Don: I'll try, I'll try. You didn't say you had come to sit with *me,* Dick? Not with *me!*

Dick: Rather!

Mr. Don: But your mother—

Dick: It's you I want.

Mr. Don: Me?

Dick: We can only come to one, you see.

Mr. Don: Then why me?

Dick: That's the reason. [*He is evidently moving about, looking curiously at old acquaintances.*] Hullo, here's your old jacket, greasier than ever!

Mr. Don: Me? But, Dick, it is as if you had forgotten. It was your mother who was everything to you. It can't be you if you have forgotten that. I used to feel so out of it; but, of course, you didn't know.

Dick: I didn't know it till now, father; but heaps of things that I didn't know once are clear to me now. I didn't know that you were the one who would miss me most; but I know now. [*Though the voice is as boyish as ever, there is a new note in it of which his father is aware.* DICK *may not have grown much wiser, but whatever he does know now he seems to know for certain.*]

Mr. Don: Me miss you most? Dick, I try to paint just as before. I go to the club. Dick, I have been to a dinner-party. I said I wouldn't give in.

Dick: We like that.

Mr. Don: But, my boy— [MR. DON'S *arms have gone out to him again.* DICK *evidently wriggles away from them. He speaks coaxingly.*]

Dick: I say, father, let's get away from that sort of thing.

Mr. Don: That is so like you, Dick! I'll do anything you ask.

Dick: Then keep a bright face.

Mr. Don: I've tried to.

Dick: Good man! I say, put on your old greasy; you are looking so beastly clean. [*The old greasy is the jacket, and* MR. DON *obediently gets into it.*]

Mr. Don: Anything you like. No, that's the wrong sleeve. Thanks, Dick. [*They are in the ingle-nook now, and the mischievous boy catches his father by the shoulders.*]

Dick: Here, let me shove you into your old seat. [MR. DON *is propelled on to the settle.*] How's that, umpire!

Mr. Don [*smiling*]: Dick, that's just how you used to butt me into it long ago! [DICK *is probably standing with his back to the fire, chuckling.*]

Dick: When I was a kid.

Mr. Don: With the palette in my hand.

Dick: Or sticking to your trousers.

Mr. Don: The mess we made of ourselves, Dick!

Dick: I sneaked behind the settle and climbed up it.

Mr. Don: Till you fell off.

Dick: On top of you and the palette. [*It is good fun for a father and son; and the crafty boy has succeeded in making the father laugh.*]

Mr. Don [*sadly*]: Ah, Dick. [*The son frowns. He is not going to stand any nonsense.*]

Dick: Now then, behave! What did I say about that face? [MR. DON *smiles at once, obediently.*] That's better. I'll sit here. [*We see from his father's face, which is smiling with difficulty, that* DICK *has plopped into the big chair on the other side of the ingle-nook. His legs are probably dangling over one of its arms.*]

Dick [*rather sharply*]: Got your pipe?

Mr. Don: I don't—I don't seem to care to smoke nowadays, Dick.

Dick: Rot! Just because I am dead. You that pretend to be plucky! I won't have it, you know. You get your pipe, and look slippy about it.

Mr. Don [*obediently*]: Yes, Dick. [*He fills his pipe from a jar on the mantelshelf. We may be sure that* DICK *is watching closely to see that he lights it properly.*]

Dick: Now, then, burn your thumb with the match—you always did, you know. That's the style. You've forgotten to cock your head to the side. Not so bad. That's you. Like it?

Mr. Don: It's rather nice, Dick. Dick, you and me by the fire!

Dick: Yes, but sit still. How often we might have been like this, father, and weren't.

Mr. Don: Ah!

Dick: Face! How is Fido?

Mr. Don: Never a dog missed her master more.

Dick [*frowning*]: She doesn't want to go and sit on my grave, or any of that tosh, does she? As if I were there!

Mr. Don [*hastily*]: No, no; she goes ratting, Dick.

Dick: Good old Fido!

Mr. Don: Dick, here's a good one. We oughtn't to keep a dog at all because we are on rations now; but what do you think Fido ate yesterday?

Dick: Let me guess. The joint?

Mr. Don: Almost worse than that. She ate all the cook's meat tickets. [*They laugh together.*]

Dick: That dog will be the death of me. [*His father shivers but* DICK *does not notice this; his eyes have drawn him to the fishing-rods.*] Hullo!

Mr. Don: Yes, those are your old fishing-rods.

Dick: Here's the little hickory! Do you remember, father, how I got the seven-pounder on a burn-trout cast? No, you weren't there. That was a day. It was really only six and three-quarters. I put a stone in its mouth the second time we weighed it!

Mr. Don: You loved fishing, Dick.

Dick: Didn't I? Why weren't you oftener with me? I'll tell you a funny thing. When I went a-soldiering I used to pray—just standing up, you know—that I shouldn't lose my right arm, because it would be so awkward for casting. [*He cogitates as he returns to the ingle-nook.*] Somehow I never thought I should be killed. Lots of fellows thought that about themselves, but I never did. It was quite a surprise to me.

Mr. Don: Oh, Dick!

Dick: What's the matter? Oh, I forgot. Face! [*He is apparently looking down at his father wonderingly.*] Haven't you got over it yet, father? I got over it so long ago. I wish you people would understand what a little thing it is.

Mr. Don: Tell me, Dick.

Dick. All right. [*He is in the chair again.*] Mind, I can't tell you where I was killed; it's against the regulations.

Mr. Don: I know where.

Dick [*curiously*]: You got a wire, I suppose?

Mr. Don: Yes.

Dick: There's always a wire for officers, even for 2nd Lieutenants. It's jolly decent of them.

Mr. Don: Tell me, Dick, about the—the veil. I mean the veil that is drawn between the living and the—

Dick: The dead? Funny how you jib at that word.

Mr. Don: I suppose the veil is like a mist?

Dick: The veil's a rummy thing, father. Yes, like a mist. But when one has been at the Front for a bit, you can't think how thin the veil seems to get; just one layer of it. I suppose it seems thin to you out there because one step takes you through it. We sometimes mix up those who have gone through with those who haven't.

I dare say if I were to go back to my old battalion the living chaps would just nod to me.

Mr. Don: My boy!

Dick: Where's that pipe! Death? Well, to me, before my day came, it was like some part of the line I had heard a lot about but never been in. I mean, never been in to stay, because, of course, one often popped in and out.

Mr. Don: Dick, the day that you—

Dick: My day? I don't remember being hit, you know. I don't remember anything till the quietness came. When you have been killed it suddenly becomes very quiet; quieter even than you have ever known it at home. Sunday used to be a pretty quiet day at my tutor's, when Trotter and I flattened out on the first shady spot up the river; but it is quieter than that. I am not boring you, am I?

Mr. Don: Oh, Dick!

Dick: When I came to, the veil was so thin that I couldn't see it at all; and my first thought was, Which side of it have I come out on? The living ones lying on the ground were asking that about themselves, too. There we were, all sitting up and asking whether we were alive or dead; and some were one, and some were the other. Sort of fluke, you know.

Mr. Don: I—I—

Dick: As soon as each had found out about himself he wondered how it had gone with his chums. I halloo'd to Johnny Randall, and he halloo'd back that he was dead, but that Trotter was living. That's the way of it. A good deal of chaff, of course. By that time the veil was there, and getting thicker, and we lined up on our right sides. Then I could only see the living ones in shadow and hear their voices from a distance. They sang out to us for a while; but just at first, father, it was rather lonely when we couldn't hear their tread any longer. What are you fidgeting about? You needn't worry; that didn't last long; we were heaps more interested in ourselves than in them. You should have heard the gabbling! It was all so frightfully novel, you see; and no one quite knew what to do next, whether all to start off together, or wait for someone to come for us. I say, what a lot I'm talking!

Mr. Don: What happened, Dick?

Dick [*a proud ring coming into the voice*]: Ockley came for us. He used to be alive, you know—the Ockley who was keeper of the fives in my first half. I once pointed him out to mother. I was

jolly glad he was the one who came for us. As soon as I saw it was Ockley I knew we should be all right.

Mr. Don: I like that Ockley.

Dick: Rather. I wish I could remember something funny to tell you, though. There are lots of jokes, but I am such a one for forgetting them. [*He laughs boisterously. We may be sure that he flings back his head. You remember how* DICK *used to fling back his head when he laughed?—No, you didn't know him.*] Father, do you remember little Wantage who was at my private and came on to Ridley's house in my third half? His mother was the one you called Emily.

Mr. Don: Emily Wantage's boy?

Dick: That's the card. We used to call him Jemima, because he and his mother were both caught crying when lockup struck, and she had to clear out.

Mr. Don: She was very fond of him.

Dick: Oh, I expect no end. Tell her he's killed.

Mr. Don: She knows.

Dick: She had got a wire. That isn't the joke, though. You see he got into a hopeless muddle about which side of the veil he had come out on; and he went off with the other ones, and they wouldn't have him, and he got lost in the veil, running up and down it, calling to us; and just for the lark we didn't answer. [*He chuckles.*] I expect he has become a ghost! [*With sudden consideration*] Best not tell his mother that. [MR. DON *rises, wincing,* and DICK *also is at once on his feet, full of compunction.*] Was that shabby of me? Sorry, father. We are all pretty young, you know, and we can't help having our fun still.

Mr. Don: I'm glad you still have your fun. Let me look at you again, Dick. There is such a serenity about you now.

Dick: Serenity—that's the word! None of us could remember what the word was. It's a ripping good thing to have. I should be awfully bucked if you would have it, too.

Mr. Don: I'll try.

Dick: I say, how my tongue runs on! But, after all, it was my show. Now, you tell me some things.

Mr. Don: What about, Dick? The war?

Dick [*almost in a shout*]: No. We have a fine for speaking about the war. And you know, those fellows we were fighting—I forget who they were?

Mr. Don: The Germans.

Dick: Oh, yes. Some of them were on the same side of the veil with us, and they were rather decent; so we chummed up in the end and Ockley took us all away together. They were jolly lucky in getting Ockley. There I go again! Come on, it's your turn. Has the bathroom tap been mended yet?

Mr. Don: I'm afraid it is—just tied up with that string still, Dick. It works all right.

Dick: It only needs two screw-nails, you know.

Mr. Don: I'll see to it.

Dick: Do you know whether anyone at my tutor's got his fives choice this half?

Mr. Don: I'm sorry, but—

Dick: Or who is the captain of the boats?

Mr. Don: No, I—

Dick: Whatever have you been doing? [*He is moving about the room.*] Hullo, here's mother's workbox! Is mother all right?

Mr. Don: Very sad about you, Dick.

Dick: Oh, I say, that isn't fair. Why doesn't she cheer up?

Mr. Don: It isn't so easy, my boy.

Dick: It's pretty hard lines on me, you know.

Mr. Don: How is that?

Dick: If you are sad, I have to be sad. That's how we have got to work it off. You can't think how we want to be bright.

Mr. Don: I'll always remember that, and I'll tell your mother. Ah, but she won't believe me, Dick; you will have to tell her yourself.

Dick: I can't do that, father. I can only come to one.

Mr. Don: She should have been the one; she loved you best, Dick.

Dick: Oh, I don't know. Do you ever [*with a slight hesitation*] see Laura now?

Mr. Don: She is staying with us at present.

Dick: Is she? I think I should like to see her.

Mr. Don: If Laura were to see you—

Dick: Oh, she wouldn't see me. She is not dressed in black, is she?

Mr: Don: No, in white.

Dick: Good girl! I suppose mother is in black!

Mr. Don: Of course, Dick.

Dick: It's too bad, you know.

Mr. Don: You weren't exactly—engaged to Laura, were you, Dick? [*Apologetically*] I never rightly knew.

Dick [*confidentially*]: Father, I sometimes thought of it, but it rather scared me. I expect that is about how it was with her, too.

Mr. Don: She is very broken about you now.

Dick [*irritated*]: Oh, hang!

Mr. Don: Would you like her to forget you, Dick?

Dick: Rather not. But she might help a fellow a bit. Hullo! [*What calls forth this exclamation is the little table at which the séance had taken place. The four chairs are still standing round it, as if they were guarding something.*]

Dick: Here's something new, father; this table.

Mr. Don: Yes, it is usually in the drawing-room.

Dick: Of course. I remember.

Mr. Don [*setting his teeth*]: Does that table suggest anything to you, Dick?

Dick: To me? Let me think. Yes, I used to play backgammon on it. What is it doing here?

Mr. Don: Your mother brought it in.

Dick: To play games on? Mother!

Mr. Don: I don't—know that it was a game, Dick.

Dick: But to play anything! I'm precious glad she can do that. Was Laura playing with her?

Mr. Don: She was helping her.

Dick: Good for Laura. [*He is looking at some slips of paper on the table.*] Are those pieces of paper used in the game? There is writing on them: "The first letter is H—the second letter is A—the letter is R." What does it mean?

Mr. Don: Does it convey no meaning to you, Dick?

Dick: To me? No; why should it? [MR. DON *is enjoying no triumph.*]

Mr. Don: Let us go back to the fire, my boy. [DICK *follows him into the ingle-nook.*]

Dick: But why should it convey a meaning to me? I was never much of a hand at indoor games. [*Brightly*] I bet you Ockley would be good at it. [*After a joyous rumble*] Ockley's nickname still sticks to him!

Mr. Don: I don't think I know it.

Dick: He was a frightful swell, you know. Keeper of the field, and played at Lord's the same year. I suppose it did go just a little to his head. [*They are back in their old seats, and* MR. DON *leans forward in gleeful anticipation. Probably* DICK *is leaning forward in the same way, and this old father is merely copying him.*]

Mr. Don: What did you nickname him, Dick?

Dick: It was his fags that did it!

Mr. Don: I should like to know it. I say, do tell me, Dick.

Dick: He is pretty touchy about it now, you know.

Mr. Don: I won't tell anyone. Come on, Dick.

Dick: His fags called him K.C.M.G.

Mr. Don: Meaning, Dick?

Dick: Meaning "Kindly Call Me God!" [MR. DON *flings back his head; so we know what* DICK *is doing. They are a hilarious pair, perhaps too noisy, for suddenly* MR. DON *looks at the door.*]

Mr. Don: I think I heard someone, Dick!

Dick: Perhaps it's mother!

Mr. Don [*nervously*]: She may have heard the row. [DICK'S *eyes must be twinkling.*]

Dick: I say, father, you'll catch it!

Mr. Don: I can't believe, Dick, that she won't see you.

Dick: Only one may see me.

Mr. Don: You will speak to her, Dick. Let her hear your voice.

Dick: Only one may hear me. I could make her the one; but it would mean your losing me.

Mr. Don: I can't give you up, Dick. [MRS. DON *comes in, as beautiful as ever, but a little aggrieved.*]

Mrs. Don: I called to you, Robert.

Mr. Don: Yes, I thought—I was just going to— [*He has come from the ingle-nook to meet her. He looks from her to* DICK, *whom he sees so clearly, standing now by the fire. An awe falls upon* MR. DON. *He says her name, meaning, "See, Grace, who is with us." Her eyes follow his, but she sees nothing, not even two arms outstretched to her.*]

Mrs. Don: What is it, Robert? What is the matter? [*She does not hear a voice say "Mother."*] I heard you laughing, Robert; what on earth at? [*The father cannot speak.*]

Dick [*in a mischievous voice*]: Now you're in a hole, father!

Mrs. Don: Can I not be told, Robert?

Dick: Something in the paper. [MR. DON *lifts the paper feebly, and his wife understands.*]

Mrs. Don: Oh, a newspaper joke! Please, I don't want to hear it.

Mr. Don: Was it my laughing that brought you back, Grace?

Mrs. Don: No, that would only have made me shut my door. If Dick thought you could laugh! [*She goes to the little table.*] I came

back for these slips of paper. [*She lifts them and presses them to her breast.*] These precious slips of paper!

Dick [*forgetting that she cannot hear him*]: How do you mean, mother? Why are they precious? [MR. DON *forgets also and looks to her for an answer.*]

Mrs. Don: What is it, Robert?

Mr. Don: Didn't you hear—anything, Grace?

Mrs. Don: No. Perhaps Laura was calling; I left her on the stair.

Mr. Don: I wish Laura would come back and say good night to me.

Mrs. Don: I dare say she will.

Mr. Don: And, if she could be—rather brighter, Grace.

Mrs. Don: Robert!

Mr. Don: I think Dick would like it. [*Her fine eyes reproach him mutely.*]

Mrs. Don: Is that how you look at it, Robert? Very well, laugh your fill—if you can. But if Dick were to appear before me tonight— [*In his distress* MR. DON *cries aloud to the figure by the fire.*]

Mr. Don: Dick, if you can appear to your mother, do it. [*There is a pause in which anything may happen, but nothing happens. Yes, something has happened:* DICK *has stuck to his father.*]

Mrs. Don: Really, Robert! [*Without a word of reproach, she goes away. Evidently* DICK *comes to his father, who has sunk into a chair, and puts a loving hand on him.* MR. DON *clasps it without looking up.*]

Dick: Father, that was top-hole of you! Poor mother, I should have liked to hug her; but I can't.

Mr. Don: You should have gone to her, Dick; you shouldn't have minded me.

Dick: Mother's a darling, but she doesn't need me as much as you do.

Mr. Don: I don't know.

Dick: I do. I'm glad she's so keen about that game, though. [*He has returned to the ingle-nook when* LAURA *comes in, eager to make amends to* DICK'S *father if she hurt him when she went out.*]

Laura [*softly*]: I have come to say good night, Mr. Don.

Mr. Don [*taking both her hands*]: It's nice of you, Laura.

Dick: I want her to come nearer to the fire; I can't see her very well there. [*For a moment* MR. DON *is caught out again; but* LAURA *has heard nothing.*]

Mr. Don: Your hands are cold, Laura; go over to the fire. I want to look at you. [*She sits on the hearthstone by* DICK'S *feet.*]

Laura [*shyly*]: Am I all right?

Dick: You're awfully pretty, Laura. You are even prettier than I thought. I remember I used to think, she can't be quite as pretty as I think her; and then when you came you were just a little prettier.

Laura [*who has been warming her hands*]: Why don't you say anything?

Mr. Don: I was thinking of you and Dick, Laura. If Dick had lived, do you think that you and he—?

Laura [*with shining eyes*]: I think—if he had wanted it very much.

Mr. Don: I expect he would, my dear. [*There is an odd candor about* DICK'S *contribution.*]

Dick: I think so, too, but I never was quite sure.

Laura [*who is trembling a little*]: Mr. Don—

Mr. Don: Yes, Laura?

Laura: I think there is something wicked about me. I sometimes feel—quite light-hearted—though Dick has gone.

Mr. Don: Perhaps, nowadays, the fruit trees have that sort of shame when they blossom, Laura; but they can't help doing it. I hope you are yet to be a happy woman, a happy wife.

Laura: It seems so heartless to Dick.

Dick: Not a bit; it's what I should like.

Mr. Don: It's what he would like, Laura.

Dick: Do you remember, Laura, I kissed you once. It was under a lilac in the Loudon Woods. I am afraid you were angry. [*His sweetheart has risen, tasting something bitter-sweet.*]

Mr. Don: What is it, Laura?

Laura: Somehow—I don't know how—but, for a moment I seemed to smell lilac. Dick was once—nice to me under a lilac. Oh, Mr. Don— [*She goes to him like a child, and he soothes and pets her. He takes her to the door.*]

Mr. Don: Good night, my dear.

Laura: Good night, Mr. Don.

Dick: Good-by, Laura. [MR. DON *is looking so glum that the moment they are alone* DICK *has to cry warningly, "Face!"*] Pretty awful things, these partings. Father, don't feel hurt though I dodge the good-by business when I leave you.

Mr. Don: That's so like you, Dick!

Dick: I'll have to go soon.

Mr. Don: Oh, Dick! Can't you—

Dick: There's something I want not to miss, you see.

Mr. Don: I'm glad of that.

Dick: I'm not going yet; but I mean that when I do I'll just slip away.

Mr. Don: What I am afraid of is that you won't come back.

Dick: I will—honest Injun—if you keep bright.

Mr. Don: But, if I do that, Dick, you might think I wasn't missing you so much.

Dick: We know better than that. You see, if you're bright, I'll get a good mark for it.

Mr. Don: I'll be bright. [DICK *pops him into the settle again.*]

Dick: Remember your pipe.

Mr. Don: Yes, Dick.

Dick: Do you still go to that swimming-bath, and do your dumb-bell exercises?

Mr. Don: No, I—

Dick: You must.

Mr. Don: All right, Dick, I will.

Dick: And I want you to be smarter next time. Your hair's awful.

Mr. Don: I'll get it cut.

Dick: Are you hard at work over your picture of those three Graces?

Mr. Don: No, I put that away. I'm just doing little things nowadays. I can't—

Dick: Look here, sonny, you've got to go on with it. You don't seem to know how interested I am in your future.

Mr. Don: Very well, Dick; I'll bring it out again. [*He hesitates.*] Dick, there is something I have wanted to ask you all the time. [*Some fear seems to come into the boy's voice.*]

Dick: Don't ask it, father.

Mr. Don: I shall go on worrying about it if I don't—but just as you like, Dick.

Dick: Go ahead; ask me.

Mr. Don: It is this. Would you rather be—here—than there?

Dick: Not always.

Mr. Don: What is the great difference, Dick?

Dick: Well, down here one knows he has risks to run.

Mr. Don: And you miss that?

Dick: It must be rather jolly.

Mr. Don: Did you know that was what I was to ask?

Dick: Yes. But, remember, I'm young at it.

Mr. Don: And your gaiety, Dick; is it all real, or only put on to help me?

Dick: It's—it's half and half, father. Face!

Mr. Don: When will you come again, Dick?

Dick: There's no saying. One can't always get through. They keep changing the password. [*His voice grows troubled.*] It's awfully difficult to get the password.

Mr. Don: What was it tonight?

Dick: Love Bade Me Welcome. [MR. DON *rises; he stares at his son.*]

Mr. Don: How did you get it, Dick?

Dick: I'm not sure. [*He seems to go closer to his father, as if for protection.*] There are lots of things I don't understand yet.

Mr. Don: There are things I don't understand either. Dick, did you ever try to send messages—from there—to us?

Dick: Me? No.

Mr. Don: Or get messages from us?

Dick: No. How could we?

Mr. Don: Is there anything in it? [*He is not speaking to his son. He goes to the little table and looks long at it. Has it taken on a sinister aspect? Those chairs, are they guarding a secret?*] Dick, this table—your mother—how could they— [*He turns to find that* DICK *has gone.*] Dick! My boy! Dick! [*The well-remembered voice leaves a message behind it.*]

Dick: Face!

III. Tragedy

EUGENE O'NEILL

THE DRAMA has always represented a confluence of the arts. It is not surprising, therefore, that a group of young journalists, teachers, sculptors, painters, architects, and novelists who happened to be spending the summer of 1916 at Provincetown, on the end of Cape Cod, found a common interest in writing and producing plays. The group had been informally organized the previous summer, when they staged *Suppressed Desires,* by two of their number, Susan Glaspell, the novelist, and George Cram Cook, the director, at the house of one of the group, with settings by Robert Edmond Jones, who was already showing promise as a scene designer. Then, finding the house too crowded, they improvised a theatre in a fishing shack on a Provincetown wharf. Thus the organization known as the Provincetown Players was born.

In that summer of 1916, having improved their wharf playhouse by installing electric lights and permanent benches so that they might continue to produce their own plays in their own way, the Provincetown Players were interested when someone mentioned that a young man, at the time in Provincetown, had a trunkful of plays. The young man, "a shy, dark boy," was introduced, and one of his plays, a one-act called *Bound East for Cardiff,* was read to them. They decided to produce the play in their second bill of the season, and it was put into rehearsal at once. The young man was Eugene O'Neill, who was of course invited to join the Provincetown. Thus began an association and a career which changed the course of American drama.

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born on October 16, 1888, in New York City, in a hotel on the corner of Broadway and Forty-third Street. His father was the actor James O'Neill. The first seven years of Eugene O'Neill's life were spent touring with his parents, his father playing in *The Count of Monte Cristo.* Then, after six years of boarding schools and four years at Betts Academy, in Stamford, Connecticut, O'Neill entered Princeton University with the class of 1910, but he did not finish his freshman year. Suspended in the spring—for what he later called "general hell-raising"—he went to work as secretary of a small mail-order house in New York. In 1909 he married, against his father's wishes. The following year a son was born, by which time O'Neill, disappointed in the marriage, was in Spanish Honduras prospecting for gold. In the United States again, after eight months as a miner, he was persuaded by his father to become assistant manager of a theatrical company producing a play called *The White Sister.* But the theatre did not appeal to the future dramatist. Having, through his reading, become interested in the sea, he shipped as ordinary seaman on a Norwegian barque sailing from Boston to Buenos Aires, where for a year he worked at various jobs—in the Westinghouse Electric, the Swift Packing Company, and the Singer Sewing Machine Company. Leaving Buenos Aires he signed on a cattle boat bound for Durban, South Africa, from which he was returned, not even being permitted to land, because he had no cash. Finally he went back to New York as an ordinary seaman on a British tramp steamer and for a while loafed and shared a three-dollar-a-month room with some derelict sailors over a water-front saloon known as Jimmy the Priest's. Then after still another voyage, as able seaman to Southampton and back, he tried the theatre again, this time as an actor in his father's *Count of Monte Cristo* company touring in the Far West. But as before, the theatre did not satisfy him. Plays like *The Count of Monte Cristo* had too little in common with reality; he thought they were false. So he went to work as a reporter on the New London *Telegraph.* The editor of this Connecticut paper, Frederick P. Latimer, thought O'Neill "the most stubborn and irreconcilable social rebel" he had ever met. At the age of twenty-four O'Neill contracted a slight touch of pulmonary tuberculosis and entered a sanatorium at Wallingford, Connecticut, where he spent six months reading and thinking and recovering his health. While he was at Wallingford, he decided to be a playwright.

In knocking about the world O'Neill had perhaps seen and felt

enough of life to be convinced that he could write plays which would interpret life more faithfully than *The Count of Monte Cristo.* He read about everything he could lay hands on: "the Greeks, the Elizabethans—practically all the classics—and of course all the moderns. Ibsen and Strindberg, especially Strindberg." After he was released from the sanatorium, he started to write. During that winter, 1914-15, he wrote eight one-act plays and two long ones, of which he has said only one, *Bound East for Cardiff,* is worth remembering. This is a one-act play about the sea. The scene is the seaman's forecastle of the British tramp steamer *Glencairn* on a foggy night midway between New York and Cardiff. The play anticipates *Beyond the Horizon* in its contrast between life at sea and life on the land. Yank, dying in his bunk in the forecastle, yearns for "a farm with a house of your own with cows and pigs and chickens, 'way in the middle of the land where yuh'd never smell the sea or see a ship."

Because he believed that he lacked some of the technique of playwriting, O'Neill went to Harvard and enrolled in George Pierce Baker's course in playwriting and play production, called the *47 Workshop,* the first course in an American university to include dramatic practice. O'Neill's chief debt to Baker is not so much that the Workshop taught him a technique as that in those days, when the Broadway theatre was hardly more than an amusement racket, Baker encouraged him to write plays about life as he saw and felt it. Baker taught his students to believe in their work. O'Neill has said, "He helped us to hope." After a year at Harvard, O'Neill spent a winter in and about Greenwich Village, in New York, observing people—and writing. The next summer he went to Provincetown, and the Provincetown Players discovered the shy young man with the trunkful of plays.

That this association of players and playwright should have come about seems natural. For the ideals the Provincetown stood for happened to be those which O'Neill had thought out for himself, which had made him realize that the accepted drama of the time was at variance with life and an honest mirroring of life, and which Baker had given him reason to believe could be fulfilled. The Provincetown was no mere group of vacationers amusing themselves by "putting on plays." It was composed of intelligent and gifted people sincerely concerned about improving the unfortunate state of the American drama. The purpose of the group was "to give American playwrights a chance to work out their ideas in freedom." Although

O'Neill would have succeeded without the Provincetown Players, they enabled him, by producing his plays, to put into effect at once the ideas he and they had in common—ideas which at the time were hardly those of Broadway. Of O'Neill's joining the Provincetown, Susan Glaspell has said: "So Gene took *Bound East for Cardiff* from his trunk and Freddie Burt read it to us. . . . Then we knew what we were for." *

Bound East for Cardiff was produced, with two other original one-acts, as the second bill of the season. O'Neill played the part of the Mate, who has but a single line. Of that performance in the little theatre on the wharf in Provincetown, the first production on any stage of a play by Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell writes:

> The sea has been good to Eugene O'Neill. It was there for his opening. There was a fog, just as the script demanded, fog bell in the harbor. The tide was in, and it washed under us and around, spraying through the holes in the floor, giving us the rhythm and flavor of the sea while the big dying sailor talked to his friend Drisc of the life he had always wanted deep in the land, where you'd never see a ship.
>
> It is not merely figurative language to say the old wharf shook with applause.*

The Provincetown produced two of O'Neill's plays that summer, the other being *Thirst,* also a one-act play of the sea. *Thirst* was one of four plays which, through the help of his father, O'Neill had published in 1914 and later attempted to recall. His chief reason for wishing to disclaim *Thirst* may have been its lack of real dramatic quality. O'Neill is unexcelled by any other modern playwright in a feeling for the genuinely *dramatic,* that is, startling situations resulting naturally and inevitably from character, as opposed to the merely *theatric* circumstances obviously superposed by the playwright to give striking effects without plausibility of character.

And *Thirst,* which represents the violent deaths of three people on a raft in a tropic sea, is theatric rather than dramatic. Furthermore, the technique of this play shows O'Neill either unaware of, or unwilling to conform to, the physical restrictions imposed on the drama by the stage. It is conceivable that "a steamer's life raft rising and falling slowly on the long ground-swell of a glassy tropic sea," as O'Neill indicates in the opening stage direction, might be made to seem comparatively real in a theatre—or even the sky above,

* *The Road to the Temple,* quoted with the permission of J. B. Lippincott Company.

which the stage direction would have "pitilessly clear, of a steel blue color merging into black shadows on the horizon's rim." How plausibly such directions might have been effected in that tiny makeshift playhouse on the wharf at Provincetown is, however, conjectural. But the most versatile of stage managers might well be baffled by the rest of that opening direction: "The sun glares down from straight overhead like a great angry eye of God. The heat is terrific. Writhing fantastic heat-waves rise from the white deck of the raft. Here and there on the still surface of the sea the fins of sharks may be seen slowly cutting the surface of the water in large circles."

For the Provincetown production William Zorach painted a formal set representing waves. (A *formal stage setting* is scenery painted on a backdrop. It originated in the sixteenth century, when a fixed setting served for several plays.) But Cook and John Reed insisting that O'Neill was a realist, canvas water was substituted. O'Neill himself played the part of the Mulatto Sailor. How closely the production followed the stage directions is not recorded.

There is, of course, much in *Thirst* which may well have given O'Neill reason to wish it had never been published. For one thing, he knows how to write dialogue that sounds more natural. The opening line of *Thirst* is the Dancer's, and it is "My God! My God! This silence is driving me mad! Why do you not speak to me? Is there no ship in sight yet?" Yet the author of that line was, only a few years later, to write *Beyond the Horizon.* On the other hand, at the time O'Neill wrote *Thirst* he also wrote the realistic *Bound East for Cardiff.* Perhaps he could not yet distinguish completely in his own work the real from the false. Nor are the stage directions in *Thirst* absolute evidence of O'Neill's not appreciating the limitations of the stage. After all, he had been brought up in a theatrical atmosphere. He had toured with his father's company and had been an assistant manager of a play company himself. And even though he was used to such romantic plays as *The Count of Monte Cristo,* in which he had seen his father rise from a canvas ocean exclaiming, "The wor-rld is mine!" he could not have escaped a first-hand knowledge of stage technique. And he read exhaustively. Probably, therefore, the impossible stage directions in *Thirst* represent O'Neill's characteristic refusal to be restricted, even by the rules of the art he was trying to master. Latimer had found him a "social rebel"; as a playwright he was, and has always been, an artistic rebel. In fact, one of his distinctions as a playwright has been his

independence from theatrical traditions, although his refusal to conform to the limitations of the theatre has made it impossible to stage some of his plays satisfactorily.

In the fall O'Neill accompanied the Players back to New York. There they converted an old brownstone house at 139 Macdougal Street into a playhouse, which at O'Neill's suggestion they called the Playwright's Theatre. A double door between front and back parlors separated stage from auditorium, and spectators sat in the front parlor, equipped with a hundred and fifty tiered seats. The whole theatre was fifteen feet wide by forty-five feet deep. *Bound East for Cardiff* was on the opening bill. The Players did three other O'Neill plays that winter: *Before Breakfast, Fog,* and *The Sniper.*

Before Breakfast is a monologue in the manner of Strindberg's *The Stronger,* except that in O'Neill's play the burden of acting is on the speaker rather than on the one spoken to. It is the monologue of a nagging wife whose husband, played in that performance by O'Neill, is represented as shaving in an adjoining room but, except for reaching his hand through a door for a basin of water, does not appear on stage. This almost invisible part of the husband was the shy playwright's favorite role. And it was his last on any stage. The wife's nagging—and the play—comes to an end when a drip . . . drip, not of water but of blood, indicates that the tormented man has cut his throat. James O'Neill directed that original production of *Before Breakfast.* That throughout the rehearsals Eugene O'Neill opposed his father's directing is hardly surprising, for the theatre that Eugene O'Neill—and the Provincetown—stood for was in revolt against the histrionics and the *Monte Cristo* kind of drama of the old school.

There were three new one-acts by O'Neill the next season, including—on the opening bill—*The Long Voyage Home.* In the fall of 1917, when the Players moved into a larger house, at 133 Macdougal Street, an O'Neill play was on the opening bill again—*Where the Cross Is Made.* This season also saw the original production of *The Moon of the Caribbees,* which was to be incorporated nearly a quarter of a century later as the opening scene of the moving picture *The Long Voyage Home.* Ten of O'Neill's plays—all one-act plays—were staged by the Provincetown Players before the young dramatist was very widely known outside the group. Then in 1920 *Beyond the Horizon* was produced, and O'Neill was famous.

Beyond the Horizon, like much of O'Neill's work, had a direct origin in actual experience. On his return trip from Buenos Aires to New York as ordinary seaman on the British tramp steamer, O'Neill became friendly with a Norwegian able-bodied seaman. The Norwegian used to grumble that he had made the mistake of his life when, as a boy on his parents' farm twenty years before, he had run away to sea. Although in all that time he had not once returned home, he liked to extoll the life of the farmer in contrast to the hard lot of the sailor. This gave O'Neill an idea:

> I thought, "What if he had stayed on the farm, with his instincts?" . . . But I realized at once he never would have stayed . . . He was too harmonious a creature of the God of things as they are . . . And from that point I started to think of a more intellectual, civilized type from the standpoint of the above-mentioned God—a man who would have my Norwegian's inborn craving for the sea's unrest, only in him it would be conscious, too conscious, intellectually diluted into a vague intangible wanderlust. His power of resistance, both moral and physical, would also probably be correspondingly watered. He would throw away his instinctive dream and accept the thralldom of the farm for—why, for almost any nice little poetical craving—the romance of sex, say.

In *Beyond the Horizon* his "more intellectual, civilized type" is, of course, Robert Mayo. He is the farm boy who, on the eve of setting out on a voyage with his sea-captain uncle, suddenly decides that he is in love. So he gives up the adventure he has long dreamed of, and his brother, who belongs on the farm, goes to sea in his place. Because of the consequences of this decision *Beyond the Horizon* is a tragedy.

To understand why it is a tragedy, let us see first what the term *tragedy* means. *Tragedy* originally meant a song sung at festivals in ancient Greece. The song, in honor of a god, was accompanied by dancing, and the parts were divided between a leader and a chorus. The song narrated the exploits of the god, and the dancing interpreted them. Through the centuries tragedies grew more elaborate, as the number of actors was increased and the subject matter, enlarged to include stories about various Greek heroes, was developed into dramatic plots. At its height in Greece *tragedy* meant a play presented by actors in costume, on a stage set with scenery, and containing a complete plot, in which the chief character, the hero, comes to misfortune, usually death, because of a flaw in his character. That is, the action seemingly results from character, and is not brought about arbitrarily by the dramatist.

By Shakespeare's time the word *tragedy* was applied to narratives, non-dramatic as well as dramatic, ending in catastrophe. Whereas in the Greek drama the chief characters of a tragedy are men greater than average—heroes or kings or even gods—in Elizabethan drama *tragedy* included plays about people of less heroic proportion. Greek tragedy tended to restrict the action to a period of time not exceeding twenty-four hours and to one place; it confined the action to one plot, a tragic one, unmixed with comedy. Most of the Elizabethans disregarded these unities of time, place, and action. The Greeks considered plot the most important element in tragedy; the Elizabethans, character. In Greek tragedy character is felt to be at least in part determined by fate, that is, the gods. In Elizabethan tragedy a decision of free will is made to seem the first cause of the hero's downfall. In both Greek and Elizabethan tragedy the decision which the tragic hero makes constitutes an ideal by which he stands, even to death. Macbeth would rather die than lose his crown, and bear-like he fights his hopeless course. The devotion of a tragic hero to his ideal will not permit him to compromise. Shylock, in *The Merchant of Venice,* is not a tragic hero, for he will not risk his life for what he most desires, the death of Antonio. Instead, at the crucial point, he grovels for his ducats. He compromises. It is the refusal to compromise that gives the tragic hero dignity.

Today *tragedy* may mean any unusual circumstance or accident from which misfortune results. In modern drama it is applied to plays with unhappy endings. Its use should be limited, though, to plays in which the unhappy endings are brought about through action determined by character. In modern tragedy, as in Elizabethan, character is the most important element. But character in modern tragedy is interpreted as fate—not the fate of Greek tragedy, in which a capricious god seems to have determined the situation in which the hero finds himself, but fate in the form of character determined by heredity and environment. For modern science shows natural causes for effects that in an earlier age were ascribed to the gods. Robert Mayo chooses to remain on the farm, it is true, because of a "nice little poetical craving—the romance of sex." But in *Beyond the Horizon* O'Neill is not saying that this whim is the basic cause for the hero's downfall. If Robert had sailed all of the Seven Seas in his uncle's *Sunda,* he would never have got beyond the horizon. For Robert represents the man in whom the romantic impulse is out of proportion to the rest of his character. It is his tragic

flaw. It is as surely the reason for his inability to adjust himself to the world about him and the real cause of his death as an over-reflective nature is for the downfall of Hamlet. And it is, ironically, responsible for the choice that O'Neill's hero makes to remain on the farm. Ironically too, Robert dies thinking that at last he has won his trip—beyond the horizon.

Since rarely does the tragic hero passively accept his fate, tragedy usually implies a *conflict*. Sometimes the conflict is between individuals. In *Hamlet,* for example, the conflict is between Hamlet and the King. Sometimes the conflict is between an individual and a group. In *The Emperor Jones* the Emperor's struggle is with Lem and the natives. Or the conflict may be between an individual and society, as in *Ghosts,* in which tragedy results because of Mrs. Alving's failure to withstand public opinion. In *Hamlet* there is an inner conflict in the hero's struggle with himself—whether or not to act. In *The Emperor Jones* O'Neill used the new device of expressionism to materialize the inner conflict on the stage—the conflict between Jones and his fate as well as the fate of his ancestors. The conflict in *Beyond the Horizon* is between Robert and reality—a conflict more inner than outer. And the outcome of that conflict is inevitable.

The tragedy in *Beyond the Horizon* is not isolated in Robert. Because of his tragic flaw, other people suffer too. Ruth is changed in eight years from a vivacious, attractive girl to a slovenly, aged woman. James Mayo dies of a broken heart. The hardships and poverty on the run-down farm bring death to Robert's little daughter and to his mother. Andy, who goes to sea in his brother's place and who would have been happy living on the land and successful in working the farm, becomes a profit-seeker with the profit-seeker's goal of "making good." He remembers ports of call on his voyage only as places where money could or could not be made. Andy becomes like another of O'Neill's characters, Marco Polo (in *Marco Millions*), who "has not even a mortal soul, he has only an acquisitive instinct. . . . He has looked at everything and seen nothing. . . . He is only a shrewd and crafty greed." Andy succeeds in making money—which, ironically, he loses.

Recognizing in the paradox of the Norwegian sailor he met on the tramp steamer the germ of a play, O'Neill wrote this tragedy. But *Beyond the Horizon* expresses O'Neill's experiences not only in its origin but in details of its content. Robert Mayo's illness, for example, had counterparts in lung afflictions O'Neill had seen the

Wallingford patients suffer. Furthermore, although none of the scenes in *Beyond the Horizon* are, as in many O'Neill plays, on shipboard, the description of the cabin of the *Sunda,* the character and speech of the sea captain, and the allusions to the sea and to the life on it came out of those years when O'Neill was a sailor himself. O'Neill had gone to sea because he had read about the sea in Joseph Conrad. He had not chosen the sea as a means of making a living: he had chosen it for the romance in it. Andy suspects that Robert wants to go to sea because "there's always a chance of a good thing coming your way in some of those foreign ports or other." And when Robert protests that he has never considered that practical side of it for a minute, Andy's reply is, "Well, you ought to."

Robert: No, I oughtn't. [*Pointing to the horizon—dreamily*] Supposing I was to tell you that it's just Beauty that's calling me, the beauty of the far off and unknown, the mystery and spell of the East which lures me in the books I've read, the need of the freedom of great wide spaces, the joy of wandering on and on—in quest of the secret which is hidden over there, beyond the horizon? Suppose I told you that was the one and only reason for my going?

And Andy, the potential profit-seeker, cannot understand.

Beyond the Horizon is the protest of the man of feeling against the crass acquisitiveness of a world in which the Andys get ahead. It represents for O'Neill the tragedy of life. In *Before Breakfast* O'Neill said what he says in *Beyond the Horizon.* One should read that earlier play to see how, although the idea of the sea-loving man forced by fate to remain on the land originated in the author's experience on the tramp steamer, *Beyond the Horizon* is the development of a theme which O'Neill, only more sketchily, had worked out before, namely, that of the idealist in an unidealistic world. Robert's tragedy is that with such a world he cannot compromise. Thus he is a hero—and thus he dies. The play, a tragedy in which a denial of life means death, is a refutation of the charge that O'Neill is a pessimist. For *Beyond the Horizon* is an affirmation of life.

"Possibly, if properly 'psyched,' " O'Neill wrote, "it would be found that my inability to climb over the rigid hills of modern dramatic technique had resulted in a complex which found expression in Robert's life imprisonment within the narrow confines of the farm." *Beyond the Horizon* shows its author willing to conform to

some of the physical restrictions of the theatre, if not all. Although the point of attack of the play is early, the opening act allows an audience time to get settled in their seats even after the curtain has gone up and still not miss the meaning of the opening lines. O'Neill shows, too, that he knows how to build up a scene. In fact, each scene works up to a crisis of its own, and thus the audience is anxious to see the curtain go up on the following scene to learn what has happened as a result. For example, at the end of the first scene Robert and Ruth have become engaged, and Robert has decided not to go to sea after all. But the family has expected that Ruth is going to marry Andy. We are therefore in suspense at the beginning of the second scene to know whether the family has meanwhile found out, and then, learning that they have not, in suspense to see how the characters will react when they do find out. And O'Neill knows how to make the most of the suspense. Thus as the curtain goes up on Scene II, we cannot tell from the first few minutes of conversation whether the news has been broken. Finally Mrs. Mayo drops an allusion that indicates that the family does *not* yet know. Then the scene continues for even a longer interval—and the tenseness of the situation is meanwhile built up—before Robert tells them. Now the center of interest turns on Andy. What will his reaction be? Andy finally announces that he will go in his brother's place. On this crisis Act I closes. Consequently, at the opening of Act II, three years later, we are again in suspense, and so on through the play.

However, O'Neill does not acknowledge all stage restrictions. For example, he has Robert's two-year-old daughter Mary appear in two scenes, with lines to speak and stage directions to follow. Obviously an actress ridiculously older than the Mayo baby has to be assigned to this role when the play is produced. On the other hand, O'Neill masters the theatre in making it an integral part of his drama. For example, the contrast between the two brothers, the one the idealist and the other the practical man of action, is brought out not only in their character, through the dialogue and action, but in their physical appearance. The descriptions of Robert and Andy in the stage directions demand considerable of theatrical make-up if not of casting. Too, anyone in the audience can recognize this contrast immediately the curtain rises at the beginning of the play—Robert on the rail fence with his book, gazing toward the horizon, and Andy with his hoe.

The play presents the degeneration of the farm as well as the

premature aging of the people on it. The dialogue skillfully indicates this deterioration in more ways than one, but O'Neill is too much of the theatre not to dramatize this decay as well in make-up, in costume, and in setting. In the interior of the farmhouse in Act I, for example, everything is clean, well-kept, and in its exact place. In Act II the curtains are soiled, the screen door is patched, the chairs appear shabby from lack of paint, and the table cover is spotted. In Act III the curtains are torn and dirty and one of them is missing, blotches of dampness disfigure the wallpaper, threadbare trails show in the faded carpet, rust covers the unblacked stove, etc. Then, too, in the very arrangement of scenes, O'Neill shows that he has the theatre in mind. Each of the three acts contains one outdoor scene and one indoor. The critics objected to this arrangement, contending that no purpose was thereby served which could not have been served by staging the entire play in the single interior set, and that the reason for the alternating scenes was undoubtedly O'Neill's lack of theatre experience.

O'Neill's answer was that he "could have laid the whole play in the farm interior, and made it tight as a drum à la Pinero," but that he imagined that the symbolism he intended to convey by the alternating scenes would be apparent even from a glance at the program. He was particularly irked, he said, at being criticized for lack of theatre experience: "To be accused of ignorance of conventional, everyday technique—I, a Baker 47 alumnus!" After the first performance, however, the final scene was left out, and all of the third act was played in the set representing the interior of the farmhouse. O'Neill admitted that, because of the saving of time in scene shifting, the change was an improvement. When *Beyond the Horizon* was revived in 1927, however, both scenes were played. But by then the play had been cut to its present form and the playing time accordingly reduced.

Beyond the Horizon, like *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,* was originally scheduled only for special matinee performances, and at first was so produced, with actors drawn from the casts of two concurrent plays. George Jean Nathan, a champion of O'Neill in those days before the dramatist was well known, had recommended the play to John D. Williams, the producer. With the idea that John and Lionel Barrymore would play the brothers, Williams bought the play at once. But it lay gathering dust on the shelf for over a year, until one day Richard Bennett, the actor-manager, happened to be in Williams' office and picked up the manuscript and read it.

Bennett, the father of Constance, Barbara, and Joan, now of movie fame, was appearing in a melodrama by Elmer Rice, called *For the Defense,* which Williams was producing at the time. Because Bennett was tired of his role in the Rice melodrama, or because he saw in *Beyond the Horizon* a great play—and a great part for himself as Robert Mayo—he decided to put the play into production immediately. Edward Arnold was obtained for the part of Andy, and the rest of the cast was made up from actors in *For the Defense* and from another play, *The Storm.* And so early in 1920 the public learned that a new play called *Beyond the Horizon* by a young playwright named Eugene O'Neill was to open at the Morosco Theatre for two matinees a week beginning February 2. Since the public showed sufficient interest to attend the matinees for four weeks, the play was judged promising enough of success to be billed for evening performances. Accordingly *Beyond the Horizon* settled down for a regular run—and continued on Broadway for the rest of the season. The climax of its success came in June, when the *Pulitzer Prize* for drama was awarded to Eugene O'Neill "for the original American play, performed in New York, which shall best represent the educational value and power of the stage in raising the standard of good morals, good taste, and good manners."

Beyond the Horizon closed in June. That fall the Provincetown Players produced O'Neill's second long play, *The Emperor Jones,* in which O'Neill, to dramatize human fear, tried a new dramatic form, called expressionism. The following season saw the production of two more of O'Neill's plays. The first of these, *Anna Christie,* a realistic play suggesting the influence of the sea on the characters, won O'Neill another Pulitzer Prize. The other production, again by the Provincetown, was that of *The Hairy Ape,* in which once more O'Neill experimented with expressionism, this time to dramatize the attempt—and failure—of the steamship stoker, Yank, to "belong." In the Fifth Avenue scene of *The Hairy Ape* the characters wear masklike expressions. For *The Great God Brown* (1926), in which the hero, as in *Beyond the Horizon,* struggles against the limitations of life, O'Neill specifies real masks, to indicate dual personality. And in *Lazarus Laughed* (1927) he carried the mask experiment still further: masks here not only distinguish individual characters but indicate in the choruses age, type, and race. *Marco Millions* (1927), presenting the thirteenth-century Marco Polo as a modern Babbitt, is at once a satire on the American businessman and a tragedy. *Desire Under the Elms,* a play about life on a New

England farm in the mid-nineteenth century, was first staged in 1924, in a set representing a farmhouse built so that the front wall could be removed to reveal a cross section of the interior and thus permit scenes in different rooms to be played simultaneously. This staging was an elaboration of the arrangement of the set for the first act of *Anna Christie*—a cross section of Johnny-the-Priest's saloon, permitting simultaneous scenes in the back room and in the bar. To witness the production of the very long play *Strange Interlude,* which won the Pulitzer Prize for drama for 1928, and of the even longer *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931) audiences arrived at the theatre in the late afternoon, recessed for dinner, and returned in the evening. In the former, a psychological study, O'Neill makes a frank use of the old theatrical device of the aside. The latter is a modern counterpart of the Electra story in the Greek drama. In 1933 he wrote *Ah, Wilderness!,* a modern sentimental comedy, in which George M. Cohan made a hit, and the movie version of which starred Lionel Barrymore and Wallace Beery. *Days Without End* (1934), a modern morality play, was not a stage success. In most of the more than forty plays that he has written O'Neill has experimented in dramatic form or in technique of staging.

O'Neill's importance in the theatre and the drama has steadily increased since that day when he took *Bound East for Cardiff* out of a trunk in Provincetown. *Beyond the Horizon* established O'Neill on Broadway, where three times his plays have won him the Pulitzer Prize. Today he is as well known abroad as he is in his own country. In 1936 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, a distinction conferred on only two other Americans. But however gratified he may be by public acclaim, O'Neill goes steadily ahead working out his ideas regardless of how "successful" his plays may be. He seldom attends the theatre, even to see his own productions; he says that the actors get between him and the play. For several years he has been at work—far from Broadway—writing a cycle of nine plays which trace several generations in the life of an American family.

But whatever their form or technique, their locale or their characters, their ideas or their plot, O'Neill's plays show their author's continued concern with one main theme—the relation of man to his environment. Sometimes, as in *The Hairy Ape,* the hero attempts to adjust himself to his environment. Sometimes, as in *Beyond the Horizon,* he attempts to resist. Sometimes the environment is the sea; sometimes the land; or, as in *Beyond the Horizon,* a contrast

between the two—with variations of the contrast represented in *Ile, Bound East for Cardiff,* and *Anna Christie.* Often the struggle is ironic, for irony is a favorite dramatic device of O'Neill's. Even the titles of some of his plays are ironic. But in dramatizing the struggle, he does not work out a pattern of *poetic justice,* whereby one is rewarded or punished according to one's devices or deserts. Justice in his plays is poetic only as it implies natural laws operating variously and mysteriously. He places his characters in a world inexorably governed by those laws, and there they struggle. This is O'Neill's interpretation of modern tragedy, of which *Beyond the Horizon* is one of the best examples.

Beyond the Horizon

by

EUGENE O'NEILL

Originally produced by John D. Williams, at the Morosco Theatre, New York City, on Monday afternoon, February 2, 1920, with the following cast:

Robert Mayo, *Andrew Mayo*, *sons of James Mayo*	Richard Bennett, Edward Arnold
Ruth Atkins	Helen MacKellar
Captain Dick Scott, Mrs. Mayo's brother, of the bark Sunda	Max Mitzel
Mrs. Kate Mayo, wife of James Mayo	Mary Jeffery
James Mayo, a farmer	Erville Anderson
Mrs. Atkins, Ruth's widowed mother	Louise Closser Hale
Mary	Elfin Finn
Ben, a farm hand	George Hadden
Dr. Fawcett	George Riddell

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: The Road. Sunset of a day in spring
SCENE 2: The Farm House. The same night

ACT TWO

(*Three years later*)

SCENE 1: The Farm House. Noon of a summer day
SCENE 2: The top of a hill on the farm overlooking the sea. The following day

ACT THREE

(*Five years later*)

SCENE 1: The Farm House. Dawn of a day in late fall
SCENE 2: The Road. Sunrise

Beyond the Horizon

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

A section of country highway. The road runs diagonally from the left, forward, to the right, rear, and can be seen in the distance winding toward the horizon like a pale ribbon between the low, rolling hills with their freshly plowed fields clearly divided from each other, checkerboard fashion, by the lines of stone walls and rough snake fences.

The forward triangle cut off by the road is a section of a field from the dark earth of which myriad bright-green blades of fall-sown rye are sprouting. A straggling line of piled rocks, too low to be called a wall, separates this field from the road.

To the rear of the road is a ditch with a sloping, grassy bank on the far side. From the center of this an old, gnarled apple tree, just budding into leaf, strains its twisted branches heavenwards, black against the pallor of distance. A snake fence sidles from left to right along the top of the bank, passing beneath the apple tree.

The hushed twilight of a day in May is just beginning. The

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horizon hills are still rimmed by a faint line of flame, and the sky above them glows with the crimson flush of the sunset. This fades gradually as the action of the scene progresses.

At the rise of the curtain, ROBERT MAYO *is discovered sitting on the fence. He is a tall, slender young man of twenty-three. There is a touch of the poet about him expressed in his high forehead and wide, dark eyes. His features are delicate and refined, leaning to weakness in the mouth and chin. He is dressed in gray corduroy trousers pushed into high laced boots, and a blue flannel shirt with a bright colored tie. He is reading a book by the fading sunset light. He shuts this, keeping a finger in to mark the place, and turns his head toward the horizon, gazing out over the fields and hills. His lips move as if he were reciting something to himself.*

His brother ANDREW *comes along the road from the right, returning from his work in the fields. He is twenty-seven years old, an opposite type to* ROBERT*—husky, sun-bronzed, handsome in a large-featured, manly fashion—a son of the soil, intelligent in a shrewd way, but with nothing of the intellectual about him. He wears overalls, leather boots, a gray flannel shirt open at the neck, and a soft, mud-stained hat pushed back on his head. He stops to talk to* ROBERT, *leaning on the hoe he carries.*

Andrew [*seeing* ROBERT *has not noticed his presence—in a loud shout*]: Hey there! [ROBERT *turns with a start. Seeing who it is, he smiles.*] Gosh, you do take the prize for day-dreaming! And I see you've toted one of the old books along with you. [*He crosses the ditch and sits on the fence near his brother.*] What is it this time—poetry, I'll bet. [*He reaches for the book.*] Let me see.

Robert [*handing it to him rather reluctantly*]: Look out you don't get it full of dirt.

Andrew [*glancing at his hands*]: That isn't dirt—it's good clean earth. [*He turns over the pages. His eyes read something and he gives an exclamation of disgust.*] Hump! [*With a provoking grin at his brother he reads aloud in a doleful, sing-song voice.*] "I have loved wind and light and the bright sea. But holy and most sacred night, not as I love and have loved thee." [*He hands the book back.*] Here! Take it and bury it. I suppose it's that year in college gave you a liking for that kind of stuff. I'm darn glad I stopped at High School, or maybe I'd been crazy too. [*He grins and slaps* ROBERT *on the back affectionately.*] Imagine me reading poetry and plowing at the same time! The team'd run away, I'll bet.

Robert [*laughing*]: Or picture me plowing.

Andrew: You should have gone back to college last fall, like I know you wanted to. You're fitted for that sort of thing—just as I ain't.

Robert: You know why I didn't go back, Andy. Pa didn't like the idea, even if he didn't say so; and I know he wanted the money to use improving the farm. And besides, I'm not keen on being a student, just because you see me reading books all the time. What I want to do now is keep on moving so that I won't take root in any one place.

Andrew: Well, the trip you're leaving on tomorrow will keep you moving all right. [*At this mention of the trip they both fall silent. There is a pause. Finally* ANDREW *goes on, awkwardly, attempting to speak casually.*] Uncle says you'll be gone three years.

Robert: About that, he figures.

Andrew [*moodily*]: That's a long time.

Robert: Not so long when you come to consider it. You know the *Sunda* sails around the Horn for Yokohama first, and that's a long voyage on a sailing ship; and if we go to any of the other places Uncle Dick mentions—India, or Australia, or South Africa, or South America—they'll be long voyages, too.

Andrew: You can have all those foreign parts for all of me. [*After a pause*] Ma's going to miss you a lot, Rob.

Robert: Yes—and I'll miss her.

Andrew: And Pa ain't feeling none too happy to have you go—though he's been trying not to show it.

Robert: I can see how he feels.

Andrew: And you can bet that I'm not giving any cheers about it. [*He puts one hand on the fence near* ROBERT.]

Robert [*putting one hand on top of* ANDREW'S *with a gesture almost of shyness*]: I know that, too, Andy.

Andrew: I'll miss you as much as anybody, I guess. You see, you and I ain't like most brothers—always fighting and separated a lot of the time, while we've always been together—just the two of us. It's different with us. That's why it hits so hard, I guess.

Robert [*with feeling*]: It's just as hard for me, Andy—believe that! I hate to leave you and the old folks—but—I feel I've got to. There's something calling me— [*He points to the horizon.*] Oh, I can't just explain it to you, Andy.

Andrew: No need to, Rob. [*Angry at himself*] Hell! You want to

go—that's all there is to it; and I wouldn't have you miss this chance for the world.

Robert: It's fine of you to feel that way, Andy.

Andrew: Huh! I'd be a nice son-of-a-gun if I didn't, wouldn't I? When I know how you need this sea trip to make a new man of you—in the body, I mean—and give you your full health back.

Robert [*a trifle impatiently*]: All of you seem to keep harping on my health. You were so used to seeing me lying around the house in the old days that you never will get over the notion that I'm a chronic invalid. You don't realize how I've bucked up in the past few years. If I had no other excuse for going on Uncle Dick's ship but just my health, I'd stay right here and start in plowing.

Andrew: Can't be done. Farming ain't your nature. There's all the difference shown in just the way us two feel about the farm. You—well, you like the home part of it, I expect; but as a place to work and grow things, you hate it. Ain't that right?

Robert: Yes, I suppose it is. For you it's different. You're a Mayo through and through. You're wedded to the soil. You're as much a product of it as an ear of corn is, or a tree. Father is the same. This farm is his life-work, and he's happy in knowing that another Mayo, inspired by the same love, will take up the work where he leaves off. I can understand your attitude, and Pa's; and I think it's wonderful and sincere. But I—well, I'm not made that way.

Andrew: No, you ain't; but when it comes to understanding, I guess I realize that you've got your own angle of looking at things.

Robert [*musingly*]: I wonder if you do, really.

Andrew [*confidently*]: Sure I do. You've seen a bit of the world, enough to make the farm seem small, and you've got the itch to see it all.

Robert: It's more than that, Andy.

Andrew: Oh, of course. I know you're going to learn navigation, and all about a ship, so's you can be an officer. That's natural, too. There's fair pay in it, I expect, when you consider that you've always got a home and grub thrown in; and if you're set on traveling, you can go anywhere you're a mind to without paying fare.

Robert [*with a smile that is half sad*]: It's more than that, Andy.

Andrew: Sure it is. There's always a chance of a good thing coming your way in some of those foreign ports or other. I've heard there are great opportunities for a young fellow with his eyes open in some of those new countries that are just being opened up. [*Jovially*] I'll bet that's what you've been turning over in your

mind under all your quietness! [*He slaps his brother on the back with a laugh.*] Well, if you get to be a millionaire all of a sudden, call 'round once in a while and I'll pass the plate to you. We could use a lot of money right here on the farm without hurting it any.

Robert [*forced to laugh*]: I've never considered that practical side of it for a minute, Andy.

Andrew: Well, you ought to.

Robert: No, I oughtn't. [*Pointing to the horizon—dreamily*] Supposing I was to tell you that it's just Beauty that's calling me, the beauty of the far off and unknown, the mystery and spell of the East which lures me in the books I've read, the need of the freedom of great wide spaces, the joy of wandering on and on—in quest of the secret which is hidden over there, beyond the horizon? Suppose I told you that was the one and only reason for my going?

Andrew: I should say you were nutty.

Robert [*frowning*]: Don't, Andy. I'm serious.

Andrew: Then you might as well stay here, because we've got all you're looking for right on this farm. There's wide space enough, Lord knows; and you can have all the sea you want by walking a mile down to the beach; and there's plenty of horizon to look at, and beauty enough for anyone, except in the winter. [*He grins.*] As for the mystery and spell, I haven't met 'em yet, but they're probably lying around somewheres. I'll have you understand this is a first class farm with all the fixings. [*He laughs.*]

Robert [*joining in the laughter in spite of himself*]: It's no use talking to you, you chump!

Andrew: You'd better not say anything to Uncle Dick about spells and things when you're on the ship. He'll likely chuck you overboard for a Jonah. [*He jumps down from fence.*] I'd better run along. I've got to wash up some as long as Ruth's Ma is coming over for supper.

Robert [*pointedly—almost bitterly*]: And Ruth.

Andrew [*confused—looking everywhere except at* ROBERT*—trying to appear unconcerned*]: Yes, Ruth'll be staying too. Well, I better hustle, I guess, and— [*He steps over the ditch to the road while he is talking.*]

Robert [*who appears to be fighting some strong inward emotion—impulsively*]: Wait a minute, Andy! [*He jumps down from the fence.*] There is something I want to— [*He stops abruptly, biting his lips, his face coloring.*]

Andrew [*facing him; half-defiantly*]: Yes?

Robert [*confusedly*]: No—never mind—it doesn't matter, it was nothing.

Andrew [*after a pause, during which he stares fixedly at* ROBERT'S *averted face*]: Maybe I can guess—what you were going to say—but I guess you're right not to talk about it. [*He pulls* ROBERT'S *hand from his side and grips it tensely; the two brothers stand looking into each other's eyes for a minute.*] We can't help those things, Rob. [*He turns away, suddenly releasing* ROBERT'S *hand.*] You'll be coming along shortly, won't you?

Robert [*dully*]: Yes.

Andrew: See you later, then. [*He walks off down the road to the left.* ROBERT *stares after him for a moment; then climbs to the fence rail again, and looks out over the hills, an expression of deep grief on his face. After a moment or so,* RUTH *enters hurriedly from the left. She is a healthy, blonde, out-of-door girl of twenty, with a graceful, slender figure. Her face, though inclined to roundness, is undeniably pretty, its large eyes of a deep blue set off strikingly by the sun-bronzed complexion. Her small, regular features are marked by a certain strength—an underlying, stubborn fixity of purpose hidden in the frankly-appealing charm of her fresh youthfulness. She wears a simple white dress but no hat.*]

Ruth [*seeing him*]: Hello, Rob!

Robert [*startled*]: Hello, Ruth!

Ruth [*jumps the ditch and perches on the fence beside him*]: I was looking for you.

Robert [*pointedly*]: Andy just left here.

Ruth: I know. I met him on the road a second ago. He told me you were here. [*Tenderly playful*] I wasn't looking for Andy, Smarty, if that's what you mean. I was looking for *you.*

Robert: Because I'm going away tomorrow?

Ruth: Because your mother was anxious to have you come home and asked me to look for you. I just wheeled Ma over to your house.

Robert [*perfunctorily*]: How is your mother?

Ruth [*a shadow coming over her face*]: She's about the same. She never seems to get any better or any worse. Oh, Rob, I do wish she'd try to make the best of things that can't be helped.

Robert: Has she been nagging at you again?

Ruth [*nods her head, and then breaks forth rebelliously*]: She never stops nagging. No matter what I do for her she finds fault. If only Pa was still living— [*She stops as if ashamed of her outburst.*] I suppose I shouldn't complain this way. [*She sighs.*] Poor

Ma, Lord knows it's hard enough for her. I suppose it's natural to be cross when you're not able ever to walk a step. Oh, I'd like to be going away some place—like you!

Robert: It's hard to stay—and equally hard to go, sometimes.

Ruth: There! If I'm not the stupid body! I swore I wasn't going to speak about your trip—until after you'd gone; and there I go, first thing!

Robert: Why didn't you want to speak of it?

Ruth: Because I didn't want to spoil this last night you're here. Oh, Rob, I'm going to—we're all going to miss you so awfully. Your mother is going around looking as if she'd burst out crying any minute. You ought to know how I feel. Andy and you and I—why, it seems as if we'd always been together.

Robert [*with a wry attempt at a smile*]: You and Andy will still have each other. It'll be harder for me without anyone.

Ruth: But you'll have new sights and new people to take your mind off; while we'll be here with the old, familiar place to remind us every minute of the day. It's a shame you're going—just at this time, in spring, when everything is getting so nice. [*With a sigh*] I oughtn't to talk that way when I know going's the best thing for you. You're bound to find all sorts of opportunities to get on, your father says.

Robert [*heatedly*]: I don't give a damn about that! I wouldn't take a voyage across the road for the best opportunity in the world of the kind Pa thinks of. [*He smiles at his own irritation.*] Excuse me, Ruth, for getting worked up over it; but Andy gave me an overdose of the practical considerations.

Ruth [*slowly, puzzled*]: Well, then, if it isn't— [*With sudden intensity*] Oh, Rob, why *do* you want to go?

Robert [*turning to her quickly, in surprise—slowly*]: Why do you ask that, Ruth?

Ruth [*dropping her eyes before his searching glance*]: Because— [*Lamely*] It seems such a shame.

Robert [*insistently*]: Why?

Ruth: Oh, because—everything.

Robert: I could hardly back out now, even if I wanted to. And I'll be forgotten before you know it.

Ruth [*indignantly*]: You won't! I'll never forget— [*She stops and turns away to hide her confusion.*]

Robert [*softly*]: Will you promise me that?

Ruth [*evasively*]: Of course. It's mean of you to think that any of us would forget so easily.

Robert [*disappointedly*]: Oh!

Ruth [*with an attempt at lightness*]: But you haven't told me your reason for leaving yet?

Robert [*moodily*]: I doubt if you'll understand. It's difficult to explain, even to myself. Either you feel it, or you don't. I can remember being conscious of it first when I was only a kid—you haven't forgotten what a sickly specimen I was then, in those days, have you?

Ruth [*with a shudder*]: Let's not think about them.

Robert: You'll have to, to understand. Well, in those days, when Ma was fixing meals, she used to get me out of the way by pushing my chair to the west window and telling me to look out and be quiet. That wasn't hard. I guess I was always quiet.

Ruth [*compassionately*]: Yes, you always were—and you suffering so much, too!

Robert [*musingly*]: So I used to stare out over the fields to the hills, out there—[*He points to the horizon*] and somehow after a time I'd forget any pain I was in, and start dreaming. I knew the sea was over beyond those hills,—the folks had told me—and I used to wonder what the sea was like, and try to form a picture of it in my mind. [*With a smile*] There was all the mystery in the world to me then about that—far-off sea—and there still is! It called to me then just as it does now. [*After a slight pause*] And other times my eyes would follow this road, winding off into the distance, toward the hills, as if it, too, was searching for the sea. And I'd promise myself that when I grew up and was strong, I'd follow that road, and it and I would find the sea together. [*With a smile*] You see, my making this trip is only keeping that promise of long ago.

Ruth [*charmed by his low, musical voice telling the dreams of his childhood*]: Yes, I see.

Robert: Those were the only happy moments of my life then, dreaming there at the window. I liked to be all alone—those times. I got to know all the different kinds of sunsets by heart. And all those sunsets took place over there—[*He points*] beyond the horizon. So gradually I came to believe that all the wonders of the world happened on the other side of those hills. There was the home of the good fairies who performed beautiful miracles. I believed in fairies then. [*With a smile*] Perhaps I still do believe in them. Any-

way, in those days they were real enough, and sometimes I could actually hear them calling to me to come out and play with them, dance with them down the road in the dusk in a game of hide-and-seek to find out where the sun was hiding himself. They sang their little songs to me, songs that told of all the wonderful things they had in their home on the other side of the hills; and they promised to show me all of them, if I'd only come, come! But I couldn't come then, and I used to cry sometimes and Ma would think I was in pain. [*He breaks off suddenly with a laugh.*] That's why I'm going now, I suppose. For I can still hear them calling. But the horizon is as far away and as luring as ever. [*He turns to her—softly*] Do you understand now, Ruth?

Ruth [*spellbound, in a whisper*]: Yes.

Robert: You feel it then?

Ruth: Yes, yes, I do! [*Unconsciously she snuggles close against his side. His arm steals about her as if he were not aware of the action.*] Oh, Rob, how could I help feeling it? You tell things so beautifully!

Robert [*suddenly realizing that his arm is around her, and that her head is resting on his shoulder, gently takes his arm away.* RUTH, *brought back to herself, is overcome with confusion*]: So now you know why I'm going. It's for that reason—that and one other.

Ruth: You've another? Then you must tell me that, too.

Robert [*looking at her searchingly. She drops her eyes before his gaze*]: I wonder if I ought to! You'll promise not to be angry—whatever it is?

Ruth [*softly, her face still averted*]: Yes, I promise.

Robert [*simply*]: I love you. That's the other reason.

Ruth [*hiding her face in her hands*]: Oh, Rob!

Robert: I wasn't going to tell you, but I feel I have to. It can't matter now that I'm going so far away, and for so long—perhaps forever. I've loved you all these years, but the realization never came 'til I agreed to go away with Uncle Dick. Then I thought of leaving you, and the pain of that thought revealed to me in a flash—that I loved you, had loved you as long as I could remember. [*He gently pulls one of* RUTH'S *hands away from her face.*] You mustn't mind my telling you this, Ruth. I realize how impossible it all is—and I understand; for the revelation of my own love seemed to open my eyes to the love of others. I saw Andy's love for you—and I knew that you must love him.

Ruth [*breaking out stormily*]: I don't! I don't love Andy! I

don't! [ROBERT *stares at her in stupid astonishment.* RUTH *weeps hysterically.*] Whatever—put such a fool notion into—into your head? [*She suddenly throws her arms about his neck and hides her head on his shoulder.*] Oh, Rob! Don't go away! Please! You mustn't, now! You can't! I won't let you! It'd break my—my heart!

Robert [*the expression of stupid bewilderment giving way to one of overwhelming joy, he presses her close to him—slowly and tenderly*]: Do you mean that—that you love me?

Ruth [*sobbing*]: Yes, yes—of course I do—what d'you s'pose? [*She lifts up her head and looks into his eyes with a tremulous smile.*] You stupid thing! [*He kisses her.*] I've loved you right along.

Robert [*mystified*]: But you and Andy were always together!

Ruth: Because you never seemed to want to go any place with me. You were always reading an old book, and not paying any attention to me. I was too proud to let you see I cared because I thought the year you had away to college had made you stuck-up, and you thought yourself too educated to waste any time on me.

Robert [*kissing her*]: And I was thinking— [*With a laugh*] What fools we've both been!

Ruth [*overcome by a sudden fear*]: You won't go away on the trip, will you, Rob? You'll tell them you can't go on account of me, won't you? You can't go now! You can't!

Robert [*bewildered*]: Perhaps—you can come too.

Ruth: Oh, Rob, don't be so foolish. You know I can't. Who'd take care of ma? Don't you see I couldn't go—on her account? [*She clings to him imploringly.*] Please don't go—not now. Tell them you've decided not to. They won't mind. I know your mother and father'll be glad. They'll all be. They don't want you to go so far away from them. Please, Rob! We'll be so happy here together where it's natural and we know things. Please tell me you won't go!

Robert [*face to face with a definite, final decision, betrays the conflict going on within him*]: But—Ruth—I—Uncle Dick—

Ruth: He won't mind when he knows it's for your happiness to stay. How could he? [*As* ROBERT *remains silent she bursts into sobs again.*] Oh, Rob! And you said—you loved me!

Robert [*conquered by this appeal—an irrevocable decision in his voice*]: I won't go, Ruth. I promise you. There! Don't cry! [*He presses her to him, stroking her hair tenderly. After a pause he speaks with happy hopefulness.*] Perhaps after all Andy was right—

righter than he knew—when he said I could find all the things I was seeking for here, at home on the farm. I think love must have been the secret—the secret that called to me from over the world's rim—the secret beyond every horizon; and when I did not come, it came to me. [*He clasps* RUTH *to him fiercely.*] Oh, Ruth, our love is sweeter than any distant dream! [*He kisses her passionately and steps to the ground, lifting* RUTH *in his arms and carrying her to the road where he puts her down.*].

Ruth [*with a happy laugh*]: My, but you're strong!

Robert: Come! We'll go and tell them at once.

Ruth [*dismayed*]: Oh, no, don't, Rob, not 'til after I've gone. There'd be bound to be such a scene with them all together.

Robert [*kissing her—gaily*]: As you like—little Miss Common Sense!

Ruth: Let's go, then. [*She takes his hand, and they start to go off left.* ROBERT *suddenly stops and turns as though for a last look at the hills and the dying sunset flush.*]

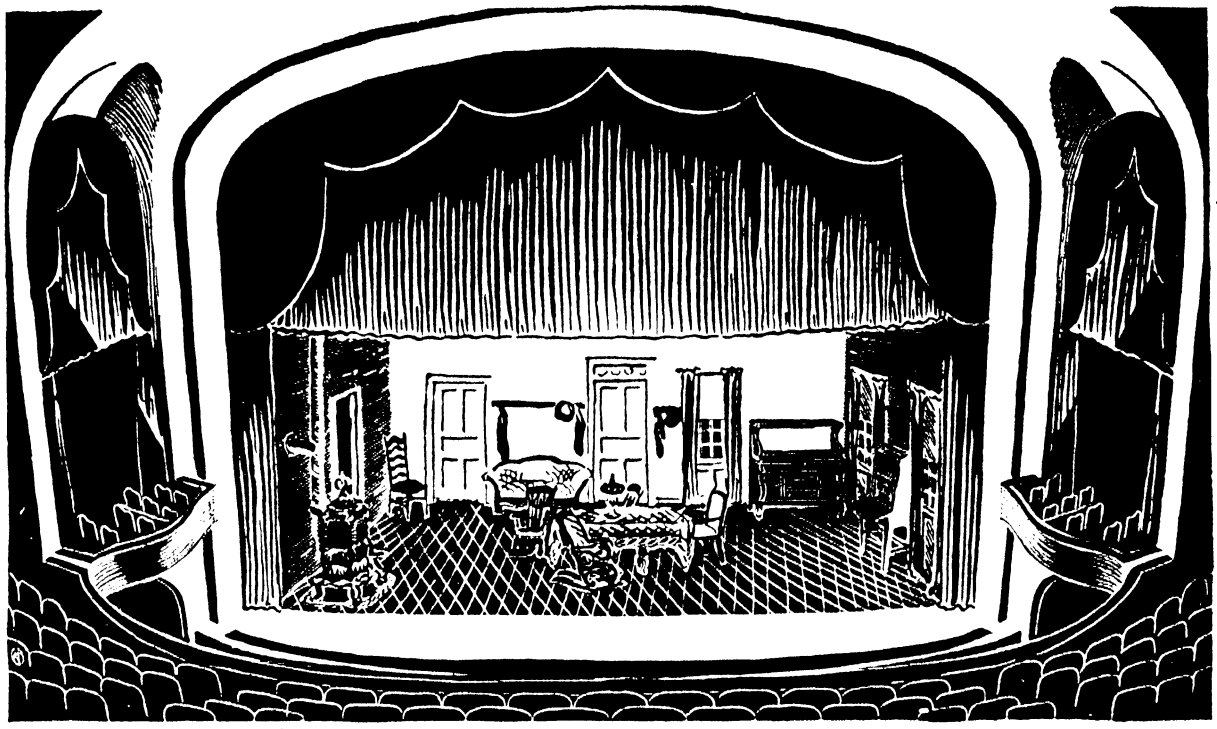
Robert [*looking upward and pointing*]: See! The first star. [*He bends down and kisses her tenderly.*] *Our* star!

Ruth [*in a soft murmur*]: Yes. Our very own star. [*They stand for a moment looking up at it, their arms around each other. Then* RUTH *takes his hand again and starts to lead him away.*] Come, Rob, let's go. [*His eyes are fixed again on the horizon as he half turns to follow her.* RUTH *urges*] We'll be late for supper, Rob.

Robert [*shakes his head impatiently, as though he were throwing off some disturbing thought—with a laugh*]: All right. We'll run then. Come on! [*They run off laughing as*

The Curtain Falls.]

SCENE TWO



The sitting room of the Mayo farm house about nine o'clock the same night. On the left, two windows looking out on the fields. Against the wall between the windows, an old-fashioned walnut desk. In the left corner, rear, a sideboard with a mirror. In the rear wall to the right of the sideboard, a window looking out on the road. Next to the window a door leading out into the yard. Farther right, a black horse-hair sofa, and another door opening on a bedroom. In the corner, a straight-backed chair. In the right wall, near the middle, an open doorway leading to the kitchen. Farther forward a double-heater stove with coal scuttle, etc. In the center of the newly carpeted floor, an oak dining-room table with a red cover. In the center of the table, a large oil reading lamp. Four chairs, three rockers with crocheted tidies on their backs, and one straight-backed, are placed about the table. The walls are papered a dark red with a scrolly-figured pattern.

Everything in the room is clean, well-kept, and in its exact place, yet there is no suggestion of primness about the whole. Rather the atmosphere is one of the orderly comfort of a simple, hard-earned prosperity, enjoyed and maintained by the family as a unit.

JAMES MAYO, *his wife, her brother,* CAPTAIN DICK SCOTT, *and*

ANDREW *are discovered.* MAYO *is his son* ANDREW *over again in body and face—an* ANDREW *sixty-five years old with a short, square, white beard.* MRS. MAYO *is a slight, round-faced, rather prim-looking woman of fifty-five who had once been a school teacher. The labors of a farmer's wife have bent but not broken her, and she retains a certain refinement of movement and expression foreign to the* MAYO *part of the family. Whatever of resemblance* ROBERT *has to his parents may be traced to her. Her brother,* THE CAPTAIN, *is short and stocky, with a weather-beaten, jovial face and a white mustache—a typical old salt, loud of voice and given to gesture. He is fifty-eight years old.*

JAMES MAYO *sits in front of the table. He wears spectacles, and a farm journal which he has been reading lies in his lap.* THE CAPTAIN *leans forward from a chair in the rear, his hands on the table in front of him.* ANDREW *is tilted back on the straight-backed chair to the left, his chin sunk forward on his chest, staring at the carpet, preoccupied and frowning.*

As the curtain rises THE CAPTAIN *is just finishing the relation of some sea episode. The others are pretending an interest which is belied by the absent-minded expressions on their faces.*

The Captain [*chuckling*]: And that mission woman, she hails me on the dock as I was acomin' ashore, and she says—with her silly face all screwed up serious as judgment—"Captain," she says, "would you be so kind as to tell me where the sea-gulls sleeps at nights?" Blow me if them warn't her exact words! [*He slaps the table with the palm of his hands and laughs loudly. The others force smiles.*] Ain't that just like a fool woman's question? And I looks at her serious as I could, "Ma'm," says I, "I couldn't rightly answer that question. I ain't never seed a sea-gull in his bunk yet. The next time I hears one snorin'," I says, "I'll make a note of where he's turned in, and write you a letter 'bout it." And then she calls me a fool real spiteful and tacks away from me quick. [*He laughs again uproariously.*] So I got rid of her that way. [*The others smile but immediately relapse into expressions of gloom again.*]

Mrs. Mayo [*absent-mindedly—feeling that she has to say something*]: But when it comes to that, where *do* sea-gulls sleep, Dick?

Scott [*slapping the table*]: Ho! Ho! Listen to her, James. 'Nother one! Well, if that don't beat all hell—'scuse me for cussin', Kate.

Mayo [*with a twinkle in his eyes*]: They unhitch their wings, Katey, and spreads 'em out on a wave for a bed.

Scott: And then they tells the fish to whistle to 'em when it's time to turn out. Ho! Ho!

Mrs. Mayo [*with a forced smile*]: You men folks are too smart to live, aren't you? [*She resumes her knitting.* MAYO *pretends to read his paper;* ANDREW *stares at the floor.*]

Scott [*looks from one to the other of them with a puzzled air. Finally he is unable to bear the thick silence a minute longer, and blurts out*]: You folks look as if you was settin' up with a corpse. [*With exaggerated concern*] God A'mighty, there ain't anyone dead, be there?

Mayo [*sharply*]: Don't play the dunce, Dick! You know as well as we do there ain't no great cause to be feelin' chipper.

Scott [*argumentatively*]: And there ain't no cause to be wearin' mourning, either, I can make out.

Mrs. Mayo [*indignantly*]: How can you talk that way, Dick Scott, when you're taking our Robbie away from us, in the middle of the night, you might say, just to get on that old boat of yours on time! I think you might wait until morning when he's had his breakfast.

Scott [*appealing to the others hopelessly*]: Ain't that a woman's way o' seein' things for you? God A'mighty, Kate, I can't give orders to the tide that it's got to be high just when it suits me to have it. I ain't gettin' no fun out o' missin' sleep and leavin' here at six bells myself. [*Protestingly*] And the *Sunda* ain't an old ship —leastways, not very old—and she's good's she ever was.

Mrs. Mayo [*her lips trembling*]: I wish Robbie weren't going.

Mayo [*looking at her over his glasses—consolingly*]: There, Katey!

Mrs. Mayo [*rebelliously*]: Well, I *do* wish he wasn't!

Scott: You shouldn't be taking it so hard, 's far as I kin see. This vige'll make a man of him. I'll see to it he learns how to navigate, 'n' study for a mate's c'tificate right off—and it'll give him a trade for the rest of his life, if he wants to travel.

Mrs. Mayo: But I don't want him to travel all his life. You've got to see he comes home when this trip is over. Then he'll be all well, and he'll want to—to marry—[ANDREW *sits forward in his chair with an abrupt movement*]—and settle down right here. [*She stares down at the knitting in her lap—after a pause*] I never realized how hard it was going to be for me to have Robbie go—or I wouldn't have considered it a minute.

Scott: It ain't no good goin' on that way, Kate, now it's all settled.

Mrs. Mayo [*on the verge of tears*]: It's all right for *you* to talk. You've never had any children. You don't know what it means to be parted from them—and Robbie my youngest, too. [ANDREW *frowns and fidgets in his chair.*]

Andrew [*suddenly turning to them*]: There's one thing none of you seem to take into consideration—that Rob wants to go. He's dead set on it. He's been dreaming over this trip ever since it was first talked about. It wouldn't be fair to him not to have him go. [*A sudden uneasiness seems to strike him.*] At least, not if he still feels the same way about it he did when he was talking to me this evening.

Mayo [*with an air of decision*]: Andy's right, Katey. That ends all argyment, you can see that. [*Looking at his big silver watch*] Wonder what's happened to Robert? He's been gone long enough to wheel the widder to home, certain. He can't be out dreamin' at the stars his last night.

Mrs. Mayo [*a bit reproachfully*]: Why didn't you wheel Mrs. Atkins back tonight, Andy? You usually do when she and Ruth come over.

Andrew [*avoiding her eyes*]: I thought maybe Robert wanted to tonight. He offered to go right away when they were leaving.

Mrs. Mayo: He only wanted to be polite.

Andrew [*gets to his feet*]: Well, he'll be right back, I guess. [*He turns to his father.*] Guess I'll go take a look at the black cow, Pa—see if she's ailing any.

Mayo: Yes—better had, son. [ANDREW *goes into the kitchen on the right.*]

Scott [*as he goes out—in a low tone*]: There's the boy that would make a good, strong sea-farin' man—if he'd a mind to.

Mayo [*sharply*]: Don't you put no such fool notions in Andy's head, Dick—or you 'n' me's goin' to fall out. [*Then he smiles.*] You couldn't tempt him, no ways. Andy's a Mayo bred in the bone, and he's a born farmer, and a damn good one, too. He'll live and die right here on this farm, like I expect to. [*With proud confidence*] And he'll make this one of the slickest, best-payin' farms in the state, too, afore he gits through!

Scott: Seems to me it's a pretty slick place right now.

Mayo [*shaking his head*]: It's too small. We need more land to make it amount to much, and we ain't got the capital to buy it.

[ANDREW *enters from the kitchen. His hat is on, and he carries a lighted lantern in his hand. He goes to the door in the rear leading out.*]

Andrew [*opens the door and pauses*]: Anything else you can think of to be done, Pa?

Mayo: No, nothin' I know of. [ANDREW *goes out, shutting the door.*]

Mrs. Mayo [*after a pause*]: What's come over Andy tonight, I wonder? He acts so strange.

Mayo: He does seem sort o' glum and out of sorts. It's 'count o' Robert leavin', I s'pose. [*To* SCOTT] Dick, you wouldn't believe how them boys o' mine sticks together. They ain't like most brothers. They've been thick as thieves all their lives, with nary a quarrel I kin remember.

Scott: No need to tell me that. I can see how they take to each other.

Mrs. Mayo [*pursuing her train of thought*]: Did you notice, James, how queer everyone was at supper? Robert seemed stirred up about something; and Ruth was so flustered and giggly; and Andy sat there dumb, looking as if he'd lost his best friend; and all of them only nibbled at their food.

Mayo: Guess they was all thinkin' about tomorrow, same as us.

Mrs. Mayo [*shaking her head*]: No. I'm afraid somethin's happened—somethin' else.

Mayo: You mean—'bout Ruth?

Mrs. Mayo: Yes.

Mayo [*after a pause—frowning*]: I hope her and Andy ain't had a serious fallin'-out. I always sorter hoped they'd hitch up together sooner or later. What d'you say, Dick? Don't you think them two'd pair up well?

Scott [*nodding his head approvingly*]: A sweet, wholesome couple they'd make.

Mayo: It'd be a good thing for Andy in more ways than one. I ain't what you'd call calculatin' generally, and I b'lieve in lettin' young folks run their affairs to suit themselves; but there's advantages for both o' them in this match you can't overlook in reason. The Atkins farm is right next to ourn. Jined together they'd make a jim-dandy of a place, with plenty o' room to work in. And bein' a widder with only a daughter, and laid up all the time to boot, Mrs. Atkins can't do nothin' with the place as it ought to be done.

She needs a man, a first-class farmer, to take hold o' things; and Andy's just the one.

Mrs. Mayo [*abruptly*]: I don't think Ruth loves Andy.

Mayo: You don't? Well, maybe a woman's eyes is sharper in such things, but—they're always together. And if she don't love him now, she'll likely come around to it in time. [*As* MRS. MAYO *shakes her head*] You seem mighty fixed in your opinion, Katey. How d'you know?

Mrs. Mayo: It's just—what I feel.

Mayo [*a light breaking over him*]: You don't mean to say—[MRS. MAYO *nods.* MAYO *chuckles scornfully.*] Shucks! I'm losin' my respect for your eyesight, Katey. Why, Robert ain't got no time for Ruth, 'cept as a friend!

Mrs. Mayo [*warningly*]: Sss-h-h! [*The door from the yard opens, and* ROBERT *enters. He is smiling happily, and humming a song to himself, but as he comes into the room an undercurrent of nervous uneasiness manifests itself in his bearing.*]

Mayo: So here you be at last! [ROBERT *comes forward and sits on* ANDY'S *chair.* MAYO *smiles slyly at his wife.*] What have you been doin' all this time—countin' the stars to see if they all come out right and proper?

Robert: There's only one I'll ever look for any more, Pa.

Mayo [*reproachfully*]: You might've even not wasted time lookin' for that one—your last night.

Mrs. Mayo [*as if she were speaking to a child*]: You ought to have worn your coat a sharp night like this, Robbie.

Scott [*disgustedly*]: God A'mighty, Kate, you treat Robert as if he was one year old!

Mrs. Mayo [*notices* ROBERT'S *nervous uneasiness*]: You look all worked up over something, Robbie. What is it?

Robert [*swallowing hard, looks quickly from one to the other of them—then begins determinedly*]: Yes, there *is* something—something I must tell you—all of you. [*As he begins to talk* ANDREW *enters quietly from the rear, closing the door behind him, and setting the lighted lantern on the floor. He remains standing by the door, his arms folded, listening to* ROBERT *with a repressed expression of pain on his face.* ROBERT *is so much taken up with what he is going to say that he does not notice* ANDREW'S *presence.*] Something I discovered only this evening—very beautiful and wonderful—something I did not take into consideration previously because I hadn't

dared to hope that such happiness could ever come to me. (*Appealingly*] You must all remember that fact, won't you?

Mayo [*frowning*]: Let's get to the point, son.

Robert [*with a trace of defiance*]: Well, the point is this, Pa: I'm not going—I mean—I can't go tomorrow with Uncle Dick—or at any future time, either.

Mrs. Mayo [*with a sharp sigh of joyful relief*]: Oh, Robbie, I'm so glad!

Mayo [*astounded*]: You ain't serious, be you, Robert? [*Severely*] Seems to me it's a pretty late hour in the day for you to be upsettin' all your plans so sudden!

Robert: I asked you to remember that until this evening I didn't know myself. I had never dared to dream—

Mayo [*irritably*]: What is this foolishness you're talkin' of?

Robert [*flushing*]: Ruth told me this evening that—she loved me. It was after I'd confessed I loved her. I told her I hadn't been conscious of my love until after the trip had been arranged, and I realized it would mean—leaving her. That was the truth. I *didn't* know until then. [*As if justifying himself to the others*] I hadn't intended telling her anything but—suddenly—I felt I must. I didn't think it would matter, because I was going away. And I thought she loved—someone else. [*Slowly—his eyes shining*] And then she cried and said it was I she'd loved all the time, but I hadn't seen it.

Mrs. Mayo [*rushes over and throws her arms about him*]: I knew it! I was just telling your father when you came in—and, oh, Robbie, I'm so happy you're not going!

Robert [*kissing her*]: I knew you'd be glad, Ma.

Mayo [*bewilderedly*]: Well, I'll be damned! You do beat all for gettin' folks' minds all tangled up, Robert. And Ruth too! Whatever got into her of a sudden? Why, I was thinkin'—

Mrs. Mayo [*hurriedly—in a tone of warning*]: Never mind what you were thinking, James. It wouldn't be any use telling us that now. [*Meaningly*] And what you were hoping for turns out just the same almost, doesn't it?

Mayo [*thoughtfully—beginning to see this side of the argument*]: Yes; I suppose you're right, Katey. [*Scratching his head in puzzlement*] But how it ever come about! It do beat anything ever I heard. [*Finally he gets up with a sheepish grin and walks over to* ROBERT.] We're glad you ain't goin', your ma and I, for we'd have missed you terrible, that's certain and sure; and we're glad you've found happiness. Ruth's a fine girl and'll make a good wife to you.

Robert [*much moved*]: Thank you, Pa. [*He grips his father's hand in his.*]

Andrew [*his face tense and drawn comes forward and holds out his hand, forcing a smile*]: I guess it's my turn to offer congratulations, isn't it?

Robert [*with a startled cry when his brother appears before him so suddenly*]: Andy! [*Confused*] Why—I—I didn't see you. Were you here when—

Andrew: I heard everything you said; and here's wishing you every happiness, you and Ruth. You both deserve the best there is.

Robert [*taking his hand*]: Thanks, Andy, it's fine of you to—[*His voice dies away as he sees the pain in* ANDREW'S *eyes.*]

Andrew [*giving his brother's hand a final grip*]: Good luck to you both! [*He turns away and goes back to the rear where he bends over the lantern, fumbling with it to hide his emotion from the others.*]

Mrs. Mayo [*to the* CAPTAIN, *who has been too flabbergasted by* ROBERT'S *decision to say a word*]: What's the matter, Dick? Aren't you going to congratulate Robbie?

Scott [*embarrassed*]: Of course I be! [*He gets to his feet and shakes* ROBERT'S *hand, muttering a vague*] Luck to you, boy. [*He stands beside* ROBERT *as if he wanted to say something more but doesn't know how to go about it.*]

Robert: Thanks, Uncle Dick.

Scott: So you're not acomin' on the *Sunda* with me? [*His voice indicates disbelief.*]

Robert: I can't, Uncle—not now. I wouldn't miss it for anything else in the world under any other circumstances. [*He sighs unconsciously.*] But you see I've found—a bigger dream. [*Then with joyous high spirits*] I want you all to understand one thing—I'm not going to be a loafer on your hands any longer. This means the beginning of a new life for me in every way. I'm going to settle right down and take a real interest in the farm, and do my share. I'll prove to you, Pa, that I'm as good a Mayo as you are—or Andy, when I want to be.

Mayo [*kindly but skeptically*]: That's the right spirit, Robert. Ain't none of us doubts your willin'ness, but you ain't never learned—

Robert: Then I'm going to start learning right away, and you'll teach me, won't you?

Mayo [*mollifyingly*]: Of course I will, boy, and be glad to, only you'd best go easy at first.

Scott [*who has listened to this conversation in mingled consternation and amazement*]: You don't mean to tell me you're goin' to let him stay, do you, James?

Mayo: Why, things bein' as they be, Robert's free to do as he's a mind to.

Mrs. Mayo: Let him! The very idea!

Scott [*more and more ruffled*]: Then all I got to say is, you're a soft, weak-willed critter to be permittin' a boy—and women, too—to be layin' your course for you wherever they damn pleases.

Mayo [*slyly amused*]: It's just the same with me as 'twas with you, Dick. You can't order the tides on the seas to suit you, and I ain't pretendin' I can reg'late love for young folks.

Scott [*scornfully*]: Love! They ain't old enough to know love when they sight it! Love! I'm ashamed of you, Robert, to go lettin' a little huggin' and kissin' in the dark spile your chances to make a man out o' yourself. It ain't common sense—no siree, it ain't—not by a hell of a sight! [*He pounds the table with his fists in exasperation.*]

Mrs. Mayo [*laughing provokingly at her brother*]: A fine one you are to be talking about love, Dick—an old cranky bachelor like you. Goodness' sakes!

Scott [*exasperated by their joking*]: I've never been a damn fool like most, if that's what you're steerin' at.

Mrs. Mayo [*tauntingly*]: Sour grapes, aren't they, Dick? [*She laughs.* ROBERT *and his father chuckle.* SCOTT *sputters with annoyance.*] Good gracious, Dick, you do act silly, flying into a temper over nothing.

Scott [*indignantly*]: Nothin'! You talk as if I wasn't concerned nohow in this here business. Seems to me I've got a right to have my say. Ain't I made all arrangements with the owners and stocked up with some special grub all on Robert's account?

Robert: You've been fine, Uncle Dick; and I appreciate it. Truly.

Mayo: 'Course; we all does, Dick.

Scott [*unplacated*]: I've been countin' sure on havin' Robert for company on this vige—to sorta talk to and show things to, and teach, kinda, and I got my mind so set on havin' him I'm goin' to be double lonesome this vige. [*He pounds on the table, attempting to cover up this confession of weakness.*] Darn all this silly lovin' business, anyway. [*Irritably*] But all this talk ain't tellin' me what

I'm to do with that sta'b'd cabin I fixed up. It's all painted white, an' a bran new mattress on the bunk, 'n' new sheets 'n' blankets 'n' things. And Chips built in a book-case so's Robert could take his books along—with a slidin' bar fixed acrost it, mind, so's they couldn't fall out no matter how she rolled. [*With excited consternation*] What d'you suppose my officers is goin' to think when there's no one comes aboard to occupy that sta'b'd cabin? And the men what did the work on it—what'll *they* think? [*He shakes his finger indignantly.*] They're liable as not to suspicion it was a *woman* I'd planned to ship along, and that she gave me the go-by at the last moment! [*He wipes his perspiring brow in anguish at this thought.*] Gawd A'mighty! They're only lookin' to have the laugh on me for something like that. They're liable to b'lieve anything, those fellers is!

Mayo [*with a wink*]: Then there's nothing to it but for you to get right out and hunt up a wife somewheres for that spick 'n' span cabin. She'll have to be a pretty one, too, to match it. [*He looks at his watch with exaggerated concern.*] You ain't got much time to find her, Dick.

Scott [*as the others smile—sulkily*]: You kin go to thunder, Jim Mayo!

Andrew [*comes forward from where he has been standing by the door, rear, brooding. His face is set in a look of grim determination*]: You needn't worry about that spare cabin, Uncle Dick, if you've a mind to take me in Robert's place.

Robert [*turning to him quickly*]: Andy! [*He sees at once the fixed resolve in his brother's eyes, and realizes immediately the reason for it—in consternation*] Andy, you mustn't!

Andrew: You've made your decision, Rob, and now I've made mine. You're out of this, remember.

Robert [*hurt by his brother's tone*]: But, Andy—

Andrew: Don't interfere, Rob—that's all I ask. [*Turning to his uncle*] You haven't answered my question, Uncle Dick.

Scott [*clearing his throat, with an uneasy side glance at* JAMES MAYO *who is staring at his elder son as if he thought he had suddenly gone mad*]: O' course, I'd be glad to have you, Andy.

Andrew: It's settled then. I can pack the little I want to take in a few minutes.

Mrs. Mayo: Don't be a fool, Dick. Andy's only joking you.

Scott [*disgruntedly*]: It's hard to tell who's jokin' and who's not in this house.

Andrew [*firmly*]: I'm not joking, Uncle Dick. [*As* SCOTT *looks at him uncertainly*] You needn't be afraid I'll go back on my word.

Robert [*hurt by the insinuation he feels in* ANDREW'S *tone*]: Andy! That isn't fair!

Mayo [*frowning*]: Seems to me this ain't no subject to joke over —not for Andy.

Andrew [*facing his father*]: I agree with you, Pa, and I tell you again, once and for all, that I've made up my mind to go.

Mayo [*dumbfounded—unable to doubt the determination in* ANDREW'S *voice—helplessly*]: But why, son? Why?

Andrew [*evasively*]: I've always wanted to go.

Robert: Andy!

Andrew [*half angrily*]: You shut up, Rob! [*Turning to his father again*] I didn't ever mention it because as long as Rob was going I knew it was no use; but now Rob's staying on here, there isn't any reason for me not to go.

Mayo [*breathing hard*]: No reason? Can you stand there and say that to me, Andrew?

Mrs. Mayo [*hastily—seeing the gathering storm*]: He doesn't mean a word of it, James.

Mayo [*making a gesture to her to keep silence*]: Let me talk, Katey. [*In a more kindly tone*] What's come over you so sudden, Andy? You know's well as I do that it wouldn't be fair o' you to run off at a moment's notice right now when we're up to our necks in hard work.

Andrew [*avoiding his eyes*]: Rob'll hold his end up as soon as he learns.

Mayo: Robert was never cut out for a farmer, and you was.

Andrew: You can easily get a man to do my work.

Mayo [*restraining his anger with an effort*]: It sounds strange to hear you, Andy, that I always thought had good sense, talkin' crazy like that. [*Scornfully*] Get a man to take your place! You ain't been workin' here for no hire, Andy, that you kin give me your notice to quit like you've done. The farm is your'n as well as mine. You've always worked on it with that understanding; and what you're sayin' you intend doin' is just skulkin' out o' your rightful responsibility.

Andrew [*looking at the floor—simply*]: I'm sorry, Pa. [*After a slight pause*] It's no use talking any more about it.

Mrs. Mayo [*in relief*]: There! I knew Andy'd come to his senses!

Andrew: Don't get the wrong idea, Ma. I'm not backing out.

Mayo: You mean you're goin' in spite of—everythin'?

Andrew: Yes. I'm going. I've got to. [*He looks at his father defiantly.*] I feel I oughtn't to miss this chance to go out into the world and see things, and—I want to go.

Mayo [*with bitter scorn*]: So—you want to go out into the world and see thin's! [*His voice raised and quivering with anger*] I never thought I'd live to see the day when a son o' mine 'd look me in the face and tell a bare-faced lie! [*Bursting out*] You're a liar, Andy Mayo, and a mean one to boot!

Mrs. Mayo: James!

Robert: Pa!

Scott: Steady there, Jim!

Mayo [*waving their protests aside*]: He is and he knows it.

Andrew [*his face flushed*]: I won't argue with you, Pa. You can think as badly of me as you like.

Mayo [*shaking his finger at* ANDY, *in a cold rage*]: You know I'm speakin' truth—that's why you're afraid to argy! You lie when you say you want to go 'way—and see thin's! You ain't got no likin' in the world to go. I've watched you grow up, and I know your ways, and they're my ways. You're runnin' against your own nature, and you're goin' to be a'mighty sorry for it if you do. 'S if I didn't know your real reason for runnin' away! And runnin' away's the only words to fit it. You're runnin' away 'cause you're put out and riled 'cause your own brother's got Ruth 'stead o' you, and—

Andrew [*his face crimson—tensely*]: Stop, Pa! I won't stand hearing that—not even from you!

Mrs. Mayo [*rushing to* ANDY *and putting her arms about him protectingly*]: Don't mind him, Andy dear. He don't mean a word he's saying! [ROBERT *stands rigidly, his hands clenched, his face contracted by pain.* SCOTT *sits dumbfounded and open-mouthed.* ANDREW *soothes his mother who is on the verge of tears.*]

Mayo [*in angry triumph*]: It's the truth, Andy Mayo! And you ought to be bowed in shame to think of it!

Robert [*protestingly*]: Pa!

Mrs. Mayo [*coming from* ANDREW *to his father; puts her hands on his shoulders as though to try and push him back in the chair from which he has risen*]: Won't you be still, James? Please won't you?

Mayo [*looking at* ANDREW *over his wife's shoulder—stubbornly*]: The truth—God's truth!

Mrs. Mayo: Sh-h-h! [*She tries to put a finger across his lips, but he twists his head away.*]

Andrew [*who has regained control over himself*]: You're wrong, Pa, it isn't truth. [*With defiant assertiveness*] I don't love Ruth. I never loved her, and the thought of such a thing never entered my head.

Mayo [*with an angry snort of disbelief*]: Humph! You're pilin' lie on lie!

Andrew [*losing his temper—bitterly*]: I suppose it'd be hard for you to explain anyone's wanting to leave this blessed farm except for some outside reason like that. But I'm sick and tired of it—whether you want to believe me or not—and that's why I'm glad to get a chance to move on.

Robert: Andy! Don't! You're only making it worse.

Andrew [*sulkily*]: I don't care. I've done my share of work here. I've earned my right to quit when I want to. [*Suddenly overcome with anger and grief; with rising intensity*] I'm sick and tired of the whole damn business. I hate the farm and every inch of ground in it. I'm sick of digging in the dirt and sweating in the sun like a slave without getting a word of thanks for it. [*Tears of rage starting to his eyes—hoarsely*] I'm through, through for good and all; and if Uncle Dick won't take me on his ship, I'll find another. I'll get away somewhere, somehow.

Mrs. Mayo [*in a frightened voice*]: Don't you answer him, James. He doesn't know what he's saying. Don't say a word to him 'til he's in his right senses again. Please, James, don't—

Mayo [*pushes her away from him; his face is drawn and pale with the violence of his passion. He glares at* ANDREW *as if he hated him*]: You dare to—you dare to speak like that to me? You talk like that 'bout this farm—the Mayo farm—where you was born—you—you— [*He clenches his fist above his head and advances threateningly on* ANDREW.] You damned whelp!

Mrs. Mayo [*with a shriek*]: James! [*She covers her face with her hands and sinks weakly into* MAYO'S *chair.* ANDREW *remains standing motionless, his face pale and set.*]

Scott [*starting to his feet and stretching his arms across the table toward* MAYO]: Easy there, Jim!

Robert [*throwing himself between father and brother*]: Stop! Are you mad?

Mayo [*grabs* ROBERT'S *arm and pushes him aside—then stands for a moment gasping for breath before* ANDREW. *He points to the*

door with a shaking finger]: Yes—go!—go!—You're no son o' mine —no son o' mine! You can go to hell if you want to! Don't let me find you here—in the mornin'—or—or—I'll *throw* you out!

Robert: Pa! For God's sake! [MRS. MAYO *bursts into noisy sobbing.*]

Mayo [*he gulps convulsively and glares at* ANDREW]: You go—tomorrow mornin'—and by God—don't come back—don't dare come back—by God, not while I'm livin'—or I'll—I'll— [*He shakes over his muttered threat and strides toward the door rear, right.*]

Mrs. Mayo [*rising and throwing her arms around him—hysterically*]: James! James! Where are you going?

Mayo [*incoherently*]: I'm goin'—to bed, Katey. It's late, Katey —it's late. [*He goes out.*]

Mrs. Mayo [*following him, pleading hysterically*]: James! Take back what you've said to Andy. James! [*She follows him out.* ROBERT *and the* CAPTAIN *stare after them with horrified eyes.* ANDREW *stands rigidly looking straight in front of him, his fists clenched at his sides.*]

Scott [*the first to find his voice—with an explosive sigh*]: Well, if he ain't the devil himself when he's roused! You oughtn't to have talked to him that way, Andy, 'bout the damn farm, knowin' how touchy he is about it. [*With another sigh*] Well, you won't mind what he's said in anger. He'll be sorry for it when he's calmed down a bit.

Andrew [*in a dead voice*]: You don't know him. [*Defiantly*] What's said is said and can't be unsaid; and I've chosen.

Robert [*with violent protest*]: Andy! You can't go! This is all so stupid—and terrible!

Andrew [*coldly*]: I'll talk to you in a minute, Rob. [*Crushed by his brother's attitude* ROBERT *sinks down into a chair, holding his head in his hands.*]

Scott [*comes and slaps* ANDREW *on the back*]: I'm damned glad you're shippin' on, Andy. I like your spirit, and the way you spoke up to him. [*Lowering his voice to a cautious whisper*] The sea's the place for a young feller like you that isn't half dead 'n' alive. [*He gives* ANDY *a final approving slap.*] You 'n' me'll get along like twins, see if we don't. I'm goin' aloft to turn in. Don't forget to pack your dunnage. And git some sleep, if you kin. We'll want to sneak out extra early b'fore they're up. It'll do away with more argyments. Robert can drive us down to the town, and bring back the team. [*He goes to the door in the rear, left.*] Well, good night.

Andrew: Good night. [SCOTT *goes out. The two brothers remain silent for a moment. Then* ANDREW *comes over to his brother and puts a hand on his back. He speaks in a low voice, full of feeling.*] Buck up, Rob. It ain't any use crying over spilt milk; and it'll all turn out for the best—let's hope. It couldn't be helped—what's happened.

Robert [*wildly*]: But it's a lie, Andy, a lie!

Andrew: Of course it's a lie. You know it and I know it,—but that's all ought to know it.

Robert: Pa'll never forgive you. Oh, the whole affair is so senseless—and tragic. Why did you think you must go away?

Andrew: You know better than to ask that. You know why. [*Fiercely*] I can wish you and Ruth all the good luck in the world, and I do, and I mean it; but you can't expect me to stay around here and watch you two together, day after day—and me alone. I couldn't stand it—not after all the plans I'd made to happen on this place thinking—[*his voice breaks*]—thinking she cared for me.

Robert [*putting a hand on his brother's arm*]: God! It's horrible! I feel so guilty—to think that I should be the cause of your suffering, after we've been such pals all our lives. If I could have foreseen what'd happen, I swear to you I'd have never said a word to Ruth. I swear I wouldn't have, Andy!

Andrew: I know you wouldn't; and that would've been worse, for Ruth would've suffered then. [*He pats his brother's shoulder.*] It's best as it is. It had to be, and I've got to stand the gaff, that's all. Pa'll see how I felt—after a time—[*as* ROBERT *shakes his head*] —and if he don't—well, it can't be helped.

Robert: But think of Ma! God, Andy, you can't go! You can't!

Andrew [*fiercely*]: I've got to go—to get away! I've got to, I tell you. I'd go crazy here, bein' reminded every second of the day what a fool I'd made of myself. I've got to get away and try and forget, if I can. And I'd hate the farm if I stayed, hate it for bringin' things back. I couldn't take interest in the work any more, work with no purpose in sight. Can't you see what a hell it'd be? You love her too, Rob. Put yourself in my place, and remember I haven't stopped loving her, and couldn't if I was to stay. Would that be fair to you or to her? Put yourself in my place. [*He shakes his brother fiercely by the shoulder.*] What'd you do then? Tell me the truth! You love her. What'd you do?

Robert [*chokingly*]: I'd—I'd go, Andy! [*He buries his face in his hands with a shuddering sob.*] God!

Andrew [*seeming to relax suddenly all over his body—in a low, steady voice*]: Then you know why I got to go; and there's nothing more to be said.

Robert [*in a frenzy of rebellion*]: Why did this have to happen to us? It's damnable! [*He looks about him wildly, as if his vengeance were seeking the responsible fate.*]

Andrew [*soothingly—again putting his hands on his brother's shoulder*]: It's no use fussing any more, Rob. It's done. [*Forcing a smile*] I guess Ruth's got a right to have who she likes. She made a good choice—and God bless her for it!

Robert: Andy! Oh, I wish I could tell you half I feel of how fine you are!

Andrew [*interrupting him quickly*]: Shut up! Let's go to bed. I've got to be up long before sun-up. You, too, if you're going to drive us down.

Robert: Yes. Yes.

Andrew [*turning down the lamp*]: And I've got to pack yet. [*He yawns with utter weariness.*] I'm as tired as if I'd been plowing twenty-four hours at a stretch. [*Dully*] I feel—dead. [ROBERT *covers his face again with his hands.* ANDREW *shakes his head as if to get rid of his thoughts, and continues with a poor attempt at cheery briskness.*] I'm going to douse the light. Come on. [*He slaps his brother on the back.* ROBERT *does not move.* ANDREW *bends over and blows out the lamp. His voice comes from the darkness.*] Don't sit there mourning, Rob. It'll all come out in the wash. Come on and get some sleep. Everything'll turn out all right in the end. [ROBERT *can be heard stumbling to his feet, and the dark figures of the two brothers can be seen groping their way toward the doorway in the rear as*

The Curtain Falls.]

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

Same as Act One, Scene Two. Sitting room of the farm house about half past twelve in the afternoon of a hot, sun-baked day in mid-summer, three years later. All the windows are open, but no breeze stirs the soiled white curtains. A patched screen door is in the rear. Through it the yard can be seen, its small stretch of lawn divided by the dirt path leading to the door from the gate in the white picket fence which borders the road.

The room has changed, not so much in its outward appearance as in its general atmosphere. Little significant details give evidence of carelessness, of inefficiency, of an industry gone to seed. The chairs appear shabby from lack of paint; the table cover is spotted and askew; holes show in the curtains; a child's doll, with one arm gone, lies under the table; a hoe stands in a corner; a man's coat is flung on the couch in the rear; the desk is cluttered up with odds and ends; a number of books are piled carelessly on the sideboard. The noon enervation of the sultry, scorching day seems to have penetrated indoors, causing even inanimate objects to wear an aspect of despondent exhaustion.

A place is set at the end of the table, left, for someone's dinner. Through the open door to the kitchen comes the clatter of dishes being washed, interrupted at intervals by a woman's irritated voice and the peevish whining of a child.

At the rise of the curtain MRS. MAYO *and* MRS. ATKINS *are discovered sitting facing each other,* MRS. MAYO *to the rear,* MRS. ATKINS *to the right of the table.* MRS. MAYO'S *face has lost all character, disintegrated, become a weak mask wearing a helpless, doleful expression of being constantly on the verge of comfortless tears. She speaks in an uncertain voice, without assertiveness, as if all power of willing had deserted her.* MRS. ATKINS *is in her wheel chair. She is a thin, pale-faced, unintelligent looking woman of about forty-eight, with hard, bright eyes. A victim of partial paralysis for many years, condemned to be pushed from day to day of her life in a wheel chair, she has developed the selfish, irritable nature of the chronic invalid. Both women are dressed in black.* MRS. ATKINS *knits nervously as she talks. A ball of unused yarn, with needles stuck through it, lies on the table before* MRS. MAYO.

Mrs. Atkins [*with a disapproving glance at the place set on the table*]: Robert's late for his dinner again, as usual. I don't see why Ruth puts up with it, and I've told her so. Many's the time I've said to her, "It's about time you put a stop to his nonsense. Does he suppose you're runnin' a hotel—with no one to help with things?" But she don't pay no attention. She's as bad as he is, a'most—thinks she knows better than an old, sick body like me.

Mrs. Mayo [*dully*]: Robbie's always late for things. He can't help it, Sarah.

Mrs. Atkins [*with a snort*]: Can't help it! How you do go on, Kate, findin' excuses for him! Anybody can help anything they've a mind to—as long as they've got health, and ain't rendered helpless like me—[*she adds as a pious after-thought*]—through the will of God.

Mrs. Mayo: Robbie can't.

Mrs. Atkins: Can't! It do make me mad, Kate Mayo, to see folks that God gave all the use of their limbs to potterin' round and wastin' time doin' everything the wrong way—and me powerless to help and at their mercy, you might say. And it ain't that I haven't pointed the right way to 'em. I've talked to Robert thousands of times and told him how things ought to be done. You know that, Kate Mayo. But d'you s'pose he takes any notice of what I say? Or Ruth, either—my own daughter? No, they think I'm a crazy, cranky old woman, half dead a'ready, and the sooner I'm in the grave and out o' their way the better it'd suit them.

Mrs. Mayo: You mustn't talk that way, Sarah. They're not as wicked as that. And you've got years and years before you.

Mrs. Atkins: You're like the rest, Kate. You don't know how near the end I am. Well, at least I can go to my eternal rest with a clear conscience. I've done all a body could do to avert ruin from this house. On their heads be it!

Mrs. Mayo [*with hopeless indifference*]: Things might be worse. Robert never had any experience in farming. You can't expect him to learn in a day.

Mrs. Atkins [*snappily*]: He's had three years to learn, and he's gettin' worse 'stead of better. Not on'y your place but mine too is driftin' to rack and ruin, and I can't do nothin' to prevent.

Mrs. Mayo [*with a spark of assertiveness*]: You can't say but Robbie works hard, Sarah.

Mrs. Atkins: What good's workin' hard if it don't accomplish anythin', I'd like to know?

Mrs. Mayo: Robbie's had bad luck against him.

Mrs. Atkins: Say what you've a mind to, Kate, the proof of the puddin's in the eatin'; and you can't deny that things have been goin' from bad to worse ever since your husband died two years back.

Mrs. Mayo [*wiping tears from her eyes with her handkerchief*]: It was God's will that he should be taken.

Mrs. Atkins [*triumphantly*]: It was God's punishment on James Mayo for the blasphemin' and denyin' of God he done all his sinful life! [MRS. MAYO *begins to weep softly.*] There, Kate, I shouldn't be remindin' you, I know. He's at peace, poor man, and forgiven, let's pray.

Mrs. Mayo [*wiping her eyes—simply*]: James was a good man.

Mrs. Atkins [*ignoring this remark*]: What I was sayin' was that since Robert's been in charge things've been goin' down hill steady. You don't know *how* bad they are. Robert don't let on to you what's happenin'; and you'd never see it yourself if 'twas under your nose. But, thank the Lord, Ruth still comes to me once in a while for advice when she's worried near out of her senses by his goin's-on. Do you know what she told me last night? But I forgot, she said not to tell you—still I think you've got a right to know, and it's my duty not to let such things go on behind your back.

Mrs. Mayo [*wearily*]: You can tell me if you want to.

Mrs. Atkins [*bending over toward her—in a low voice*]: Ruth was almost crazy about it. Robert told her he'd have to mortgage

the farm—said he didn't know how he'd pull through 'til harvest without it, and he can't get money any other way. [*She straightens up—indignantly*] Now what do you think of your Robert?

Mrs. Mayo [*resignedly*]: If it has to be—

Mrs. Atkins: You don't mean to say you're goin' to sign away your farm, Kate Mayo—after me warnin' you?

Mrs. Mayo: I'll do what Robbie says is needful.

Mrs. Atkins [*holding up her hands*]: Well, of all the foolishness! —well, it's your farm, not mine, and I've nothin' more to say.

Mrs. Mayo: Maybe Robbie'll manage till Andy gets back and sees to things. It can't be long now.

Mrs. Atkins [*with keen interest*]: Ruth says Andy ought to turn up any day. When does Robert figger he'll get here?

Mrs. Mayo: He says he can't calculate exactly on account o' the *Sunda* being a sail boat. Last letter he got was from England, the day they were sailing for home. That was over a month ago, and Robbie thinks they're overdue now.

Mrs. Atkins: We can give praise to God then that he'll be back in the nick o' time. He ought to be tired of travelin' and anxious to get home and settle down to work again.

Mrs. Mayo: Andy *has* been working. He's head officer on Dick's boat, he wrote Robbie. You know that.

Mrs. Atkins: That foolin' on ships is all right for a spell, but he must be right sick of it by this.

Mrs. Mayo [*musingly*]: I wonder if he's changed much. He used to be so fine-looking and strong. [*With a sigh*] Three years! It seems more like three hundred. [*Her eyes filling—piteously*] Oh, if James could only have lived 'til he came back—and forgiven him!

Mrs. Atkins: He never would have—not James Mayo! Didn't he keep his heart hardened against him till the last in spite of all you and Robert did to soften him?

Mrs. Mayo [*with a feeble flash of anger*]: Don't you dare say that! [*Brokenly*] Oh, I know deep down in his heart he forgave Andy, though he was too stubborn ever to own up to it. It was that brought on his death—breaking his heart just on account of his stubborn pride. [*She wipes her eyes with her handkerchief and sobs.*]

Mrs. Atkins [*piously*]: It was the will of God. [*The whining crying of the child sounds from the kitchen.* MRS. ATKINS *frowns irritably.*] Drat that young one! Seems as if she cries all the time on purpose to set a body's nerves on edge.

Mrs. Mayo [*wiping her eyes*]: It's the heat upsets her. Mary doesn't feel any too well these days, poor little child!

Mrs. Atkins: She gets it right from her pa—bein' sickly all the time. You can't deny Robert was always ailin' as a child. [*She sighs heavily.*] It was a crazy mistake for them two to get married. I argyed against it at the time, but Ruth was so spelled with Robert's wild poetry notions she wouldn't listen to sense. Andy was the one would have been the match for her.

Mrs. Mayo: I've often thought since it might have been better the other way. But Ruth and Robbie seem happy enough together.

Mrs. Atkins: At any rate it was God's work—and His will be done. [*The two women sit in silence for a moment.* RUTH *enters from the kitchen, carrying in her arms her two-year-old daughter,* MARY, *a pretty but sickly and anemic-looking child with a tear-stained face.* RUTH *has aged appreciably. Her face has lost its youth and freshness. There is a trace in her expression of something hard and spiteful. She sits in the rocker in front of the table and sighs wearily. She wears a gingham dress with a soiled apron tied around her waist.*]

Ruth: Land sakes, if this isn't a scorcher! That kitchen's like a furnace. Phew! [*She pushes the damp hair back from her forehead.*]

Mrs. Mayo: Why didn't you call me to help with the dishes?

Ruth [*shortly*]: No. The heat in there'd kill you.

Mary [*sees the doll under the table and struggles on her mother's lap*]: Dolly, Mamma! Dolly!

Ruth [*pulling her back*]: It's time for your nap. You can't play with Dolly now.

Mary [*commencing to cry whiningly*]: Dolly!

Mrs. Atkins [*irritably*]: Can't you keep that child still? Her racket's enough to split a body's ears. Put her down and let her play with the doll if it'll quiet her.

Ruth [*lifting* MARY *to the floor*]: There! I hope you'll be satisfied and keep still. [MARY *sits down on the floor before the table and plays with the doll in silence.* RUTH *glances at the place set on the table.*] It's a wonder Rob wouldn't try to get to meals on time once in a while.

Mrs. Mayo [*dully*]: Something must have gone wrong again.

Ruth [*wearily*]: I s'pose so. Something's always going wrong these days, it looks like.

Mrs. Atkins [*snappily*]: It wouldn't if you possessed a bit of spunk. The idea of you permittin' him to come in to meals at all

hours—and you doin' the work! I never heard of such a thin'. You're too easygoin', that's the trouble.

Ruth: Do stop your nagging at me, Ma! I'm sick of hearing you. I'll do as I please about it; and thank you for not interfering. [*She wipes her moist forehead—wearily.*] Phew! It's too hot to argue. Let's talk of something pleasant. [*Curiously*] Didn't I hear you speaking about Andy a while ago?

Mrs. Mayo: We were wondering when he'd get home.

Ruth [*brightening*]: Rob says any day now he's liable to drop in and surprise us—him and the Captain. It'll certainly look natural to see him around the farm again.

Mrs. Atkins: Let's hope the farm'll look more natural, too, when he's had a hand at it. The way thin's are now!

Ruth [*irritably*]: Will you stop harping on that, Ma? We all know things aren't as they might be. What's the good of your complaining all the time?

Mrs. Atkins: There, Kate Mayo! Ain't that just what I told you? I can't say a word of advice to my own daughter even, she's that stubborn and self-willed.

Ruth [*putting her hands over her ears—in exasperation*]: For goodness' sakes, Ma!

Mrs. Mayo [*dully*]: Never mind. Andy'll fix everything when he comes.

Ruth [*hopefully*]: Oh, yes, I know he will. He always did know just the right thing ought to be done. [*With weary vexation*] It's a shame for him to come home and have to start in with things in such a topsy-turvy.

Mrs. Mayo: Andy'll manage.

Ruth [*sighing*]: I s'pose it isn't Rob's fault things go wrong with him.

Mrs. Atkins [*scornfully*]: Humph! [*She fans herself nervously.*] Land o' Goshen, but it's bakin' in here! Let's go out in under the trees in back where there's a breath of fresh air. Come, Kate. [MRS. MAYO *gets up obediently and starts to wheel the invalid's chair toward the screen door.*] You better come too, Ruth. It'll do you good. Learn him a lesson and let him get his own dinner. Don't be such a fool.

Ruth [*going and holding the screen door open for them—listlessly*]: He wouldn't mind. He doesn't eat much. But I can't go anyway. I've got to put baby to bed.

Mrs. Atkins: Let's go, Kate. I'm boilin' in here. [MRS. MAYO

wheels her out and off left. RUTH *comes back and sits down in her chair.*]

Ruth [*mechanically*]: Come and let me take off your shoes and stockings, Mary, that's a good girl. You've got to take your nap now. [*The child continues to play as if she hadn't heard, absorbed in her doll. An eager expression comes over* RUTH'S *tired face. She glances toward the door furtively—then gets up and goes to the desk. Her movements indicate a guilty fear of discovery. She takes a letter from a pigeon-hole and retreats swiftly to her chair with it. She opens the envelope and reads the letter with great interest, a flush of excitement coming to her cheeks.* ROBERT *walks up the path and opens the screen door quietly and comes into the room. He, too, has aged. His shoulders are stooped as if under too great a burden. His eyes are dull and lifeless, his face burned by the sun and unshaven for days. Streaks of sweat have smudged the layer of dust on his cheeks. His lips, drawn down at the corners, give him a hopeless, resigned expression. The three years have accentuated the weakness of his mouth and chin. He is dressed in overalls, laced boots, and a flannel shirt open at the neck.*]

Robert [*throwing his hat over on the sofa—with a great sigh of exhaustion*]: Phew! The sun's hot today! [RUTH *is startled. At first she makes an instinctive motion as if to hide the letter in her bosom. She immediately thinks better of this and sits with the letter in her hands looking at him with defiant eyes. He bends down and kisses her.*]

Ruth [*feeling of her cheek—irritably*]: Why don't you shave? You look awful.

Robert [*indifferently*]: I forgot—and it's too much trouble this weather.

Mary [*throwing aside her doll, runs to him with a happy cry*]: Dada! Dada!

Robert [*swinging her up above his head—lovingly*]: And how's this little girl of mine this hot day, eh?

Mary [*screeching happily*]: Dada! Dada!

Ruth [*in annoyance*]: Don't do that to her! You know it's time for her nap and you'll get her all waked up; then I'll be the one that'll have to sit beside her till she falls asleep.

Robert [*sitting down in the chair on the left of table and cuddling* MARY *on his lap*]: You needn't bother. I'll put her to bed.

Ruth [*shortly*]: You've got to get back to your work, I s'pose.

Robert [*with a sigh*]: Yes, I was forgetting. [*He glances at the*

open letter on RUTH's *lap.*] Reading Andy's letter again? I should think you'd know it by heart by this time.

Ruth [*coloring as if she'd been accused of something—defiantly*]: I've got a right to read it, haven't I? He says it's meant for all of us.

Robert [*with a trace of irritation*]: Right? Don't be so silly. There's no question of right. I was only saying that you must know all that's in it after so many readings.

Ruth: Well, I don't. [*She puts the letter on the table and gets wearily to her feet.*] I s'pose you'll be wanting your dinner now.

Robert [*listlessly*]: I don't care. I'm not hungry.

Ruth: And here I been keeping it hot for you!

Robert [*irritably*]: Oh, all right then. Bring it in and I'll try to eat.

Ruth: I've got to get her to bed first. [*She goes to lift* MARY *off his lap.*] Come, dear. It's after time and you can hardly keep your eyes open now.

Mary [*crying*]: No, no! [*Appealing to her father*] Dada! No!

Ruth [*accusingly to* ROBERT]: There! Now see what you've done! I told you not to—

Robert [*shortly*]: Let her alone, then. She's all right where she is. She'll fall asleep on my lap in a minute if you'll stop bothering her.

Ruth [*hotly*]: She'll not do any such thing! She's got to learn to mind me! [*Shaking her finger at* MARY] You naughty child! Will you come with Mamma when she tells you for your own good?

Mary [*clinging to her father*]: No, Dada!

Ruth [*losing her temper*]: A good spanking's what you need, my young lady—and you'll get one from me if you don't mind better, d'you hear? [MARY *starts to whimper frightenedly.*]

Robert [*with sudden anger*]: Leave her alone! How often have I told you not to threaten her with whipping? I won't have it. [*Soothing the wailing* MARY] There! There, little girl! Baby mustn't cry. Dada won't like you if you do. Dada'll hold you and you must promise to go to sleep like a good little girl. Will you when Dada asks you?

Mary [*cuddling up to him*]: Yes, Dada.

Ruth [*looking at them, her pale face set and drawn*]: A fine one you are to be telling folks how to do things! [*She bites her lips. Husband and wife look into each other's eyes with something akin to hatred in their expressions; then* RUTH *turns away with a shrug of affected indifference.*] All right, take care of her then, if you think it's so easy. [*She walks away into the kitchen.*]

Robert [*smoothing* MARY'S *hair—tenderly*]: We'll show Mamma you're a good little girl, won't we?

Mary [*crooning drowsily*]: Dada, Dada.

Robert: Let's see: Does your mother take off your shoes and stockings before your nap?

Mary [*nodding with half-shut eyes*]: Yes, Dada.

Robert [*taking off her shoes and stockings*]: We'll show Mamma we know how to do those things, won't we? There's one old shoe off—and there's the other old shoe—and here's one old stocking—and there's the other old stocking. There we are, all nice and cool and comfy. [*He bends down and kisses her.*] And now will you promise to go right to sleep if Dada takes you to bed? [MARY *nods sleepily.*] That's the good little girl. [*He gathers her up in his arms carefully and carries her into the bedroom. His voice can be heard faintly as he lulls the child to sleep.* RUTH *comes out of the kitchen and gets the plate from the table. She hears the voice from the room and tiptoes to the door to look in. Then she starts for the kitchen but stands for a moment thinking, a look of ill-concealed jealousy on her face. At a noise from inside she hurriedly disappears into the kitchen. A moment later* ROBERT *re-enters. He comes forward and picks up the shoes and stockings which he shoves carelessly under the table. Then, seeing no one about, he goes to the sideboard and selects a book. Coming back to his chair, he sits down and immediately becomes absorbed in reading.* RUTH *returns from the kitchen bringing his plate heaped with food, and a cup of tea. She sets those before him and sits down in her former place.* ROBERT *continues to read, oblivious to the food on the table.*]

Ruth [*after watching him irritably for a moment*]: For heaven's sakes, put down that old book! Don't you see your dinner's getting cold?

Robert [*closing his book*]: Excuse me, Ruth. I didn't notice. [*He picks up his knife and fork and begins to eat gingerly, without appetite.*]

Ruth: I should think you might have some feeling for me, Rob, and not always be late for meals. If you think it's fun sweltering in that oven of a kitchen to keep things warm for you, you're mistaken.

Robert: I'm sorry, Ruth, really I am. Something crops up every day to delay me. I mean to be here on time.

Ruth [*with a sigh*]: Mean-tos don't count.

Robert [*with a conciliating smile*]: Then punish me, Ruth. Let the food get cold and don't bother about me.

Ruth: I'd have to wait just the same to wash up after you.

Robert: But I can wash up.

Ruth: A nice mess there'd be then!

Robert [*with an attempt at lightness*]: The food is lucky to be able to get cold this weather. [*As* RUTH *doesn't answer or smile he opens his book and resumes his reading, forcing himself to take a mouthful of food every now and then.* RUTH *stares at him in annoyance.*]

Ruth: And besides, you've got your own work that's got to be done.

Robert [*absent-mindedly, without taking his eyes from the book*]: Yes, of course.

Ruth [*spitefully*]: Work you'll never get done by reading books all the time.

Robert [*shutting the book with a snap*]: Why do you persist in nagging at me for getting pleasure out of reading? Is it because— [*He checks himself abruptly.*]

Ruth [*coloring*]: Because I'm too stupid to understand them, I s'pose you were going to say.

Robert [*shamefacedly*]: No—no. [*In exasperation*] Why do you goad me into saying things I don't mean? Haven't I got my share of troubles trying to work this cursed farm without your adding to them? You know how hard I've tried to keep things going in spite of bad luck—

Ruth [*scornfully*]: Bad luck!

Robert: And my own very apparent unfitness for the job, I was going to add; but you can't deny there's been bad luck to it, too. Why don't you take things into consideration? Why can't we pull together? We used to. I know it's hard on you also. Then why can't we help each other instead of hindering?

Ruth [*sullenly*]: I do the best I know how.

Robert [*gets up and puts his hand on her shoulder*]: I know you do. But let's both of us try to do better. We can both improve. Say a word of encouragement once in a while when things go wrong, even if it is my fault. You know the odds I've been up against since Pa died. I'm not a farmer. I've never claimed to be one. But there's nothing else I can do under the circumstances, and I've got to pull things through somehow. With your help, I can do it. With you against me— [*He shrugs his shoulders. There is a pause. Then he bends down and kisses her hair—with an attempt at cheerfulness.*] So you promise that; and I'll promise to be here when the clock strikes—and anything else you tell me to. Is it a bargain?

Ruth [*dully*]: I s'pose so. [*They are interrupted by the sound*

of a loud knock at the kitchen door.] There's someone at the kitchen door. [*She hurries out. A moment later she reappears.*] It's Ben.

Robert [*frowning*]: What's the trouble now, I wonder? [*In a loud voice*] Come on in here, Ben. [BEN *slouches in from the kitchen. He is a hulking, awkward young fellow with a heavy, stupid face and shifty, cunning eyes. He is dressed in overalls, boots, etc., and wears a broad-brimmed hat of coarse straw pushed back on his head.*] Well, Ben, what's the matter?

Ben [*drawlingly*]: The mowin' machine's bust.

Robert: Why, that can't be. The man fixed it only last week.

Ben: It's bust just the same.

Robert: And can't you fix it?

Ben: No. Don't know what's the matter with the goll-darned thing. 'Twon't work, anyhow.

Robert [*getting up and going for his hat*]: Wait a minute and I'll go look it over. There can't be much the matter with it.

Ben [*impudently*]: Don't make no diff'rence t' me whether there be or not. I'm quittin'.

Robert [*anxiously*]: You don't mean you're throwing up your job here?

Ben: That's what! My month's up today and I want what's owin' t' me.

Robert: But why are you quitting now, Ben, when you know I've so much work on hand? I'll have a hard time getting another man at such short notice.

Ben: That's for you to figger. I'm quittin'.

Robert: But what's your reason? You haven't any complaint to make about the way you've been treated, have you?

Ben: No. 'Tain't that. [*Shaking his finger*] Look-a-here. I'm sick o' being made fun at, that's what; an' I got a job up to Timms' place; an' I'm quittin' here.

Robert: Being made fun of? I don't understand you. Who's making fun of you?

Ben: They all do. When I drive down with the milk in the mornin' they all laughs and jokes at me—that boy up to Harris' and the new feller up to Slocum's, and Bill Evans down to Meade's, and all the rest on 'em.

Robert: That's a queer reason for leaving me flat. Won't they laugh at you just the same when you're working for Timms?

Ben: They wouldn't dare to. Timms is the best farm hereabouts. They was laughin' at me for workin' for *you,* that's what! "How're things up to the Mayo place?" they hollers every mornin'. "What's

Robert doin' now—pasturin' the cattle in the cornlot? Is he seasonin' his hay with rain this year, same as last?" they shouts. "Or is he inventin' some 'lectrical milkin' engine to fool them dry cows o' his into givin' hard cider?" [*Very much ruffled*] That's like they talks; and I ain't goin' to put up with it no longer. Everyone's always knowed me as a first-class hand hereabouts, and I ain't wantin' 'em to get no different notion. So I'm quittin' you. And I wants what's comin' to me.

Robert [*coldly*]: Oh, if that's the case, you can go to the devil. You'll get your money tomorrow when I get back from town—not before!

Ben [*turning to doorway to kitchen*]: That suits me. [*As he goes out he speaks back over his shoulder*] And see that I do get it, or there'll be trouble. [*He disappears and the slamming of the kitchen door is heard.*]

Robert [*as* RUTH *comes from where she has been standing by the doorway and sits down dejectedly in her old place*]: The stupid damn fool! And now what about the haying? That's an example of what I'm up against. No one can say I'm responsible for that.

Ruth: He wouldn't dare act that way with anyone else! [*Spitefully, with a glance at* ANDREW'S *letter on the table*] It's lucky Andy's coming back.

Robert [*without resentment*]: Yes, Andy'll see the right thing to do in a jiffy. [*With an affectionate smile*] I wonder if the old chump's changed much? He doesn't seem to from his letters, does he? [*Shaking his head*] But just the same I doubt if he'll want to settle down to a hum-drum farm life, after all he's been through.

Ruth [*resentfully*]: Andy's not like you. He likes the farm.

Robert [*immersed in his own thoughts—enthusiastically*]: Gad, the things he's seen and experienced! Think of the places he's been! All the wonderful far places I used to dream about! God, how I envy him! What a trip! [*He springs to his feet and instinctively goes to the window and stares out at the horizon.*]

Ruth [*bitterly*]: I s'pose you're sorry now you didn't go?

Robert [*too occupied with his own thoughts to hear her—vindictively*]: Oh, those cursed hills out there that I used to think promised me so much! How I've grown to hate the sight of them! They're like the walls of a narrow prison yard shutting me in from all the freedom and wonder of life! [*He turns back to the room with a gesture of loathing.*] Sometimes I think if it wasn't for you,

Ruth, and—[*his voice softening*]—little Mary, I'd chuck everything up and walk down the road with just one desire in my heart—to put the whole rim of the world between me and those hills, and be able to breathe freely once more! [*He sinks down into his chair and smiles with bitter self-scorn.*] There I go dreaming again—my old fool dreams.

Ruth [*in a low, repressed voice—her eyes smoldering*]: You're not the only one!

Robert [*buried in his own thoughts—bitterly*]: And Andy, who's had the chance—what has he got out of it? His letters read like the diary of a—of a farmer! "We're in Singapore now. It's a dirty hole of a place and hotter than hell. Two of the crew are down with fever and we're short-handed on the work. I'll be damn glad when we sail again, although tacking back and forth in these blistering seas is a rotten job too!" [*Scornfully*] That's about the way he summed up his impressions of the East.

Ruth [*her repressed voice trembling*]: You needn't make fun of Andy.

Robert: When I think—but what's the use? You know I wasn't making fun of Andy personally, but his attitude toward things is—

Ruth [*her eyes flashing—bursting into uncontrollable rage*]: You was too making fun of him! And I ain't going to stand for it! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! [ROBERT *stares at her in amazement. She continues furiously.*] A fine one to talk about anyone else—after the way you've ruined everything with your lazy loafing!—and the stupid way you do things!

Robert [*angrily*]: Stop that kind of talk, do you hear?

Ruth: You findin' fault—with your own brother who's ten times the man you ever was or ever will be! You're jealous, that's what! Jealous because he's made a man of himself, while you're nothing but a—but a— [*She stutters incoherently, overcome by rage.*]

Robert: Ruth! Ruth! You'll be sorry for talking like that.

Ruth: I won't! I won't never be sorry! I'm only saying what I've been thinking for years.

Robert [*aghast*]: Ruth! You can't mean that!

Ruth: What do you think—living with a man like you—having to suffer all the time because you've never been man enough to work and do things like other people. But no! You never own up to that. You think you're so much better than other folks, with your college education, where you never learned a thing, and always reading your stupid books instead of working. I s'pose you think I

ought to be *proud* to be your wife—a poor, ignorant thing like me! [*Fiercely*] But I'm not. I hate it! I hate the sight of you. Oh, if I'd only known! If I hadn't been such a fool to listen to your cheap, silly, poetry talk that you learned out of books! If I could have seen how you were in your true self—like you are now—I'd have killed myself before I'd have married you! I was sorry for it before we'd been together a month. I knew what you were really like—when it was too late.

Robert [*his voice raised loudly*]: And now—I'm finding out what you're really like—what a—a creature I've been living with. [*With a harsh laugh*] God! It wasn't that I haven't guessed how mean and small you are—but I've kept on telling myself that I must be wrong—like a fool!—like a damned fool!

Ruth: You were saying you'd go out on the road if it wasn't for me. Well, you can go, and the sooner the better! I don't care! I'll be glad to get rid of you! The farm'll be better off too. There's been a curse on it ever since you took hold. So go! Go and be a tramp like you've always wanted. It's all you're good for. I can get along without you, don't you worry. [*Exulting fiercely*] Andy's coming back, don't forget that! He'll attend to things like they should be. He'll show what a man can do! I don't need you. Andy's coming!

Robert [*they are both standing.* ROBERT *grabs her by the shoulders and glares into her eyes*]: What do you mean? [*He shakes her violently.*] What are you thinking of? What's in your evil mind, you—you— [*His voice is a harsh shout.*]

Ruth [*in a defiant scream*]: Yes, I do mean it! I'd say it if you was to kill me! I do love Andy. I do! I do! I always loved him. [*Exultantly*] And he loves me! He loves me! I know he does. He always did! And you know he did, too! So go! Go if you want to!

Robert [*throwing her away from him. She staggers back against the table—thickly*]: You—you slut! [*He stands glaring at her as she leans back, supporting herself by the table, gasping for breath. A loud frightened whimper sounds from the awakened child in the bedroom. It continues. The man and woman stand looking at one another in horror, the extent of their terrible quarrel suddenly brought home to them. A pause. The noise of a horse and carriage comes from the road before the house. The two, suddenly struck by the same premonition, listen to it breathlessly, as to a sound heard in a dream. It stops. They hear* ANDY'S *voice from the road shouting a long hail—"Ahoy there!"*]

Ruth [*with a strangled cry of joy*]: Andy! Andy! [*She rushes and grabs the knob of the screen door, about to fling it open.*]

Robert [*in a voice of command that forces obedience*]: Stop! [*He goes to the door and gently pushes the trembling* RUTH *away from it. The child's crying rises to a louder pitch.*] I'll meet Andy. You better go in to Mary, Ruth. [*She looks at him defiantly for a moment, but there is something in his eyes that makes her turn and walk slowly into the bedroom.*]

Andy's Voice [*in a louder shout*]: Ahoy there, Rob!

Robert [*in an answering shout of forced cheeriness*]: Hello, Andy! [*He opens the door and walks out as*

The Curtain Falls.]

SCENE TWO

The top of a hill on the farm. It is about eleven o'clock the next morning. The day is hot and cloudless. In the distance the sea can be seen.

The top of the hill slopes downward slightly toward the left. A big boulder stands in the center toward the rear. Further right, a large oak tree. The faint trace of a path leading upward to it from

the left foreground can be detected through the bleached, sun-scorched grass.

ROBERT *is discovered sitting on the boulder, his chin resting on his hands, staring out toward the horizon seaward. His face is pale and haggard, his expression one of utter despondency.* MARY *is sitting on the grass near him in the shade, playing with her doll, singing happily to herself. Presently she casts a curious glance at her father, and, propping her doll up against the tree, comes over and clambers to his side.*

Mary [*pulling at his hand—solicitously*]: Dada sick?

Robert [*looking at her with a forced smile*]: No, dear. Why?

Mary: Play wif Mary.

Robert [*gently*]: No, dear, not today. Dada doesn't feel like playing today.

Mary [*protestingly*]: Yes, Dada!

Robert: No, dear. Dada does feel sick—a little. He's got a bad headache.

Mary: Mary see. [*He bends his head. She pats his hair.*] Bad head.

Robert [*kissing her—with a smile*]: There! It's better now, dear, thank you. [*She cuddles up close against him. There is a pause during which each of them looks out seaward. Finally* ROBERT *turns to her tenderly.*] Would you like Dada to go away?—far, far away?

Mary [*tearfully*]: No! No! No, Dada, no!

Robert: Don't you like Uncle Andy—the man that came yesterday—not the old man with the white mustache—the other?

Mary: Mary loves Dada.

Robert [*with fierce determination*]: He won't go away, baby. He was only joking. He couldn't leave his little Mary. [*He presses the child in his arms.*]

Mary [*with an exclamation of pain*]: Oh! Hurt!

Robert: I'm sorry, little girl. [*He lifts her down to the grass.*] Go play with Dolly, that's a good girl; and be careful to keep in the shade. [*She reluctantly leaves him and takes up her doll again. A moment later she points down the hill to the left.*]

Mary: Mans, Dada.

Robert [*looking that way*]: It's your Uncle Andy. [*A moment later* ANDREW *comes up from the left, whistling cheerfully. He has changed but little in appearance, except for the fact that his face has been deeply bronzed by his years in the tropics; but there is a*

lecided change in his manner. The old easy-going good-nature seems o have been partly lost in a breezy, business-like briskness of voice nd gesture. There is an authoritative note in his speech as though e were accustomed to give orders and have them obeyed as a natter of course. He is dressed in the simple blue uniform and cap f a merchant ship's officer.]

Andrew: Here you are, eh?

Robert: Hello, Andy.

Andrew [*going over to* MARY]: And who's this young lady I find ou all alone with, eh? Who's this pretty young lady? [*He tickles he laughing, squirming* MARY, *then lifts her up at arm's length ver his head.*] Upsy-daisy! [*He sets her down on the ground gain.*] And there you are! [*He walks over and sits down on the oulder beside* ROBERT *who moves to one side to make room for im.*] Ruth told me I'd probably find you up top-side here; but 'd have guessed it, anyway. [*He digs his brother in the ribs affec-ionately.*] Still up to your old tricks, you old beggar! I can re-ember how you used to come up here to mope and dream in the ld days.

Robert [*with a smile*]: I come up here now because it's the oolest place on the farm. I've given up dreaming.

Andrew [*grinning*]: I don't believe it. You can't have changed hat much. [*After a pause—with boyish enthusiasm*] Say, it sure rings back old times to be up here with you having a chin all by ur lonesomes again. I feel great being back home.

Robert: It's great for us to have you back.

Andrew [*after a pause—meaningly*]: I've been looking over the ld place with Ruth. Things don't seem to be—

Robert [*his face flushing—interrupts his brother shortly*]: Never ind the damn farm! Let's talk about something interesting. This s the first chance I've had to have a word with you alone. Tell e about your trip.

Andrew: Why, I thought I told you everything in my letters.

Robert [*smiling*]: Your letters were—sketchy, to say the least.

Andrew: Oh, I know I'm no author. You needn't be afraid of urting my feelings. I'd rather go through a typhoon again than rite a letter.

Robert [*with eager interest*]: Then you were through a typhoon?

Andrew: Yes—in the China Sea. Had to run before it under bare oles for two days. I thought we were bound down for Davy Jones,

sure. Never dreamed waves could get so big or the wind blow so hard. If it hadn't been for Uncle Dick being such a good skipper we'd have gone to the sharks, all of us. As it was we came out minus a main top-mast and had to beat back to Hong-Kong for repairs. But I must have written you all this.

Robert: You never mentioned it.

Andrew: Well, there was so much dirty work getting things shipshape again I must have forgotten about it.

Robert [*looking at* ANDREW—*marveling*]: Forget a typhoon? [*With a trace of scorn*] You're a strange combination, Andy. And is what you've told me all you remember about it?

Andrew: Oh, I could give you your bellyful of details if I wanted to turn loose on you. It was all-wool-and-a-yard-wide-Hell, I'll tell you. You ought to have been there. I remember thinking about you at the worst of it, and saying to myself: "This'd cure Rob of them ideas of his about the beautiful sea, if he could see it." And it would have too, you bet! [*He nods emphatically.*]

Robert [*dryly*]: The sea doesn't seem to have impressed you very favorably.

Andrew: I should say it didn't! I'll never set foot on a ship again if I can help it—except to carry me some place I can't get to by train.

Robert: But you studied to become an officer!

Andrew: Had to do something or I'd gone mad. The days were like years. [*He laughs.*] And as for the East you used to rave about —well, you ought to see it, and *smell* it! One walk down one of their filthy narrow streets with the tropic sun beating on it would sicken you for life with the "wonder and mystery" you used to dream of.

Robert [*shrinking from his brother with a glance of aversion*]: So all you found in the East was a stench?

Andrew: A stench! Ten thousand of them!

Robert: But you did like some of the places, judging from your letters—Sydney, Buenos Aires—

Andrew: Yes, Sydney's a good town. [*Enthusiastically*] But Buenos Aires—there's the place for you. Argentine's a country where a fellow has a chance to make good. You're right I like it. And I'll tell you, Rob, that's right where I'm going just as soon as I've seen you folks a while and can get a ship. I can get a berth as second officer, and I'll jump the ship when I get there. I'll need

very cent of the wages Uncle's paid me to get a start at something B. A.

Robert [*staring at his brother—slowly*]: So you're not going to ay on the farm?

Andrew: Why, sure not! Did you think I was? There wouldn't be ıy sense. One of us is enough to run this little place.

Robert: I suppose it does seem small to you now.

Andrew [*not noticing the sarcasm in* ROBERT'S *tone*]: You've no ea, Rob, what a splendid place Argentine is. I had a letter from a arine insurance chap that I'd made friends with in Hong-Kong to s brother, who's in the grain business in Buenos Aires. He took ıite a fancy to me, and what's more important, he offered me a job I'd come back there. I'd have taken it on the spot, only I couldn't ave Uncle Dick in the lurch, and I'd promised you folks to come)me. But I'm going back there, you bet, and then you watch me t on! [*He slaps* ROBERT *on the back.*] But don't you think it's a g chance, Rob?

Robert: It's fine—for you, Andy.

Andrew: We call this a farm—but you ought to hear about the rms down there—ten square miles where we've got an acre. It's a w country where big things are opening up—and I want to get on something big before I die. I'm no fool when it comes to rming, and I know something about grain. I've been reading up lot on it, too, lately. [*He notices* ROBERT'S *absent-minded expres-)n and laughs.*] Wake up, you old poetry bookworm, you! I ıow my talking about business makes you want to choke me,)esn't it?

Robert [*with an embarrassed smile*]: No, Andy, I—I just hap-ned to think of something else. [*Frowning*] There've been lots of nes lately that I've wished I had some of your faculty for business.

Andrew [*soberly*]: There's something I want to talk about, Rob, the farm. You don't mind, do you?

Robert: No.

Andrew: I walked over it this morning with Ruth—and she told e about things— [*Evasively*] I could see the place had run down; ıt you mustn't blame yourself. When luck's against anyone—

Robert: Don't, Andy! It *is* my fault. You know it as well as I do. ıe best I've ever done was to make ends meet.

Andrew [*after a pause*]: I've got over a thousand saved, and you n have that.

Robert [*firmly*]: No. You need that for your start in Buenos Aires.

Andrew: I don't. I can—

Robert [*determinedly*]: No, Andy! Once and for all, no! I won't hear of it!

Andrew [*protestingly*]: You obstinate old son of a gun!

Robert: Oh, everything'll be on a sound footing after harvest. Don't worry about it.

Andrew [*doubtfully*]: Maybe. [*After a pause*] It's too bad Pa couldn't have lived to see things through. [*With feeling*] It cut me up a lot—hearing he was dead. He never—softened up, did he—about me, I mean?

Robert: He never understood, that's a kinder way of putting it. He does now.

Andrew [*after a pause*]: You've forgotten all about what—caused me to go, haven't you, Rob? [ROBERT *nods but keeps his face averted.*] I was a slushier damn fool in those days than you were. But it was an act of Providence I did go. It opened my eyes to how I'd been fooling myself. Why, I'd forgotten all about—that—before I'd been at sea six months.

Robert [*turns and looks into* ANDREW'S *eyes searchingly*]: You're speaking of—Ruth?

Andrew [*confused*]: Yes. I didn't want you to get false notions in your head, or I wouldn't say anything. [*Looking* ROBERT *squarely in the eyes*] I'm telling you the truth when I say I'd forgotten long ago. It don't sound well for me, getting over things so easy, but I guess it never really amounted to more than a kid idea I was letting rule me. I'm certain now I never was in love—I was getting fun out of thinking I was—and being a hero to myself. [*He heaves a great sigh of relief.*] There! Gosh, I'm glad that's off my chest. I've been feeling sort of awkward ever since I've been home, thinking of what you two might think. [*A trace of appeal in his voice*] You've got it all straight now, haven't you, Rob?

Robert [*in a low voice*]: Yes, Andy.

Andrew: And I'll tell Ruth, too, if I can get up the nerve. She must feel kind of funny having me round—after what used to be—and not knowing how I feel about it.

Robert [*slowly*]: Perhaps—for her sake—you'd better not tell her.

Andrew: For her sake? Oh, you mean she wouldn't want to be reminded of my foolishness? Still, I think it'd be worse if—

Robert [*breaking out—in an agonized voice*]: Do as you please, Andy; but for God's sake, let's not talk about it! [*There is a pause.* ANDREW *stares at* ROBERT *in hurt stupefaction.* ROBERT *continues after a moment in a voice which he vainly attempts to keep calm.*] Excuse me, Andy. This rotten headache has my nerves shot to pieces.

Andrew [*mumbling*]: It's all right, Rob—long as you're not sore at me.

Robert: Where did Uncle Dick disappear to this morning?

Andrew: He went down to the port to see to things on the *Sunda.* He said he didn't know exactly when he'd be back. I'll have to go down and tend to the ship when he comes. That's why I dressed up in these togs.

Mary [*pointing down the hill to the left*]: See! Mamma! Mamma! [*She struggles to her feet.* RUTH *appears at left. She is dressed in white, shows she has been fixing up. She looks pretty, flushed and full of life.*]

Mary [*running to her mother*]: Mamma!

Ruth [*kissing her*]: Hello, dear! [*She walks toward the rock and addresses* ROBERT *coldly.*] Jake wants to see you about something. He finished working where he was. He's waiting for you at the road.

Robert [*getting up—wearily*]: I'll go down right away. [*As he looks at* RUTH, *noting her changed appearance, his face darkens with pain.*]

Ruth: And take Mary with you, please. [*To* MARY] Go with Dada, that's a good girl. Grandma has your dinner most ready for you.

Robert [*shortly*]: Come, Mary!

Mary [*taking his hand and dancing happily beside him*]: Dada! Dada! [*They go down the hill to the left.* RUTH *looks after them for a moment, frowning—then turns to* ANDY *with a smile.*] I'm going to sit down. Come on, Andy. It'll be like old times. [*She jumps lightly to the top of the rock and sits down.*] It's so fine and cool up here after the house.

Andrew [*half-sitting on the side of the boulder*]: Yes. It's great.

Ruth: I've taken a holiday in honor of your arrival. [*Laughing excitedly*] I feel so free I'd like to have wings and fly over the sea. You're a man. You can't know how awful and stupid it is—cooking and washing dishes all the time.

Andrew [*making a wry face*]: I can guess.

Ruth: Besides, your mother just insisted on getting your first

dinner to home, she's that happy at having you back. You'd think I was planning to poison you the flurried way she shooed me out of the kitchen.

Andrew: That's just like Ma, bless her!

Ruth: She's missed you terrible. We all have. And you can't deny the farm has, after what I showed you and told you when we was looking over the place this morning.

Andrew [*with a frown*]: Things are run down, that's a fact! It's too darn hard on poor old Rob.

Ruth [*scornfully*]: It's his own fault. He never takes any interest in things.

Andrew [*reprovingly*]: You can't blame him. He wasn't born for it; but I know he's done his best for your sake and the old folks and the little girl.

Ruth [*indifferently*]: Yes, I suppose he has. [*Gaily*] But, thank the Lord, all those days are over now. The "hard luck" Rob's always blaming won't last long when you take hold, Andy. All the farm's ever needed was someone with the knack of looking ahead and preparing for what's going to happen.

Andrew: Yes, Rob hasn't got that. He's frank to own up to that himself. I'm going to try and hire a good man for him—an experienced farmer—to work the place on a salary and percentage. That'll take it off of Rob's hands, and he needn't be worrying himself to death any more. He looks all worn out, Ruth. He ought to be careful.

Ruth [*absent-mindedly*]: Yes, I s'pose. [*Her mind is filled with premonitions by the first part of his statement.*] Why do you want to hire a man to oversee things? Seems as if now that you're back it wouldn't be needful.

Andrew: Oh, of course I'll attend to everything while I'm here. I mean after I'm gone.

Ruth [*as if she couldn't believe her ears*]: Gone!

Andrew: Yes. When I leave for the Argentine again.

Ruth [*aghast*]: You're going away to sea!

Andrew: Not to sea, no; I'm through with the sea for good as a job. I'm going down to Buenos Aires to get in the grain business.

Ruth: But—that's far off—isn't it?

Andrew [*easily*]: Six thousand miles more or less. It's quite a trip. [*With enthusiasm*] I've got a peach of a chance down there, Ruth. Ask Rob if I haven't. I've just been telling him all about it.

Ruth [*a flush of anger coming over her face*]: And didn't he try to stop you from going?

Andrew [*in surprise*]: No, of course not. Why?

Ruth [*slowly and vindictively*]: That's just like him—not to.

Andrew [*resentfully*]: Rob's too good a chum to try and stop me when he knows I'm set on a thing. And he could see just as soon's I told him what a good chance it was.

Ruth [*dazedly*]: And you're bound on going?

Andrew: Sure thing. Oh, I don't mean right off. I'll have to wait for a ship sailing there for quite a while, likely. Anyway, I want to stay to home and visit with you folks a spell before I go.

Ruth [*dumbly*]: I s'pose. [*With sudden anguish*] Oh, Andy, you can't go! You can't. Why, we've all thought—we've all been hoping and praying you was coming home to stay, to settle down on the farm and see to things. You mustn't go! Think of how your ma'll take on if you go—and how the farm'll be ruined if you leave it to Rob to look after. You can see that.

Andrew [*frowning*]: Rob hasn't done so bad. When I get a man to direct things the farm'll be safe enough.

Ruth [*insistently*]: But your ma—think of her.

Andrew: She's used to me being away. She won't object when she knows it's best for her and all of us for me to go. You ask Rob. In a couple of years down there I'll make my pile, see if I don't; and then I'll come back and settle down and turn this farm into the crackiest place in the whole state. In the meantime, I can help you both from down there. [*Earnestly*] I tell you, Ruth, I'm going to make good right from the minute I land, if working hard and a determination to get on can do it; and I *know* they can! [*Excitedly —in a rather boastful tone*] I tell you, I feel ripe for bigger things than settling down here. The trip did that for me, anyway. It showed me the world is a larger proposition than ever I thought it was in the old days. I couldn't be content any more stuck here like a fly in molasses. It all seems trifling, somehow. You ought to be able to understand what I feel.

Ruth [*dully*]: Yes—I s'pose I ought. [*After a pause—a sudden suspicion forming in her mind*] What did Rob tell you—about me?

Andrew: Tell? About you? Why, nothing.

Ruth [*staring at him intensely*]: Are you telling me the truth, Andy Mayo? Didn't he say—I— [*She stops confusedly.*]

Andrew [*surprised*]: No, he didn't mention you, I can remember. Why? What made you think he did?

Ruth [*wringing her hands*]: Oh, I wish I could tell if you're lying or not!

Andrew [*indignantly*]: What're you talking about? I didn't used to lie to you, did I? And what in the name of God is there to lie for?

Ruth [*still unconvinced*]: Are you sure—will you swear—it isn't the reason— [*She lowers her eyes and half turns away from him.*] The same reason that made you go last time that's driving you away again? 'Cause if it is—I was going to say—you mustn't go—on that account. [*Her voice sinks to a tremulous, tender whisper as she finishes.*]

Andrew [*confused—forces a laugh*]: Oh, is *that* what you're driving at? Well, you needn't worry about that no more— [*Soberly*] I don't blame you, Ruth, feeling embarrassed having me around again, after the way I played the dumb fool about going away last time.

Ruth [*her hope crushed—with a gasp of pain*]: Oh, Andy!

Andrew [*misunderstanding*]: I know I oughtn't to talk about such foolishness to you. Still I figure it's better to get it out of my system so's we three can be together same's years ago, and not be worried thinking one of us might have the wrong notion.

Ruth: Andy! Please! Don't!

Andrew: Let me finish now that I've started. It'll help clear things up. I don't want you to think once a fool always a fool, and be upset all the time I'm here on my fool account. I want you to believe I put all that silly nonsense back of me a long time ago—and now—it seems—well—as if you'd always been my sister, that's what, Ruth.

Ruth [*at the end of her endurance—laughing hysterically*]: For God's sake, Andy—won't you please stop talking! [*She again hides her face in her hands, her bowed shoulders trembling.*]

Andrew [*ruefully*]: Seem's if I put my foot in it whenever I open my mouth today. Rob shut me up with almost the same words when I tried speaking to him about it.

Ruth [*fiercely*]: You told him—what you've told me?

Andrew [*astounded*]: Why, sure! Why not?

Ruth [*shuddering*]: Oh, my God!

Andrew [*alarmed*]: Why? Shouldn't I have?

Ruth [*hysterically*]: Oh, I don't care what you do! I don't care! Leave me alone! [ANDREW *gets up and walks down the hill to the left, embarrassed, hurt, and greatly puzzled by her behavior.*]

Andrew [*after a pause—pointing down the hill*]: Hello! Here

they come back—and the Captain's with them. How'd he come to get back so soon, I wonder? That means I've got to hustle down to the port and get on board. Rob's got the baby with him. [*He comes back to the boulder.* RUTH *keeps her face averted from him.*] Gosh, I never saw a father so tied up in a kid as Rob is! He just watches every move she makes. And I don't blame him. You both got a right to feel proud of her. She's surely a little winner. [*He glances at* RUTH *to see if this very obvious attempt to get back in her good graces is having any effect.*] I can see the likeness to Rob standing out all over her, can't you? But there's no denying she's your young one, either. There's something about her eyes—

Ruth [*piteously*]: Oh, Andy, I've a headache! I don't want to talk! Leave me alone, won't you please?

Andrew [*stands staring at her for a moment—then walks away saying in a hurt tone*]: Everybody hereabouts seems to be on edge today. I begin to feel as if I'm not wanted around. [*He stands near the path, left, kicking at the grass with the toe of his shoe. A moment later* CAPTAIN DICK SCOTT *enters, followed by* ROBERT *carrying* MARY. *The* CAPTAIN *seems scarcely to have changed at all from the jovial, booming person he was three years before. He wears a uniform similar to* ANDREW'S. *He is puffing and breathless from his climb and mops wildly at his perspiring countenance.* ROBERT *casts a quick glance at* ANDREW, *noticing the latter's discomfited look, and then turns his eyes on* RUTH *who, at their approach, has moved so her back is toward them, her chin resting on her hands as she stares out seaward.*]

Mary: Mamma! Mamma! [ROBERT *puts her down and she runs to her mother.* RUTH *turns and grabs her up in her arms with a sudden fierce tenderness, quickly turning away again from the others. During the following scene she keeps* MARY *in her arms.*]

Scott [*wheezily*]: Phew! I got great news for you, Andy. Let me get my wind first. Phew! God A'mighty, mountin' this damned hill is worser'n goin' aloft to the skys'l yard in a blow. I got to lay to a while. [*He sits down on the grass, mopping his face.*]

Andrew: I didn't look for you this soon, Uncle.

Scott: I didn't figger it, neither; but I run across a bit o' news down to the Seamen's Home made me 'bout ship and set all sail back here to find you.

Andrew [*eagerly*]: What is it, Uncle?

Scott: Passin' by the Home I thought I'd drop in an' let 'em know I'd be lackin' a mate next trip count o' your leavin'. Their

man in charge o' the shippin' asked after you 'special curious. "Do you think he'd consider a berth as Second on a steamer, Captain?" he asks. I was goin' to say no when I thinks o' you wantin' to get back down south to the Plate agen; so I asks him: "What is she and where's she bound?" "She's the *El Paso,* a brand-new tramp," he says, "and she's bound for Buenos Aires."

Andrew [*his eyes lighting up—excitedly*]: Gosh, that is luck! When does she sail?

Scott: Tomorrow mornin'. I didn't know if you'd want to ship away agen so quick an' I told him so. "Tell him I'll hold the berth open for him until late this afternoon," he says. So there you be, an' you can make your own choice.

Andrew: I'd like to take it. There may not be another ship for Buenos Aires with a vacancy in months. [*His eyes roving from* ROBERT *to* RUTH *and back again—uncertainly*] Still—damn it all—tomorrow morning *is* soon. I wish she wasn't leaving for a week or so. That'd give me a chance—it seems hard to go right away again when I've just got home. And yet it's a chance in a thousand—[*Appealing to* ROBERT] What do you think, Rob? What would you do?

Robert [*forcing a smile*]: He who hesitates, you know. [*Frowning*] It's a piece of good luck thrown in your way—and—I think you owe it to yourself to jump at it. But don't ask me to decide for you.

Ruth [*turning to look at* ANDREW—*in a tone of fierce resentment*]: Yes, go, Andy! [*She turns quickly away again. There is a moment of embarrassed silence.*]

Andrew [*thoughtfully*]: Yes, I guess I will. It'll be the best thing for all of us in the end, don't you think so, Rob? [ROBERT *nods but remains silent.*]

Scott [*getting to his feet*]: Then, that's settled.

Andrew [*now that he has definitely made a decision his voice rings with hopeful strength and energy*]: Yes, I'll take the berth. The sooner I go the sooner I'll be back, that's a certainty; and I won't come back with empty hands next time. You bet I won't!

Scott: You ain't got so much time, Andy. To make sure you'd best leave here soon's you kin. I got to get right back aboard. You'd best come with me.

Andrew: I'll go to the house and repack my bag right away.

Robert [*quietly*]: You'll both be here for dinner, won't you?

Andrew [*worriedly*]: I don't know. Will there be time? What time is it now, I wonder?

Robert [*reproachfully*]: Ma's been getting dinner especially for you, Andy.

Andrew [*flushing—shamefacedly*]: Hell! And I was forgetting! Of course I'll stay for dinner if I missed every damned ship in the world. [*He turns to the* CAPTAIN—*briskly*] Come on, Uncle. Walk down with me to the house and you can tell me more about this berth on the way. I've got to pack before dinner. [*He and the* CAPTAIN *start down to the left.* ANDREW *calls back over his shoulder*] You're coming soon, aren't you, Rob?

Robert: Yes. I'll be right down. [ANDREW *and the* CAPTAIN *leave.* RUTH *puts* MARY *on the ground and hides her face in her hands. Her shoulders shake as if she were sobbing.* ROBERT *stares at her with a grim, somber expression.* MARY *walks backward toward* ROBERT, *her wondering eyes fixed on her mother.*]

Mary [*her voice vaguely frightened, taking her father's hand*]: Dada, Mamma's cryin', Dada.

Robert [*bending down and stroking her hair—in a voice he endeavors to keep from being harsh*]: No, she isn't, little girl. The sun hurts her eyes, that's all. Aren't you beginning to feel hungry, Mary?

Mary [*decidedly*]: Yes, Dada.

Robert [*meaningly*]: It must be your dinner time now.

Ruth [*in a muffled voice*]: I'm coming, Mary. [*She wipes her eyes quickly and, without looking at* ROBERT, *comes and takes* MARY'S *hand—in a dead voice*] Come on and I'll get your dinner for you. [*She walks out left, her eyes fixed on the ground, the skipping* MARY *tugging at her hand.* ROBERT *waits a moment for them to get ahead and then slowly follows as*

The Curtain Falls.]

ACT THREE

SCENE ONE

Same as Act Two, Scene One—The sitting room of the farm house about six o'clock in the morning of a day toward the end of October five years later. It is not yet dawn, but as the action progresses the darkness outside the windows gradually fades to gray.

The room, seen by the light of the shadeless oil lamp with a smoky chimney which stands on the table, presents an appearance of decay, of dissolution. The curtains at the windows are torn and dirty and one of them is missing. The closed desk is gray with accumulated dust as if it had not been used in years. Blotches of dampness disfigure the wall paper. Threadbare trails, leading to the kitchen and outer doors, show in the faded carpet. The top of the coverless table is stained with the imprints of hot dishes and spilt food. The rung of one rocker has been clumsily mended with a piece of plain board. A brown coating of rust covers the unblacked stove. A pile of wood is stacked up carelessly against the wall by the stove.

The whole atmosphere of the room, contrasted with that of former years, is one of an habitual poverty too hopelessly resigned to be any longer ashamed or even conscious of itself.

At the rise of the curtain RUTH *is discovered sitting by the stove, with hands outstretched to the warmth as if the air in the room were damp and cold. A heavy shawl is wrapped about her shoulders, half-concealing her dress of deep mourning. She has aged horribly. Her pale, deeply lined face has the stony lack of expression*

of one to whom nothing more can ever happen, whose capacity for emotion has been exhausted. When she speaks her voice is without timbre, low and monotonous. The negligent disorder of her dress, the slovenly arrangement of her hair, now streaked with gray, her muddied shoes run down at the heel, give full evidence of the apathy in which she lives.

Her mother is asleep in her wheel chair beside the stove toward the rear, wrapped up in a blanket.

There is a sound from the open bedroom door in the rear as if someone were getting out of bed. RUTH *turns in that direction with a look of dull annoyance. A moment later* ROBERT *appears in the doorway, leaning weakly against it for support. His hair is long and unkempt, his face and body emaciated. There are bright patches of crimson over his cheek bones and his eyes are burning with fever. He is dressed in corduroy pants, a flannel shirt, and wears worn carpet slippers on his bare feet.*

Ruth [*dully*]: S-s-s-h! Ma's asleep.

Robert [*speaking with an effort*]: I won't wake her. [*He walks weakly to a rocker by the side of the table and sinks down in it exhausted.*]

Ruth [*staring at the stove*]: You better come near the fire where it's warm.

Robert: No. I'm burning up now.

Ruth: That's the fever. You know the doctor told you not to get up and move round.

Robert [*irritably*]: That old fossil! He doesn't know anything. Go to bed and stay there—that's his only prescription.

Ruth [*indifferently*]: How are you feeling now?

Robert [*buoyantly*]: Better! Much better than I've felt in ages. Really I'm fine now—only very weak. It's the turning point, I guess. From now on I'll pick up so quick I'll surprise you—and no thanks to that old fool of a country quack, either.

Ruth: He's always tended to us.

Robert: Always helped us to die, you mean! He "tended" to Pa and Ma and—[*his voice breaks*]—and to—Mary.

Ruth [*dully*]: He did the best he knew, I s'pose. [*After a pause*] Well, Andy's bringing a specialist with him when he comes. That ought to suit you.

Robert [*bitterly*]: Is that why you're waiting up all night?

Ruth: Yes.

Robert: For Andy?

Ruth [*without a trace of feeling*]: Somebody had got to. It's only right for someone to meet him after he's been gone five years.

Robert [*with bitter mockery*]: Five years! It's a long time.

Ruth: Yes.

Robert [*meaningly*]: To *wait!*

Ruth [*indifferently*]: It's past now.

Robert: Yes, it's past. [*After a pause*] Have you got his two telegrams with you? [RUTH *nods.*] Let me see them, will you? My head was so full of fever when they came I couldn't make head or tail to them. [*Hastily*] But I'm feeling fine now. Let me read them again. [RUTH *takes them from the bosom of her dress and hands them to him.*]

Ruth: Here. The first one's on top.

Robert [*opening it*]: New York. "Just landed from steamer. Have important business to wind up here. Will be home as soon as deal is completed." [*He smiles bitterly.*] Business first was always Andy's motto. [*He reads.*] "Hope you are all well. Andy." [*He repeats ironically.*] "Hope you are all well"!

Ruth [*dully*]: He couldn't know you'd been took sick till I answered that and told him.

Robert [*contritely*]: Of course he couldn't. I'm a fool. I'm touchy about nothing lately. Just what did you say in your reply?

Ruth [*inconsequentially*]: I had to send it collect.

Robert [*irritably*]: What did you say was the matter with me?

Ruth: I wrote you had lung trouble.

Robert [*flying into a petty temper*]: You *are* a fool! How often have I explained to you that it's *pleurisy* is the matter with me. You can't seem to get it in your head that the pleura is outside the lungs, not in them!

Ruth [*callously*]: I only wrote what Doctor Smith told me.

Robert [*angrily*]: He's a damned ignoramus!

Ruth [*dully*]: Makes no difference. I had to tell Andy something, didn't I?

Robert [*after a pause, opening the other telegram*]: He sent this last evening. Let's see. [*He reads.*] "Leave for home on midnight train. Just received your wire. Am bringing specialist to see Rob. Will motor to farm from Port." [*He calculates.*] What time is it now?

Ruth: Round six, must be.

Robert: He ought to be here soon. I'm glad he's bringing a doctor

who knows something. A specialist will tell you in a second that there's nothing the matter with my lungs.

Ruth [*stolidly*]: You've been coughing an awful lot lately.

Robert [*irritably*]: What nonsense! For God's sake, haven't you ever had a bad cold yourself? [RUTH *stares at the stove in silence.* ROBERT *fidgets in his chair. There is a pause. Finally* ROBERT'S *eyes are fixed on the sleeping* MRS. ATKINS.] Your mother is lucky to be able to sleep so soundly.

Ruth: Ma's tired. She's been sitting up with me most of the night.

Robert [*mockingly*]: Is she waiting for Andy, too? [*There is a pause.* ROBERT *sighs.*] I couldn't get to sleep to save my soul. I counted ten million sheep if I counted one. No use! I gave up trying finally and just laid there in the dark thinking. [*He pauses, then continues in a tone of tender sympathy.*] I was thinking about you, Ruth—of how hard these last years must have been for you. [*Appealingly*] I'm sorry, Ruth.

Ruth [*in a dead voice*]: I don't know. They're past now. They were hard on all of us.

Robert: Yes; on all of us but Andy. [*With a flash of sick jealousy*] Andy's made a big success of himself—the kind he wanted. [*Mockingly*] And now he's coming home to let us admire his greatness. [*Frowning—irritably*] What am I talking about? My brain must be sick, too. [*After a pause*] Yes, these years have been terrible for both of us. [*His voice is lowered to a trembling whisper.*] Especially the last eight months since Mary—died. [*He forces back a sob with a convulsive shudder—then breaks out in a passionate agony.*] Our last hope of happiness! I could curse God from the bottom of my soul—if there was a God! [*He is racked by a violent fit of coughing and hurriedly puts his handkerchief to his lips.*]

Ruth [*without looking at him*]: Mary's better off—being dead.

Robert [*gloomily*]: We'd all be better off for that matter. [*With a sudden exasperation*] You tell that mother of yours she's got to stop saying that Mary's death was due to a weak constitution inherited from me. [*On the verge of tears of weakness*] It's got to stop, I tell you!

Ruth [*sharply*]: S-h-h! You'll wake her; and then she'll nag at me—not you.

Robert [*coughs and lies back in his chair weakly—a pause*]: It's all because your mother's down on me for not begging Andy for help.

Ruth [*resentfully*]: You might have. He's got plenty.

Robert: How can *you* of all people think of taking money from *him?*

Ruth [*dully*]: I don't see the harm. He's your own brother.

Robert [*shrugging his shoulders*]: What's the use of talking to you? Well, *I* couldn't. [*Proudly*] And I've managed to keep things going, thank God. You can't deny that without help I've succeeded in— [*He breaks off with a bitter laugh.*] My God, what am I boasting of? Debts to this one and that, taxes, interest unpaid! I'm a fool! [*He lies back in his chair closing his eyes for a moment, then speaks in a low voice.*] I'll be frank, Ruth. I've been an utter failure, and I've dragged you with me. I couldn't blame you in all justice—for hating me.

Ruth [*without feeling*]: I don't hate you. It's been my fault too, I s'pose.

Robert: No. You couldn't help loving—Andy.

Ruth [*dully*]: I don't love anyone.

Robert [*waving her remark aside*]: You needn't deny it. It doesn't matter. [*After a pause—with a tender smile*] Do you know, Ruth, what I've been dreaming back there in the dark? [*With a short laugh*] I was planning our future when I get well. [*He looks at her with appealing eyes as if afraid she will sneer at him. Her expression does not change. She stares at the stove. His voice takes on a note of eagerness.*] After all, why shouldn't we have a future? We're young yet. If we can only shake off the curse of this farm! It's the farm that's ruined our lives, damn it! And now that Andy's coming back—I'm going to sink my foolish pride, Ruth! I'll borrow the money from him to give us a good start in the city. We'll go where people live instead of stagnating, and start all over again. [*Confidently*] I won't be the failure there that I've been here, Ruth. You won't need to be ashamed of me there. I'll prove to you the reading I've done can be put to some use. [*Vaguely*] I'll write, or something of that sort. I've always wanted to write. [*Pleadingly*] You'll want to do that, won't you, Ruth?

Ruth [*dully*]: There's Ma.

Robert: She can come with us.

Ruth: She wouldn't.

Robert [*angrily*]: So that's your answer! [*He trembles with violent passion. His voice is so strange that* RUTH *turns to look at him in alarm.*] You're lying, Ruth! Your mother's just an excuse.

You want to stay here. You think that because Andy's coming back that— [*He chokes and has an attack of coughing.*]

Ruth [*getting up—in a frightened voice*]: What's the matter? [*She goes to him.*] I'll go with you, Rob. Stop that coughing for goodness' sake! It's awful bad for you. [*She soothes him in dull tones.*] I'll go with you to the city—soon's you're well again. Honest I will, Rob, I promise! [ROB *lies back and closes his eyes. She stands looking down at him anxiously.*] Do you feel better now?

Robert: Yes. [RUTH *goes back to her chair. After a pause he opens his eyes and sits up in his chair. His face is flushed and happy.*] Then you *will* go, Ruth?

Ruth: Yes.

Robert [*excitedly*]: We'll make a new start, Ruth—just you and I. Life owes us some happiness after what we've been through. [*Vehemently*] It must! Otherwise our suffering would be meaningless—and that is unthinkable.

Ruth [*worried by his excitement*]: Yes, yes, of course, Rob, but you mustn't—

Robert: Oh, don't be afraid. I feel completely well, really I do—now that I can hope again. Oh, if you knew how glorious it feels to have something to look forward to! Can't you feel the thrill of it, too—the vision of a new life opening up after all the horrible years?

Ruth: Yes, yes, but do be—

Robert: Nonsense! I won't be careful. I'm getting back all my strength. [*He gets lightly to his feet.*] See! I feel light as a feather. [*He walks to her chair and bends down to kiss her smilingly.*] One kiss—the first in years, isn't it?—to greet the dawn of a new life together.

Ruth [*submitting to his kiss—worriedly*]: Sit down, Rob, for goodness' sake!

Robert [*with tender obstinacy—stroking her hair*]: I won't sit down. You're silly to worry. [*He rests one hand on the back of her chair.*] Listen. All our suffering has been a test through which we had to pass to prove ourselves worthy of a finer realization. [*Exultingly*] And we did pass through it! It hasn't broken us! And now the dream is to come true! Don't you see?

Ruth [*looking at him with frightened eyes as if she thought he had gone mad.*] Yes, Rob, I see; but won't you go back to bed now and rest?

Robert: No. I'm going to see the sun rise. It's an augury of good fortune. [*He goes quickly to the window in the rear left, and push-*

ing the curtains aside, stands looking out. RUTH *springs to her feet and comes quickly to the table, left, where she remains watching* ROBERT *in a tense, expectant attitude. As he peers out his body seems gradually to sag, to grow limp and tired. His voice is mournful as he speaks.*] No sun yet. It isn't time. All I can see is the black rim of the damned hills outlined against a creeping grayness. [*He turns around; letting the curtains fall back, stretching a hand out to the wall to support himself. His false strength of a moment has evaporated leaving his face drawn and hollow-eyed. He makes a pitiful attempt to smile.*] That's not a very happy augury, is it? But the sun'll come—soon. [*He sways weakly.*]

Ruth [*hurrying to his side and supporting him*]: Please go to bed, won't you, Rob? You don't want to be all wore out when the specialist comes, do you?

Robert [*quickly*]: No. That's right. He mustn't think I'm sicker than I am. And I feel as if I could sleep now—[*cheerfully*]—a good, sound, restful sleep.

Ruth [*helping him to the bedroom door*]: That's what you need most. [*They go inside. A moment later she reappears calling back*] I'll shut this door so's you'll be quiet. [*She closes the door and goes quickly to her mother and shakes her by the shoulder.*] Ma! Ma! Wake up!

Mrs. Atkins [*coming out of her sleep with a start*]: Glory be! What's the matter with you?

Ruth: It was Rob. He's just been talking to me out here. I put him back to bed. [*Now that she is sure her mother is awake her fear passes and she relapses into dull indifference. She sits down in her chair and stares at the stove—dully*] He acted—funny; and his eyes looked so—so wild like.

Mrs. Atkins [*with asperity*]: And is that all you woke me out of a sound sleep for, and scared me near out of my wits?

Ruth: I was afraid. He talked so crazy. I couldn't quiet him. I didn't want to be alone with him that way. Lord knows what he might do.

Mrs. Atkins [*scornfully*]: Humph! A help I'd be to you and me not able to move a step! Why didn't you run and get Jake?

Ruth [*dully*]: Jake isn't here. He quit last night. He hasn't been paid in three months.

Mrs. Atkins [*indignantly*]: I can't blame him. What decent person'd want to work on a place like this? [*With sudden exasperation*] Oh, I wish you'd never married that man!

Ruth [*wearily*]: You oughtn't to talk about him now when he's sick in his bed.

Mrs. Atkins [*working herself into a fit of rage*]: You know very well, Ruth Mayo, if it wasn't for me helpin' you on the sly out of my savin's, you'd both been in the poorhouse—and all 'count of his pigheaded pride in not lettin' Andy know the state thin's were in. A nice thin' for me to have to support him out of what I'd saved for my last days—and me an invalid with no one to look to!

Ruth: Andy'll pay you back, Ma. I can tell him so's Rob'll never know.

Mrs. Atkins [*with a snort*]: What'd Rob think you and him was livin' on, I'd like to know?

Ruth [*dully*]: He didn't think about it, I s'pose. [*After a slight pause*] He said he'd made up his mind to ask Andy for help when he comes. [*As a clock in the kitchen strikes six*] Six o'clock. Andy ought to get here directly.

Mrs. Atkins: D'you think this special doctor'll do Rob any good?

Ruth [*hopelessly*]: I don't know. [*The two women remain silent for a time staring dejectedly at the stove.*]

Mrs. Atkins [*shivering irritably*]: For goodness' sake put some wood on that fire. I'm most freezin'!

Ruth [*pointing to the door in the rear*]: Don't talk so loud. Let him sleep if he can. [*She gets wearily from the chair and puts a few pieces of wood in the stove.*] This is the last of the wood. I don't know who'll cut more now that Jake's left. [*She sighs and walks to the window in the rear, left, pulls the curtains aside, and looks out.*] It's getting gray out. [*She comes back to the stove.*] Looks like it'd be a nice day. [*She stretches out her hands to warm them.*] Must've been a heavy frost last night. We're paying for the spell of warm weather we've been having. [*The throbbing whine of a motor sounds from the distance outside.*]

Mrs. Atkins [*sharply*]: S-h-h! Listen! Ain't that an auto I hear?

Ruth [*without interest*]: Yes. It's Andy, I s'pose.

Mrs. Atkins [*with nervous irritation*]: Don't sit there like a silly goose. Look at the state of this room! What'll this strange doctor think of us? Look at that lamp chimney all smoke! Gracious sakes, Ruth—

Ruth [*indifferently*]: I've got a lamp all cleaned up in the kitchen.

Mrs. Atkins [*peremptorily*]: Wheel me in there this minute. I don't want him to see me looking a sight. I'll lay down in the room

the other side. You don't need me now and I'm dead for sleep. [RUTH *wheels her mother off right. The noise of the motor grows louder and finally ceases as the car stops on the road before the farmhouse.* RUTH *returns from the kitchen with a lighted lamp in her hand which she sets on the table beside the other. The sound of footsteps on the path is heard—then a sharp rap on the door.* RUTH *goes and opens it.* ANDREW *enters, followed by* DOCTOR FAWCETT *carrying a small black bag.* ANDREW *has changed greatly. His face seems to have grown highstrung, hardened by the look of decisiveness which comes from being constantly under a strain where judgments on the spur of the moment are compelled to be accurate. His eyes are keener and more alert. There is even a suggestion of ruthless cunning about them. At present, however, his expression is one of tense anxiety.* DOCTOR FAWCETT *is a short, dark, middle-aged man with a Vandyke beard. He wears glasses.*]

Ruth: Hello, Andy! I've been waiting—

Andrew [*kissing her hastily*]: I got here as soon as I could. [*He throws off his cap and heavy overcoat on the table, introducing* RUTH *and the* DOCTOR *as he does so. He is dressed in an expensive business suit and appears stouter.*] My sister-in-law, Mrs. Mayo—Doctor Fawcett. [*They bow to each other silently.* ANDREW *casts a quick glance about the room.*] Where's Rob?

Ruth [*pointing*]: In there.

Andrew: I'll take your coat and hat, Doctor. [*As he helps the* DOCTOR *with his things*] Is he very bad, Ruth?

Ruth [*dully*]: He's been getting weaker.

Andrew: Damn! This way, Doctor. Bring the lamp, Ruth. [*He goes into the bedroom, followed by the* DOCTOR *and* RUTH *carrying the clean lamp.* RUTH *reappears almost immediately closing the door behind her, and goes slowly to the outside door, which she opens, and stands in the doorway looking out. The sound of* ANDREW'S *and* ROBERT'S *voices comes from the bedroom. A moment later* ANDREW *re-enters, closing the door softly. He comes forward and sinks down in the rocker on the right of table, leaning his head on his hand. His face is drawn in a shocked expression of great grief. He sighs heavily, staring mournfully in front of him.* RUTH *turns and stands watching him. Then she shuts the door and returns to her chair by the stove, turning it so she can face him.*]

Andrew [*glancing up quickly—in a harsh voice*]: How long has this been going on?

Ruth: You mean—how long has he been sick?

Andrew [*shortly*]: Of course! What else?

Ruth: It was last summer he had a bad spell first, but he's been ailin' ever since Mary died—eight months ago.

ANDREW [*harshly*]: Why didn't you let me know—cable me? Do you want him to die, all of you? I'm damned if it doesn't look that way! [*His voice breaking*] Poor old chap! To be sick in this out-of-the-way hole without anyone to attend to him but a country quack! It's a damned shame!

Ruth [*dully*]: I wanted to send you word once, but he only got mad when I told him. He was too proud to ask anything, he said.

Andrew: Proud? To ask *me?* [*He jumps to his feet and paces nervously back and forth.*] I can't understand the way you've acted. Didn't you see how sick he was getting? Couldn't you realize—why, I nearly dropped in my tracks when I saw him! He looks—[*he shudders*]—terrible! [*With fierce scorn*] I suppose you're so used to the idea of his being delicate that you took his sickness as a matter of course. God, if I'd only known!

Ruth [*without emotion*]: A letter takes so long to get where you were—and we couldn't afford to telegraph. We owed everyone already, and I couldn't ask Ma. She'd been giving me money out of her savings till she hadn't much left. Don't say anything to Rob about it. I never told him. He'd only be mad at me if he knew. But I had to, because—God knows how we'd have got on if I hadn't.

Andrew: You mean to say— [*His eyes seem to take in the poverty-stricken appearance of the room for the first time.*] You sent that telegram to me collect. Was it because— [RUTH *nods silently.* ANDREW *pounds on the table with his fist.*] Good God! And all this time I've been—why, I've had everything! [*He sits down in his chair and pulls it close to* RUTH'S—*impulsively*] But—I can't get it through my head. Why? Why? What has happened? How did it ever come about? Tell me!

Ruth [*dully*]: There's nothing much to tell. Things kept getting worse, that's all—and Rob didn't seem to care. He never took any interest since way back when your ma died. After that he got men to take charge, and they nearly all cheated him—he couldn't tell—and left one after another. Then after Mary died he didn't pay no heed to anything any more—just stayed indoors and took to reading books again. So I had to ask Ma if she wouldn't help us some.

Andrew [*surprised and horrified*]: Why, damn it, this is frightful! Rob must be mad not to have let me know. Too proud to ask help of *me!* What's the matter with him, in God's name? [*A sudden,*

horrible suspicion entering his mind.] Ruth! Tell me the truth. His mind hasn't gone back on him, has it?

Ruth [*dully*]: I don't know. Mary's dying broke him up terrible —but he's used to her being gone by this, I s'pose.

Andrew [*looking at her queerly*]: Do you mean to say *you're* used to it?

Ruth [*in a dead tone*]: There's a time comes—when you don't mind any more—anything.

Andrew [*looks at her fixedly for a moment—with great pity*]: I'm sorry, Ruth—if I seemed to blame you. I didn't realize— The sight of Rob lying in bed there, so gone to pieces—it made me furious at everyone. Forgive me, Ruth.

Ruth: There's nothing to forgive. It doesn't matter.

Andrew [*springing to his feet again and pacing up and down*]: Thank God I came back before it was too late. This doctor will know exactly what to do. That's the first thing to think of. When Rob's on his feet again we can get the farm working on a sound basis once more. I'll see to that—before I leave.

Ruth: You're going away again?

Andrew: I've got to.

Ruth: You wrote Rob you was coming back to stay this time.

Andrew: I expected to—until I got to New York. Then I learned certain facts that make it necessary. [*With a short laugh*] To be candid, Ruth, I'm not the rich man you've probably been led to believe by my letters—not now. I was when I wrote them. I made money hand over fist as long as I stuck to legitimate trading; but I wasn't content with that. I wanted it to come easier, so like all the rest of the idiots, I tried speculation. Oh, I won all right! Several times I've been almost a millionaire—on paper—and then come down to earth again with a bump. Finally the strain was too much. I got disgusted with myself and made up my mind to get out and come home and forget it and really live again. [*He gives a harsh laugh.*] And now comes the funny part. The day before the steamer sailed I saw what I thought was a chance to become a millionaire again. [*He snaps his fingers.*] That easy! I plunged. Then, before things broke, I left—I was so confident I couldn't be wrong. But when I landed in New York—I wired you I had business to wind up, didn't I? Well, it was the business that wound me up! [*He smiles grimly, pacing up and down, his hands in his pockets.*]

Ruth [*dully*]: You found—you'd lost everything?

Andrew [*sitting down again*]: Practically. [*He takes a cigar from*

his pocket, bites the end off, and lights it.] Oh, I don't mean I'm dead broke. I've saved ten thousand from the wreckage, maybe twenty. But that's a poor showing for five years' hard work. That's why I'll have to go back. [*Confidently*] I can make it up in a year or so down there—and I don't need but a shoestring to start with. [*A weary expression comes over his face and he sighs heavily.*] I wish I didn't have to. I'm sick of it all.

Ruth: It's too bad—things seem to go wrong so.

Andrew [*shaking off his depression—briskly*]: They might be much worse. There's enough left to fix the farm O.K. before I go. I won't leave 'til Rob's on his feet again. In the meantime I'll make things fly around here. [*With satisfaction*] I need a rest, and the kind of rest I need is hard work in the open—just like I used to do in the old days. [*Stopping abruptly and lowering his voice cautiously*] Not a word to Rob about my losing money! Remember that, Ruth! You can see why. If he's grown so touchy he'd never accept a cent if he thought I was hard up; see?

Ruth: Yes, Andy. [*After a pause, during which* ANDREW *puffs at his cigar abstractedly, his mind evidently busy with plans for the future, the bedroom door is opened and* DOCTOR FAWCETT *enters, carrying a bag. He closes the door quietly behind him and comes forward, a grave expression on his face.* ANDREW *springs out of his chair.*]

Andrew: Ah, Doctor! [*He pushes a chair between his own and* RUTH'S.] Won't you have a chair?

Fawcett [*glancing at his watch*]: I must catch the nine o'clock back to the city. It's imperative. I have only a moment. [*Sitting down and clearing his throat—in a perfunctory, impersonal voice*] The case of your brother, Mr. Mayo, is— [*He stops and glances at* RUTH *and says meaningly to* ANDREW] Perhaps it would be better if you and I—

Ruth [*with dogged resentment*]: I know what you mean, Doctor. [*Dully*] Don't be afraid I can't stand it. I'm used to bearing trouble by this; and I can guess what you've found out. [*She hesitates for a moment—then continues in a monotonous voice*] Rob's going to die.

Andrew [*angrily*]: Ruth!

Fawcett [*raising his hand as if to command silence*]: I am afraid my diagnosis of your brother's condition forces me to the same conclusion as Mrs. Mayo's.

Andrew [*groaning*]: But, Doctor, surely—

Fawcett [*calmly*]: Your brother hasn't long to live—perhaps a few days, perhaps only a few hours. It's a marvel that he's alive at this moment. My examination revealed that both of his lungs are terribly affected.

Andrew [*brokenly*]: Good God! [RUTH *keeps her eyes fixed on her lap in a trance-like stare.*]

Fawcett: I am sorry I have to tell you this. If there was anything that could be done—

Andrew: There isn't anything?

Fawcett [*shaking his head*]: It's too late. Six months ago there might have—

Andrew [*in anguish*]: But if we were to take him to the mountains—or to Arizona—or—

Fawcett: That might have prolonged his life six months ago. [ANDREW *groans.*] But now— [*He shrugs his shoulders significantly.*]

Andrew [*appalled by a sudden thought*]: Good heavens, you haven't told him this, have you, Doctor?

Fawcett: No. I lied to him. I said a change of climate— [*He looks at his watch again nervously.*] I must leave you. [*He gets up.*]

Andrew [*getting to his feet—insistently*]: But there must still be some chance—

Fawcett [*as if he were reassuring a child*]: There is always that last chance—the miracle. [*He puts on his hat and coat—bowing to* RUTH] Good-by, Mrs. Mayo.

Ruth [*without raising her eyes—dully*]: Good-by.

Andrew [*mechanically*]: I'll walk to the car with you, Doctor. [*They go out of the door.* RUTH *sits motionlessly. The motor is heard starting and the noise gradually recedes into the distance.* ANDREW *re-enters and sits down in his chair, holding his head in his hands.*] Ruth! [*She lifts her eyes to his.*] Hadn't we better go in and see him? God! I'm afraid to! I know he'll read it in my face. [*The bedroom door is noiselessly opened and* ROBERT *appears in the doorway. His cheeks are flushed with fever, and his eyes appear unusually large and brilliant.* ANDREW *continues with a groan.*] It can't be, Ruth. It can't be as hopeless as he said. There's always a fighting chance. We'll take Rob to Arizona. He's *got* to get well. There *must* be a chance!

Robert [*in a gentle tone*]: Why must there, Andy? [RUTH *turns and stares at him with terrified eyes.*]

Andrew [*whirling around*]: Rob! [*Scoldingly*] What are you doing out of bed? [*He gets up and goes to him.*] Get right back now and obey the Doc, or you're going to get a licking from me!

Robert [*ignoring these remarks*]: Help me over to the chair, please, Andy.

Andrew: Like hell I will! You're going right back to bed, that's where you're going, and stay there! [*He takes hold of* ROBERT'S *arm.*]

Robert [*mockingly*]: Stay there 'til I die, eh, Andy? [*Coldly*] Don't behave like a child. I'm sick of lying down. I'll be more rested sitting up. [*As* ANDREW *hesitates—violently*] I swear I'll get out of bed every time you put me there. You'll have to sit on my chest, and that wouldn't help my health any. Come on, Andy. Don't play the fool. I want to talk to you, and I'm going to. [*With a grim smile*] A dying man has some rights, hasn't he?

Andrew [*with a shudder*]: Don't talk that way, for God's sake! I'll only let you sit down if you'll promise that. Remember. [*He helps* ROBERT *to the chair between his own and* RUTH'S.] Easy now! There you are! Wait, and I'll get a pillow for you. [*He goes into the bedroom.* ROBERT *looks at* RUTH *who shrinks away from him in terror.* ROBERT *smiles bitterly.* ANDREW *comes back with the pillow which he places behind* ROBERT'S *back.*] How's that?

Robert [*with an affectionate smile*]: Fine! Thank you! [*As* ANDREW *sits down*] Listen, Andy. You've asked me not to talk—and I won't after I've made my position clear. [*Slowly*] In the first place I know I'm dying. [RUTH *bows her head and covers her face with her hands. She remains like this all during the scene between the two brothers.*]

Andrew: Rob! That isn't so!

Robert [*wearily*]: It *is* so! Don't lie to me. After Ruth put me to bed before you came, I saw it clearly for the first time. [*Bitterly*] I'd been making plans for our future—Ruth's and mine—so it came hard at first—the realization. Then when the doctor examined me, I knew—although he tried to lie about it. And then to make sure I listened at the door to what he told you. So don't mock me with fairy tales about Arizona, or any such rot as that. Because I'm dying is no reason you should treat me as an imbecile or a coward. Now that I'm sure what's happening I can say Kismet to it with all my heart. It was only the silly uncertainty that hurt. [*There is a pause.* ANDREW *looks around in impotent anguish, not*

knowing what to say. ROBERT *regards him with an affectionate smile.*]

Andrew [*finally blurts out*]: It isn't foolish. You *have* got a chance. If you heard all the Doctor said that ought to prove it to you.

Robert: Oh, you mean when he spoke of the miracle? [*Dryly*] I don't believe in miracles—in my case. Besides, I know more than any doctor on earth *could* know—because I *feel* what's coming. [*Dismissing the subject*] But we've agreed not to talk of it. Tell me about yourself, Andy. That's what I'm interested in. Your letters were too brief and far apart to be illuminating.

Andrew: I meant to write oftener.

Robert [*with a faint trace of irony*]: I judge from them you've accomplished all you set out to do five years ago?

Andrew: That isn't much to boast of.

Robert [*surprised*]: Have you really, honestly reached that conclusion?

Andrew: Well, it doesn't seem to amount to much now.

Robert: But you're rich, aren't you?

Andrew [*with a quick glance at* RUTH]: Yes, I s'pose so.

Robert: I'm glad. You can do to the farm all I've undone. But what did you do down there? Tell me. You went in the grain business with that friend of yours?

Andrew: Yes. After two years I had a share in it. I sold out last year. [*He is answering* ROBERT'S *questions with great reluctance.*]

Robert: And then?

Andrew: I went in on my own.

Robert: Still in grain?

Andrew: Yes.

Robert: What's the matter? You look as if I were accusing you of something.

Andrew: I'm proud enough of the first four years. It's after that I'm not boasting of. I took to speculating.

Robert: In wheat?

Andrew: Yes.

Robert: And you made money—gambling?

Andrew: Yes.

Robert [*thoughtfully*]: I've been wondering what the great change was in you. [*After a pause*] You—a farmer—to gamble in a wheat pit with scraps of paper. There's a spiritual significance in that picture, Andy. [*He smiles bitterly.*] I'm a failure, and Ruth's

another—but we can both justly lay some of the blame for our stumbling on God. But you're the deepest-dyed failure of the three, Andy. You've spent eight years running away from yourself. Do you see what I mean? You used to be a creator when you loved the farm. You and life were in harmonious partnership. And now—[*He stops as if seeking vainly for words.*] My brain is muddled. But part of what I mean is that your gambling with the thing you used to love to create proves how far astray— So you'll be punished. You'll have to suffer to win back— [*His voice grows weaker and he sighs wearily.*] It's no use. I can't say it. [*He lies back and closes his eyes, breathing pantingly.*]

Andrew [*slowly*]: I think I know what you're driving at, Rob—and it's true, I guess. [ROBERT *smiles gratefully and stretches out his hand, which* ANDREW *takes in his.*]

Robert: I want you to promise me to do one thing, Andy, after—

Andrew: I'll promise anything, as God is my Judge!

Robert: Remember, Andy, Ruth has suffered double her share. [*His voice faltering with weakness*] Only through contact with suffering, Andy, will you—awaken. Listen. You must marry Ruth—afterwards.

Ruth [*with a cry*]: Rob! [ROBERT *lies back, his eyes closed, gasping heavily for breath.*]

Andrew [*making signs to her to humor him—gently*]: You're tired out, Rob. You better lie down and rest awhile, don't you think? We can talk later on.

Robert [*with a mocking smile*]: Later on! You always were an optimist, Andy! [*He sighs with exhaustion.*] Yes, I'll go and rest awhile. [*As* ANDREW *comes to help him*] It must be near sunrise, isn't it?

Andrew: It's after six.

Robert [*as* ANDREW *helps him into the bedroom*]: Shut the door, Andy. I want to be alone. [ANDREW *reappears and shuts the door softly. He comes and sits down on his chair again, supporting his head on his hands. His face is drawn with the intensity of his dry-eyed anguish.*]

Ruth [*glancing at him—fearfully*]: He's out of his mind now, isn't he?

Andrew: He may be a little delirious. The fever would do that. [*With impotent rage*] God, what a shame! And there's nothing we can do but sit and—wait! [*He springs from his chair and walks to the stove.*]

Ruth [*dully*]: He was talking—wild—like he used to—only this time it sounded—unnatural, don't you think?

Andrew: I don't know. The things he said to me had truth in them—even if he did talk them way up in the air, like he always sees things. Still— [*He glances down at* RUTH *keenly.*] Why do you suppose he wanted us to promise we'd— [*Confusedly*] You know what he said.

Ruth [*dully*]: His mind was wandering, I s'pose.

Andrew [*with conviction*]: No—there was something back of it.

Ruth: He wanted to make sure I'd be all right—after he'd gone, I expect.

Andrew: No, it wasn't that. He knows very well I'd naturally look after you without—anything like that.

Ruth: He might be thinking of—something happened five years back, the time you came home from the trip.

Andrew: What happened? What do you mean?

Ruth [*dully*]: We had a fight.

Andrew: A fight? What has that to do with me?

Ruth: It was about you—in a way.

Andrew [*amazed*]: About *me?*

Ruth: Yes, mostly. You see I'd found out I'd made a mistake about Rob soon after we were married—when it was too late.

Andrew: Mistake? [*Slowly*] You mean—you found out you didn't love Rob?

Ruth: Yes.

Andrew: Good God!

Ruth: And then I thought that when Mary came it'd be different, and I'd love him; but it didn't happen that way. And I couldn't bear with his blundering and book-reading—and I grew to hate him, almost.

Andrew: Ruth!

Ruth: I couldn't help it. No woman could. It had to be because I loved someone else, I'd found out. [*She sighs wearily.*] It can't do no harm to tell you now—when it's all past and gone—and dead. *You* were the one I really loved—only I didn't come to the knowledge of it 'til too late.

Andrew [*stunned*]: Ruth! Do you know what you're saying?

Ruth: It was true—then. [*With sudden fierceness*] How could I help it? No woman could.

Andrew: Then—you loved me—that time I came home?

Ruth [*doggedly*]: I'd known your real reason for leaving home the first time—everybody knew it—and for three years I'd been thinking—

Andrew: That I loved you?

Ruth: Yes. Then that day on the hill you laughed about what a fool you'd been for loving me once—and I knew it was all over.

Andrew: Good God, but I never thought— [*He stops, shuddering at his remembrance.*] And did Rob—

Ruth: That was what I'd started to tell. We'd had a fight just before you came and I got crazy mad—and I told him all I've told you.

Andrew [*gaping at her speechlessly for a moment*]: You told Rob —you loved me?

Ruth: Yes.

Andrew [*shrinking away from her in horror*]: You—you—you mad fool, you! How could you do such a thing?

Ruth: I couldn't help it. I'd got to the end of bearing things—without talking.

Andrew: Then Rob must have known every moment I stayed here! And yet he never said or showed—God, how he must have suffered! Didn't you know how much he loved you?

Ruth [*dully*]: Yes. I knew he liked me.

Andrew: Liked you! What kind of a woman are you? Couldn't you have kept silent? Did you have to torture him? No wonder he's dying! And you've lived together for five years with this between you?

Ruth: We've lived in the same house.

Andrew: Does he still think—

Ruth: I don't know. We've never spoke a word about it since that day. Maybe, from the way he went on, he s'poses I care for you yet.

Andrew: But you don't. It's outrageous. It's stupid! You don't love me!

Ruth [*slowly*]: I wouldn't know how to feel love, even if I tried, any more.

Andrew [*brutally*]: And I don't love you, that's sure! [*He sinks into his chair, his head between his hands.*] It's damnable such a thing should be between Rob and me. Why, I love Rob better'n anybody in the world and always did. There isn't a thing on God's green earth I wouldn't have done to keep trouble away from him. And I have to be the very one—it's damnable! How am I going to face him again? What can I say to him now? [*He groans with*

anguished rage. After a pause] He asked me to promise—what am I going to do?

Ruth: You can promise—so's it'll ease his mind—and not mean anything.

Andrew: What? Lie to him now—when he's dying? [*Determinedly*] No! It's *you* who'll have to do the lying, since it must be done. You've got a chance now to undo some of all the suffering you've brought on Rob. Go in to him! Tell him you never loved me—it was all a mistake. Tell him you only said so because you were mad and didn't know what you were saying! Tell him something, anything, that'll bring him peace!

Ruth [*dully*]: He wouldn't believe me.

Andrew [*furiously*]: You've got to make him believe you, do you hear? You've got to—now—hurry—you never know when it may be too late. [*As she hesitates—imploringly*] For God's sake, Ruth! Don't you see you owe it to him? You'll never forgive yourself if you don't.

Ruth [*dully*]: I'll go. [*She gets wearily to her feet and walks slowly toward the bedroom.*] But it won't do any good. [ANDREW'S *eyes are fixed on her anxiously. She opens the door and steps inside the room. She remains standing there for a minute. Then she calls in a frightened voice*] Rob! Where are you? [*Then she hurries back, trembling with fright.*] Andy! Andy! He's gone!

Andrew [*misunderstanding her—his face pale with dread*]: He's not—

Ruth [*interrupting him—hysterically*]: He's gone! The bed's empty. The window's wide open. He must have crawled out into the yard!

Andrew [*springing to his feet. He rushes into the bedroom and returns immediately with an expression of alarmed amazement on his face*]: Come! He can't have gone far! [*Grabbing his hat he takes* RUTH'S *arm and shoves her toward the door.*] Come on! [*Opening the door*] Let's hope to God— [*The door closes behind them, cutting off his words as*

The Curtain Falls.]

SCENE TWO

Same as Act One, Scene One—A section of country highway. The sky to the east is already alight with bright color and a thin, quivering line of flame is spreading slowly along the horizon rim of the dark hills. The roadside, however, is still steeped in the grayness of the dawn, shadowy and vague. The field in the foreground has a wild uncultivated appearance as if it had been allowed to remain fallow the preceding summer. Parts of the snake-fence in the rear have been broken down. The apple tree is leafless and seems dead.

ROBERT *staggers weakly in from the left. He stumbles into the ditch and lies there for a moment; then crawls with a great effort to the top of the bank where he can see the sun rise, and collapses weakly.* RUTH *and* ANDREW *come hurriedly along the road from the left.*

Andrew [*stopping and looking about him*]: There he is! I knew it! I knew we'd find him here.

Robert [*trying to raise himself to a sitting position as they hasten to his side—with a wan smile*]: I thought I'd given you the slip.

Andrew [*with kindly bullying*]: Well, you didn't, you old scoundrel, and we're going to take you right back where you belong—in bed. [*He makes a motion to lift* ROBERT.]

Robert: Don't, Andy. Don't, I tell you!

Andrew: You're in pain?

Robert [*simply*]: No. I'm dying. [*He falls back weakly.* RUTH *sinks down beside him with a sob and pillows his head on her lap.* ANDREW *stands looking down at him helplessly.* ROBERT *moves his head restlessly on* RUTH'S *lap.*] I couldn't stand it back there in the room. It seemed as if all my life—I'd been cooped in a room. So I thought I'd try to end as I might have—if I'd had the courage—alone—in a ditch by the open road—watching the sun rise.

Andrew: Rob! Don't talk. You're wasting your strength. Rest awhile and then we'll carry you—

Robert: Still hoping, Andy? Don't. I know. [*There is a pause during which he breathes heavily, straining his eyes toward the horizon.*] The sun comes so slowly. [*With an ironical smile*] The doctor told me to go to the far-off places—and I'd be cured. He was right. That was always the cure for me. It's too late—for this life—but— [*He has a fit of coughing which racks his body.*]

Andrew [*with a hoarse sob*]: Rob! [*He clenches his fists in an impotent rage against Fate.*] God! God! [RUTH *sobs brokenly and wipes* ROBERT'S *lips with her handkerchief.*]

Robert [*in a voice which is suddenly ringing with the happiness of hope*]: You mustn't feel sorry for me. Don't you see I'm happy at last—free—free!—freed from the farm—free to wander on and on—eternally! [*He raises himself on his elbow, his face radiant, and points to the horizon.*] Look! Isn't it beautiful beyond the hills? I can hear the old voices calling me to come— [*Exultantly*] And this time I'm going! It isn't the end. It's a free beginning—the start of my voyage! I've won to my trip—the right of release—beyond the horizon! Oh, you ought to be glad—glad—for my sake! [*He collapses weakly.*] Andy! [ANDREW *bends down to him.*] Remember Ruth—

Andrew: I'll take care of her, I swear to you, Rob!

Robert: Ruth has suffered—remember, Andy—only through sacrifice—the secret beyond there— [*He suddenly raises himself with his last remaining strength and points to the horizon where the edge of the sun's disc is rising from the rim of the hills.*] The sun! [*He remains with his eyes fixed on it for a moment. A rattling noise throbs from his throat. He mumbles.*] Remember! [*And falls back and is still.* RUTH *gives a cry of horror and springs to her feet, shuddering, her hands over her eyes.* ANDREW *bends on one knee beside the body, placing a hand over* ROBERT'S *heart, then he kisses his brother reverentially on the forehead and stands up.*]

Andrew [*facing* RUTH, *the body between them—in a dead voice*]: He's dead. [*With a sudden burst of fury*] God damn you, you never told him!

Ruth [*piteously*]: He was so happy without my lying to him.

Andrew [*pointing to the body—trembling with the violence of his rage*]: This is your doing, you damn woman, you coward, you murderess!

Ruth [*sobbing*]: Don't, Andy! I couldn't help it—and he knew how I'd suffered, too. He told you—to remember.

Andrew [*stares at her for a moment, his rage ebbing away, an expression of deep pity gradually coming over his face. Then he glances down at his brother and speaks brokenly in a compassionate voice*]: Forgive me, Ruth—for his sake—and I'll remember— [RUTH *lets her hands fall from her face and looks at him uncomprehendingly. He lifts his eyes to hers and forces out falteringly*] I—you—we've both made a mess of things! We must try to help

each other—and—in time—we'll come to know what's right—[*Desperately*] And perhaps we— [*But* RUTH, *if she is aware of his words, gives no sign. She remains silent, gazing at him dully with the sad humility of exhaustion, her mind already sinking back into that spent calm beyond the further troubling of any hope.*]

[*The Curtain Falls.*]

IV. Expressionism

JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

DURING the quarter of a century after the production of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* the English drama underwent more changes than it had in the preceding two centuries and a half. Pinero was influenced by Ibsen, whose great contribution to the drama was that something beyond reality which the so-called naturalists had lacked. The reception of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* encouraged other English playwrights to write plays in which ideas were as important as technique—ideas which on the Victorian stage were new.

Of help also in clearing the cluttered nineteenth-century stage was another influence. Toward the close of the century there sprang up throughout Europe small theatres where the plays of little-known but promising dramatists could find production in the spirit in which they were written. These playhouses, known as *free theatres,* were organized not as money-making schemes for the production of popular plays, but as means of advancing the cause of dramatic art. The free-theatre movement, simultaneous with the infusion of new life into the drama, encouraged playwrights to experiment with new forms. In Paris the Théâtre Libre opened in 1887 and introduced Hauptmann, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Tolstoy to France. In Berlin the Freie Bühne was founded two years later, with the Théâtre Libre as a model. Soon little theatres in imitation were established throughout Germany and Austria. In England the movement was represented when J. T. Grein founded the Independent Theatre in 1891; in Russia when the Moscow Art Theatre was founded at the close of the century; and in Ireland, a few years later, when Lady

Gregory interested some of her fellow artists in establishing the Irish Literary Theatre, which was later to become the now famous Abbey Theatre.

The movement not only encouraged experiments in playwriting but initiated reforms in acting and staging. At the Théâtre Libre, André Antoine, influenced by the realistic productions of the amateur German company, the Meiningen Players, established modern realistic acting and showed the importance of costuming and staging the play to complement the acting. Stanislavsky, who with Danchenko founded the Moscow Art Theatre, translated the ideas of Antoine and the Meiningen Players into Russian terms and thereby strengthened the movement in Europe. An important contribution of the Russian theatre was its discovery of Chekhov and its production of his plays.

Thus the stage at the turn of the century was cleared of much of the rubbish which had collected on it during the past two centuries and a half. But hardly had it been reset than it began to be cleared again. A year after the founding of the Moscow Art Theatre the Swiss scene designer Adolph Appia published his *Music and the Scene,* which illustrates the value of light in binding actor and setting together. Appia, who realized the mobility which the recently invented incandescent lamp made possible in stage lighting, contended that light for the stage is of two kinds: *flat light,* to illuminate actors and setting; and *plastic light,* to cast shadows. Appia visualized in his use of light a way to present an inner reality comparable to an inner reality, or meaning, in music. Ten years after the publication of *Music and the Scene* there appeared an equally significant work, *The Revolution of the Theatre,* by Georg Fuchs. Whereas Appia's approach was through lighting, Fuchs' theory is based on the proportions of the stage itself. Rejecting realism, Fuchs held that unity in the theatre depends on a frank recognition of the theatric medium, the stage, which he would have shallow. A deep stage, he said, provides space for properties and other illustrative detail which distract from the actors. He contended that, since true perspective is impossible in the theatre anyway, the third dimension might as well be disregarded. Accordingly his shallow stage is backed by a simple piece of scenery, often painted on flat canvas, against which the actors stand out in relief—an arrangement which gives this style of stage the name *relief stage.* Another designer who helped to clear the cluttered realistic stage at the beginning of the century is Gordon Craig. Although Craig's designs for

stage settings are impracticable, his emphasis on the *way* of staging a play, that is, style, is significant. Craig would bring out the inner meaning of the play not through illusion of reality but through suggestion. "On a sheet of paper two inches square," he says, "you can make a line which seems to tower miles in the air, and you can do the same on your stage, for it is all a matter of proportion and nothing to do with actuality." Appia, Fuchs, and Craig, although working separately and according to different theories, were united in a single purpose—to bring out the inner meaning of the play. Thus they set the stage for a new form of drama—*expressionism.*

Originating in the plays of the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg, expressionism reached its height in Germany at the end of World War I. The Treaty of Versailles having left Germany broken socially as well as economically, change was inevitable. In the arts the change, accelerated by Freudian psychology and the psychoanalytic spirit of the times, was expressed by a broadening application of philosophical thought to everyday life. In the drama, exponents of the movement were young playwrights whom the war had left pacifists and mystics, or skeptics. Seeing in the troubled world about them a confirmation of their ideas—a revolt against conventions and concepts previously held as truths—they expressed these ideas in their work. Man was to be the means for effecting the destruction of the old order—Man *vs.* Society. In expressionistic plays Man is the hero.

In the United States the expressionistic movement was felt soon after it came to its height in Germany. But whether because the revolt in this country, as evidenced in the feverish twenties, was less intense, or because American dramatists experimenting in expressionistic forms tended to copy some of the manifestations of the German expressionism without catching its spirit, or because they saw these manifestations only as devices to be subordinated to realism and intentionally rejected the rest—whatever the reason, when the expressionistic movement subsided, it left in the American drama only a handful of plays which are essentially expressionistic. The first of these was Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape,* which the Provincetown Players produced in 1922. O'Neill's play does not, however, illustrate expressionism so extensively or demand so much of expressionistic staging as *Roger Bloomer,* produced a year later.

The author of this play, John Howard Lawson, was born in New York City in 1895. He entered Williams College when he was fifteen and while there wrote two plays, both of which were produced but

neither of which he thought good. After four years at Williams he worked for a year as an editor with Reuter's Press Cables, of which his father was head. World War I having taken him to Europe, where he served as ambulance driver in France and Italy, he remained abroad another year, writing plays. *Roger Bloomer,* his first play to reach Broadway, was produced by the Actors' Theatre in 1923. Two years later New York saw his second play, *Processional,* which its author subtitled "a jazz symphony of American life," and which, when revived by the Federal Theatre in 1937, one New York critic called "the best American play of the year." Against a background of postwar confusion, it presents the struggle of a miner in the West Virginia coal fields during a strike. As experimental as *Roger Bloomer,* though less expressive of the stage, *Processional* caused more discussion than any other of the dozen or so plays Lawson has written. *Loud Speaker,* a political satire, was produced in 1927 by the new Playwrights' Theatre, of which Lawson was a director. His play which has had the longest run is *Success Story,* produced by the Group Theatre in 1932. Lawson has also written movie scenarios, including *Blockade, Algiers, Action in the North Atlantic,* and *Counter Attack.*

To Lawson the drama is a reflection of social environment, and the function of the dramatist is to observe his environment, formulate laws which seem to govern it, and choose incidents which illustrate the laws. Lawson holds that the theatre can be saved only, as Bernard Shaw says, by "the reintroduction of problem with its remorseless logic and iron framework of fact." Upon this premise and the fact that the playwright puts himself into his play, Lawson evolves a theory which may be summarized as follows: The playwright's personality, thus expressed in the play, is the result of a social system of which the playwright is a part. Through the playwright, therefore, the play expresses the life and thought of the times—of course, as the playwright sees them. And since the playwright, being human, must adjust himself to his environment, the mirror which he holds up to nature reflects not only the environment but also the struggle of the playwright to adjust himself to it. This theory suggests expressionism and is exemplified in Lawson's expressionistic play *Roger Bloomer.*

In *Roger Bloomer* Lawson presents the conflict between a young man's aspirations and his social environment. Roger is an average American boy, who revolts against the humdrum complacency of his home town by escaping to New York. Although Roger fails to find

in the city the emotional release he seeks, he gains freedom, and the play ends on a note of hope. If in mirroring the conflict expressionistically and thus giving the mirrored images brightness, Lawson does not make them consistently distinct, the difficulty is one of handling the devices of the expressionistic stage; it is not in avoiding the conflict. Kenneth Macgowan, who likens *Roger Bloomer* to "free verse poems of good quality read by actors in costume," contends, however, that its materials are far above those of Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine,* the most popular of the American expressionistic plays. *Roger Bloomer* represents an attempt to convey what its author calls "the extraordinary poetry that lies in the common slang of the New York street." Lawson says he has endeavored to convey this "by a rhythm of American words and phrases as carefully schemed as the movement of music." If in doing so he has written a less successful play than *The Adding Machine,* he has at least not failed to present American life in American terms. And *Roger Bloomer,* unlike some other plays which merely contain a few expressionistic devices, is expressionistic throughout.

This distinction may be illustrated by three well-known American plays which have been called expressionistic—Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1920), Marc Connelly and George Kaufman's *Beggar on Horseback* (1924), and Connelly's *The Green Pastures* (1930)—but which are essentially realistic. Although in number of lines the expressionistic parts in all three of these plays exceed the realistic, the expressionistic parts are subordinate. In *Beggar on Horseback* the hero, Neil McRae, and the other characters are realistically represented in the opening scene—in a realistic set. There is nothing in that scene to suggest expressionism. The last scene is similarly realistic. The dream, for which the realistic scenes are a frame, is the only expressionistic part of the play. But to present a dream on the stage in the realistic style of stage production would not make the dream so credible as the method that Kaufman and Connelly hit upon, for the distinguishing characteristic of dreams is distortion of reality. Recognizing in expressionistic devices the very way to make their dream dream-like, the authors use these devices in the dream part of their play. But the play, as represented by its realistic frame, is essentially realistic. It is significant that throughout the presentation of the dream, Neil's piano and his easy chair remain where they were in the opening scene. O'Neill similarly uses expressionistic devices in *The Emperor Jones* to dramatize the inner conflict, which parallels the completely realistic attempt of Jones to

escape from Lem and the natives. As in *Beggar on Horseback* the frame of the play—the opening and closing scenes—is realistic. Realism is shown, too, whenever Jones fires his gun and the apparitions vanish. And although the thump of the tom-tom is an expressionistic device, it represents throughout the scenes of Jones' hallucinations the realism which frames them. In *The Green Pastures* expressionistic devices materialize on the stage the images in the minds of the Negroes, realistically presented in the opening scene and suggested in later parts of the play when Pastor Deshee's voice or the voice of the children in the Sunday School interrupt the expressionistic presentation of the Bible story. In these three plays expressionistic devices present more realistically than realistic ones could, respectively, a dream, an hallucination, and a naive conception of Heaven.

Expressionism is the result of the artist's attempt to express himself more intensely than his medium permits—or more intensely than it permits in realistic forms. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,* for example, is realistic. In that play Pinero holds a comparatively plain and accurate mirror up to nature. Although Pinero's mirror does not reflect everything, the images it does reflect are real, or lifelike. They are objective. But the expressionist does not find these objective forms adequate to his purpose, which is to express not only himself but also his struggle to adjust himself to his environment. Accordingly he oversteps the forms, which include not only the lines of the play but the media of the theatre, comprising acting, scenery, lighting, etc. In expressionistic plays these are "expressed" or, as it were, projected by distortion so that they stand out from the ordinary functions they have in realistic plays.

These distortions, which are frank and studied, are the results of extreme subjectivism, the essence of expressionism. The problem of the expressionist is to manifest emotion—which cannot be seen or heard—in the media of the theatre—which can be seen or heard—such as the flesh-and-blood actors and the paint and canvas of the setting. The solution is to distort the media. The resulting distortions are the manifestations of expressionism. There are many of them, for once the playwright begins to distort his media, variations become limitless. A few which are typical follow:

The monodramatic. A *monodrama* is a play in which the hero is the only character. The expressionistic part of *The Emperor Jones* is monodramatic: except for Jones, the characters are only figments of Jones' fear. *Roger Bloomer* is monodramatic to the extent that Roger, as Lawson

says, is the most normal person in the play. The other characters tend to be types. This play is a kind of monologue—the monologue of Roger Bloomer.

Type character. A character not individualized but representing all people of his kind is a type character. In *Roger Bloomer* many of the characters do not even have names to identify them as distinct personalities but are called instead A Ragged Man, A College Examiner, Tall Old Woman, A Judge, etc.

Abstract character. An even less individualized character than the type character is the abstract character, who instead of representing a class or type of people, represents a quality which a type or an individual may possess. The Little Formless Fears in *The Emperor Jones* are abstract characters.

Telescopic characterization. Characters are sometimes made up to look identical or to suggest the same person. The Judge in *Roger Bloomer* reminds one of the College Examiner.

Symbolism. A symbol being an object that stands for another object or an idea by suggestion rather than representation, symbolism in the drama is the use of a character, a situation, scenery or even lighting to suggest something else. The robots in Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* symbolize the results of the machine age. Bloomer's closing the window at the end of Act I, in *Roger Bloomer,* because there is going to be a storm, symbolizes not only Roger's sense of confinement but his revolt against it. And in the same play the outer curtain of Act I symbolizes the Midwest, just as the second-act outer curtain symbolizes New York.

The soliloquy. The soliloquy is that device whereby a character expresses his thoughts by speaking them aloud. Sometimes, though, the soliloquy is made to seem natural. In *A Doll's House,* for example, Nora speaks in soliloquy several times, but her soliloquies are not entirely unrealistic, since she speaks them under emotional tension and accordingly in clipped, sometimes incomplete sentences. In *Hamlet* the King's prayer is a soliloquy, but realistic, since a person could naturally pray aloud. There are several soliloquies in *Roger Bloomer,* some of them frankly unrealistic.

The aside. In the first prairie scene in *Roger Bloomer,* there is no attempt to make the asides realistic, as there is, for example, in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.*

Telegraphic dialogue. A rather common manifestation of expressionism is dialogue so distorted as to suggest a telegram-like style. In *Roger Bloomer* this is suggested in the dialogue between Bloomer and son and Poppin and son and, more obviously, in the speech of the businessman, Elliott T. Rumsey.

Lyrical dialogue. Sometimes, as though to intensify emotion, expressionistic dramatists write in poetic prose or even in verse. Many of Roger Bloomer's speeches, particularly his soliloquies, are lyrical.

Kaleidoscopic sequence. Scenes in expressionistic plays fade into each other as fragments of colored glass in a kaleidoscope form varying patterns when the instrument is turned. In the movies such changes are more easily effected than on the stage, where a lowering and raising of the lights are usually necessary to conceal the scene shifting. Some of the changes in *Roger Bloomer* are effected by the actors moving from one part of the stage to the other.

Pantomime. Since pantomime is acting without words, it is a form of distortion. There is pantomime, for example, in *The Emperor Jones* in the scene of the slave auction when "the auctioneer begins his silent spiel." Pantomime is distorted even further when it includes action not only without speech but without any sound at all. In the chain-gang scene the convicts "swing their picks, they shovel, but not a sound comes from their labor," and "the Prison Guard cracks his whip—noiselessly." Pantomime in *Roger Bloomer* is slight.

Music. Although music is frequently played or sung in expressionistic plays, the only music in *Roger Bloomer* is in Roger's dream. The scene of the dream is played, in fact, "like a piece of very exciting music."

Accentuated arbitrary lighting. Appia having pointed out in *Music and the Scene* the possibilities of plastic light, the expressionists carried the idea further, using light and shadow to obtain various effects. In *Roger Bloomer* the shift in scene from the dining room to the living room is made when the lights on stage left are turned down and those on stage right turned up. The bright ray of light, together with the opened door at the end of the play, symbolizes Roger's freedom. Lawson has said of the Greenwich Village Theatre production of *Roger Bloomer,* "Lighting was done with a complicated (and highly effective) use of sharply focused spots, half lights, interesting shadows, and color effects with lights."

Abstract settings. Curtains or screens for scenery are sometimes used to make a setting abstract. Hanging in folds, curtains suggest a plasticity but not realism. Screens, such as Gordon Craig built in series of varying widths but uniform height, are even more adaptable than curtains to give a scene an abstract background. It is significant that *Roger Bloomer* staged before curtains, with some use of painted drops, was more successful than staged realistically.

Drops. A drop is a large piece of canvas, often used at the back of the scene to suggest the sky. Before the advent of realism it was painted to represent scenery. Sometimes the drop is cut out in the outline of the scene it represents; then it is called a *cut-out,* or a *cut-drop.* The cut-outs for the production of *Roger Bloomer* were, as Lawson says, "rather brightly painted, frankly musical-comedy technique, the effect of poetry and grotesquerie gotten solely by the lighting." (Cf. Fuchs' relief stage.)

Projection of the stage. The modern stage is separated from the auditorium of the theatre by the *proscenium arch*—a separation which helps to create an illusion of detachment. The scene is framed like a picture, for within the arch, at the top, a curtain, called the *teaser,* is lowered or raised as the height of the stage setting demands; and at the sides, screens, called *tormentors,* are pushed toward the center or drawn out to give the desired width. Footlights, now used sparingly, light the scene from below. Behind the tormentors, lights, called *strips,* or *strip lights,* cast light from the sides. And *border lights,* arranged in rows behind the teaser, light the scene from above. Thus the modern stage is called a *picture-frame stage,* as distinguished, for example, from the *platform stage* of the Elizabethan theatre, in which the stage projected into the auditorium. But some expressionistic plays call for a projecting, as it were, of the stage as though to break down the theatrical illusion and unite stage and auditorium, actors and audience. In *Roger Bloomer* the illusion is broken when, in the scene on the prairie, "Eugene leans against proscenium right" or when, in the same scene, Bloomer and Poppin "descend steps left into orchestra." Another attempt to project the stage—and bring the audience into the scene—is exemplified when for the scene of the department store "the whole stage and auditorium are lighted."

Many of these manifestations are of course older than expressionism. Monodrama and abstract characters are exemplified in *Everyman;* type characters in the miracle plays and in the humor plays of Ben Jonson; symbolism proved an effective device for Strindberg and Ibsen; the soliloquy, the aside, and pantomime appeared in the drama almost at the beginning; painted drops have been a part of theatre equipment for two hundred years; and music, popular in the old melodramas, was the form for the tropes. Another expressionistic manifestation, the projection of the stage, is only a revision to a much earlier way of staging. In the mystery plays Herod raged on the pageant "and in the street." Through the centuries the scene was gradually pushed back from the audience, until stage, scenery, and actors were neatly framed by the proscenium. Utilizing such old devices as these, expressionistic dramatists studiedly distort reality and thereby manifest and project the meaning of their plays. It is in total effect, though, rather than in specific juxtaposition of time, space, nature, and language that the expressionists intensify emotion and thus interpret, rather than reproduce, reality.

The original Broadway production of *Roger Bloomer,* in realistic —and cumbersome—sets, was not so successful as the production two weeks later at the Greenwich Village Theatre, where the real-

istic sets were discarded in favor of drapes and set pieces. For the second production the full stage was backed by a black velvet cyclorama, in front of which unrealistic cut-outs served for scenery. Sharply focused spotlights and color effects obtained with lights complemented this staging. In contrast to the unrealistic settings, realistic properties transferred from the uptown production were used effectively. For example, in the opening scene, the Bloomer dining room, realistic cutlery and food on the table underneath a real glass lamp hanging above were spotlighted, whereas nothing but shadows suggested the rest of the room. So in the second scene, the living room, only two or three pieces of furniture are revealed by the light. In the college-examination scene the only realistic prop was a brightly colored map of the United States, hung on a black curtain behind the Examiner, who sat on an ordinary stepladder about four feet above the floor, and was fronted by a black masking piece of velvet on a frame. Here again lighting gave the scene its effect.

Some of the unfavorable criticism of the original production was due to the failure of the stage machinery to function smoothly and the resultant interruption in the flow of action. What was chiefly wrong with that production, though, was the realistic sets, since *Roger Bloomer* requires a setting in keeping with the play—as Lawson himself points out in the foreword to the published text, and as the Greenwich Village production demonstrated. For one of the essences of expressionism is expression of the medium, which is the stage itself.

The final test for *Roger Bloomer,* as for any play, is communicability. It is not enough that the spectator see and hear what the dramatist has experienced or how the dramatist reacts to the experience. The experience itself must be mirrored. Therefore the expressionistic playwright, whose material is images in the mind presented in physical form on the stage, should distort that form no further than communicability permits. If he would express himself, he must manifest the expression in terms the spectator can understand. This, Lawson has done in *Roger Bloomer.*

Pinero, taking his cue from Ibsen, revolted against conventions which had stultified the English drama. Expressionism, a quarter of a century later, revolting from other conventions, led the drama away from imitation, encouraged experimentation, and gave the stage new life. In itself expressionism is, however, of relatively minor significance. It has not produced a great play. But it has been a stimulating force in modern drama.

Roger Bloomer

by

JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

Originally produced by Equity Players, at the Equity Forty-eighth Street Theatre, New York City, on Thursday evening, March 1, 1923; then at the Greenwich Village Theatre by Marguerite A. Barker, March 15, 1923.

PRODUCTION PLANNED BY AUGUSTIN DUNCAN

DIRECTED BY MRS. SHELLEY HULL

SCENERY DESIGNED BY WOODMAN THOMPSON

CAST

Roger Bloomer	Henry Hull
Mrs. Bloomer	Caroline Newcombe
Everett Bloomer	Walter Walker
Mary, the Maid	Isabel Hill
Mr. Poppin	John C. Hickey
Eugene Poppin	Louis Calhern
Emma, the Stenographer	Adelaide Wilson
Louise	Mary Fowler
Another Salesgirl	Helen Carew
A College Examiner	J. Hammond Dailey
A Landlady	Julia Ralph
Miss Burns	Helen Van Hoose
Elliott T. Rumsey	Frederick Burton

Office Assistants	Alan Bunce Dolph Ryan Robert Forsythe Harry Hahn
A Ragged Man	Fletcher Norton
A Street Walker	Margaret Fareleigh
Drug Clerk	Charles Webster
Another Drug Clerk	Harry Hahn
An Old Man	Halliam Bosworth
Another Old Man	James G. Morton
A Detective	Halliam Bosworth
A Judge	Thomas J. Keogh
Prison Attendant	Emil Hoch
Tall Old Woman	Helen Van Hoose
Small Old Woman	Kate Morgan

ACT I—*Excelsior, Iowa*

ACT II—*New York*

ACT III—*New York*

Roger Bloomer

TYPE OF ACTOR

ROGER BLOOMER *must* be played by an actor of sturdy virile appearance, giving impression of average American boy. ROGER'S problem is that of normal young manhood. He is not neurasthenic, but rather the most normal person in the play.

SETTING

Scenic plan involves the simplest use of setting conveying impression by single articles of furniture, and portable setting, spotted against curtains, with occasional use of painted drops. Elaboration or expensiveness would hurt the play. The suggested division of the stage into sections, with the action taking place first at one side and then at the other as indicated in the text, does not mean that the movement of the players is confined to small cubby-holes in which they enact realistic bits of action. On the contrary, these divisions are rather to suggest the background of the scene, but full width of stage, curtained in simplest manner, is used by the actors in the great majority of scenes.

(*Stage directions in parentheses and small type are from John Howard Lawson's notes on the production at the Greenwich Village Theatre.*)

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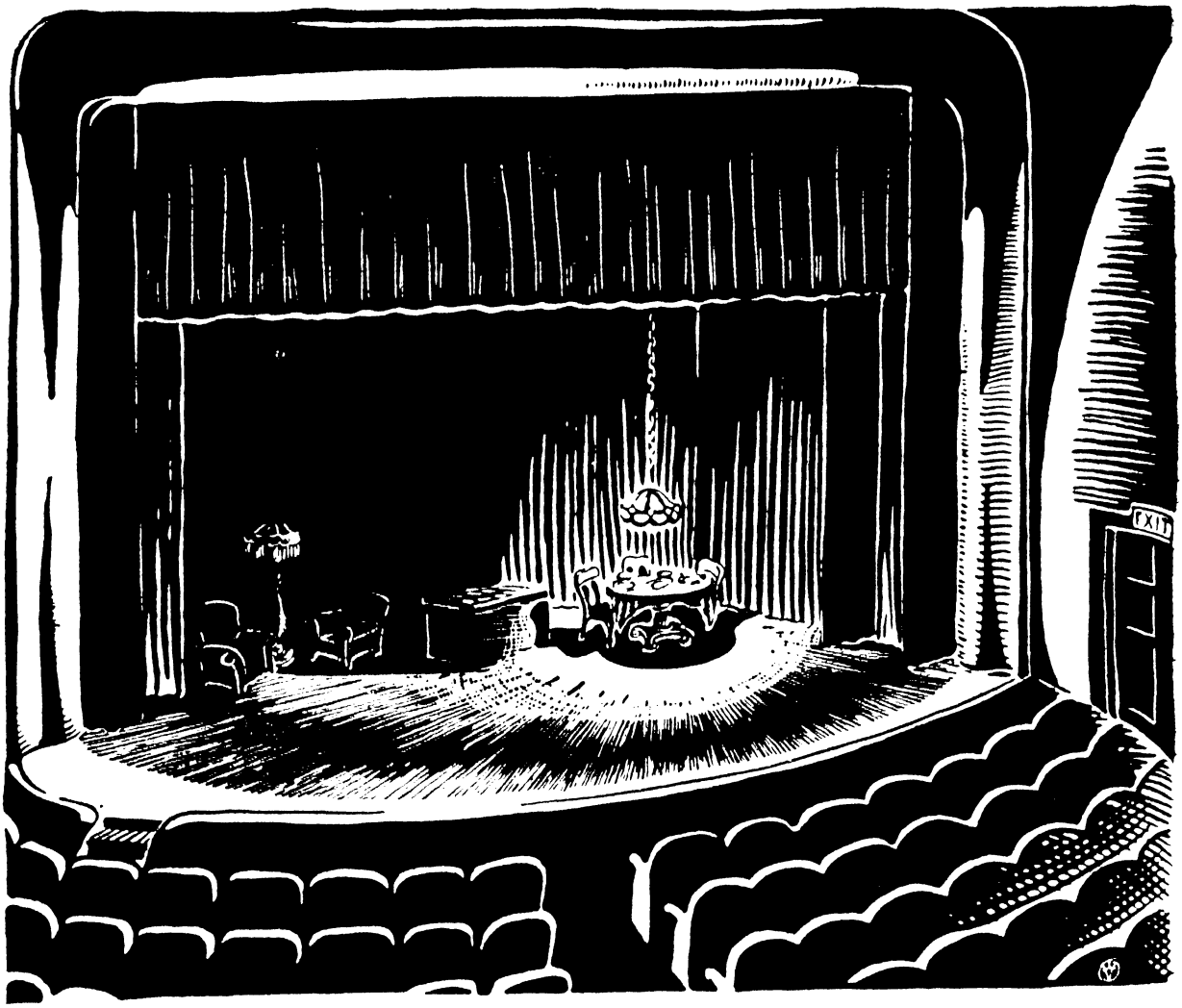
ACT I

Excelsior, Iowa

The outer curtain of Act I is yellow, like fields of wheat, patterned with olive green of young trees. It opens and



The BLOOMER *family is at dinner under a red-and-green electric lamp.* MRS. BLOOMER *sits center, facing audience fatuously, her husband to her right, her son to her left. A matronly smallish woman.* EVERETT BLOOMER *is middle-aged, hair turning gray. His stomach is beginning to bulge, for he is swelling a little with prosperity. His neck is becoming flabby under his wide stiff jaw. He owns the biggest store in a town of thirty thousand people. It is located at the corner of Main Street and Upper Broadway.* ROGER *is eighteen, an average American boy of Middle Western type, solidly built,*

keen face, vigorous character. He has reached the age when many things begin to worry him.

Dining-room set is at left, occupying more than half the stage. Right of it darkness, the remaining space being curtained off.

The MAID *waits at* BLOOMER'S *elbow as he carves the roast. He does this earnestly, standing up to it, his sleeves pulled back, eyes intent. The others watch in silence.* ROGER *taps nervously on the table with his fork. Having done full justice to the cutting,* BLOOMER *sits, selects a piece which he puts on a plate, with potato and gravy.*

Bloomer [*passing it to* MAID, *looking at his wife*]: That's for you, mother. [MRS. BLOOMER'S *fatuous fixed look has centered on space. She now lowers her head to stare at the plate in front of her. Silence while* BLOOMER *helps himself and his son. Then* BLOOMER *sighs, produces a big white handkerchief, wipes his face and settles himself.*] That's over. [*They eat several mouthfuls in silence.*] Excellent cut of meat tonight.

Roger: You say that every night.

Mrs. Bloomer: My dear boy, I always buy the best.

Roger: Yes, mother. [*The* MAID *has passed the vegetables.*]

Bloomer: Lucky to be able to . . . I tell you, there was a day when the food in my mouth didn't come easy. [*They eat with clock-like regularity.*] It came with sweat in those days . . . sweat . . . sweat!

Mrs. Bloomer: I don't know how the poor manage to live.

Bloomer: Poor! Who's poor? There's no poor in America.

Roger: But you always tell us how poor you were yourself.

Bloomer: That's different; times have changed. I was a poor boy, I sweated and made good. People don't know the meaning of sweat these days—that's the whole cause of this social unrest: no poor in America.

Mrs. Bloomer [*venturing on dangerous ground*]: Think of Poland!

Roger [*waving knife and fork with his mouth full*]: Russia, Turkey . . . Armenia . . .

Bloomer: This is the U. S. A., isn't it? [*They all nod sleepily.*] This is Iowa, isn't it? Little old Iowa! Down to the store, the poor come in and buy aluminum pans and silk stockings that you wouldn't afford yourself, mother.

Mrs. Bloomer: No, no.

Bloomer: Over-pay the poor and you cheat the rich!

Roger: You're rich now, aren't you, father?

Bloomer: I . . . oh, so, so!

Roger: Then what do you care?

Bloomer [*lays down knife and fork and looks at his son*]: What? What? . . . what do I care? It's my money, isn't it? My store? The margin of profit is comparatively narrow in any case—modern merchandising. Why should I, who built the store out of my sweat, I did, why should I be bullied into paying inefficient people more than they deserve?

Roger [*embarrassed*]: But you have enough. . . . I mean, you have money . . . enough money!

Bloomer [*with almost passion*]: Never enough money! Never enough. [MRS. BLOOMER *agrees fatuously.*]

Mrs. Bloomer: What's the world coming to? [*A long dead pause*]

Bloomer [*across to* ROGER, *more confidentially*]: I need every penny, I'm thinking of spreading, spreading . . . opening stores in other cities . . . my stores, spreading! [*He sits quite still, stirred by this dream.*]

Roger: Think of that . . .

Bloomer: Look at Woolworth, there's a great man: there's America for you, Washington to Woolworth, business . . . spread . . . spread!

Roger: Father, which was a greater man, Washington or Lincoln?

Bloomer [*thinks it over, then dogmatically*]: Washington, because he was the father of his country. [ROGER *is tipping back his chair.*]

Mrs. Bloomer: Roger, please don't do that, it makes me so nervous.

Roger: Excuse me, mother.

Bloomer: But what about Woolworth?

Roger: Washington had an ideal, Freedom! Lincoln had an ideal, Freedom! What was Woolworth's ideal?

Bloomer: To sell big and sell cheap. [MAID *is clearing away dishes.*]

Mrs. Bloomer: What's the world coming to?

Bloomer: Is there salad this evening?

Mrs. Bloomer: No, just rice pudding.

Roger: There was rice pudding night before last.

Mrs. Bloomer: You had ice cream last night. [MAID *brings the rice pudding which* BLOOMER *serves.* ROGER *is again tipping his chair.*] Don't do that, Roger.

Roger [*as before*]: Excuse me, mother.

Mrs. Bloomer: How nervous you are in springtime, Roger.

Bloomer: This is different from other springtimes, Roger with college just ahead of him.

Mrs. Bloomer: Roger's getting to be a man—

Bloomer: Got a long way to go yet, eh, Roger? [ROGER *is gloomily silent.*] And this college problem. . . . [BLOOMER *scratches his head.*] Well, I'm not much on education, it's for you to have the learning I missed, Roger. . . . All I know about is the store. . . . [*He sits back and smiles, contemplative after an excellent meal, slowly, half to himself.*] Pots and pans . . . pianos . . . millinery . . . farm machinery and miscellaneous cutlery—that's me, I've made that! [ROGER *folds his napkin and rises.*]

Roger: Excuse me . . . tired: I think I'll go to my room. I don't care for any rice pudding. Good night. [*He crosses into shadow right, opens a door from which comes a streak of light, right center. He shuts the door behind him. The father and mother sit in silence, eating rhythmically.*]

Bloomer: More?

Mrs. Bloomer [*with the usual twitter in her voice*]: No, thank you.

Bloomer [*to* MAID]: That's all, Mary. [MARY *carries out rice pudding and dishes.*] Queer!

Mrs. Bloomer: What's queer?

Bloomer: Nothing.

Mrs. Bloomer: Why shouldn't he go to his own room after dinner?

Bloomer: Every night, he runs, as if he were escaping from us—

Mrs. Bloomer [*frightened*]: No!

Bloomer: That's how I feel it.

Mrs. Bloomer [*with a gasp*]: Oh . . .

Bloomer: Alone in there, him and his books. . . . [*Disgustedly*] Books! . . . Queer boy . . . queer . . .

Mrs. Bloomer: What?

Bloomer: I said, queer.

Mrs. Bloomer: I guess it's just the spring!

Bloomer: A boy is a responsibility and I feel it.

Mrs. Bloomer: You! What about me?

Bloomer: You don't understand.

Mrs. Bloomer: Think how much worse it would be if it had been a girl.

Bloomer: One thing: He'll be safe at college.

Mrs. Bloomer: Safe at college!

Bloomer: Won't he?

Mrs. Bloomer: It's you that don't understand. I'm losing him anyway—he's not my son any more . . . lost!

Bloomer: That's your side of it. My side of it is, it's disagreeable to have a son who . . . he . . . who's different from other people.

Mrs. Bloomer: Seems like you ought to be proud to have him different.

Bloomer: Anybody who's a little different from everybody else gets it in the neck. That boy is fixing up to get it in the neck. That's why I'm talking. It's up to us to smooth him out . . . mold! [MRS. BLOOMER *shakes her head. There are tears in her eyes.*] You're his mother, talk to him.

Mrs. Bloomer [*wiping her eyes*]: I can't.

Bloomer: What do you mean, you can't?

Mrs. Bloomer: Grown up! All of a sudden, quick, grown up! . . . [*Gradually as she talks the fatuous little lady becomes a personality.*] He's hidden his heart where I can't find it. He's gone on a trip, his heart has, a million miles away, and he's never coming back. . . . [*Pointing to* ROGER'S *closed door*] What goes on in there?

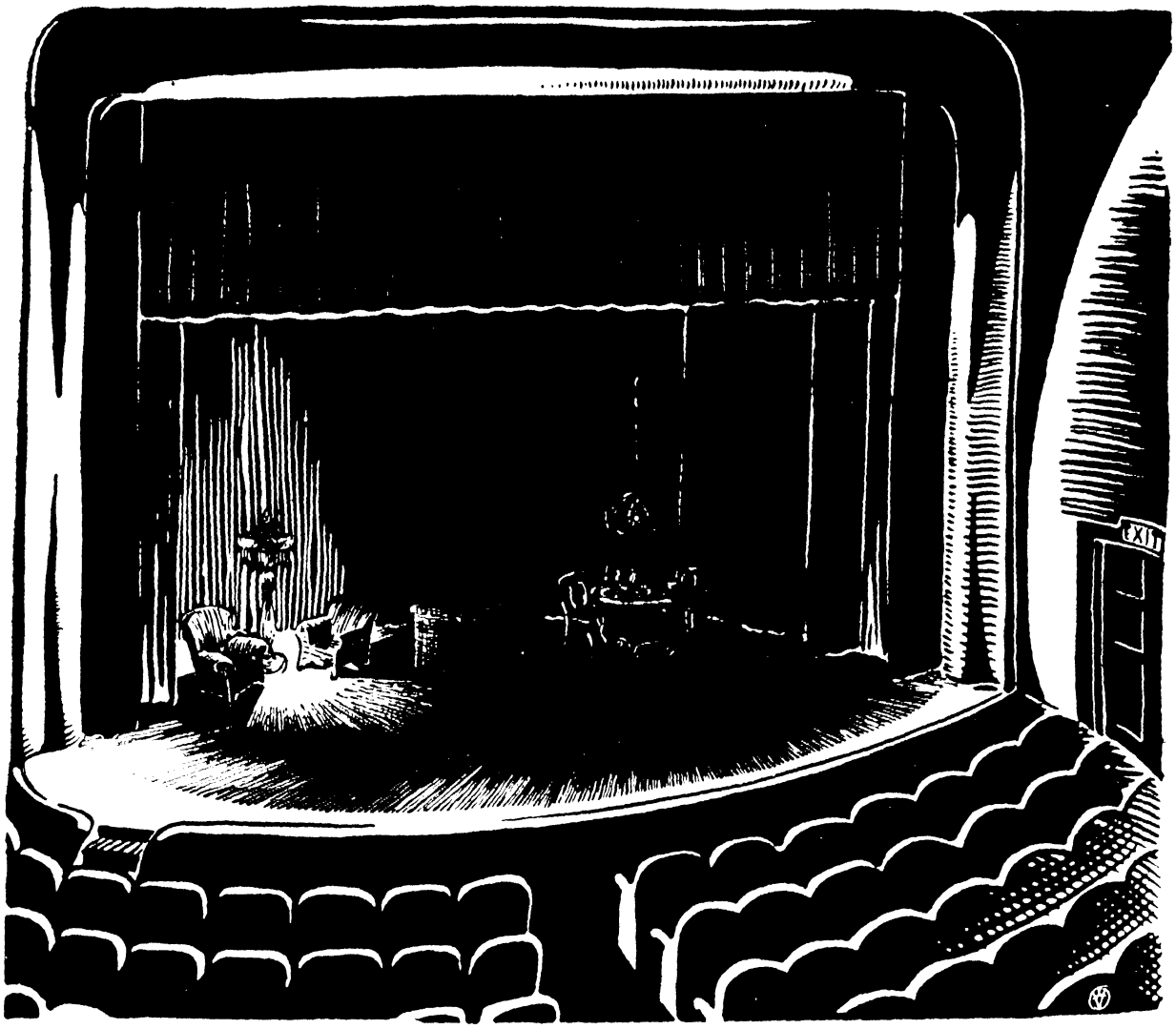
Bloomer: What goes on in his head?

Mrs. Bloomer: Yes, I mean his head! What goes on? You don't know . . . you never will, you can't . . . it's his . . . it's a closed door, barred, locked, secret, secret . . . [*Her voice trails off in tears.*]

Bloomer: I never heard you go on like this before.

Mrs. Bloomer: You never will again. I'm scared . . . it's an awful thing to have a son. [*They have moved into the shadowed space right.* BLOOMER *turns on an electric light on the table beside him.*

(*Lights go out in the dining-room as they cross to right.*)



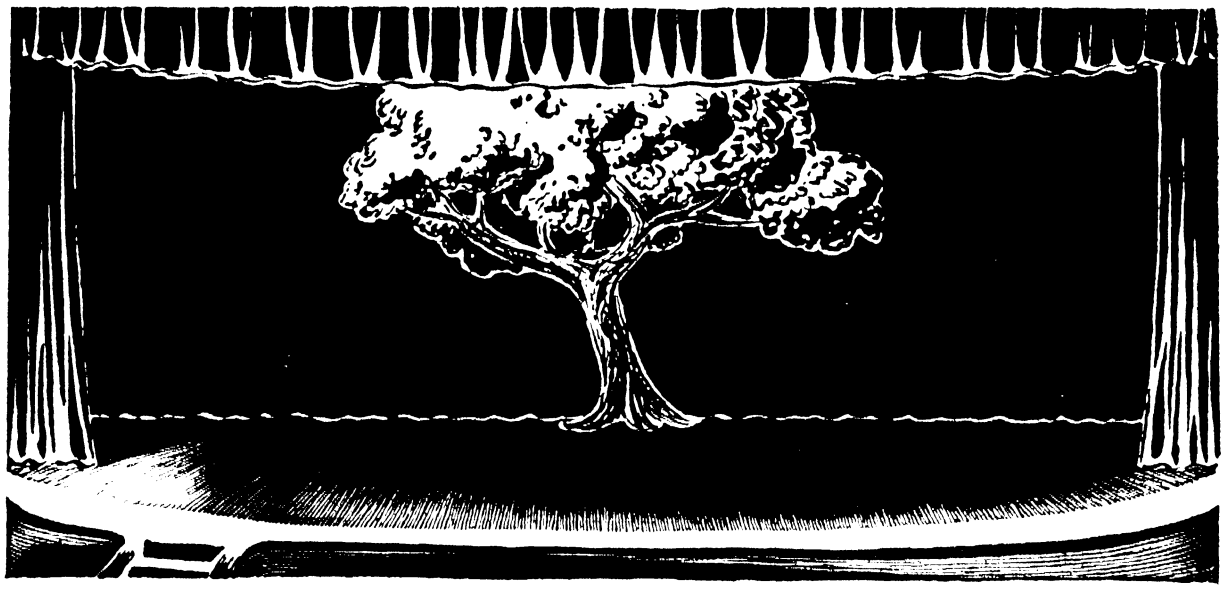
They are in the BLOOMER *living-room, extreme right of stage. Abruptly, startlingly,* MRS. BLOOMER *lapses into fatuity.*] Here's your evening paper. [BLOOMER *with a yawn lapses into the only comfortable chair, rattling his paper.* MRS. BLOOMER, *sitting on the edge of a small chair, picks up her sewing. After a moment, she speaks with a little twittering sigh.*] Isn't the new lamp beautiful?

Bloomer [*glancing at it*]: It cost money. [BLOOMER *suddenly rises.*] This can't go on! I'm going to talk to him. [*He knocks at* ROGER'S *door.* MRS. BLOOMER *shakes her head sadly.*] Roger, come out, will you? Just take a little walk with me, down street and back. [ROGER *comes out.* BLOOMER *coughs self-consciously.*] Not so busy with your books you can't spare a minute for your old father.

Roger: All right, dad.

Mrs. Bloomer: Take your muffler, Roger, the air's still sharp. [*The two men go. The curtain closes on* MRS. BLOOMER *who sews, smiling fatuously.*]

Before the Outer Curtain



The dusty twilight of the prairies.

(*Against the curtain is spotted a rather elaborate, delicately constructed apple tree in full blossom.*)

[*Enter left,* BLOOMER *with* ROGER. BLOOMER *smokes a cigar.*]

Bloomer: Going to be a fine night, and yet . . . yet there might be a little storm at that.

Roger [*sullenly*]: You wanted to talk to me, dad?

Bloomer: Yes, but I don't seem to have so much to say now. [*Pause*] The air's a bit sharp still . . . um . . . how the dust blows— We seem to be growing apart, that's not right, fathers and sons should be pals! [*Enter right,* POPPIN *with his son* EUGENE.] There's Poppin with that boy of his; that's a college boy, that is! [POPPIN *is a large loose man with flapping old-fashioned clothes. A big red face and voice hoarse from years of political speaking. His son is a stocky young man of twenty-three, of much the same physical type as* ROGER, *but heavier and older by five important years.* EUGENE *is well poised, college clothes, and hair glossed back. The* POPPINS *are laughing.* BLOOMER *turns pathetically to* ROGER *as they approach.*] Now there!

Eugene: That's a good one, dad.

Poppin [*slapping his son on shoulder*]: Thought your father was a dead one, eh? Life in the old horse yet, boy! [*The two parties meet.*] Howdy, Bloomer.

Bloomer: Hello, Poppin, taking a little air?

Poppin: Me an' the boy takin' a little air after dinner.

Bloomer: How's the missus?

Poppin: Good! How's your missus?

Bloomer: Good!

Poppin: Um . . . how the dust blows.

Bloomer: Just what I was saying: dust thick in the houses.

Poppin: Hardly know Gene, would you? Filled out, ain't he?

Bloomer: Filled out big.

Poppin: Home from Yale on his Easter vacation.

Bloomer [*tapping* EUGENE's *chest*]: Where'd you get that chest, Eugene?

Poppin: That's the Yale chest, Bloomer.

Bloomer: I hear you're on a team at Yale.

Eugene: I'm Yale Varsity football.

Bloomer: Varsity! That's a proud thing, that's making good!

Poppin: And not only that— I tell you he's made friends—going to spend this summer in New York—

Bloomer: New York . . .

Poppin [*in an awed voice*]: He's got millionaire friends . . .

Bloomer: That's making good! Now my son— [ROGER *has remained in the background.*]

Poppin: He ain't made good yet, give him time.

Bloomer: Roger is on his way to college—but not East. Too far away from his old father: we been thinking of State College.

Eugene [*sarcastic*]: Ah! State College?

Bloomer: Suppose you boys walk along: Poppin and me will have a little chat.

Eugene: Sure, sir. [EUGENE *and* ROGER *move to right.* BLOOMER *and* POPPIN *to left.*] Have a cigarette?

Roger: I don't smoke. [EUGENE *lights one.*]

Poppin [*to* BLOOMER, *left*]: What's new?

Bloomer: One thing and another. [*They descend steps left into orchestra in silence.*]

Poppin: Got something on your mind?

Bloomer: Yes, I have.

Poppin: I seen you had: I guess you an' me understand each other. I guess you an' me stand for good business in this town—and all over Iowa! Money's a little tight this spring, but—

Bloomer [*muttering*]: It ain't that, it ain't that, it's my son!

Poppin: What about him? [*Meanwhile,* EUGENE *leans against proscenium right, smoking his cigarette, occasionally addressing* ROGER.]

Eugene: Know any skirts in this town?

Roger: No.

Eugene: I do! [*He smokes contentedly, puffing rings.*]

Bloomer: These are queer times . . . new times . . . think of our sons, the new generation growing up in these times—what are our sons coming to? [*Pause*]

Poppin: We gotta make Americans out of our sons.

Eugene [*eyeing* ROGER *deliberately*]: Wait'll you get to college. Hell, what they won't do to you!

Roger: How?

Eugene: I remember you in High School: you was a funny kid!

Roger: I've grown up since then.

Eugene: Not so much, just wait till you get to college!

Roger: I thought I'd try to play football at college.

Eugene: Who! You! No, better stick to ping-pong.

Roger: I mean . . . oh, never mind, I'm going home!

Eugene [*laughing*]: Mamma waiting?

Roger [*fists clenched, he speaks helplessly*]: I'm going home. [*Draggingly, he crosses stage and exits.* EUGENE *continues to lean listlessly against proscenium. The two elder men talk.*]

Bloomer: Your son: he's an upstanding boy.

Poppin: He's an American.

Bloomer: No doubt about that! But what can I do with my boy? He's a problem, Roger . . .

Poppin: Every boy's a problem.

Bloomer: I want to keep my eye on him, been thinking of State College, near home, near me!

Poppin: No: too many Socialists at these state colleges!

Bloomer: Then what would you advise?

Poppin: Get him out, get him to a big place where he'll learn. [*They come center in orchestra.*]

Bloomer: You mean East?

Poppin: That's where they've got this education game down to a science.

Bloomer: It's a long way East.

Poppin: It costs money.

Bloomer: I guess I can go that!

Poppin: Yale is the best college! Your son can go to Yale along with mine, go to Yale and be somebody.

Bloomer: I want my son to be somebody!

Poppin: Fathers and sons, we stick together, for Americanism and the right ideals, that's it, ain't it?

Bloomer: That's it.

Poppin: Say, Gene, come here.

Bloomer [*to* EUGENE]: Roger gone?

Eugene: Yes, he sort of thought he'd go home.

Poppin: All the better: want to talk to you about him.

Bloomer: My son . . .

Poppin: He's his father's son all right . . . bright . . .

Bloomer: Bright, yes . . . good-natured. . . . He dreams—well, that's neither here nor there, no,—but on account of your father and me being friends, I'm thinking: send him to Yale next fall.

Eugene: Entrance examinations?

Bloomer: He'll pass them: he's bright! Why, he's got books you never heard of in languages that ain't.

Eugene: I'm not bright.

Bloomer: Why, I'll bet he could help you yourself with your lessons.

Poppin: And you help him with all them college customs.

Bloomer: That's it: turn and turn about.

Eugene: Pretty green, I suppose?

Bloomer: Green as grass . . . green, but willing, eighteen years old. [*Pause*] I want my son to be a man!

Eugene: Nothing finer than a Yale man.

Bloomer: I'm sure of that.

Poppin [*sentimentally, wagging his head*]: An American, that's it!

Eugene: First off, you got to send him to the best tailor.

Bloomer [*chuckling and nodding*]: Sure: say, I like you, I like your line of talk.

Eugene: Got to give him a big allowance.

Bloomer: I'm no tightwad.

Poppin [*jovially*]: I tell you, Bloomer, he eats money.

Bloomer: My boy's got a quiet disposition.

Poppin: The quiet ones are the biggest spenders.

Bloomer: Business proposition! You can't expect to make a man out of a boy for nothing. [*Wearily*] I want to do what's right for him, you don't know how I want to do what's right for him!

Eugene: Then you send him to Yale?

Bloomer: Yes, I send him to Yale!

Eugene: And you put it up to me?

Bloomer: To smooth him out, mold . . .

Poppin: Bloomer and me has always been business associates.

Eugene: Then I'll be over to talk to him seriously.

Poppin: Don't put the boy wise: in a sense a put-up job, for his own good.

Bloomer [*to* EUGENE]: You'll come in and advise him like a friend, is that it?

Eugene: I'll tell him what he'd ought to know.

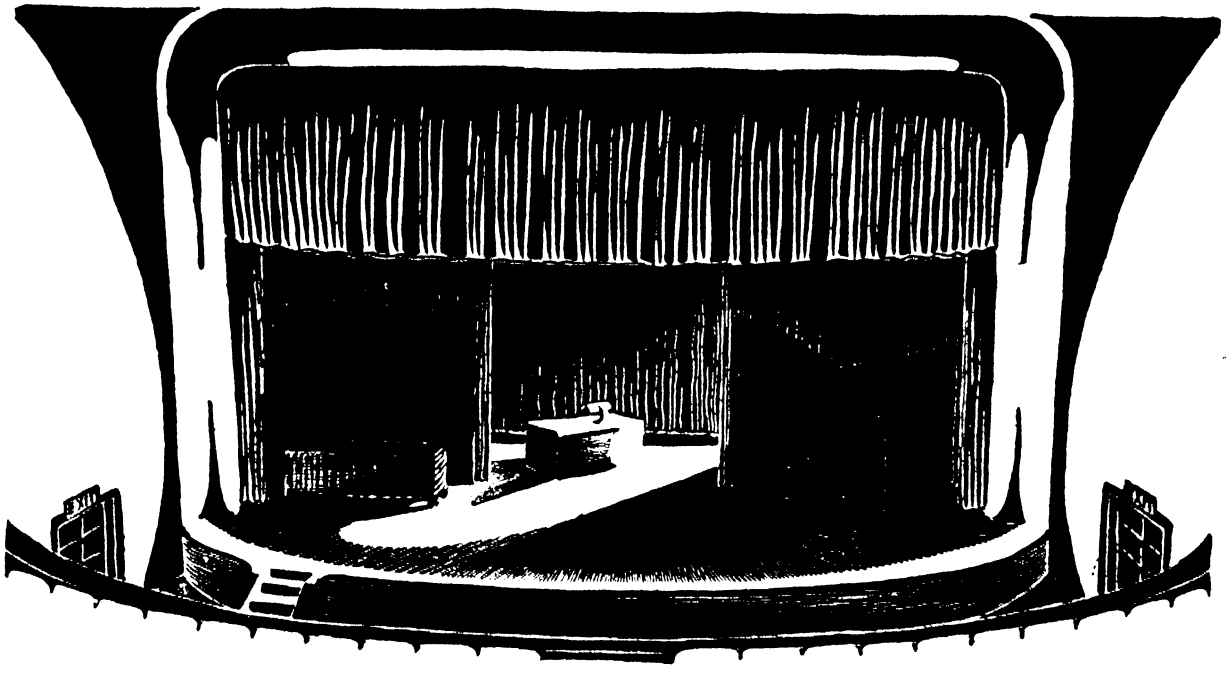
Bloomer [*still a little doubtful*]: Nervous boy . . .

Eugene: College'll fix him, get him among men . . . men . . .

Bloomer [*rubbing his hands*]: That's it, that must be it.

Eugene: Understand, it's like stepping into the world: competition! A man's got to make good, keep in right, learn when to keep his mouth shut, dress well, make useful friends . . . that's how college makes the American citizen!

Poppin: That's the future talking: mark my words, Bloomer, the future's in the hands of wise guys, our sons! The young are wise guys! [*They go out.*]



The stoutish blonde stenographer raises the window shade in BLOOMER'S *office at the store, allowing the sunlight to fall straight across his desk. A solid plain desk.* BLOOMER'S *office occupies space which in first scene had been curtained off between the* BLOOMER *dining-room and library. These two sets are now covered with curtains,* BLOOMER'S *office alone being visible.* BLOOMER *enters.*

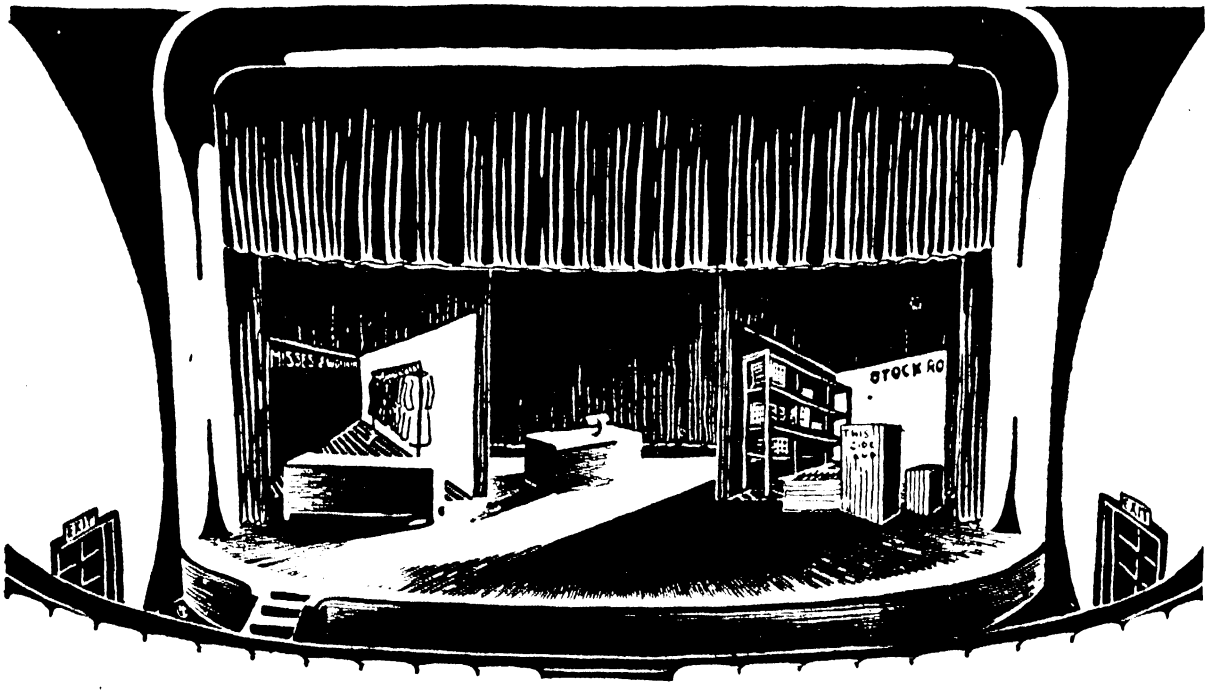
Bloomer: Good morning, Emma. [*He gives her his hat, then turning*] Come right in, Roger, my office is the same as yours. [ROGER *enters. Exit* EMMA.]

Roger: Tell me, dad, how many girls work in this store?

Bloomer: Forty-three: forty-three girls working for you and me. . . . Good, eh? Glad you take an interest: some day it's going to be yours. [*Pause*] I asked you to come to the store with me this morning, thought maybe I could talk to you better here, I'm more at home here . . . h'm. . . . Have a look over the store. . . . Want you to take an interest! [*They come to front of stage.* BLOOMER *spreads his arms wide.*] Enlargements all the time. . . . Spread! That's been my motto: spread!

Roger: It's a swell store!

Bloomer: Quite a place, eh? Quite an up-to-date little place!



The whole stage and auditorium are lighted. Left, a painted drop in front of where the BLOOMER *dining-room had been, gives an impression of a department store. In front of this drop, a few bales and heavy packing cases. Front right, two salesgirls are behind the notions counter. One hastily arranges articles to show how busy she is. The other stares tiredly in awed blankness. The tired girl's name is* LOUISE. *Here and there are hung signs with pointers, "Millinery," "Kitchen Utensils," etc.*

Bloomer [*pointing to right*]: That entire side is devoted to notions and women's wear. [ROGER *stares at the salesgirls.*]

Roger: It's a swell store. [*They pass back toward left.*]

Bloomer: I don't believe you'll find a more complete line of merchandise even in St. Louis. Spread! Understand? [*In front of*

heavy bales and packing cases, left] I'm planning to install a music room here. . . . Magnificent, where twenty people can listen to victrolas in twenty separate compartments, listening to the world's greatest music rendered by the world's greatest artists right here in Iowa!

Louise [*behind the counter, looking at the other salesgirl*]: Kid, your hair's coming down. [*The girl with busy fingers tries to adjust it hastily.* LOUISE *reaches over the counter and picks a few packages of hair-pins.*] Use these! [*The hair is rearranged as* BLOOMER *and* ROGER *return from left to right.*]

Bloomer: I made it, I say, made it!

Roger: What about these, the girls?

Bloomer: Eh, oh, them? I trained 'em, I cussed 'em into politeness. [*Near counter right, he addresses the girls paternally.*] Good morning, girls.

Both Girls: Good morning, sir.

Bloomer: Do you always say "Sir" and "Ma'am" to the customers?

Both Girls: Yes, sir. [BLOOMER *and* ROGER *descend steps right into orchestra.*]

Bloomer: Now I'm thinking of extending my stores throughout the state's principal towns, calling them the Buywell Stores. Get the idea? Buy Well! Good, eh? [*He slaps* ROGER *on the back.*] The Bloomer Buywell Stores!

Other Salesgirl [*with busy fingers attending to her unruly hair, comes close to* LOUISE]: Him! Old man Bloomer, he's a self-made man!

Louise [*very low, sullenly*]: I don't think much of him.

Other Salesgirl: What?

Louise: There's stores fifteen times as big as this in New York.

Other Salesgirl [*still thinking about it*]: This is a big store. [BLOOMER *and* ROGER *are center in orchestra.*]

Bloomer: The store ought to explain things, the store's what I made: I want you to know your father, you're old enough to know me like I am.

Roger: Say, I never thought of that.

Bloomer: What it means, this store, to you and to me!

Roger: Money, isn't that what it means?

Bloomer: Honest merchandising, do you know what that is? Blood and sweat!

Roger [*impulsively*]: Say, dad!

Bloomer: What!

Roger [*after an embarrassed pause*]: It's a swell store, but I'm thinking. . . . I'd like to set to work and make something out of my blood . . . my sweat . . .

Bloomer: But it's ready-made for you. It's my blood in you, ain't it?

Roger: No . . .

Bloomer: What do you mean?

Roger: Blood and sweat!

Louise: I'm sick of it. [*Suddenly flashing*] What's this town? Nothing but a village.

Other Salesgirl: Thirty thousand inhabitants and the best sewerage in the state.

Louise: Sewers! Haven't you anything to brag about but sewers?

Other Salesgirl: I was born here. You wasn't!

Louise [*mystically*]: Me for New York!

Other Salesgirl: New York ain't safe.

Louise: All right!

Other Salesgirl: I know a girl got into trouble in New York.

Louise: I know some got into trouble right here.

Other Salesgirl [*hastily*]: Who'd you mean? [*They are silent as* BLOOMER *and* ROGER *return up steps, right.*]

Bloomer: Pots and pans . . . bath-tubs . . . carpets . . . I wouldn't sell out for a million. [BLOOMER *and* ROGER *go into his office.*]

Louise [*rising and shaking her fist after them, then spreading her arms in a gesture of crucified defiance*]: Oh, what's the use? [*Lights fade, except the clear sunlight across the desk in* BLOOMER'S *office.*]

Bloomer: Sit down. [*He and* ROGER *sit on opposite sides of the desk.*] That's me! I'm old; what about you! You're young; now there's this college business, got to think seriously.

Roger: I have thought.

Bloomer: So have I: what do you say to going East?

Roger: What's that? East!

Bloomer: Big step, college: got to go to a thoroughgoing place where they make a man out of you.

Roger: Where's that?

Bloomer: Yale College! What sort of place would you figure a good college to be?

Roger: I think . . . quiet old buildings, people planning their lives under the shade of trees.

Bloomer: I think you got the wrong idea: it's a business institution, this Yale, that's how I figure it.

Roger: I'm nervous about this, dad, I don't know where I stand.

Bloomer: Too much nerves: you think too much!

Roger: I can't help it, I'm afraid of college—

Bloomer: If you're my son, you ain't afraid—that's your future!

Roger: Yes, my future!

Bloomer: Where you make your friends. Manhood. . . . Way East! [*Sad and gruff*] Sure, then Yale is the place. I'll dictate a letter to Yale College right now. [BLOOMER *rings bell on his desk.*]

Roger: It's a university, dad.

Bloomer: A letter to Yale University, that'll arrange it. [EMMA *enters.*] Now, then, Emma, ready. This is to Yale University.

Emma: Who to—I mean, what person?

Bloomer [*puzzled*]: Someone in authority. Leave the address blank. I'll ask Poppin. Now then: "I am an Iowa merchant, but I have a son of average intelligence" . . . eh, Roger? "Eighteen years old" . . . h'm . . . let's see . . . [*The lights fade to darkness.*]

Then BLOOMER *turns on the elaborate lamp in the* BLOOMER *sitting-room. He and* MRS. BLOOMER *seat themselves as before. He settles himself, rattling his newspaper. She sews, looking furtively at* ROGER'S *mysterious door.* ROGER'S *door is in curtained space behind which* BLOOMER'S *office has been, thus forming an opening in curtains between the sitting-room and dining-room.*

Mrs. Bloomer [*frightened*]: Again tonight, he shuts himself in.

Bloomer: Every night.

Mrs. Bloomer: What goes on?

Bloomer: Hush . . . don't. . . . [*A long pause. He rattles his paper.*]

Maid [*entering*]: Here's a young man, sir. [*Enter* EUGENE POPPIN.]

Bloomer [*rising and seizing* EUGENE *nervously*]: Lord, I'm glad you've come, we need you. Ma, here's Eugene Poppin, gonna be a friend to Roger. [MAID *goes out.*]

Mrs. Bloomer [*puts down her sewing, adjusts her glasses, looks hard at* EUGENE]: Well, he's very quiet, Roger is.

Eugene: Yes, ma'am.

Bloomer: He's in his room. Been studying those college examinations. [BLOOMER *goes to* ROGER'S *door and knocks.*] Roger! Here's Gene. [ROGER *opens the door.*]

Eugene [*condescendingly*]: Hello, Roger, just thought I'd drop in.

Roger: Thanks!

Bloomer: Been working, Roger?

Roger: Yes, dad; Latin, French, geometry—

Eugene: Boy, wait'll you get in that examining room, takes a man's nerve.

Bloomer: Going to take his test right here in town—what's the name of the place?

Roger: State College Examiner, dad.

Bloomer: Latin, geometry . . . ah, that's a proud thing. Now get together, have a talk: Roger, take him in your room.

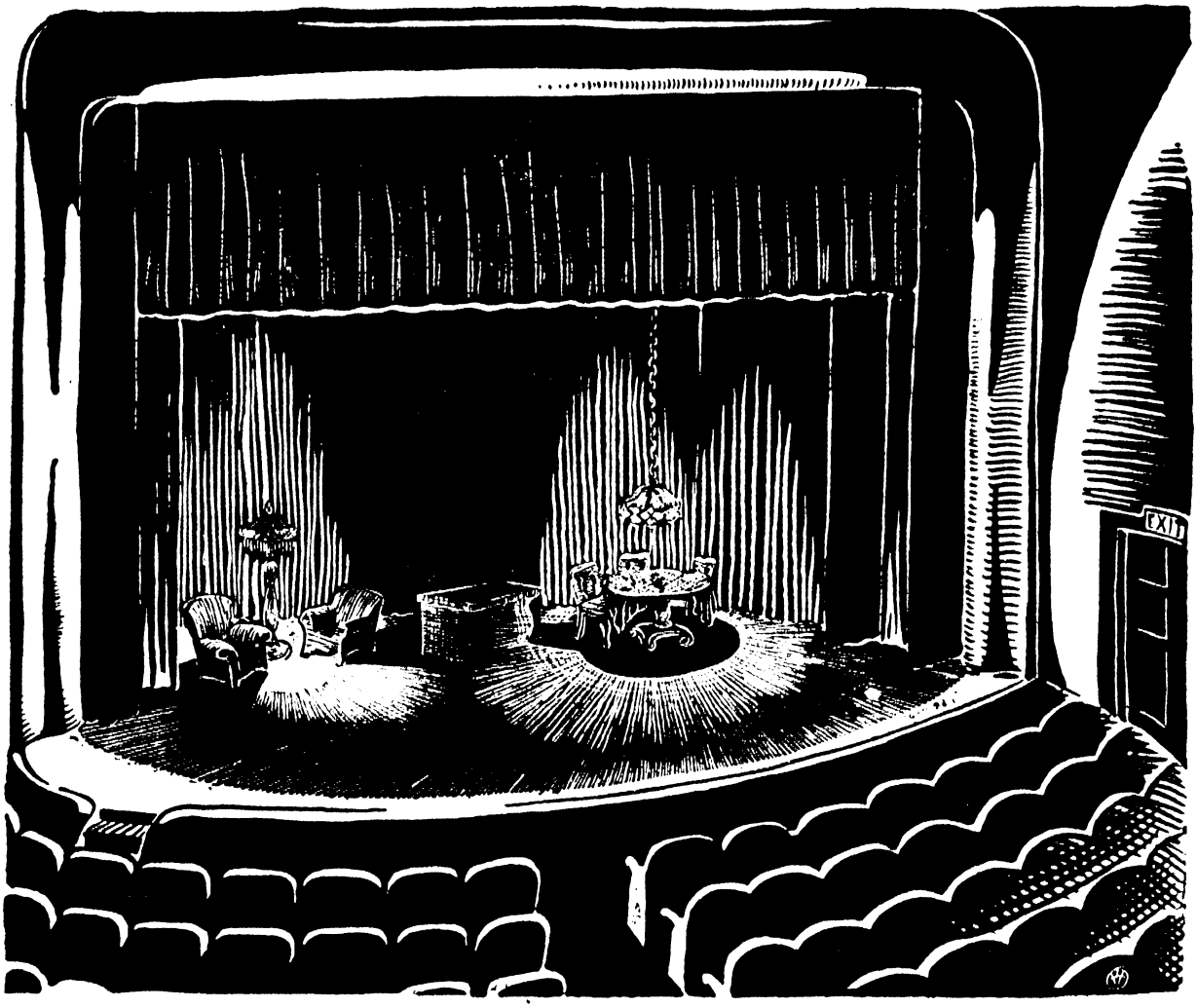
Roger: We'll be more comfortable in the dining-room.

Eugene: Anything suits me.

Roger: In here, please.

Eugene [*starts to go and remembers his manners*]: If you'll excuse, Mrs. Bloomer.

Mrs. Bloomer: Certainly.



ROGER *has turned on lights in dining-room.* EUGENE *sits down left of dining-room table, crossing his legs.*

Eugene [*as if he owned the place*]: Sit down! [ROGER *goes around the table, draws a chair to the corner of it and sits. In the sitting-room,* BLOOMER *continues to read his paper, occasionally coughing and clearing his throat.* MRS. BLOOMER *sews.* EUGENE *lights a cigarette.*]

Bloomer [*half to himself*]: H'm . . . someone his own age to tell him facts.

Mrs. Bloomer [*adjusting her glasses*]: What do you mean by facts?

Bloomer: H'm . . . things fellows that age talk about: baseball . . .

Mrs. Bloomer [*relieved*]: Ah . . .

Bloomer: Two boys figuring out the game! [*In the other room,* ROGER *and* EUGENE *are silent. Then* EUGENE *exclaims vigorously.*]

Eugene: Aw, come out of it!

Roger [*jumping up as if he had been stung*]: What did you come here for? I know when I'm being spied on.

Eugene: You're not being spied on, being educated.

Roger: You look at me like you hated me.

Eugene: I don't: it's you! think you're too good for me and the regular fellows! That won't get you anything at Yale! Buck up, be a man!

Roger: What does that mean? [EUGENE *blows smoke rings.*]

Eugene [*after an appropriate silence*]: Look at me!

Roger: I don't think so much of you.

Eugene: I've made good at college, I'm a big man. What are you? Nothing. You're going to get hell at college. If you go on like this they'll beat you up.

Roger: I can take a licking all right, but it's got to be from a better man than I am. [*They look at each other fixedly.*]

Mrs. Bloomer [*sleepily in the other room*]: It seems like a puzzle, doesn't it? They grow so quickly. Seems like yesterday he was learning to walk . . . tomorrow . . . ?

Bloomer [*grunting*]: H'm . . . tomorrow. . . .

Eugene [*rising*]: I didn't come here for this kind of argument. I'm here as a friend, honest. Will you listen? [ROGER *nods.*] Buck up and listen: College is a business proposition: athletics, competition, real life . . . you're a kid, you are! I'll tell you something that's worth money to you: *why* you go to college! To make friends,

that's why! Useful friends you can use all your life. Figure on it! Stick to the guys with money and an American name and you can't go wrong . . . that's life, isn't it?

Roger: Is that true, is that the secret?

Eugene: I've got big friends. I'm going to spend this summer in New York among millionaires.

Roger [*laughs*]: I wouldn't care so much for that.

Eugene: Wouldn't you? Nervous, eh! I know: College'll give you a new point of view, make you contented!

Roger: And if I don't want to be contented?

Eugene: Don't you know discontentment of any sort is unpatriotic: you love your country, don't you? You want to get on in these United States?

Roger: I do, I do!

Eugene: Well, college is your first step into the United States.

Roger: I hadn't thought of that.

Eugene: Look at me! Senior year, I'm sure of the best club. Simple rule: I always kept away from Jews, highbrows and guys that eat with their knives! You got a suspicion of highbrow yourself that'll kill you in college! . . . If you want friends—

Roger [*seizing* EUGENE's *arm*]: I never had a friend in my life! [*Pause.* EUGENE *looks at him curiously.*]

Eugene: What's bothering you? Cigarettes . . . coke, or women?

Roger [*rising, a gesture of defiance*]: Ah . . .

Eugene [*in placid comprehension*]: Ah! [*In the other room,* MR. *and* MRS. BLOOMER *have been sitting quietly by the lamp.* BLOOMER *folds his paper methodically and rises.*]

Mrs. Bloomer: I feel safer now. Roger's found a friend. [BLOOMER *yawns largely.*]

Bloomer: I'll be off to bed.

Mrs. Bloomer: Be sure to lock the windows. [*He goes.* MRS. BLOOMER *yawns and follows him.* BLOOMER *returns, puts out the drop-light and exits again. Meanwhile the conversation in the dining-room continues.*]

Eugene: I knew a kid freshman year used to talk like you.

Roger: What . . . what about him?

Eugene [*nonchalantly*]: Oh, he went bad . . . wild . . .

Roger: Wild?

Eugene: Pst! . . . smashed up in a motor with some women. [*Motioning toward right, discreetly*] Can they hear us?

Roger: Not a word. [*Looking at watch*] It's nine o'clock: they've gone to bed.

Eugene: Oh, I know: I see it in your eye!

Roger: What?

Eugene: You talk highbrow, but it isn't that . . . oh, it isn't the bean; it's inside!

Roger [*frightened*]: Inside!

Eugene: One of those softies that go straight to Hell with skirts.

Roger: Me? You can see that in me?

Eugene: What do you know about women?

Roger: I saw a burlesque show once, and I've got a copy of the *Police Gazette.*

Eugene: Experience is the only thing that counts.

Roger [*embarrassed*]: I never touched . . . I mean, touched . . . a girl . . .

Eugene: Don't get excited! Oh, you listen now . . . you're excited now! Women. . . . [*Pause.* ROGER *waits tensely, hands clenched.*] I'm not averse to that myself, but I keep my head, I go easy on it. There's a big difference between chasing chickens and pursuing select skirts. No champagne suppers for me! I've got lined up a couple of nice quiet girls that know just where to draw the line! Of course, it takes time and money to break 'em in, but it's worth it, boy, it's worth it . . . blondes by preference! Down to New Haven I got three or four that's worth loving! [*Pause*]

Roger: I shouldn't think you could love more than one.

Eugene: I mean loving in the strictly technical sense. It all depends how far she'll go. Last year I had a little factory girl . . . quiet, but wait till you get her in the dark. She married a butcher. This year I'm traveling with a society girl, a sort of society girl. . . . [*Reminiscently*] Passionate as a rabbit! I guess she takes on eight or ten of the boys a season.

Roger: Don't you mind?

Eugene: As long as it's good loving, what's the odds. One would never do for her, too passionate! Yet some way, just at the limit, she always draws the line—women are wonderful!

Roger: Then I should think I'd want one all to myself, very completely—

Eugene: You mean all night?

Roger: Longer . . . longer . . . loving, to know, to talk to—they . . . they must have souls!

Eugene [*sentimentally*]: Oh, I've had my dreams of a little girl strictly private . . .

Roger: You too? You've got dreams?

Eugene: There's nothing in that stuff—too European! It isn't safe.

Roger [*more to himself than* EUGENE]: Women must have souls!

Eugene: A guy soon finds out what's good for him. Two years ago I was just like you.

Roger: Then I shall be like you?

Eugene [*cordially*]: Here's hoping! Either that or you'll go wrong—

Roger: Then I'll go wrong, I will—

Eugene: You've got no self-control.

Roger: You don't understand what I mean. . . . I mean I want something, a dim passion!

Eugene: Come out of the trance, the séance is over.

Roger: I've made a fool of myself by telling you this.

Eugene: You'll make a fool of yourself a lot of times; none of my business.

Roger [*desperately*]: How should you know what I mean when I say passion—

Eugene: I know what you mean all right! If you go wild like that you'll smash up inside a year: Passion you call it! That's the bad thing: take your pleasure like a man safely: no regular man touches this passion stuff!

Roger [*accepting it*]: All right, for me then!

Eugene [*with nonchalance*]: They say there's a hundred thousand whores in New York . . . but I've only seen one or two. Ever seen a naked woman?

Roger: No.

Eugene: I have.

Roger [*in a whisper*]: Where?

Eugene: At a place. [EUGENE *rises and looks* ROGER *full in the face.*] For a kid, you got ambitious ideas!

Roger [*his voice trembling with an awful determination*]: I've told you, the whole hog or none for me in life!

Eugene: Hog is right! Don't do it, boy: I give you advice like a father now! Keep away from Sin: try the nice girls first, try a nice girl in the dark!

Roger: Nice girls here don't do those things.

Eugene: They don't advertise it. Just the same when I see a grass stain on one of those gingham dresses I know what I think.

Roger: What about your own sister?

Eugene [*firing up violently*]: You keep my sister out of it!

Roger [*excitedly*]: It's your sister I want. . . . I want the impossible, I want to change things, I want women's souls—and I'll never be satisfied with less . . . I swear. . . . Never!

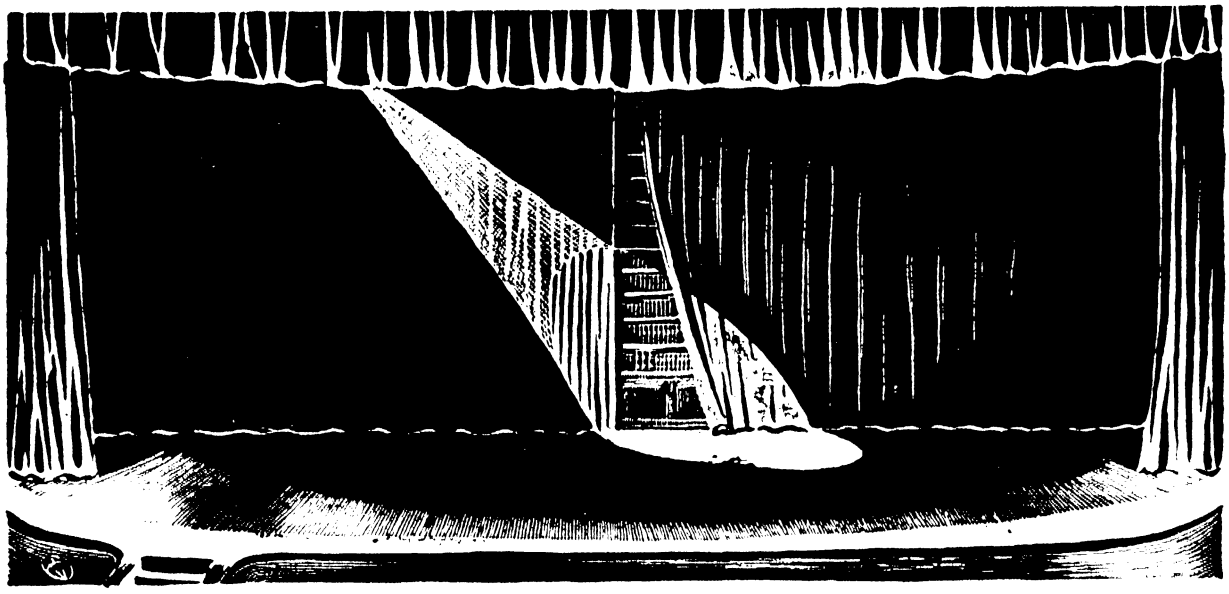
Eugene: I'm done with you then. Why, you're not even safe to talk to, can't talk like a gentleman.

Roger: Give me passion!

Eugene: Fool! Fool! Where will you end, on what ash-heap? I've done what I could, stay alone then with your passion. [EUGENE *goes.* ROGER *suddenly becomes perfectly stiff, thinking, hands clenched. Then he turns out light in dining-room, crosses stage in the pale gloom and opens the door of his room. Light comes from the opened door. He goes in and closes the door. In the darkness an oblique ray of light from above falls center on* ROGER. *Around him shadows. Near him the tail of a curtain, purple-blue covered with black symbols of monsters, trails on the fringe of the light.*]

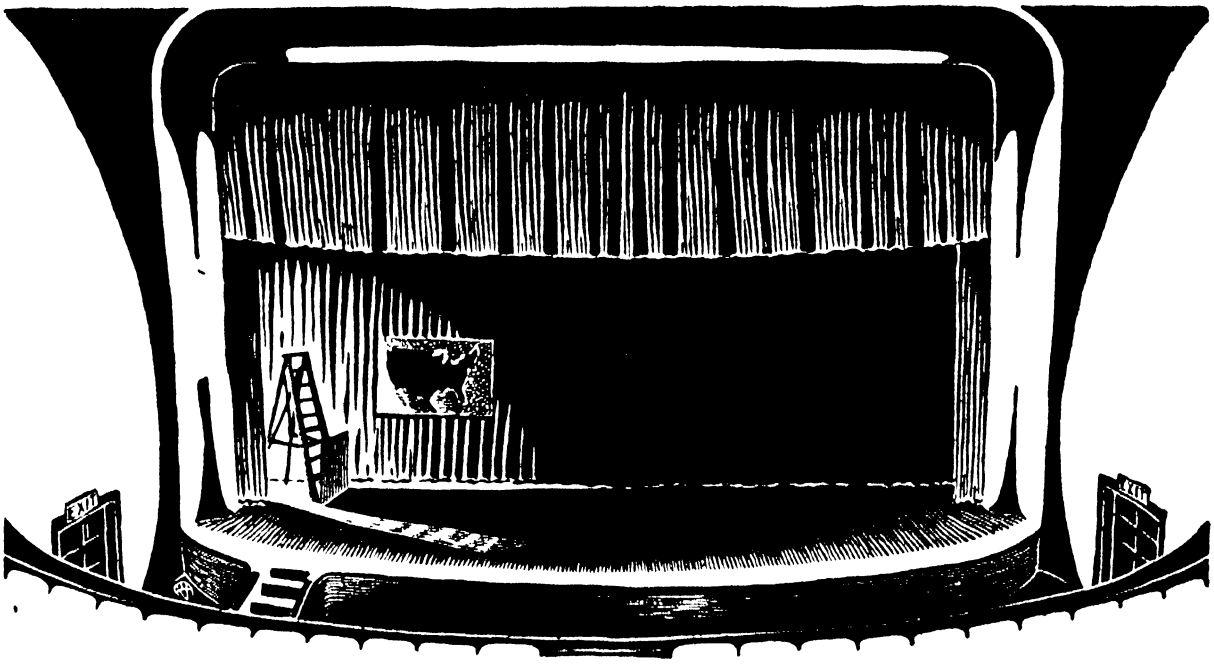
Roger: Alone with my passion! [*Slowly weighing his thoughts*] So that's it, that's what's in the hearts of these wise solid people that I fear so—and envy! They have everything, they have friends, while I stand alone, with my passion alone! asking my everlasting why! wanting to find out everything, to see, to know, to touch life, to lay both hands upon it as if it were a woman, crush it to me with my fingers in the warm flesh lovingly— [*He stands before the mysterious curtain spreading his arms wide.*] Life like a curtain before me, a curtain figured with beasts. You shake the cloth and they squirm strangely, but behind the curtain, behind, what mystical things? [*He starts to open it and retreats.*] I believe intensely that behind the curtain of life there is luminous purity, beauty . . . passionate beauty. [*Pause*] For I have accepted passion and my heart beats— I can't let myself go like this: if I shut my eyes my imagination is a mad horse trampling me down . . . the room is filled with ghosts and flame-like shadows, and I can see them with my eyes, cynical ghosts licking me with tiny tongues of flame. [*He moves about the room—suddenly stopping.*] That's white magic! And there's magic behind the curtain! Behind the curtain, a maiden with a dulcimer, rubies in her gold hair, her face pink, her arms pink, pink breasts bared to me—[*bitterly*] she too knowing just

where to draw the line— Come out to me, then, come out, whoever you are . . . magic girl, melting girl—



[*He throws the curtain (slightly open). Behind it, shelves upon shelves of books.*] So that's the end of magic . . . nothing but books, old books! I ask life for its secret and dusty books come to me grinning! Then help me, help me now when I need you . . . Shelley. . . . [*He picks the book from the shelf.*] Oh, there were others whose hearts were unquiet, fighting ghosts in the night . . . you and I, Shelley, you and I. . . . [*He opens the book.*] "Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun." . . . But I have a body— [*He feels his body all over with a tragic sense of flesh. Then he almost tears the book in a revulsion of feeling and throws it away laughing. He blows his nose healthily.*] I've got my health—away with ghosts—away. [*Waving them off*] I'm a man. It's poetry that gets me into trouble. Shelley knew nothing. Shelley was pure spirit. Shelley never read the *Police Gazette!* [*From behind the shelves he draws out a copy of the* Police Gazette.] That's healthy anyway; it's full of prize fighters and girls— [*He turns over the pages eagerly.*] Girls waving their legs and sticking out their stomachs, and fat, strong, naked men— Maybe I could be a prize fighter— [*Feeling his muscles thoughtfully. Finding something in the magazine*] "Loss of Will!" What is the will of man? "Loss of Manhood." My God, what is manhood, how do you lose it? . . . Manhood— [*Slapping his chest*] That's me, that's me— [*Finding something new in the magazine*] "Life's secret, physiology of Sex!" [*He gasps.*] "Seventy-five pages in plain envelope." That's how my

father and mother made me— [*A grim bitter smile*] Surely there was no hot flesh, no fevered reaching in that . . . but like the dinner table, with a little talk of the weather and the high cost of living, calmly . . . calmly . . . and yet from them I came . . . my hot flesh was born! Myself, against all these generations, I mocking, asking . . . red with fever tossing in the night . . . alone till the dawn brings laughter. . . . I myself, fighting my body, denying my body . . . a man is made out of flesh and passion! All right. . . . Come on, you damned ghosts, come on, you laughing shadows, I'm strong and alone, and somehow . . . I'll beat you yet! [*Total darkness.*]



In a long curtained room the COLLEGE EXAMINER *sits at a desk on a raised dais. He is a little gray man in flowing black collegiate robes lined with purple; a fantastic figure; on his owl-like head a mortar board. He sits on a throne-like chair. On the wall behind him an enormous map of the United States.* EXAMINER'S *dais occupies space at extreme right where* BLOOMER *sitting-room had been. This change of furniture behind curtains, substituting* EXAMINER'S *dais for library table, is the only change of set required in the course of Act I.*

(*The* EXAMINER *sits on an ordinary stepladder, about four feet above the floor, a black masking piece—velvet on a frame—in front of him; only prop the brightly colored map of the United States hung on a black curtain behind him.*)

[ROGER *enters left, and slowly crosses stage to the* EXAMINER'S *desk, papers in his hand.*]

Examiner [*looking up, kindly but brisk*]: You can't be through yet, you've only been writing an hour.

Roger: I'm not through, but—

Examiner: Address me as Mr. Examiner.

Roger: Mr. Examiner—

Examiner: What's that in your hand?

Roger: It's my College Entrance Examination in American History: I can't go on!

Examiner: What?

Roger: I can't . . . for four days, I've been sitting here writing, gathering my thoughts—I'm going mad, I have no thoughts—

Examiner: What's your name?

Roger: Roger Bloomer.

Examiner: Age?

Roger: Eighteen.

Examiner [*leaning over desk and waving a long ruler as if it were a weapon*]: Nerves! What's the use of nerves? I haven't any nerves—

Roger: I can't go on.

Examiner: Then you can't go to college.

Roger: I've been writing, writing . . . Latin . . . French and geometry—I don't know what's true and what's false.

Examiner: That happens: put your head in cold water and then go on.

Roger: I can't, I won't!

Examiner [*rising majestically*]: Are you a man? [*He waves long ruler at map of the United States.*] All over the United States today boys are sitting at desks, answering, getting on, into college and on . . .

Roger: Lies! They're telling lies—

Examiner: I'm authority here: as a Supreme Court Judge sits at his desk, I sit at mine! This is the climax of your youth and you funk it, you come to me in a state of nerves: haven't you any Will? Haven't you any Manhood?

Roger: What is the Will of Man?

Examiner: Obedience and competitive ambition. Stop and think: College is your first step into the United States and you begin by defying authority. Take that examination and write it like a man.

[ROGER *stands stiff, looking fixedly at the* EXAMINER *and shakes his head.*]

Roger: I can refuse, I am able to refuse!

Examiner: Where will you end in life if you start like this?

Roger: How do I know? There are so many people in black sitting on thrones, so many judges! They crammed my head full of lies to write an examination paper—I can't do it! I can't remember the lies! [*He turns away.*]

Examiner [*in magisterial fashion*]: This is definitive: leave this room and your chance of college ends: Never again! [ROGER *turns and tears his paper into bits.*]

Roger: There, then: it's lies, full of lies!

Examiner: Is this our young manhood, eh? Is this America in the making? Anarchical, absolutely anarchical! We won't have emotions here. [*Pause. He looks at* ROGER *fixedly.*] Is this a defiance? [ROGER *nods and returns the* EXAMINER'S *fixed look.*] I shall remember this if we meet again! Defiance! Get out then . . . very quietly. . . .

The store is in full swing. BLOOMER *at his desk in the private office.* LOUISE *and the* OTHER SALESGIRL *behind the notions counter, right.*

Louise: I can't stand this a minute longer.

Other Salesgirl: They all say that—

Louise [*her violence increasing*]: My God, but I'm sick of everything! [*She brushes her hand across the counter violently.*]

Other Salesgirl [*grabbing her arm firmly*]: Careful! [LOUISE *falls across the counter sobbing. At the same moment, enter* ROGER *right in great excitement. The* OTHER SALESGIRL *nervously pats* LOUISE'S *head.*] Don't . . . don't . . . don't . . . don't!

Roger: What's that? She? Is she crying?

Other Salesgirl: I don't know. [*A tremor of sobbing shakes* LOUISE'S *whole body. The* OTHER SALESGIRL *is apologetic.*] Maybe she's tired: it's the spring.

Roger: Me too. . . . [*He pulls himself together and goes into his father's office.*]

Other Salesgirl: Careful, dearie, you'll get the hair-nets wet. [*The exterior lights fade, leaving* BLOOMER'S *office alone visible.*]

Roger [*in the inner office*]: I'm all in, dad, I'm done.

Bloomer [*in the office, calmly*]: Anything important? [ROGER *is silent.*] Out with it, I'm a busy man.

Roger: Not going to college, that's all, I'm done with it.

Bloomer [*pointing angrily to chair*]: Sit down there, sit down! What's wrong with you?

Roger: I sassed the Examiner, got thrown out of the examining room.

Bloomer: What'll your mother say?

Roger: I told her. She cried.

Bloomer: And doesn't that mean anything to you, to make your mother cry, at her age?

Roger: I can't help it.

Bloomer: Can't you help anything? Can't you be a man? [*Pause.* ROGER'S *hands twist on the sunlit desk.*] I asked you a question.

Roger: What's being a man?

Bloomer: Not to be afraid, I'd say.

Roger: I'm not afraid.

Bloomer: Eh . . . ?

Roger: I wasn't afraid of the Examiner, I sassed him—I'm not afraid of you!

Bloomer: Go on, sass me!

Roger: I've got to get away: if I could travel . . .

Bloomer: Travel! [*He laughs with genuine amusement.*] Do you think you're a young duke?

Roger: I can't stay here, I need to move.

Bloomer: This is a live city, there's plenty of movement right here.

Roger: I know this place, I know the streets, faces: I want what I don't know.

Bloomer: You don't know what you want! Too much alone! It's no good. I know that, though you may think I'm a fool.

Roger: You're right, dad.

Bloomer: Oh, you do think I'm a fool?

Roger: No, you're right about being alone. That's why I want to get out among people.

Bloomer: There's thirty thousand people here.

Roger [*sitting down exhausted*]: I can't make you see.

Bloomer: See what?

Roger: The splendor of strange places.

Bloomer [*with a chuckle*]: Bagdad, eh?

Roger: Why not? [*The only answer is a grunt.*] That's in my head, Bagdad and all the other places.

Bloomer: You'll stick right here, face the music here.

Roger: Will I? You may wake up in the morning to find me gone! [*The stenographer enters.*]

Bloomer: Well, Emma?

Emma: One of the salesgirls is waiting to see you, sir.

Bloomer: Send her in when I ring. [*Exit* EMMA. ROGER *moves as if to go.*] No, no! Wait. [*Seriously he leans over* ROGER, *patting his shoulder.*] Life is not an illustrated edition of the Arabian Nights.

Roger: I don't know what life is: I want to find out, face it . . . the whole hog.

Bloomer: What's that about a hog? Make friends, mix with boys your own age, you'll learn from them—

Roger: A lot of dirty stories.

Bloomer: All right. What do you suppose I listen to at the club once a week? Same stories! And I laugh; yes, and they're telling those same dirty stories right now in Bagdad. Because Bagdad is just like little old Iowa, except it smells worse because the sewerage is rotten. [*He rings bell on his desk.* LOUISE *enters. She stands meekly before* BLOOMER *who looks her over from head to foot.*] Well?

Louise: I want to resign.

Bloomer: Without notice in advance?

Louise: Right away.

Bloomer: Why?

Louise [*smiling wanly with a puzzled gesture*]: Tired. [BLOOMER *looks at his watch.*]

Bloomer: Four-forty. [*He scribbles on a piece of paper.*] Here's an order for your pay up to four-forty-five.

Louise: Thanks. [*She starts to go.*]

Bloomer: Come back here. Are you under the impression that you haven't been paid enough?

Louise: It's not much, but I'd say at that it was more than I deserved.

Bloomer: Then why quit? Cultivate habits of industry and earn more pay. [LOUISE *laughs unexpectedly.*]

Louise: What would I have at the end of a year? A dollar a week raise and consumption. . . . I'm too proud! You and your store ain't worth it. [*Raising both her hands against him defiantly.*] Don't start asking me questions or I might tell you what I think, 'cause I'm so tired. . . . [*She goes out with real dignity.* BLOOMER *turns on* ROGER *with great energy.*]

Bloomer: Life! There's life for you. That girl goes out of here to starvation and the gutter—why? Because she won't put up with things like they are . . . nervous, something different!

Roger [*thinking*]: There's life for you.

Bloomer: I can't help her. . . . Sorry, but I can't. But it's life before your eyes, you can't beat it in Bagdad. [*Pause*] Can't you learn a lesson?

Roger: Slowly, slowly I learn things. . . . Good-by, dad. [ROGER *exits. Enter* EMMA *with papers.*]

Bloomer: Emma, am I an old man?

Emma: Oh, no, sir.

Bloomer: You're wrong. I'm old and I'm feeble. [*Motioning her away*] Take away the papers. Not now. . . . [*He sits down.* EMMA *retires astonished.*]

Before the Outer Curtain.

[*Enter* LOUISE, *right. She takes off her hat, breathes the air with a deep relief.* ROGER *enters right.*]

Roger: Thank God I've found you.

Louise: Can't you leave me in peace in the sunshine?

Roger: I am Roger Bloomer, son of Everett Bloomer. I followed you from my father's office.

Louise: What do you do?

Roger: I chase rainbows . . . and you!

Louise: Me, I'm no rainbow.

Roger: Yes, you are, because my desire followed you, followed you—

Louise [*frightened*]: What?

Roger: There's something between us. We both hate my father.

Louise: Do you hate him?

Roger: Two years ago I cried with loving him. Now all that's turned to dust . . . but there's something else.

Louise: What is it?

Roger [*dreamily*]: Never to be satisfied with things as they are . . . nervous. . . . [*She is silent, uncertain.* ROGER *goes on desperately.*] When you went out of my father's office just now, something in me answered your feeling . . . a burning sensation more than tears! For the first time in my life I heard a despairing cry, like children being born, like . . . [LOUISE *gives a short sob, dabbing at her eyes.*] It's true, it's true!

Louise: What?

Roger: We answered each other: wanting something just out of sight, just around the corner!

Louise [*facing him*]: What's in your head?

Roger: Don't go back on me. Do you think it was easy to follow you like this? attack you—

Louise: Attack is right, it's an attack all right!

Roger: I've come to you like this straight out, asking you . . . wanting—

Louise: Wanting, eh? What do you suppose I want, I . . . a girl?

Roger: Answer me, tell me! You've got to now!

Louise: Don't get excited—

Roger: I will be excited—I will find life, find it where it hides, take life for what it's worth. . . . I followed you because you went out of my father's office wearing life like a cloak around you—

Louise: Go away from me, go away— [*They are at steps, left. She goes to center of stage.* ROGER *goes down steps, standing center in orchestra beneath stage at her feet.*]

Roger: Tell me what you want! Is it love? Is it?

Louise: Love! It's a swell fake, love is! You see with a girl, she either does or she don't. . . . Love, if you want to be cute and call it that, don't bother me a bit. Oh, if there were only that to bother about!

Roger: Oh, but I do, I bother about it quite a lot.

Louise: If you'd ever been hungry, you'd know how little difference men and women make—those things aren't clean!

Roger: Ah . . .

Louise: They mean nothing to me but disgust! *You* disgust me with that little look of curiosity. . . . Oh, you're a man, it's in the blood! It's been like that always, men trying to get away with something, women keeping cool and saying No: that's all there is to this here pure love! A woman saying No till the man gets sore and marries her!

Roger: Sometime it'll hit you . . . Love, whatever you call it!

Louise: Me, as you see me now standing in front of you, I'd rather die than let a man have me, married or any other way, so help me God! Never! Never! Never!—Remember that!

Roger: That's awful.

Louise: It's me! . . . I hate it, I tell you, I hate it.

Roger: Almost seems like hating life itself.

Louise: I do! I refuse! [*Pause.* ROGER *sits on steps, right.*]

Roger [*dreamily*]: Never to be satisfied with things as they are, wanting something different: and my father said, that means starvation, the gutter—

Louise [*coming nearer to him*]: You're in the magazine section, turn over to the comic page.

Roger: I can't forget it, because there in a flash, like in a moving picture theatre, I saw you against my father . . . you against the others . . . you against the wise people, splendidly foolish! That's unforgettable, that is! [*Pause*] Here we are, you and me in Iowa!

Louise: It's a dead hole.

Roger: But just over the hill there's Bagdad, Samarcand and Bessarabia.

Louise: Never heard of 'em, but every place is dead, every place is lonely, hating alone—and just the same you've got to move, because there's something in you that says: Move! Move! [*She opens her vanity case, straightening her hat, etc.*] So it's New York, it's New York next!

Roger [*awed*]: You're going to New York? That's magnificent, that is.

Louise: Don't fool yourself. You're a dreamy kid, dream till your mouth is full of sand! I've got money enough for the train; New York's the same as here. I've got an aunt there that I hate, it'll be lonely, hating alone!

Roger: Me too, me for New York!

Louise [*hastily, excited*]: Don't do it, dreamy kid, hold onto what you've got, love your family.

Roger: That's not love, maybe there's love in New York!

Louise: Humph!

Roger: I'll find out, find life where it hides, I will . . .

Louise: What is it that makes us wild? What is it? Oh, if I could just sit here, smelling the smell of flowers . . .

Roger: But more flowers, stranger smells . . . the desire of the world upon me, to bury myself in apple blossoms, to melt into the sun like a bird, to wear a dress suit on Broadway. . . . [*The scene has grown darker. A red gold light from the setting sun.*]

Louise: The sun is setting.

Roger: Give me your address in New York, we'll see what luck brings to you and to me!

Louise: What luck! [*She silently takes a slip of paper from vanity case and writes on it.*] My address in New York.

Roger: I'll take some of my father's money: he owes me that—and be off chasing destinies.

Louise: New York'll kill you . . . you can't stand it, it'll kill you, honest!

Roger: Ah, but to die like the sun in red splendor! [*They go to opposite sides of the stage.*]

Louise: Good-by. . . . Luck!

Roger: Luck to you! [*They raise their hands and go.*]

Evening. An oblique ray of moonlight shines on the exterior of an open window with lace curtains. The window is two feet above the ground. The shade is drawn. Inside a light. This window is set in curtains center, in front of space occupied by BLOOMER'S *office at the store. A figure comes to the window, silhouetted stoutly for a moment, then raises the shade. It is* BLOOMER.

Bloomer: There's heat lightning in the air. . . . Bad. . . . Roger, come here, Roger. Take a look at that sky. [ROGER *joins him at the window.*]

Roger: Pretty moon, eh, dad?

Bloomer: You can't buy it or sell it, what's the good of it? [*He looks at his watch.*] Nine o'clock. Ask your mother if she wants to go up to bed.

Roger [*turning into room*]: Mother. [MRS. BLOOMER *comes near the window, peeking around her husband's shoulder.*]

Mrs. Bloomer: Is there going to be a storm tonight, Everett?

Bloomer: H'mm . . . little storm . . . [ROGER *beside his mother,* MRS. BLOOMER *takes an arm of each.*]

Mrs. Bloomer [*in her twittering voice*]: I'm almost glad you're not going to college, Roger. It keeps the three of us together, that's nice, isn't it? The three of us together.

Roger: Yes, mother. [ROGER *goes away from the window.*]

Mrs. Bloomer: So there's going to be a storm. Then close the window carefully.

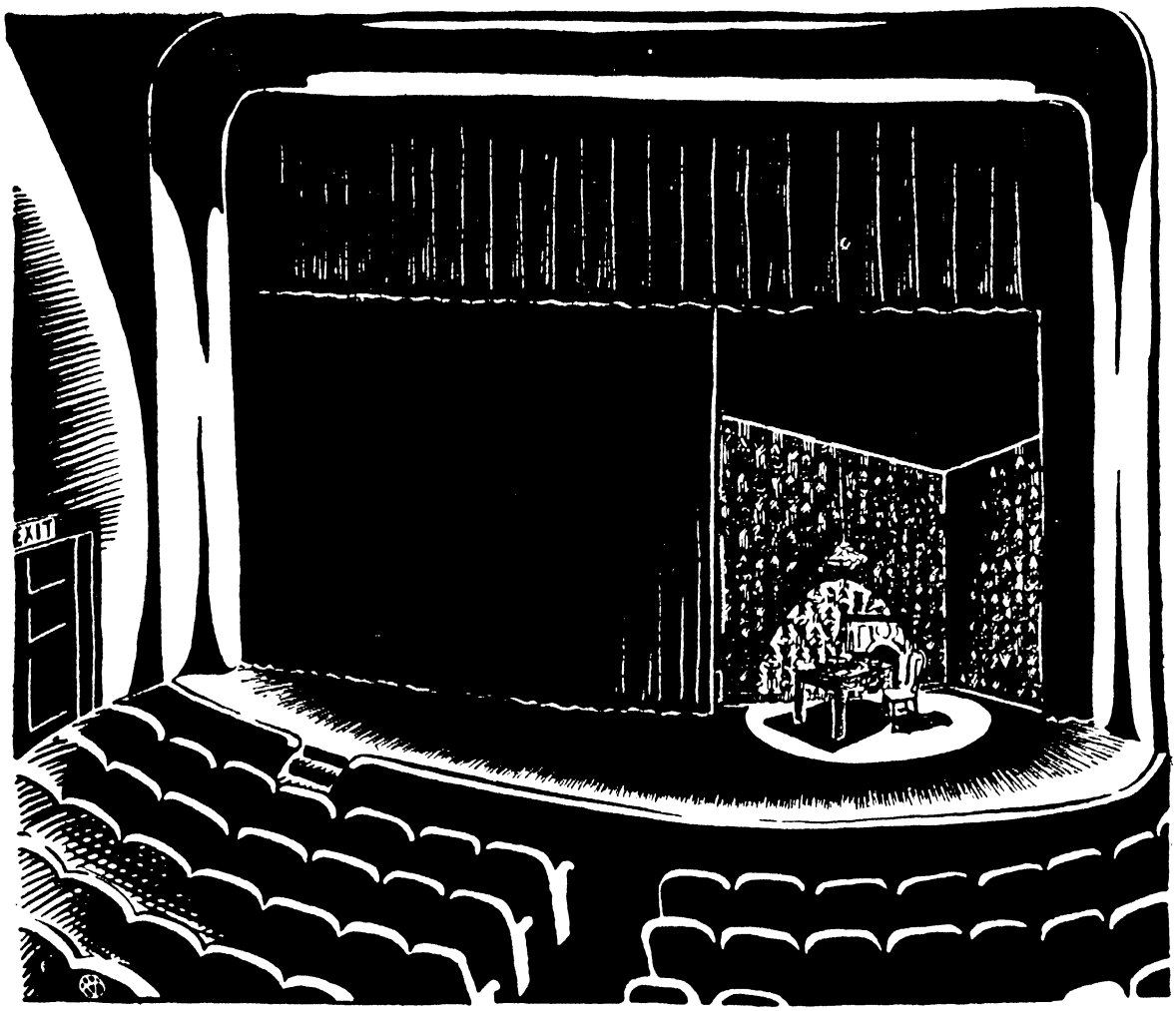
Bloomer: I always close the window carefully. [*He does so. Then he draws the shade. The light is turned off inside. After a moment,* ROGER *throws open the window. He climbs out carrying hat, coat and small bag. He shakes his fist at the house, for there is no sentiment in his going, but a sullen anger. Stirred by the wind, the lace curtains flap out white in the moonlight.* ROGER *moves into shadow. For a moment his raised clenched hand is still visible in the moonlight. The wind increases. A cloud obscures the moon. Absolute darkness. Silence. Then the long whistle of a train in the night.*]

[*Curtain*]

ACT II

New York

The Outer Curtain of Act II is gray, blotched with great masses of houses, geometrical and perpendicular tumbled magnificently, an impression of New York.



The curtain opens on a boarding-house room: a mantel, a table and garish wall paper. A pathetic mess of papers on the table. At it, his back to the light which gilds his shoulders and reflects his shadow on wall, sits ROGER. *His collar soiled, hair unkempt.*

Behind him, enters a FAT LANDLADY, *looking very much as if she were a piece of the wall paper come to life. A loose garish dress under which her big flabby breasts shake like jellies. About her the general greasiness of a frumpy kitchen. A languishing quality in her broken voice. She carries a duster. She looks at* ROGER, *arms akimbo. She begins dusting all around him. Then, surprised at his*

not noticing her, she tickles the back of his head with the duster. He turns, she steps back grandly and they stare at one another.

Landlady: I bet you ain't got the price of a piece of bread.

Roger: I have a little money still, and I've paid for the room another week in advance, haven't I?

Landlady: Poor boy! You young an' no mother, a boy without a mother, alone in New York, that touches the heart.

Roger: I have a mother . . . at home!

Landlady: Long way off, ain't it?

Roger: Iowa.

Landlady: An' you here alone.

Roger: It's a month now.

Landlady: I s'pose you're writin' to your mother now, writin' for money, I s'pose. [*She picks up a piece of paper on the table.*]

Roger: No, you don't, don't touch it, keep away.

Landlady: Wha'd'you sit here writin' for, all day long?

Roger: I'm writing things very important and personal, things essential to me.

Landlady: My Gawd, are you an anarchist?

Roger: These are poems.

Landlady: Poems, me eye! [*She laughs coarsely and sits with her legs wide apart, shaking like a jelly.*] Aw, now, read us a bit!

Roger [*desperately*]: Leave me alone, I'm fighting something alone . . . fighting!

Landlady: Is that your poem? [ROGER, *staring straight in front of him, nods.*]

Roger: That's my poem.

Landlady: Lonely?

Roger: Lonely . . . no, I guess that's not it.

Landlady: You don't get away with your bluff very well.

Roger: I'm not bluffing.

Landlady: Everybody in this burg is bluffin' . . . you a man! You're just a homesick kid, dead homesick, ready to cry, huh? [*She pats his cheek with her greasy hand.*]

Roger: Awfully nice of you.

Landlady: I could be a mother to you, come to the kitchen an' have some cabbage.

Roger: I . . . I mean, why should you treat me like this?

Landlady: 'Cause I'm lonely too . . . 'tain't all roses in a boarding house, I may be fat but what about my mother's heart! A pure kid like you hits me right in the heart, that's where you

hit me. [*She indicates her capacious bosom.*] Feel! [*He touches her gingerly and removes his hand.*] Feel again! Pure! That's what I like about you, 'cause I know you'll understand, like a mother talkin'. . . . [*She sits in an inviting attitude.*] Some men if you talk friendly wants to jump on you an' do somethin' bad before you could say boo . . . you ain't like that, you take things friendly, gradual-like.

Roger: So that's it.

Landlady: I could teach you things, stick to the fat ones, you can't go wrong!

Roger [*turning from her*]: Is this what I came for, is this passion?

Landlady: What's that?

Roger: I was just thinking, New York's different from what I expected.

Landlady: You thought there'd be women with diamonds askin' you to sit on their knees! Better take what you can get. [*She laughs coarsely.*] Don't you never laugh?

Roger: Not since I came to New York.

Landlady: In this town we take what we can get, we ain't so skittish here as where you come from. Sit here [*she indicates her knee*] an' kiss me!

Roger: I'd as soon kiss a horse.

Landlady [*rising in majestic rage*]: Wha'd'you mean, you little whippersnapper, you! 'Cause I treat you like a mother, you think I'm after somethin' wrong with you—an' if I was—[*pausing for breath*]—if I was, you think I'd ask you, why, I'd walk in an' take you in your bed like you'd crack a nut, an' it would be done that job before you could whisper mamma. . . . [ROGER *has been gathering up his poems from table and putting them in his pockets.*] An' I got half a mind to do it now, just to learn you what you'd oughter know.

Roger: For God's sake, let me out.

Landlady: Aw, that gets your nerve, that shows you. [ROGER *circles. She pursues him with duster. By-play.*]

Roger: Let me out.

Landlady: Why should I, huh, why should I?

Roger [*face to face with the panting woman, suddenly laughs*]: But you're being foolish, don't you know you're being foolish—you've made me laugh. [LANDLADY *suddenly collapses like a blown*

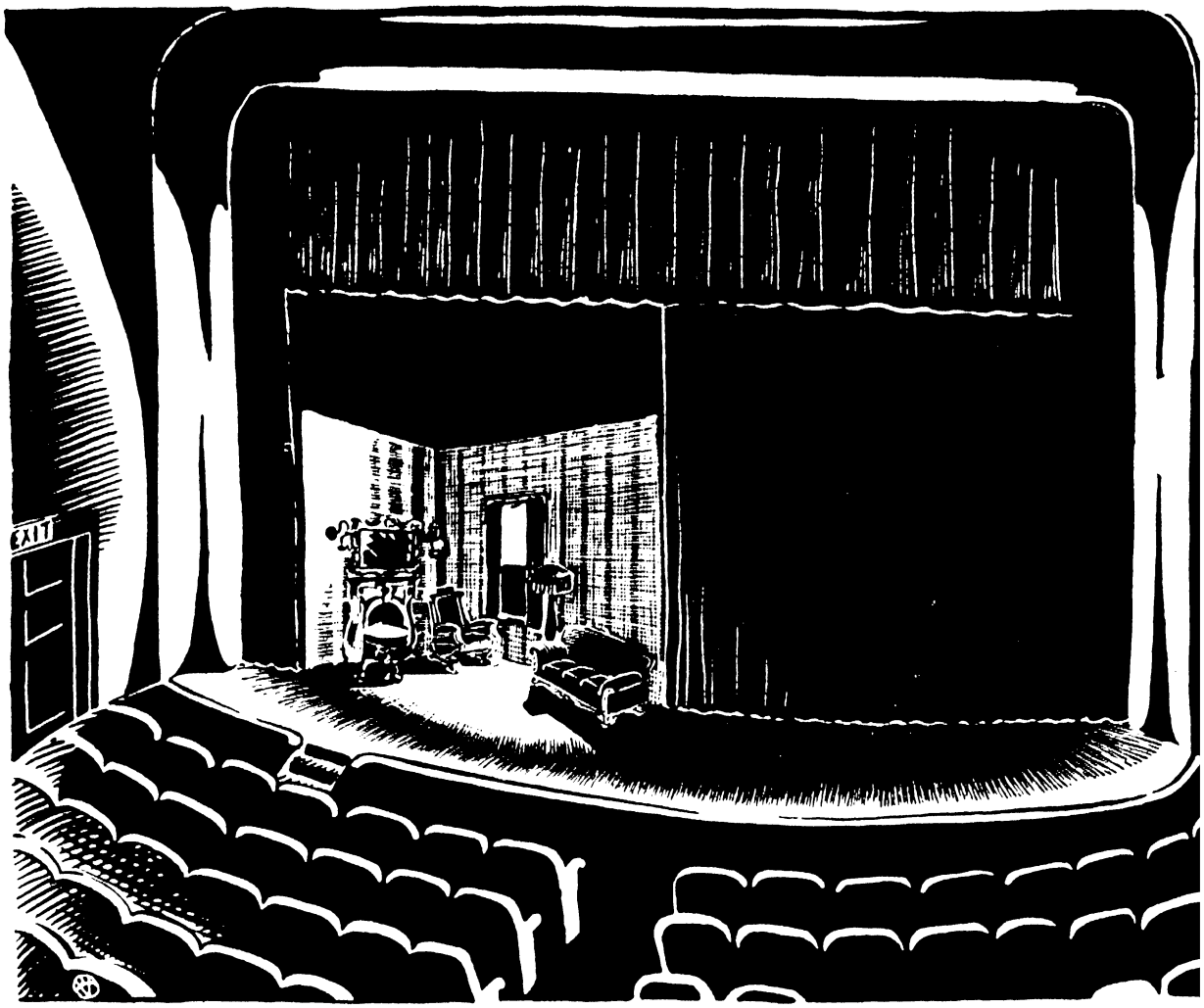
Landlady [*sitting, touched*]: That's true, that's true.

Roger: What's the use of making things worse by cutting up rough—I can't give you what you want, try the iceman!

Landlady: I have tried him! You don't know what it is to be a widow with an unquenched heart.

Roger: I'll send for my suitcase.

Landlady: Go on, go out in the street, boy, you'll be back in a week askin' to sit on my knee! You can't stand New York, it'll get you, mind, kill you, mind! You're too skittish for New York! [ROGER *goes,* LANDLADY *continues emotionally.*] Don't forget . . . don't forget the old girl with the mother's heart! [*Outer Curtain closes on her.*]



The flat where LOUISE *lives with her aunt. The sort of mantelpiece that grows in cheap flats. Under it gas logs not lighted. Over it a mirror. In front of it a table. At rear a window, at the left an old couch. A sweet old lady with white hair sits by window in the gloaming.*

[*Enter* LOUISE. *She lights electric lamps with green shades on either side of mantel. She takes off her hat tiredly.*]

Louise: Hello, auntie, isn't it awful hot?

Miss Burns: I just been sitting here in the gloaming thinking about God.

Louise [*gives a short laugh and sits down*]: I been working at the office for our bread and butter.

Miss Burns: God's ways are inscrutable.

Louise [*sarcastic*]: Yes, they are! It's late. [MISS BURNS *rises.*]

Miss Burns: Supper's on the fire. [*Doorbell rings.*] Sit still, dearie, I'll go. [MISS BURNS *goes.*]

Roger's Voice [*off stage*]: I must see her, I must. . . . [*And* MISS BURNS' *voice protesting.* ROGER *pushes* MISS BURNS *before him.* ROGER *and* LOUISE *stand facing each other.*]

Roger [*twisting hat in hand, his voice trembling with emotion*]: You remember me . . . well, I've come to you . . .

Louise: Springtime in Iowa and the apple blossoms were like snow.

Roger: And you said, if you go to New York, you'll die, you said. . . . I've come, I've come alone . . . but you were right.

Louise: You're not dead.

Roger [*smiling*]: Pretty near.

Louise: Oh, so am I, near enough. We, none of us, keeps more'n a stone's throw ahead of . . . it.

Miss Burns: Ahead of what?

Roger: Death.

Miss Burns: Oh, that frightens a body!

Louise: This is my aunt, Miss Burns.

Roger: Guess I frightened you, ma'am.

Miss Burns: Small wonder, you've got a look.

Louise: Hungry! I know that look, I'll get you some bread and butter till dinner's ready.

Roger: Thanks. [LOUISE *goes.*]

Miss Burns: So you knew Louise out to Iowa?

Roger [*impulsively, coming close to her*]: You're like the people out in Iowa, kind and simple. I didn't know people were like that in New York.

Miss Burns: You talk like a decent clean young boy. [MISS BURNS *putters about, putting tablecloth and dishes on table.*]

Roger: Thank you, ma'am.

Miss Burns: Take heed in this city, there's dangers here. I hope you love your mother.

Roger: Why do you say that?

Miss Burns: If you love your mother, you're safe at the ends of the earth, isn't it so?

Roger: My mother looks something like you, ma'am.

Miss Burns: That's good, to be told I'm like a boy's mother, that makes it worth while.

Roger: What?

Miss Burns: I'm a maiden lady, Miss Burns is the name, *Miss* Burns.

Roger: Yes, ma'am. [LOUISE *returns with bread and butter on a plate.* ROGER *eats eagerly like one in great hunger.*]

Louise: Look after the dinner, will you, auntie. I want to talk to my friend.

Miss Burns: He says I look like his mother. [LOUISE *laughs an unexpected bitter laugh.*]

Roger: Yes, indeed.

Miss Burns: I know what it means, the old caring for the young in the rough places, I've tried to be a mother to Louise. [*She exits.* LOUISE *comes nearer to* ROGER.]

Louise: What do you want of me now?

Roger: Remember that afternoon?

Louise: Do I? Ask me!

Roger: The sun setting and the portent of disaster.

Louise: But nothing happened, nothing ever happens.

Roger: You stood on a long road and you had the sun perched red on your shoulder, you cried out loud—

Louise: Aw, don't—

Roger: You said, I'm tired, I hate life. . . . Now I've come, now I know what you meant.

Louise: What does that matter now? This isn't Iowa . . . this is little old New York. . . . Aren't the buildings high?

Roger: Immense.

Louise: Made of stone . . . it's not like a dusty road with Bagdad just over the hill.

Roger: No, not here.

Louise: I been here long enough to get the habit. Right off the bat I got a good job . . . luck! I run to the subway every morning. If I'm two minutes late I lose my job, then I starve.

Roger: It's like a nightmare in the streets, millions hurrying, diving into the pit of the subway . . . blind . . .

Louise: They're not blind, they see their bread and butter—so it's hurry, hurry. . . .

Roger: Makes me feel like a ghost.

Louise: Me too . . . two ghosts of springtime.

Roger: Once you taught me what hating is. What can you teach me now? Here in the city of Hate?

Louise: I been thinking since I came to New York! there's one thing that beats out Hate, sets you above tiredness—Money! This town makes you think . . . Money!

Roger: Why should you worry about that? You're not alone like me; you've got a home.

Louise: You call this home? That old woman, if you knew how I hate her. . . . I don't say anything, try to be nice, I haven't busted out . . . not yet . . . but some day, oh, I might kill her—

Roger: Why?

Louise: She's old and sweet, she's got an old head full of musty, dusty things . . . what are those things to me? She's against me, she hates me, and she's sentimental!

Roger: She said a mother to you—

Louise: She lives off me if that's what you mean. She hasn't got a cent, and with all that she's superstitious, thinks there's angels and demons over her bed at night.

Roger: Maybe there are.

Louise: I'd like to catch an angel snooping around my bed! She dreams dreams, and she figures them out this way, that way for days—that's not healthy in these hard times.

Roger: She belongs to other softer times.

Louise: Not me! I hate old soft people. Her head's full of proverbs and deaths—am I to be dragged to my grave by her memories? I hate everyone. . . . I hate my own mother that's dead.

Roger: Lives separate, lives come together, no one knows why! [*Pause*] You said you had a good job.

Louise: Swell! I started as a sort of office girl, assistant to the Boss's stenographer . . . big broker on Wall Street. But the Boss took to me, he took one squint at me and he says, that girl is executive . . . me executive! He raised me two bucks per week. Now I run the files in the private office.

Roger: They treat you well?

Louise: Yes, the Boss is white all right, free lunch! Why, they

give you a medical examination once a week as if you was a prize horse. Honest, it's an elegant job.

Roger: Then you're happy, aren't you?

Louise: Hunger's more'n bread and butter, it's all the pretty things, it's money! I tell you, it's money. Listen, kid, lonely kid, what'll you do?

Roger: Oh, I'm all right.

Louise: I ain't so sure.

Roger: I'll try to get a job.

Louise: It's everyone for himself in this town.

Roger: Maybe I'll get rich.

Louise: That's it, heads up! Maybe I could get you a job in my office, swell office, mahogany and all.

Roger: Why should you do that?

Louise: Them that's seen despair together must stand by each other. You must come, get in the crowd, get in the subway, get in the procession.

Roger: Where does that lead?

Louise: Lead! It's a kind of a dance of death. . . . [MISS BURNS *enters carrying baked beans and one boiled potato apiece. She hastily sets another place.* LOUISE *puts her fingers on her lips.*]

Miss Burns: Of course you'll share our humble meal.

Louise: Of course.

Roger: Thanks, hungry . . . thanks. [*The two take their places, one on either side of* MISS BURNS *who stands.*]

Miss Burns: Our Holy Father and Lord Jesus, bless the bread which we are about to break in humbleness! Bless this young woman and this young man, humbly content with Thy strange ways, asking no impossible favors, unworthily craving Thy grace. . . . Amen.

Before the Outer Curtain.

[ROGER *and* LOUISE *are on their way to the Office.*]

Louise: The big boss is going to see you himself. Tell him you've had a little experience.

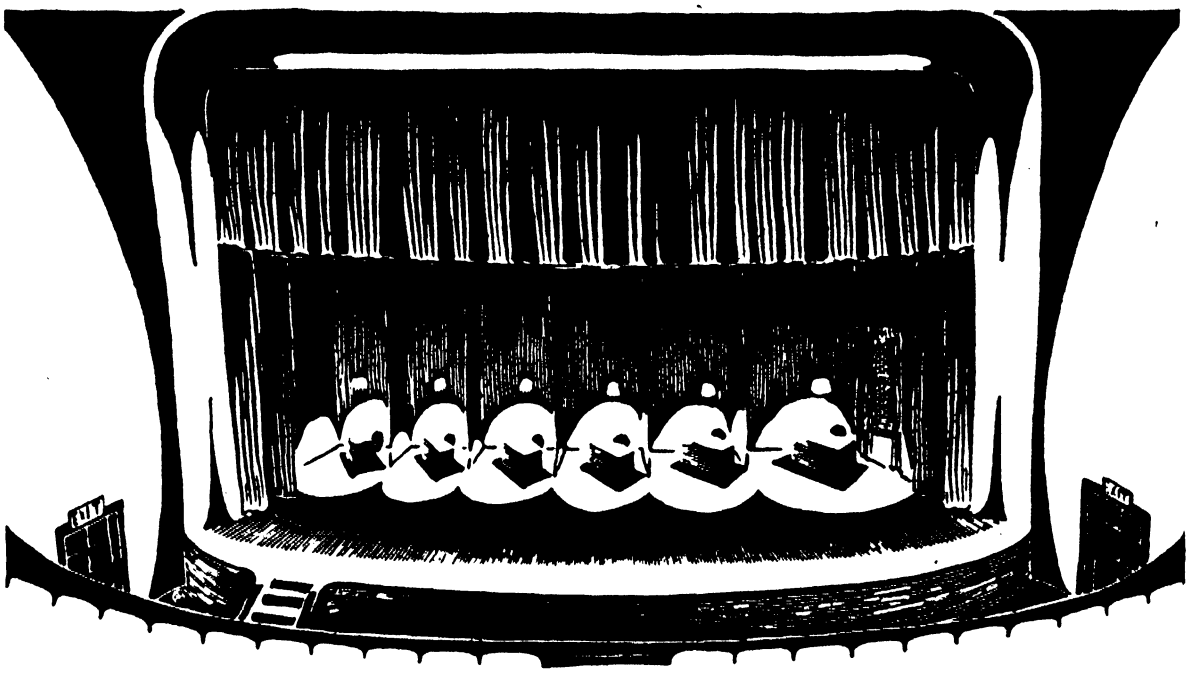
Roger: Don't worry, I won't be afraid of him.

Louise: Talk the New York way: I'm it, I know it all, that's how they talk in this town. Are your clothes all right?

Roger: They're all I've got, I guess they'll have to do.

Louise: I'm sure he'll give you a job, he must—fix your tie: there, that's better.

Roger: Come on then. [*They hurry along.*]



Across the greater part of the stage, a series of little offices, doors opening from one to the other. In each a desk lighted by a green droplight. At each desk a man bending over papers. There are five little rooms. This solid set has been ready throughout Act II, occupying space behind curtain.

These men are very busy, and in spite of the fact that they are separated by partitions, they all move in unison like wax-works throughout the scene, turn over papers, pick up telephones, rise and walk around their desks at stated intervals with appearance of organized haste, giving impression of choral movement. In each room, a telephone at a long distance from the desk on an adjustable arm that pulls out and in.

At extreme left a larger office in which sits ELLIOTT T. RUMSEY *at a more ornamental desk. A tall, stiff man of fifty. Through a window behind his head, the flat, unbroken wall of another building.*

[*At extreme right appear* ROGER *and* LOUISE.]

Louise [*in a whisper to* ROGER]: That is it, this is where they make the money.

Rumsey [*dictating in a staccato voice into a dictaphone*]: Seventeen billion, six hundred million, eight hundred and forty-two thousand, two hundred and eleven . . . [*he pauses, scratching his head*] er . . . kronon. . . . [*They come to the first office, where the man at the desk looks up.*]

Louise: An appointment with Mr. Rumsey. [*Man nods and motions to next door. This exact procedure is repeated in each of the*

little offices.] An appointment with Mr. Rumsey. [*Man at second desk motions them on. They come to third office.*] An appointment with Mr. Rumsey. [*They reach the fourth office.*]

Rumsey [*dictating*]: Six million . . . er . . . marks, fourteen hundred thousand . . . er . . . yen. . . . [RUMSEY *rings bell on his desk and man in fifth office goes into* RUMSEY'S *room and stands stiff at desk.* LOUISE *and* ROGER *enter the empty fifth office.*]

Roger: It's like a church, one chapel to another, each holier, and in the holy of holies a priest at a desk. Think of trying to get out, opening endless doors, trying to escape!

Louise: But they make money here, lots of money. [*The man comes out of* RUMSEY'S *office and motions them in. They enter.*]

Rumsey: Seventeen thousand. . . . [*He stops abruptly, addresses them, his voice smooth and passionless.*] Come here, nearer the desk. [*Pause. He consults a paper on his desk.*] Roger Bloomer, eh?

Roger: I've come to you looking for work, I need work.

Rumsey: I consider your application because you are recommended by Miss Chamberlain. Miss Chamberlain has shown herself efficient and executive. I believe in the personal touch with my employees, I know the people who work for me, body and soul, if I may so express myself.

Louise: I can tell you, sir, Mr. Bloomer is intelligent and reliable, we were acquainted in Excelsior, Iowa, where his father is a prominent man—

Rumsey [*cutting her off*]: That's enough. Let the young man speak: Age?

Roger: Eighteen.

Rumsey: What are you doing in New York?

Roger: I've gone hungry, I've walked the streets and I want work.

Rumsey [*rubbing his hands*]: Not so easy to make money, eh? A little starving is good for boys like you, brings you round, eh, Miss Chamberlain? [*He chuckles.*]

Louise: Yes, sir, a little starving is good.

Roger: I want work. [*Each man in each of the five rooms rises simultaneously, picks a sheet of pink paper out of a file, and returns to his desk consulting it.*]

Rumsey [*chuckling*]: H'm . . . everybody wants . . . what good are you? Take a look at the big buildings, see your real size. [*The five men in the five offices begin taking papers out of drawers, piling them up on the desks higher, higher.*]

Roger: I want a chance to make good.

Rumsey [*looks at* ROGER *fixedly, then shakes head definitely, turning back to papers on his desk—after a moment*]: No! Go and starve some more.

Roger: Must I?

Rumsey [*looking up as if explaining to a child*]: Unreliable, nervous, careless appearance . . . why, your clothes aren't clean . . . sorry to tell you, for your own good—learn a lesson . . . no place for you here, this is Wall Street, a gigantic exchange of energies. [*In each of five offices bells ring. Simultaneously, five men pull telephones toward them on adjustable arms.*]

Five Men: Hello— Yes— Good-by. [*Telephones spring back.*]

Rumsey [*going on calmly*]: Takes moral fiber this game . . . self-control, that's the secret! [ROGER *laughs nervously.*] You laugh . . . bad habit . . . nerves . . . no moral character—get the money-making manner, brief, persuasive.

Louise: But please—

Rumsey: That's all. Don't thank me, we do business here courteously, but always business. Don't thank me, good day. [*By this time there is an enormous pile of papers on each of the five desks in the little offices. The five men start going over the papers feverishly with staccato gestures.* ROGER *and* LOUISE *back away from* RUMSEY, *crushed.* RUMSEY *turns to the dictaphone.*] Seventeen billion, six hundred million, eight hundred and forty-two thousand. . . . [*Curtain closes.*]

Before Outer Curtain. Twilight.

[ROGER *very tired and more ragged, in front of curtain. A ragged man enters left, collarless, a torn hat, a professional slouch.*]

Ragged Man [*after considering* ROGER]: Aw, give us a dime for a sandwich, can't yer?

Roger: No, I can't, I only have a little money.

Ragged Man: Give us wot you got.

Roger: No, I need it.

Ragged Man: All right, I ain't had no food today.

Roger: Neither have I. [RAGGED MAN *without surprise, produces cigarette butt, then he searches his pockets for a lonely match and lights the butt.*]

Ragged Man: To hell with New York! [*Querulously*] I say, to hell with New York! No women in New York, all the dames is too thin, bones, nuthin' to hold onto. Where the hell is all the fat wimmin, huh? This city is on the bum.

Roger: Yes, maybe it is.

Ragged Man: It's mostways guys like you an' me, lazy guys, watch the procession, pick up cigarette butts—

Roger: I don't do that.

Ragged Man [*scanning him carefully*]: Wait, you will! Ain't we the riff-raff, dead ones . . . die on the asphalt like you see an old horse die! Wot street do we take? Who cares? Ain't it a scream? I could croak o' laughin', I could! An' it's move on . . . move on . . . you get pulled if you don't move fast.

Roger: I know it.

Ragged Man [*growling bitterly*]: Move on! Say, how'd you like t'hop a freight for the Middle West?

Roger: No, I just came from there.

Ragged Man: That's different! Don't matter: I been everywhere.

Roger: Have you?

Ragged Man: Everywhere—East, West, every place is on the bum!

Roger: Is this all of life, the sum of it?

Ragged Man: Wot's the use o' life when Death's awaitin' for you? Death's better: the river's there waitin' . . . that's movin' on!

Roger: Not by drowning, I couldn't drown.

Ragged Man: There's other ways, Death's waitin'! [*Looking at* ROGER *closely*] That's all right, you're a good kid, wait'll you know wot I know.

Roger: What do you know?

Ragged Man: All wot these here streets can tell! [*Scratching himself, speaks with slow wisdom*] Women, Death an' garbage . . . things that walk the streets. [*He puffs on the dying cigarette butt, then he spies another butt on the ground, picks it up, arranges it with some care and lights it from the first one.*] That's all right, pal, any time you might want me, I generally hang around this street when night comes on . . . when it goes kind o' gray here I be. . . . [*Enter a* STREET WALKER, *very thin, queer bedraggled hat perched on bright peroxide hair, big feverish eyes in an old face, carrying a little black bag. She comes center and stands there looking back as if afraid of something.*]

Street Walker [*in a moaning singsong voice*]: Them cops gimme a scare . . . they follow you, an' you run like a rat, you run like the ghost of a rat . . .

Ragged Man [*bored*]: Bones, too thin, nuthin' but bones. [*He slouches off. The* STREET WALKER *approaches* ROGER *pathetically.*]

Street Walker: I walk in daylight to make it easier . . . but it ain't no different, day an' night, day an' night . . . huh! Love walks day an' night! [*In a low voice, a weird crooning singsong, like a mother singing to her child*] Come on, lonely kid, wanna have a good time? I make you warm, I sweet-mamma you, I show you the gate of Paradise, say come in, come in, sweet papa! the face ain't so much, but it's the shape, the thin shape in a silk shimmy, silk like you see in the magazines, sweet mamma smell good in silk shimmy, lonely kid . . .

Roger [*takes her by both arms, staring at her brutally*]: Are you a bad dream walking the street, are you white magic?

Street Walker [*laughing raucously*]: No, I'm sour Sadie . . . come quick. . . . [*Looking up in his face and beckoning*] You got a wad, you got mazuma for love bird . . .

Roger: What?

Street Walker: Money, money . . .

Roger: I have less than a dollar.

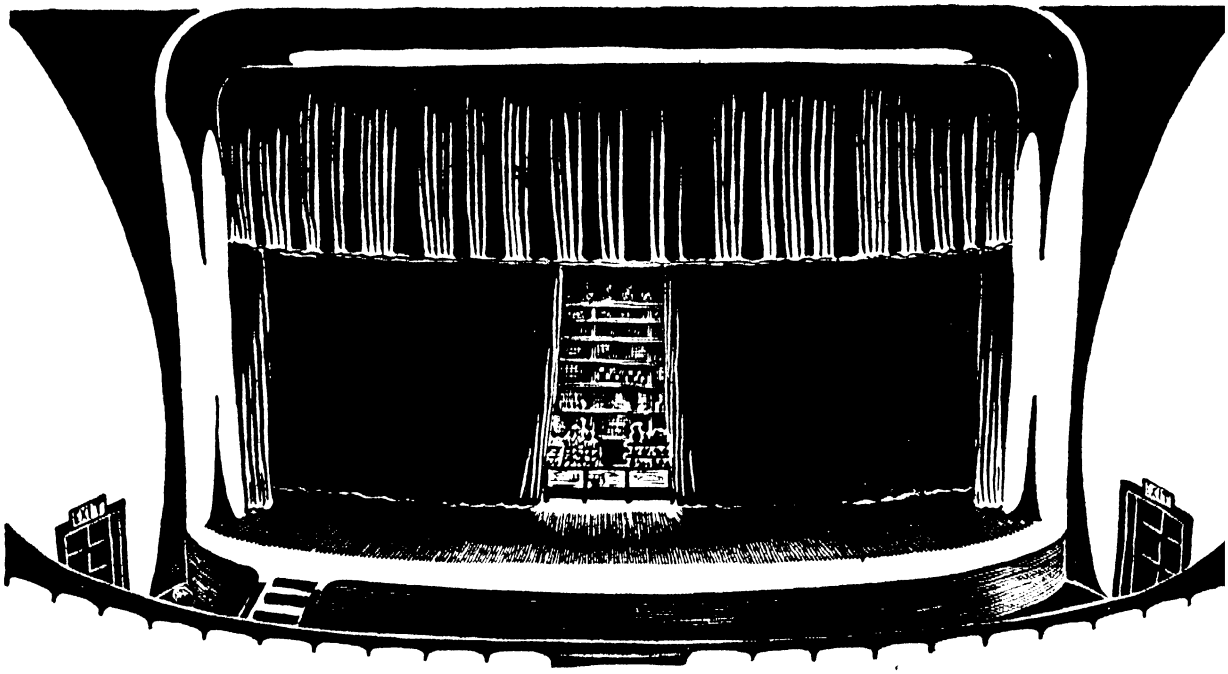
Street Walker [*violently angry*]: Leggo me, leggo—

Roger [*persistently*]: Are you the secret, the key?

Street Walker: Not to tramps. [*Screaming*] Leggo. . . . Police, police, here's a guy without money, chase him, run him in! [*Wild and shrill*] Police! [ROGER *has backed away against proscenium, left. A man enters right, hands in pockets, hat pulled over eyes. The* STREET WALKER *approaches him exactly as she had approached* ROGER.] Come on, lonely kid, wanna have a good time? I make you warm, I sweet-mamma you, I show you the gate to Paradise. [*The* MAN *turns away from her and exits. She follows, crooning the same words mechanically.*]

Roger [*alone, trembling with anger and bitterness*]: The air is full of gasoline and perfume and the smell of it is poison! I sweat with fear hurrying in tall streets among gray windows. [*Shaking his fist up at the towering curtain*] What do the windows hide, what people laughing among treasures? To be home, just to be home! Oh, City, oh, City of stone and steel. . . . I belong to you now! Beaten and afraid I take my way hungrily among the living dead. . . . Give me bread, only bread! What are dreams? I came looking for golden women, I came from wide prairies. . . . Why does your stone splendor touch the sky? Oh, City, do you mock the stars with your brightness? . . . In the gray pit of the streets pass the gray millions—and all these that pass are hungry . . . starving men and women, hungry . . . like me! like me! What doom will come on

this place, what doom, oh, hungry City? Your thrones will fall and your buildings will crash together, Singer and Woolworth will go to dust. . . . Death will come in a whirlwind breaking your sky towers—and the hungry will shout for joy! Are these dead, these that pass with white faces? Will these men rise from their graves in the streets and subways, will they rise laughing to destroy the city of their shame? . . . I am yours, oh, City of slaves. . . . I am one of the millions, servants of death and time, hungry, moaning for bread! [*He falls on his knees.*] I pray before you, New York. . . . I, Roger Bloomer, pray and curse you, oh, City, mother of my fear . . . like my own mother, my flesh mother, to whom I curse and pray. . . . [*He lies on ground at foot of the curtain in the dusk.*]



The Curtain opens center on a neat drugstore counter. Bottles and toilet articles in the brightly illuminated glass case. Behind, cases of drugs. A brisk clerk in white coat, hair slick.

[ROGER *comes to the counter timidly, perspiring with determination.*]

Roger: I want . . . [*he gulps and goes on*] I want some bichloride of mercury! [*The* CLERK *leans far over counter looking intently at* ROGER.]

Clerk [*in a dry nasal voice*]: That's poison! That's Death! Make your application at the Morgue, we don't sell Death here! [*He leans back and chuckles dryly, turning away from* ROGER.] We don't sell Death here!

Roger: But I want it to kill rats.

Clerk [*carelessly*]: Y'want rat poison?

Roger: Yes, I want rat poison. [CLERK *produces a bottle and sets it on counter.*] How much is it?

Clerk: Fifty cents. Pay the cashier. [ROGER *searches pockets for fifty-cent piece and goes, clutching coin in one hand and bottle in the other. Another clerk in white, exactly like the first, joins his companion behind the counter.* FIRST CLERK *points after* ROGER, *with shrill laugh.*] Funny! They come in here lookin' for Death.

The Other Clerk: Will he drink it?

The First Clerk: Sure, couldn't do him no harm, mebbe give 'im a gut-ache. . . . Serve 'im right for goin' wild!

The Other Clerk: What makes 'em like that? [*Both clerks laugh.*]

MR. *and* MRS. BLOOMER *are at dinner under the red and green electric lamp.*

[*They are eating the roast,* ROGER'S *empty chair between them. The phlegmatic sadness of middle age is heavy on the two.*]

Bloomer: Will you ring the bell? [MRS. BLOOMER *rings bell and* MAID *comes.*] Some more potatoes, Mary. [MAID *passes potatoes. She goes. Time elapses. They have no gusto for the food. Both stare at one another and at the ceiling. Then together they each take a mouthful and return to their awkward, tragic contemplation.*] The new store of mine in Butte is making money . . . and when I say money, I mean money! [*Pause*] What's the dessert tonight?

Mrs. Bloomer: Well, I thought you'd like rice pudding tonight.

Bloomer: Sure, why not? [*He takes another mouthful. He pushes his plate away, his voice completely breaking.*] That boy may be coming to harm! [MRS. BLOOMER *looks pleadingly. She blows her nose. At the same time she wipes away a tear with the corner of her handkerchief. She settles herself, they eat doggedly.*] I've done everything I could, telegraphed to those lawyers in New York, telegraphed to Poppin's boy to find him . . . what else?

Mrs. Bloomer [*suddenly her high choked voice breaks out of her as if released by a spring*]: I want to cry and I can't! [BLOOMER *grunts.*] I can't go on like this, week in, week out . . . everything goes to pieces, what's the world coming to, what are people doing?

Bloomer: Same old things.

Mrs. Bloomer: No, new things, bad things! I've gone to church, I've been a church woman . . . and now, nothing to hold onto.

Bloomer: Hold onto me, ma.

Mrs. Bloomer: You! I don't know you . . . My son! My son! [*They continue to sit stiffly at the table in the attitudes of mummies. Silence while* MAID *changes the dishes and goes.*]

Bloomer: What things are in women's heads?

Mrs. Bloomer: I feel like those horrid animals you see hung up in the butcher shops, inside out . . . bleeding . . .

Bloomer [*muttering*]: Just when I'm getting rich . . . rich . . .

Mrs. Bloomer: Everything goes to pieces, the world ends in a doom . . . and my son alone . . . dying . . . ?

Bloomer [*rises*]: I'm going to New York. [*He exits.*]

Mrs. Bloomer [*calling after him in squeaky voice*]: Be sure you take your rubbers! [*Her hands go out in a wide flutter.*] He doesn't listen, no one listens. . . . I feel a doom all over the world, people breaking things, breaking carelessly. . . . [*Clutching at tablecloth she pulls it wildly, the dishes clattering broken to the floor.*] I, too . . . breaking up! It's so careless . . . churches falling down! [*Her hands go up in the air and she collapses over the table.*]

Before the Outer Curtain. Dim evening light.

[ROGER *crosses to right. Looks at the bottle in his hand curiously.*]

Roger [*reading label*]: "Best for pests, they don't die in the house, an end to rats and all similar vermin!" [*He uncorks the bottle.*] That's for me: similar vermin! [*He swallows the whole contents. He stands waiting for something to happen, then he doubles up with a violent cramp, holding stomach with both hands. He sits on steps right. Enter the* RAGGED MAN *left, slouching as usual.*]

Ragged Man: So you come to meet me when the dark comes on—I was waitin'.

Roger: Where's Death? Is Death waiting?

Ragged Man: Say, pal, gotta drink, got joy in a bottle. [*He seizes the rat poison bottle.*]

Roger: It's finished.

Ragged Man [*scratching head*]: Now that's one I never tried.

Roger: Can a man die like a rat if he wants to?

Ragged Man [*frightened*]: No, get up quick, pal . . . a cop'll come by, run us both in an' where'll I be! [*Whining*] If I leave you here, you'll go blooie, someone might blame me! [ROGER *gets uncertainly to his feet.*]

Roger: I saw the City in a dream, women and death and garbage . . . I wanted to die!

Ragged Man: This is no place to croak. You don't know nuthin', there's a way for all them things. I know a way to get wimmin widout payin' nuthin', I know a way to croak so easy, shake hands with Death! [*He approaches* ROGER *menacingly.*] Howdy, Mr. Death.

Roger [*backing away from him, frightened*]: No, no . . .

Ragged Man: You dunno what you want, you dunno nuthin'! Hell, wot a soft guy! You're all right, lean on me, walk natural. . . . [RAGGED MAN *and* ROGER *walk across stage.* ROGER, *helpless, dangles along in firm grip of the other.*] Let your legs loose, I'll keep 'em straight, dead or alive, walk like a man, head up! Just to kid the cops, just to keep the law. . . . [*They go out.*]

LOUISE'S *flat. The lights lighted.*

[MISS BURNS *stands listening intently.*]

Miss Burns: At last . . . is it you, dear? [LOUISE *enters tiredly.*]

Louise: Who'd you think it was, a ghost?

Miss Burns: This must stop: you're very late again, been mooning about, I suppose. Oh, I'm old and I understand— [*Hastily*] You think I don't, but I do . . . people must live in an orderly way, must be respectable!

Louise: What for? For what end?

Miss Burns: I guess God sees the end. [*Doorbell rings.*]

Louise: What can that be? It might be . . . [*She hurries off.* MISS BURNS *shrugs.* LOUISE *returns followed by* RAGGED MAN *with* ROGER, ROGER *hanging limp as before.*]

Ragged Man [*philosophically*]: He don't know much, he walks like in a fog.

Louise: But he asked to be brought here.

Ragged Man: Not him—I found your address in his pocket!

Miss Burns [*in firm quavering voice*]: What is the meaning of this? [RAGGED MAN *produces the rat poison bottle.* MISS BURNS *snatches it hastily.*] But he couldn't have taken it, it smells so badly.

Ragged Man: The world's a heap o' garbage an' it smells lousy— wha'd'yer know, little dame?

Miss Burns [*her voice rising*]: This is most disorderly.

Ragged Man: Do I smell so bad? [LOUISE *pushes* MISS BURNS *angrily aside.*]

Louise: Oh, stop talking: this is my job. [*To* RAGGED MAN] We'll fix him as comfortable as we can on the couch.

Miss Burns: But it's not decent, we can't keep him here, two lone women in a flat . . .

Ragged Man: Anyway, you're safe, with that face!

Louise [*bending tenderly over* ROGER]: If he'd come to me this wouldn't have happened. [ROGER *sits on the couch, dazed, gathering his strength.*]

Ragged Man [*laughing*]: Huh! Let it learn 'im, he didn't know so much.

Miss Burns: Have you anything else to say?

Ragged Man [*quietly to* LOUISE]: I better slip out: the old 'un, she don't like the smell.

Louise: Go on then.

Ragged Man: I brung 'im to yer, that's worth somethin'!

Louise: What do you want?

Ragged Man: Dollar!

Louise: Here's fifty cents.

Ragged Man [*takes it shrugging*]: Is that wot this bird's life is worth, huh? [*He exits.*]

Louise [*to* MISS BURNS]: See that he goes.

Miss Burns: Mercy on us! I'll send for a doctor! [*Exit* MISS BURNS.]

Louise [*softly*]: Roger . . . Roger Bloomer, do you hear me? I'm by your side. I was waiting for you. [*Looking out at the night sky*] There's a buzzin' out there . . . the lights shake and the whole town's laughing! Laugh, New York, laugh, stone city, him and me will beat you yet, wait, we'll lick you, New York, him and me. . . . [*Suddenly tender*] How do you feel, tired kid?

Roger [*slowly recollecting himself*]: Seems like some terrible joke was played on me.

Louise: On both of us!

Roger: I thought I was so brave, and I was just sick at my stomach!

Louise: You'll be brave some other time.

Roger: I heard you say you were waiting for me, we'll beat New York, you said! [LOUISE, *head bent, silent*] Well, did I dream it? [*She shakes her head. He goes on, his voice strained and hoarse.*] I don't know how to thank you, don't deserve it frankly, I'm not much of a man.

Louise [*huddled closer in herself*]: Don't—

Roger: You must give me a chance to make the dream real—that's what's hard, making dreams come real.

Louise: If you'd only come to me, Roger.

Roger: This is what I came for, but I didn't know! I was looking for some mystery. [*She smiles.*] How did I know it was so simple? [*They look at each other.* LOUISE *shakes off the spell.*] I'll go out and get a job tomorrow, find some sort of work.

Louise: You're not well enough yet.

Roger: No more nonsense; I'll find something, then I'll come to you, tell you all about it.

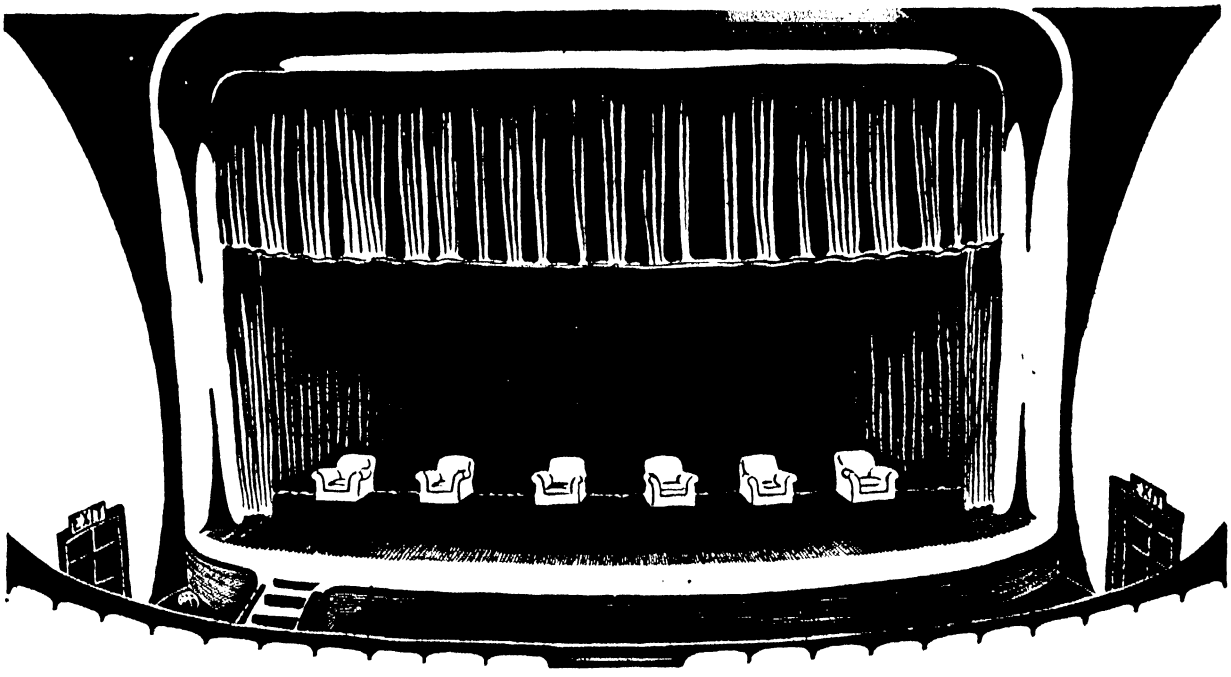
Louise: I think of you like a knight, Roger, in a battle.

Roger: Better wait, the battle's just beginning!

[*Curtain*]

ACT III

New York



In front of a curtain, six large brown leather arm-chairs. The two center ones are empty. In the other four, two on either side, sit four elderly gentlemen reading conservative newspapers and smoking cigars.

[*Enter left,* EUGENE POPPIN *with* ROGER. ROGER *is dressed neatly, stiff new clothes which fit badly.* EUGENE *as a New York young man is more dignified and sophisticated than out in Excelsior.*]

Eugene [*as they walk slowly in front of row of chairs, speaks with quiet dignity in a low voice*]: This is one of the best clubs, I'm lucky to have the entrée here.

Roger [*imitating* EUGENE'S *hushed manner*]: Everybody seems very old.

Eugene [*stops and whispers significantly*]: Millionaires! [*They continue their walk.*] And we move among them like one friend with another, that's this great Democracy for you . . . no classes! [*They turn at right.*] Let's just move, quietly, to these chairs here. [*They sit down,* ROGER *very uncertainly as if he feared there were pins in the chair. The* OLD GENTLEMEN *pay no attention.*]

Roger: I must thank you again for lending me that money, I didn't have a cent.

Eugene [*nervously*]: Hush, don't speak of it here . . . but between ourselves, you looked bad when I found you: here's the telegram I received from your father. [*He hands the yellow sheet to* ROGER.]

Roger [*reads*]: "Find Roger Bloomer, put him on right track." [ROGER *looks up.*] But what is the right track? [EUGENE *lights a cigarette and his manner reminds one of Iowa.*]

Eugene: Look at me!

Roger: I'd hardly know you, you've changed a lot.

Eugene: It's New York, the downtown manner.

Roger: Me, too, I've come a long way from Iowa.

Eugene: Why don't you go back? I've already telegraphed your family.

Roger: Can't go backward, I must go on, find myself—

Eugene: Hush, this is a very good club.

Roger: Every man, in torture even, got to find his own soul—

Eugene [*suavely*]: Oh, as to that, I know about that . . . *Life,* you see! Life is a treadmill . . . week follows week, today treads on the heels of tomorrow, your brain goes tick-tack, your heart goes quack-quack, and your blood curdles like milk! The trick is to dress well and laugh.

Roger [*astonished*]: But . . . but you never used to talk like that.

Eugene: I'm in with a very literary crowd: . . . I understand

you perfectly, got ideas myself—but I know what things are worth, learned a gentle cynicism: there are no red moments in life.

Roger: There are for me.

Eugene: Who's the girl?

Roger: How did you know?

Eugene: I might have known that wild talk would end in the first shop girl you met—and they call that idealism!

Roger: She's not a shop girl . . . well, not exactly.

Eugene: Isn't it a rotten joke, the devil's own joke? [OLD GENTLEMAN *at left, who has white side whiskers, rises and goes to* OLD MAN *second from left, showing him something in newspaper.*]

First Old Gentleman: Did you see this?

Second Old Gentleman [*sleepily*]: Disgraceful!

First Old Gentleman: Where do these things happen?

Second Old Gentleman [*tapping newspaper*]: Saloons, brothels, gambling dens, tenements, crimes of passion . . .

First Old Gentleman [*sitting down again*]: Must be stopped, must be stopped!

Eugene: How will you get money? Thought of that? [ROGER *nods.*] What you need is a technical education.

Roger: I'll manage somehow!

Eugene [*amused*]: Love will find a way. [*He rises.*] Better let me see this young woman.

Roger: Come, if you like. [*Facing him*] But don't interfere. . . . [*He doubles his fists.*] Or I'll show you, I have a will of my own, not a child as I was back home.

Eugene [*suavely, as they move across to left*]: Ah, but think of your father and mother eating their hearts out, way back in Iowa!

Roger: Can't I get away from my ancestors, be myself!

Eugene: No, you can't, only think. . . . [*They exit left,* EUGENE *still talking.*]

Old Gentleman [*at left, turning to one next him, tapping newspaper*]: Did you see this . . . ? [*The other* OLD GENTLEMAN *snores. The snore is repeated musically from the two old men at right. The* OLD GENTLEMAN *at left grunts, puts newspaper over eyes, and snores louder than the rest.*]

LOUISE'S *flat.*

[MISS BURNS *and* LOUISE *sit in silence.* MISS BURNS *in the rocker swaying gently.*]

Louise: I wish he'd come.

Miss Burns: Maybe he won't!

Louise: Why are you so mean about it?

Miss Burns: In my day, young people had delicate feelings. Now if a young man had loved me—

Louise: Fat chance you would of had of a man.

Miss Burns: I was very handsome in the old-fashioned way!

Louise [*flaring up*]: What do I care for you—we're young, we got our own ways! Don't simper at me, I'm sick of it!

Miss Burns: Hate never built a house yet!

Louise: Don't talk to me any more, or I'll . . . I'll . . . [ROGER *appears, facing her in her rising passion.*]

Roger: The door was open, I just walked in. [LOUISE *looks at him sullenly.* MISS BURNS *chirps pleasantly.*]

Miss Burns: I'll leave you two young creatures alone. [*She exits.*]

Roger: What were you so angry about?

Louise: Don't you know I'm always angry? Did you get a job?

Roger: No, but I lunched with a lot of millionaires!

Louise: My God!

Roger: A friend of mine is coming here tonight.

Louise: But, Roger, I'm not dressed.

Roger: Never mind . . . anything new at the office?

Louise: The Boss looked at me sort of soft today.

Roger: Elliott T. Rumsey!

Louise: If he should slip me a bid to dinner, him with his morals, that would be funny!

Roger: Funny things happen.

Louise: And what I'd answer would be funnier yet.

Roger: You wouldn't go?

Louise: I dunno. . . . I might, Roger!

Roger: Louise, don't look like you were going to cry! Long enough the bride of misery, you're mine now—I'll love you, I'll take care of you.

Louise [*sniffling, dabbing at her eyes uneasily with her handkerchief*]: Don't, Roger, I can't stand no more! [*He kisses her gently.*] Don't . . . it kinder hurts!

Roger: It's meant to hurt, that shows it's the real thing.

Louise [*simply*]: Where's the money coming from?

Roger: I must think . . . you see, there's not much opening for a man without a technical education, that's the key!

Louise: Won't your friend help you out?

Roger: No, he's trying to send me back to Iowa.

Louise: Don't leave me, Roger.

Roger: Maybe I could get money from my father, for a technical education, but I hate to ask him for that. I must think about myself, plan . . .

Louise: But me, what about me?

Roger: Oh . . . er . . . wait, wait a few years.

Louise: I can't stand it a day longer!

Roger: But money—

Louise: It makes me afraid to think.

Roger: Me too, I'm afraid to think.

Louise: There's only one thing that beats out fear, money makes you safe— [*Softly as if she were singing a lullaby*] Money makes your heart warm and kind . . . money . . .

Roger: This is the spring song of tired youth.

Louise: If you have money, you eat, you sleep, the others work on the cold winter mornings!

Roger: I've had so many dreams.

Louise: That's a dream all gold! then you lie in the soft places, and dreams come to your tired mind softly without effort . . .

Roger: To laugh at the world, to throw dollars in everyone's face —to give, to give—

Louise: Oh, no, don't give it: save it, pile it in big neat piles— aren't the buildings high, in those buildings money lives! But how to get it . . . ah . . . [*The bell has rung.* MISS BURNS *ushers in* EUGENE POPPIN.]

Miss Burns: Come right in, so glad to have you.

Eugene: Good evening, Roger.

Roger: My friend, Miss Chamberlain, Mr. Poppin.

Eugene: Charmed.

Louise: I didn't expect you or I would of dressed.

Miss Burns: I'll make a wee bit of coffee. [*She exits busily.*]

Eugene [*sitting down easily*]: Quite all right. I like the home atmosphere, just for a quiet talk.

Roger: I guess you'll do most of the talking.

Eugene [*offering cigarette to* LOUISE]: You smoke?

Louise: No.

Eugene [*lighting one*]: May I? [*She nods.*] Do you read the latest books?

Louise: No.

Eugene: You go to the theatre?

Louise: No.

Eugene: I seldom miss anything good! I try to keep in the inner circle of all the latest movements.

Louise: You must have a swell time.

Eugene: I do as I please, that's my secret.

Louise: You must have lots of money then.

Eugene [*considering her thoughtfully*]: Ah, money! I live modestly, but I think it pays to have the best of everything. Now, Miss Chamberlain, tell me all about yourself.

Louise: Myself, I'm nothing much.

Roger [*rising*]: Louise, you're tired, better not talk any more tonight.

Louise: Let him go on, Roger, I like to hear him.

Eugene: Psychology, Suppression, Inhibitions, Complexes— [*He hesitates, unable to think of any more words.*] Ah, well, what difference does it all make?

Louise [*smiling at* ROGER]: He's right, Roger, nothing makes any difference: you take things so seriously.

Eugene: Just what I tell him.

Louise: What does it matter if the world ends tomorrow, none of us much good!

Roger: Then why do we all sit here?

Eugene: Talk! That keeps you from doing things you might be sorry for. Exchange ideas! Now I think . . . [*He is still talking easily as the lights fade.*]

Before the Outer Curtain. Light of fading afternoon.

[ROGER *waiting. He looks at his watch. Enter* LOUISE, *greatly excited.*]

Roger: You left the office late, I've been waiting for you a long time.

Louise: Yes, I've done it . . . done it—

Roger: What have you done?

Louise: What's the use, you wouldn't understand, you play at love, but you're against me, like the others!

Roger: Have we two got secrets already?

Louise [*looking up into his face pathetically*]: Then be gentle, Roger, look at me kindly, you're looking at a thief . . . today at the office, I stole three thousand dollars in bonds. . . . Oh, this was easy, nothing brave about it! Blind chance took me, I went all hot, I was carrying the bonds through the hall, I just took three and

put them in my dress. They're as good as cash, three thousand dollars here, next my heart!

Roger: It's not you talking, it's a strange voice talking nonsense—

Louise: I've trusted you, now you must swear secrecy.

Roger: Of course—

Louise: Swear by what you love!

Roger [*turning from her bitterly*]: I don't love anything now.

Louise: So that's how you take it? It's you that made me do it, turned me off my balance when I was going so nicely—all of a sudden this blind hatred took me.

Roger [*holding her arm in a violent grip turns her round to face him*]: Louise, this is a bad dream . . . answer me!

Louise: You must swear secrecy—

Roger: I swear.

Louise: Swear by what you hate!

Roger: I swear by New York, our granite mother—

Louise [*opening her little bag*]: Maybe this'll show you, look with your eyes, touch 'em!

Roger [*straining to see the papers in the dim light*]: One thousand . . . two thousand . . . three thousand dollars.

Louise: You gave me a gold nightmare! Wait years, you said, with that old woman heckling me; technical school, you said—

Roger: You think I'd go on this money?

Louise: No, but I thought you'd understand: I came to you, didn't I, like a child to its mother, saying, Roger . . . [*Pause. She goes on brokenly.*] Roger, I'm so scared and nervous . . . something bigger'n me is happening to me.

Roger: I didn't understand it like that.

Louise: You ought to, you the rebel, against the fat-heads and the old lying people, you that hate fakes—

Roger: This is no fake, it's life and death—

Louise: I'm ready! have a good laugh before I die.

Roger [*holding her arms in an iron grip*]: And love, Louise?

Louise [*laughing bitterly*]: Maybe it's another fake.

Roger: You and I must get at each other, understand, somehow . . . all your life has been sort of a fight, hasn't it, struggle against odds . . . poverty . . . ?

Louise: What makes it worth while? What fruit does it bring? Money, that's all! [*She presses her little bag against her bosom.*]

Did you ever think how it feels—money, did you ever think what it buys? . . . Me, I've done that!

Roger: So have I!

Louise: Silk, satin, sweet perfume crushed out of swell flowers, soft running whispering motors . . .

Roger: This is a gold nightmare—and Money on a throne. . . . Money, the dirty god, the obscene god, what a dream! What's the end of it!

Louise: Oh, I guess the end's near, but I'm not afraid, because I know the meanness of things right to the bottom.

Roger: Maybe the real gods are coming, there's a whisper of doom in the sky and the big black houses are dancing—don't do it, Louise!

Louise: It's better than selling my body to a rich man, and anyway no one wants me. [*She wants desperately to make* ROGER *understand.*] Girls sell their bodies, near all of 'em, one way or another—but with me, I've kept my body clean, that's something, isn't it?

Roger: One more question—do you love me? [*She looks at him fixedly, smiles.*]

Louise: Not even sure about that! [*He turns from her. She follows him.*] You're so young and wild, how can you understand the dead Hell where I walk?

Roger: Maybe I've walked there, too.

Louise: No, your head's in the sky listening for the tread of gods' feet on clouds—come down to earth!

Roger: It's you that won't see clearly, won't even admit we love each other—that's a nice joke, you try to make yourself bitter against me, try to hate me—but you can't! I tell you, inside you there's the living springtime: you're just afraid, that's all, afraid of yourself, worse afraid of me!

Louise [*hands raised against him*]: No, no, don't talk to me like that!

Roger: You pretend your heart's dead, but it's living still!

Louise: How long still, how long!

Roger: The dead heart is beating fast! I'm your man—

Louise: What do you want of me, Roger?

Roger: I need you! What am I without you? You've got to make good.

Louise [*quietly, bowing her head*]: What you say I'll do, because I must.

Roger: Give me the bonds, I'll take them back for you.

Louise: No, no, that's impossible, you couldn't get in.

Roger: Perhaps not, I must think—

Louise: I'll take them back, it's my job, I must see it to the end.

Roger: Then go back to the office, perfectly safe, it's not late, you can still get in, nobody will be there, it will be dark, leave these on a desk in the outer office, in a drawer where they will be found.

Louise: I'll try.

Roger: Then you must go alone, perfectly safe, if anyone sees you, act natural, say you came back for something, don't be frightened, dry your eyes.

Louise: You're so strong, Roger.

Roger: I'll wait here, if you don't come back in ten minutes, I'll come for you. [*She still hesitates.*] Now go.

Louise: I must do what you say. [*She goes listlessly.*]

The offices of ELLIOTT T. RUMSEY *cover the greater part of stage as before.*

[*But it is now pitch dark, except in* RUMSEY'S *inner sanctum, where he sits at his desk, on it a red droplight.* RUMSEY *is tired out, erect after a hard business day, going over papers wearily. On the desk as usual, a glass water pitcher and two glasses.*]

Rumsey [*looking at his watch, mumbles*]: Late . . . late. . . . [LOUISE *lights electric light in office at extreme right. Scared and nervous, she takes bonds from her little bag.* RUMSEY *listens, rises, and goes to door of his office. He passes through slowly to next office.* LOUISE *listens, hears* RUMSEY *coming. She hesitates, puts the papers back in her bag, then turns out light.* RUMSEY *comes through lighting electricity as he comes. Pressing button in office at extreme right, he reveals* LOUISE *standing with her back to door panting.*]

Rumsey [*without surprise*]: Ah, it's you, Miss Chamberlain.

Louise: I came back for my purse which I left here. [*She holds up her bag.*]

Rumsey: Of course, I don't question your movements . . . on the other hand, I am pleased; I want to talk to you . . . don't be alarmed, personally: will you come into my office? [*He opens the door for her.*]

Louise [*looking at her bag, hesitating*]: But I . . . that is . . .

Rumsey: What is it?

Louise [*clutching the bag with a smile*]: Nothing at all. [*She*

goes through draggingly. In silence they cross to his office. He sits down, folding his hands on desk. She stands by it respectfully.]

Rumsey: This chance meeting pleases me, this is calm, without the tension of the business day.

Louise: Yes, sir. [*He looks up. Something in his face surprises her.*] Is there anything wrong?

Rumsey: No, indeed . . . I want you to sit down. [*She is surprised.*] Don't make me repeat it. [*She sits.*] Now we can talk on a more equal basis: I've been thinking this over, today I reached a decision, a change of great importance, making you a proposition of a sort that might surprise you: Miss Chamberlain, how would you like to marry me?

Louise [*exclaiming*]: God!

Rumsey [*continuing in his even passionless voice*]: Oh, I know it's unusual, these things happen: you're an intelligent and able girl, surely there are no classes in this great Democracy! I've watched you improve and develop, something's been changing in you—

Louise: It has, it has . . .

Rumsey: I've selected you, I think, with rare judgment. [*He smiles and rubs his hands.*]

Louise [*with a little choking laugh*]: Aw, you're joking.

Rumsey: Does it strike you as a humorous subject?

Louise: Then you ask me?

Rumsey: I am rich in the common acceptance of the term, not young, but I've lived a temperate life, self-control, I've lived straight from A to Z: I take it then to be settled?

Louise: No, no, I can't do it. . . . Honest, I appreciate it.

Rumsey: I can see it upsets you.

Louise: Let me go, don't talk to me tonight.

Rumsey: This is calm here, without the buzz of typewriters, time to talk. [*Rising, he walks about her chair, for the first time showing some feeling.*] It means a lot to me this, means a lot, must have an answer, must discuss it!

Louise: All right, I wouldn't marry you for a million dollars. [*Pause.* RUMSEY *considers.*]

Rumsey: How about a million and a half? When it comes to money . . .

Louise: Oh, money . . . !

Rumsey: I can offer you money to a degree beyond the common dream! Have you thought of that, dreamed of money? [LOUISE

nods.] You'd be a lady, that is, you're a lady now, but dresses, you know, dresses!

Louise [*in scarcely audible voice*]: Silks, sweet perfumes, soft running motors . . .

Rumsey: Yes, a motor, that helps . . . you could get up late, have people to tea, go to lectures.

Louise [*hiding her insane amusement*]: Sounds good, it does!

Rumsey: This I offer you: money doesn't come easy to those that go after it with their brains. Maybe I didn't work myself gray, maybe I didn't go home tired at night, aching!

Louise: You, too?

Rumsey: Holding on tight, fighting for another inch, another golden inch!

Louise: Then why hand the spoils to me?

Rumsey: With me the time is ripe, for a woman trustworthy, attractive to me in the highest degree—

Louise: You think I'm that?

Rumsey: Your body, if I may so express myself, has produced a sensation in me natural, but beyond expectation.

Louise: Oh, my body?

Rumsey: It's natural to share one's fortune in a union both spiritual and satisfactory: after the hard fight the reward—for us both! I've lived a very severe life, self-control.

Louise: To think, if you'd asked me to supper and a show I might have fallen for it . . . but this, the whole future laid out like a map!

Rumsey: Marriage is the biggest offer a man can make.

Louise: It's not enough.

Rumsey: I think you want the stars and the sun.

Louise: And if I do?

Rumsey: And what about my wants? Do you think they're less violent or less desperate? [*She turns away. His voice changes to pleading.*] Listen, at least listen! You're youth, and all the rest, money, this office, is nothing but a bad dream—you're everything to me right now, everything . . .

Louise: Me that's nothing!

Rumsey: I want you.

Louise: We can't have everything we want. [*She laughs.*]

Rumsey: There was a woman that laughed once too often. [*She laughs helplessly like a very small child. He is close to her, he takes hold of her shoulders violently.*] Am I funny to you now?

Louise: Oh, funny . . . funny.

Rumsey: Human I am, you understand—no, you don't know that, you'll never know, nobody will ever know!

Louise: Let me go. [*He releases her.*] Self-control, Mister—

Rumsey [*violently*]: You think I'll hurt you: why should I hurt you? You're not here, are you? Your heart's not here! But there's something to say from me to your heart: passion exists, when everything turns black and reality dies . . . Elliott T. Rumsey says, passion exists! [*He throws her violently away from him. She stumbles to the ground. He sweeps up all the papers on desk and throws them about him with wide gesture of contempt. He pours water from glass pitcher over papers, as if he were watering flowers. He throws the pitcher, tray and glasses to the ground with great crash. Then he sinks into chair.*]

Louise: Mr. Rumsey, what is it?

Rumsey [*with an effort*]: Just leave, will you, and never come back.

Louise: You feel better now?

Rumsey: I'm all right, subject to attacks, I'll see my doctor. I beg you to walk out quietly. Keep it quiet, always keep things quiet! That will be all, never come back. [LOUISE *hastens through offices toward right.* RUMSEY *twitches aimlessly in his chair.*]

Before the Outer Curtain.

[ROGER *is waiting for* LOUISE. *She comes, breathless.*]

Roger: Did you leave them?

Louise: No, no, I couldn't, the Boss was there.

Roger: Well, what happened?

Louise: I feel like laughing, Roger, everything happens so queerly—

Roger: But the bonds.

Louise: I have them still, I got scared and ran away.

Roger: Give them to me, it's not safe to carry them a minute, I'll tear them up.

Louise: No, no.

Roger: Safer. [*He takes the bonds from her and tears them into bits.*]

Louise: I'll do something like this again, steal again, feelings take me so queerly.

Roger: Trust me!

Louise: Supposing I should die or something.

Roger: Don't talk like that.

Louise: People that aren't strong enough to live ought to die, that's what I'll do, you wait!

Roger: You and I are stronger than this whole town—

Louise: All the shadows are laughing at us, I guess the town's full of people like us, wanting something they can't have. One's feelings are like a ripple in a pond, it spreads and spreads, the feeling of all the world, the heart's wish gets this awful sweep till it gilds the skies, the little ripples spreading till they wrinkle the far skies!

Roger: Louise, come home, come home. [*They exit.*]

LOUISE'S *flat.* LOUISE *alone.*

[*Enter* EUGENE.]

Eugene: Ah, good evening . . . [*Pause*] Have you seen Roger today?

Louise: I think he'll be here soon.

Eugene: Fond of him?

Louise [*with elaborate carelessness*]: Oh, of course.

Eugene: Then why don't you leave him alone?

Louise: Because he needs me.

Eugene: Nonsense, he needs to get on his own feet and you know it . . . hanging onto your skirts. I'm trying to be Roger's friend. When I see a man . . . no, a boy . . .

Louise: Yes, he's only a boy.

Eugene: Glad you admit it: trying to be Romeo doesn't do in this world, and you're no Juliet.

Louise [*smiling*]: No, I'm not romantic.

Eugene: You see, Life is a funny game, all made up of laws—

Louise: You talk like you invented it.

Eugene: We're all little babies in the game. You can't get away from those bitter dusty laws—

Louise: Are you sure love isn't a law?

Eugene: You and he try to make a new world, but it's not real.

Louise: Didn't you ever hear it yourself, that clear love call?

Eugene: I'm hearing it now.

Louise: What?

Eugene: Take it for what it's worth . . . smiling! May I tell you?

Louise: Go on.

Eugene: It's a dirty thing called Sex, made to laugh at.

Louise: You're no gentleman!

Eugene: Can't you laugh? Just smile then. Come away to the seashore with me for a few weeks and forget it.

Louise: You ask me, just calmly like that?

Eugene: Might be a real emotion.

Louise: You're nothing but a straw man!

Eugene: I ask you in the most manly and cynical way . . . you hesitate, but think it over, I really believe you'll come. [*Enter* ROGER.] Hello, Roger.

Roger: Hello.

Eugene: One comes and one goes . . . funny! see you again. [*Exit* EUGENE.]

Louise: He just says a lot of words that people have told him, a straw man!

Roger: What's he been saying to you?

Louise: I can't get away from it, Roger . . . this dirty thing, they call it Sex! Well, that's a pretty word, that is . . . what's in a girl that makes men's eyes pop? Am I dirty?

Roger: My dear. [*He takes hold of her shoulder. She shakes him off.*]

Louise: Don't touch me. You too! oh, we kid ourselves, with this love fake! I guess it's all sort of dirt.

Roger: What did that beast say to you?

Louise: Does it matter?

Roger: Oh, I could see all right, making love to you—I'll show him! [ROGER *goes to door.*]

Louise: Where are you going?

Roger: Settle with him once for all. [*Exit* ROGER.]

Louise: Roger, for my sake—[*stopping bitterly*] What does he care about my sake? [*Enter* MISS BURNS.]

Miss Burns [*scared, apologetic*]: There's a man here.

Louise: I can't see him.

Miss Burns: It seems important. [*In a whisper*] From the office, perhaps about a job. [*Loudly*] Come in, Sir. [*Enter the* DETECTIVE, *a polite, noncommittal man, ingratiating but firm. He waits for* MISS BURNS *to leave. She exits.*]

Detective: Miss Chamberlain? Ah, yes, of course . . . my card . . . I am in the confidential employ of Elliott T. Rumsey. Get me? I make investigations.

Louise: What do you want of me?

Detective: Not a thing, not a thing in the world! There's been

a theft, little matter of three thousand dollars, bonds. I don't know who did it, but of course I'll find out.

Louise: How can you?

Detective: Everything traceable down to some little cause—just interviewing you as a matter of form.

Louise: I can't talk to you tonight.

Detective: Why not?

Louise: Oh, nerves . . .

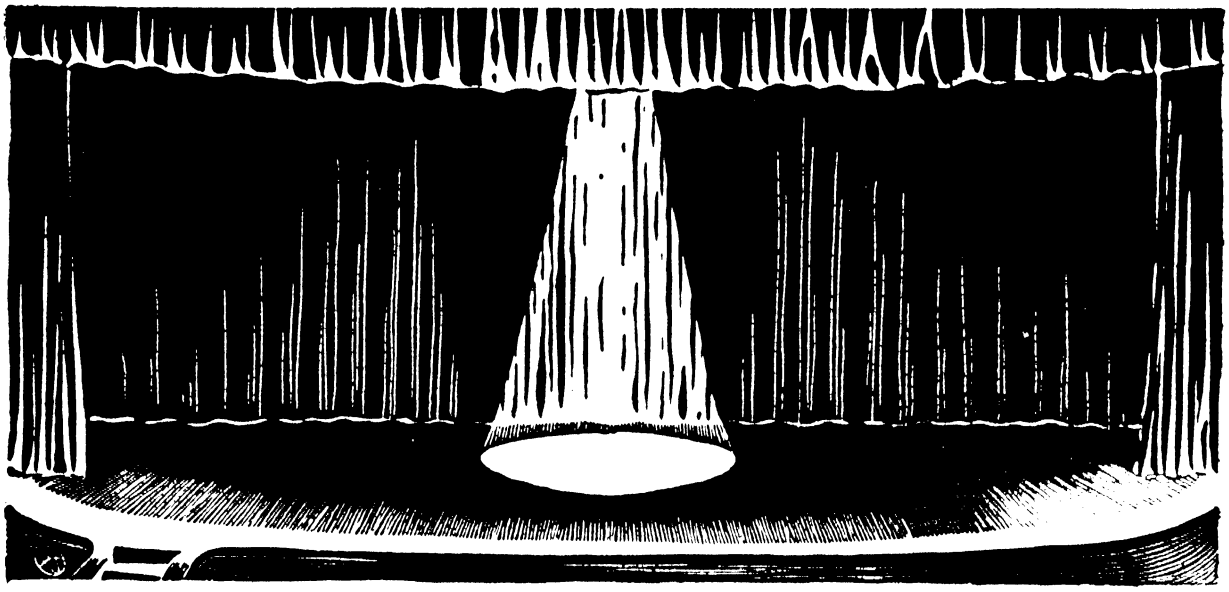
Detective: If there's an emotional motive, we're inclined to be lenient: some love story . . . do you read the *Evening Journal?*

Louise: No.

Detective: City's full of that sort of thing, crimes of passion—but they don't unravel so easy! . . . h'm . . . that's where I come in.

Louise: I tell you I don't know anything, I'm just too tired to talk . . . tired!

Detective: Quite so, I'll be around again then . . . um . . . no hurry! Good night. [*He bows smiling.*]



[*Under a yellow lamp that hangs from ceiling,* ROGER *and* EUGENE *face each other.*

(*The yellow light comes from a spot hung in a black cornucopia directly stage center, in middle of full stage.*)]

Roger: I love her, I tell you—

Eugene: No, no, you get the thing dead wrong, listen! There are only two things in New York, Sex and Money—if you get one, you get the other.

Roger: You're nothing but a straw man.

Eugene: You're weak, led around by a woman.

Roger: You and I are both weak, but I stand up to it, I know you, you're a fake, with your talk, talk—

Eugene: Am I?

Roger: I believe, under the skin, you're a dirty coward.

Eugene: That's enough, you're nothing but a tramp in this town.

Roger: A tramp can build his house, out of love and hate, higher than these sky-scrapers.

Eugene: Talk about love, listen! [*He takes roll of bills from pocket, counting out.*] Hundred, two hundred, three hundred—[*Putting rest of roll away prudently*] I bet you that, I can get your girl in four days, for a joke, like everything else, to teach you.

Roger [*livid with anger*]: I'll do the teaching then—take off your coat. [*Taking off his own*] You're bigger than I am, but I bet I'm not so soft.

Eugene: Say, you are in love—

Roger: Coward, damn you, come on— [*They approach each other savagely. Darkness.*]

[LOUISE'S *flat.* LOUISE *sits lost in thoughts, unseeing. Enter* ROGER, *collar torn and sleeve ripped.*]

Louise: What have you done?

Roger: We had a fight, we made too much noise, people came in and stopped us—but I would have won! So it ends like everything else, in a crazy joke.

Louise: You shouldn't have fought over me.

Roger: Fought for you, like a knight, to conquer what stood between us! That's real anyway—when you draw blood!

Louise: What a child you are, Roger.

Roger: So I come to you, kind of tired. [*Pause*] I'm so lonely, Louise, I guess a man wants safeness in a woman: I come to you seeking refuge, I'm so sure of you now. [*She laughs.*] Why do you laugh?

Louise: Because there's no refuge in this life—it's a storm where your thoughts are blown like birds.

Roger: Women have queer souls.

Louise: You don't know mine, you're too selfish ever to find out.

Roger: I'll learn, slowly . . .

Louise: Then I'll tell you one thing I've been thinking: I'd cut my hair off, put on trousers and be a man, then you and I would

go to sail the sea, Shanghai and the Bosphorous and nights at Port Said!

Roger [*catching her moment's mood*]: There'd be many a fine sight sailing the sea under the stars!

Louise: You shall do that, Roger, but never I.

Roger: Why not you?

Louise: Because it would be free that would, and brave—but for me there will never be any freedom.

Roger: Wait . . . just wait!

Louise: Oh, if I'd been bad, I might have had a swell time—but I came of a good family, my ancestors must have been terrible—

Roger: Never mind our ancestors.

Louise: How can I help it? Don't I see them, with bony fingers pointing the way!

Roger: You talk as if all your life were over behind you!

Louise: It is, all in the mud of defeat . . . and I sit here, just thinking about it.

Roger: What about me?

Louise [*smiling*]: Selfish to the last, that's right. You don't need me, I'd be a fine stone around your neck! I really never had a will of my own, just negative . . . a bundle of denials: it's for you to be Yourself!

Roger: You're killing me with this talk.

Louise: I must . . . good for you! Go it alone, I'm your childhood, bright and past. [*Looking at him with a new startling brightness*] You're a man from this minute.

Roger: What do you mean?

Louise: All a joke anyway: I'm caught in a net, more subtle than Law, wider than Time, that's all there is to this pure love stuff! What are we anyway? Just two children, caught by this terrible Sex joke, that's all there is—I've denied, I've been subtle, and all the time the clamor of the flesh was in my voice . . . [*Her voice is weakening as she speaks.*]

Roger: What's happening to your voice?

Louise: Going away! My flesh is melting, so I can speak . . . [*She smiles.*] The dangerous spark between a man and a woman—

Roger: Louise, what is all this?

Louise: Oh, I just imitated you, found Death when I wanted him, but I was clever, I did it very thoroughly— An hour ago I took poison, it's working very nicely.

Roger [*clutching her with his hands*]: Get up, Louise, stand up—

Louise: You can't fight Death with your fists!

Roger: You can't go like this, mustn't, I need you.

Louise: Oh, there was a moment, our moment, when I loved you, Roger . . . I love the world now—so the feeling grows till it bursts!

Roger: You can't go like that—

Louise: I told you no man would get me: you see what an awful coward I am . . . [*She rises.*] My mother and father and all the grandmothers . . . how glad they are now, saying we got her all right! I'm coming, old people, I'm coming pure . . . [*Clutching her breast*] It hurts! [*Smiling*] Passion exists, when everything turns black and reality dies. [*She sits.* ROGER *galvanized into action rushes off. We hear his voice off-stage.*]

Roger: Get a doctor, telephone, quickly, quickly . . . She's poisoned—can't you understand, poisoned: antidotes, water, anything, mix it— [*He returns still talking, carrying a glass.*] People can't go in less than a few hours, there's lots of time, perfectly safe, lots of time, perfectly safe, lots of time . . . [*Softly, urgently, as he stands over her with the glass*] Louise, you must take it, you must— [*He looks at her unresponsive face. Quietly, simply, he knows that she has died. He puts down the glass, shrinks away from her, stands at a safe distance, petrified with fear. He sinks to his knees mumbling prayers.*]

The offices of ELLIOTT T. RUMSEY *in full swing.*

[*Men at desks in five little compartments, moving papers in unison stiffly.* RUMSEY *at his desk. The* DETECTIVE *stands beside it, reporting to* RUMSEY, *who sits grimly.*]

Detective: It don't unravel so easy: lots of feelings, running criss-cross.

Rumsey: Never mind the feelings.

Detective: The police are questioning this boy—

Rumsey: What was the name?

Detective: Roger Bloomer. But my theory is suicide. I seen it in her eye.

Rumsey: And the funeral?

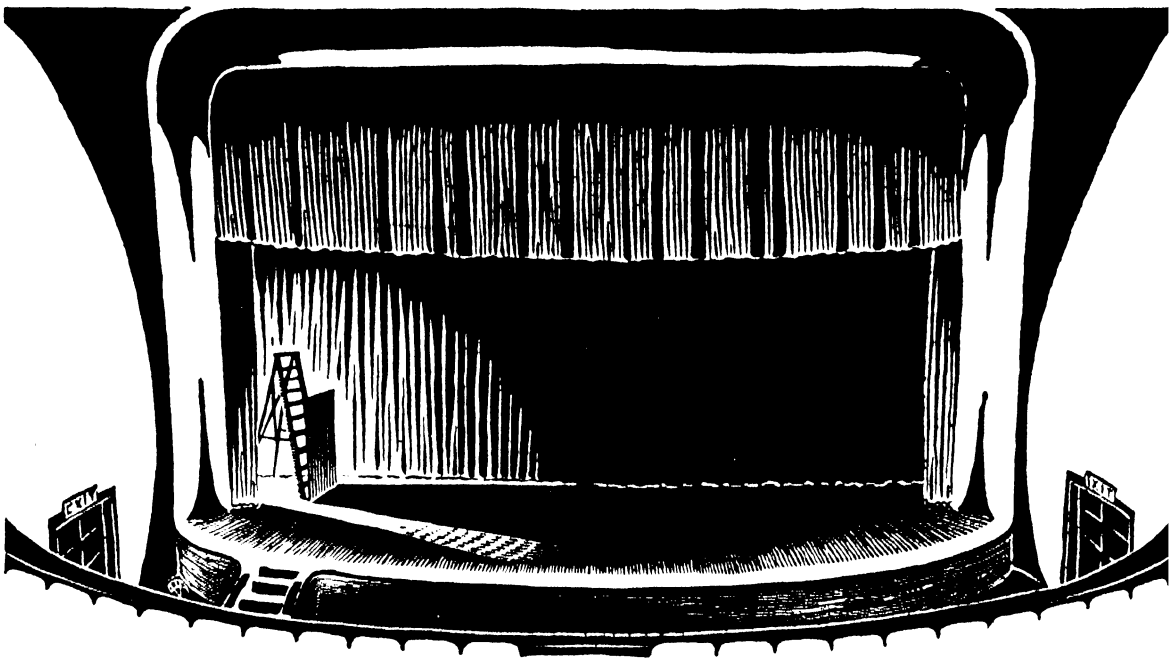
Detective: Wednesday at two, from the house. Woodlawn Cemetery. Seems her mother and grandmother lie there.

Rumsey: Any other details?

Detective: No, sir.

Rumsey: Send an appropriate wreath in my name. She seemed like a good girl, got herself into trouble. What can you expect?

[*Abruptly*] It's a bitter thing. Nothing left these days for the pure women but Death.



[*The* JUDGE *sits on his high seat in judicial robes, holding a gavel. It reminds one of the* COLLEGE EXAMINER *in Act I, but this* JUDGE *is a round little man with red face, sitting high up wagging his head. Below him stands* ROGER.

(*The* JUDGE *is treated exactly as the* EXAMINER *in Act I, but there is no map behind him, and he sits a good deal higher on the same step-ladder behind the masking piece.*)]

The Judge: You were present when she took this poisonous concoction?

Roger: No, Judge.

The Judge: Address me as your Honor.

Roger: No, your Honor.

The Judge: The girl was already poisoned then, when you came in, talked, chatted as if nothing had happened? [ROGER *nods.*] What did you talk about?

Roger: About our future.

The Judge: She didn't have much future. [*He chuckles loudly.*] Now tell me in detail what you said.

Roger [*with difficulty*]: We talked about how to be free.

The Judge: Ah, intellectual people!

Roger: No, human beings.

The Judge: Tut . . . tut . . . tut . . . [*He shakes his head and*

makes a noise expressing grave disapproval. Then, startlingly, he points his gavel at ROGER.] You still deny having deliberately planned the death of this young woman?

Roger: I loved her, I tell you.

The Judge [*wagging his head*]: Well, you might love her to death, eh. . . . What is love and how does it connect with crime? [*Very pleased with himself*] Tut! make a note of that. . . . I suppose you got in too deep for your age.

Roger [*desperately*]: Love's free, isn't it?

The Judge: No, indeed, not in a civilized community; we have laws here.

Roger: I only mean—

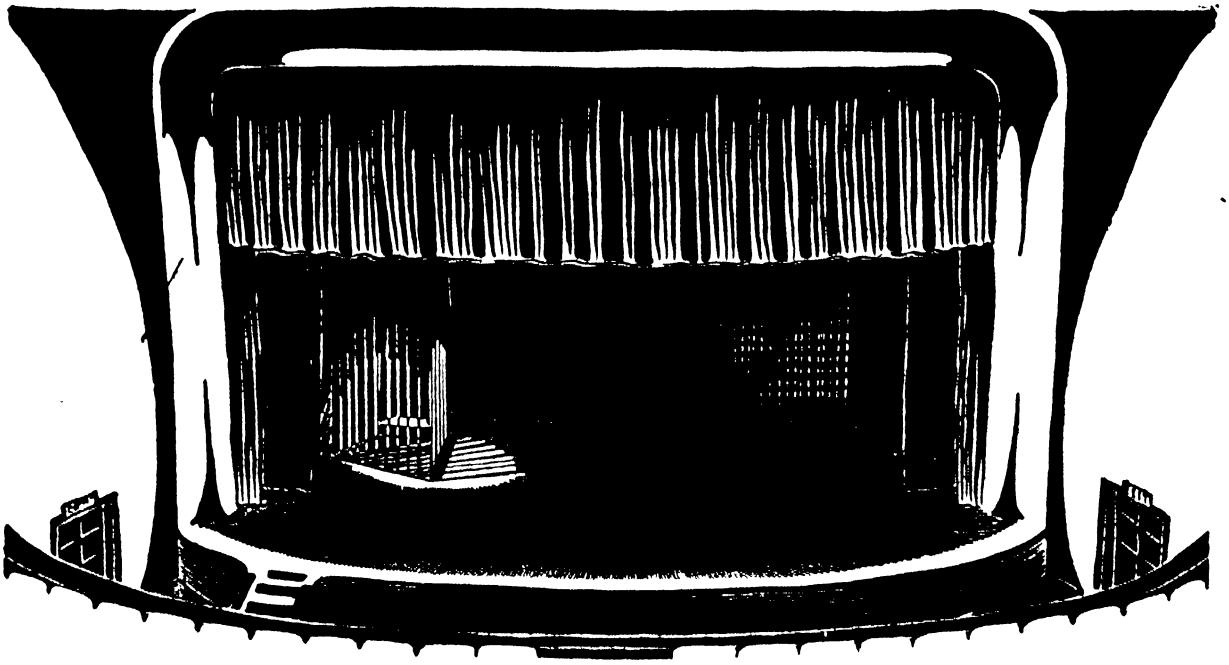
The Judge [*interrupting sternly*]: Are you a Socialist?

Roger: I don't think so, sir, your Honor.

The Judge: Lucky for you . . . a man of your age in a case like this! It's anarchical: where is our young manhood going? People have lost the old standards: where will these passions end? Have you any idea of right and wrong?

Roger: No, sir; but, by God, I intend to find out.

The Judge [*hammering hard with his gavel as if a host of people were attacking him*]: Not here; Order in the Court! Every crime or misfortune is due to disorganization of ideas: Organize your ideas, young man! What use are you to Society? Hah! I've got you there! [*He hammers with gavel.*] You are held as a material witness until further evidence. Let him cool his thoughts in a cell!



[ROGER *sits in a gray cell, dimly lighted.*]

Roger [*alone*]: What use am I to Society? They put you in a gray place and tell you to think! Fat people sit on thrones, reading dusty laws. . . . To hell with Society, to hell with everything that stands between me and my own soul! [*He laughs.*] Damn fool I am. Death is the only way to know your soul fully: then I could do it right now, mash my head against a wall, that would clear my brain, and not much loss—what am I? a straw man torn by windy feelings! There must be some secret word that I've never known . . . magic secret that turns a boy into a man! It's easy to face Death, but at Life I dare not look. [*A great rattling of keys and a door opens, letting in a bright ray of light.*]

Prison Attendant [*gruffly*]: Someone to see you. [*Enter* BLOOMER, *wearing a fancy vest, puffing and frightened. The* ATTENDANT *goes.* BLOOMER *looks around uncomfortably.*]

Bloomer: Roger, I find you at last . . . not much of a place to be!

Roger: Father, I didn't pick it of my own accord.

Bloomer: I'm not here to blame: thank God I've come, thank God.

Roger: Be all right, dad.

Bloomer: I think I can get you out, I've talked to my lawyers, a matter of seeing the right people.

Roger: Dad . . . [*His voice choked, uncertain*] How's everyone? Business good?

Bloomer: So, so, . . . it's a dull year.

Roger: What about mother?

Bloomer: She sent me, so I came on from Iowa, to find death in the path. Your mother wants you back, Roger, back where it's safe.

Roger: I guess Death's everywhere, Death stalks the Middle West.

Bloomer: I've seen her, my boy.

Roger: Who?

Bloomer: The defunct . . . it's a beautiful corpse, the old lady's half crazy.

Roger [*laughs*]: I bet she enjoys it.

Bloomer [*slowly*]: Nothing to laugh at, I assure you; I'm moved.

Roger: Is Death so sacred? just another joke, like the other mysteries that people cry about.

Bloomer: You've got yourself to consider.

Roger: I know it.

Bloomer [*in a hushed voice*]: Tell me, was she a bad woman?

Roger: Is that all you care about?

Bloomer: Did she tempt you, lure, lead you on?

Roger [*smiling*]: Oh, she was pure and quiet.

Bloomer: Then why did she do it?

Roger: Love's a queer thing.

Bloomer [*shaking head gloomily*]: Right.

Roger: I tell you, it was the real thing, this was.

Bloomer: Um . . . nothing in it, nothing in that kind of love!

Roger: That's what she said.

Bloomer [*startled*]: Oh, I see.

Roger: Pure, and crushed she was, the quiet one seeking quietness . . . so she left me to go it alone, she made even that sacrifice. . . . Old people have made dusty laws, they won't let love live!

Bloomer [*puzzled, unhappy*]: I'm not so young as I was, boy.

Roger: I guess we understand each other now, dad.

Bloomer: You see, Roger, I wanted to save you from every unhappy thing.

Roger: The young must learn!

Bloomer: Flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood, you are, Roger. I know what you've been through, felt it myself, step by step.

Roger: I see now, dad, that's a secret I didn't know.

Bloomer: It's this way: your mother's crying and I came for you.

Roger: Guess you've been making money out in Iowa.

Bloomer [*muttering*]: Yes, I've made money, but what good is it?

Roger: I could tell by your vest.

Bloomer: For God's sake, Roger, for your mother, come back.

Roger: Never . . . never . . . why ask me the one thing I can't do? Don't make it harder for me. I must go on—

Bloomer: Still the same boy, seeing things, dreams.

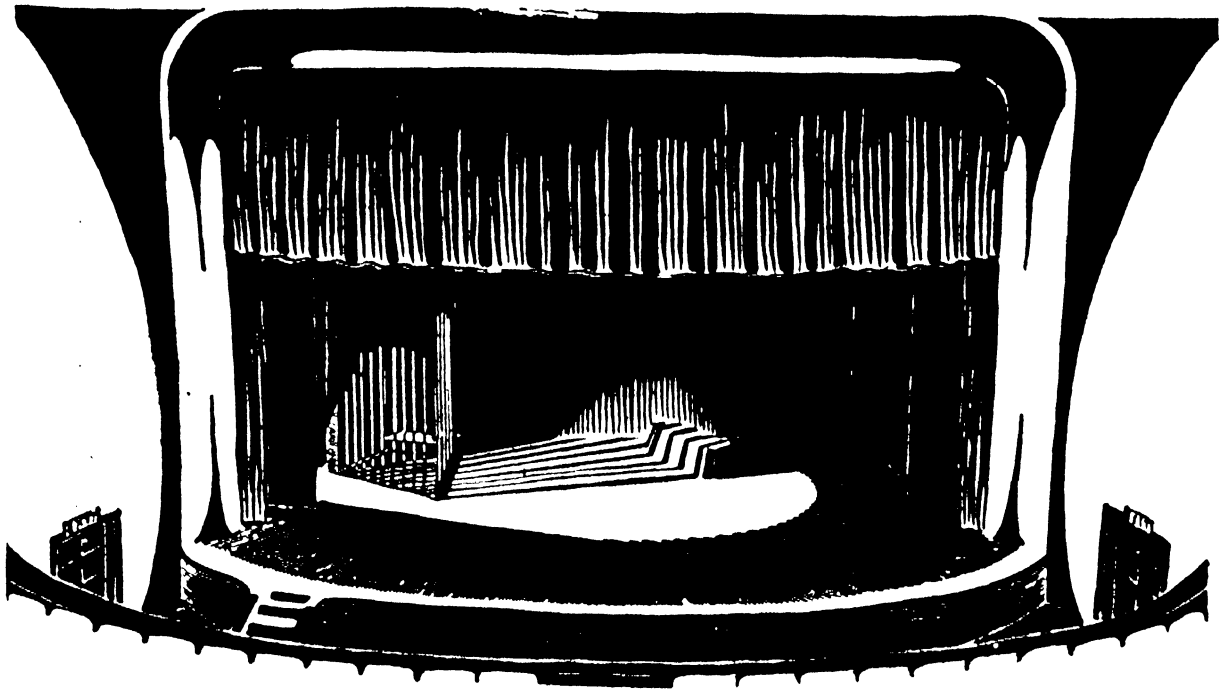
Roger: Oh, I'm frightened and alone; been sitting here thinking in this cell, but there's a great voice in me saying, Roger Bloomer, go it alone. [*A pause.* BLOOMER *mutters unhappily.*]

Bloomer: All right. You'll be needing money for that. [BLOOMER *puts a hand timidly on his son's shoulder.*] Never . . . never say an old man didn't understand. [*The* ATTENDANT *returns.*]

The Attendant: Time's up.

Bloomer [*muttering*]: See it through, boy; I'll speak to those lawyers, try to fix it somehow. . . . [*Exit* BLOOMER *and* ATTENDANT. *Keys jangle in the lock.*]

Roger [*alone*]: A man must fight alone . . . in torture alone, with his own dreams! Is Death coming for me, too? Better than a prison . . . Love and Death are one laughter ringing in my ears. [*He lies down.*



The prison walls open, revealing a shrouded body lying in a wide green place. ROGER *rises.*] In the open at last . . . here's a space for dreams . . . space. . . . [*He knows that a nightmare has taken him and that he belongs to it.*]

NOTE

[ROGER'S *dream is a nightmare of pursuit.*

This follows technique of a very rapid ballet, with accompaniment of words half chanted. Playing time is extremely short, for it is done at great speed, like a piece of very exciting music.

There are three movements or strophes:

First Strophe: *All the figures of the play, representing the conventions and proprieties, surround* ROGER *threateningly in grotesque black.*

Second Strophe: *In* ROGER'S *fevered imagination, the grotesque figures become a mocking orgy of Sex and Obscenity. Behind all the respectabilities, there is obscenity and fear of Death.* ROGER *defies the taunting ghosts; they rush upon him to kill him.*

Third Strophe: LOUISE, *"the dream that will not die," life force,*

rises radiant to protect him, dispersing the bloody ghosts that surround him, leaving him alone, ready for manhood.

Pale green light spreads over the floor, luminous, mystic. The bier makes an oblong shadow.]

Roger: What body is this? Who lies here dreaming Death's dream? Here in the desert of my soul, beside the body of love, dead love made beautiful, I pray . . . [*From either side of the bier pop out the* COLLEGE EXAMINER *and the* JUDGE, *one long and sinister and the other fat and round, both in black robes, one with a stick and the other with a gavel.*]

College Examiner: About time you prayed, young man.

The Judge: Hah! About time you organized your thoughts.

College Examiner: Don't you know us, Roger?

The Judge: Lawmakers!

College Examiner: Aged and wise.

Roger: So you've come down off your thrones, at last—here then, tell me the truth!

The Judge [*jumping about gaily*]: What is love? How does it connect with crime?

College Examiner [*severely*]: Brothels, gambling dens, tenements, crimes of passion—

The Judge: Must be stopped, must be stopped!

College Examiner: Obedience and competitive ambition.

The Judge [*gaily*]: Early to bed, early to rise—

Roger [*disgusted*]: What about my heart?

College Examiner: Your heart is dust!

The Judge: Your heart will be silent soon!—

Roger: You lawmakers are a couple of old women.

College Examiner: Ah, but we've got you in our claws.

The Judge [*getting gayer and gayer*]: Torture you at will. . . .

Roger: My father's got money, he'll get me out.

College Examiner: You'll come to us in the end, like she did! [*Pointing to the corpse*] Death is our servant! [*There has entered behind, a procession of ghostly creatures, bird-like with enormous flapping wings; these grotesques have awful claws, shapeless bodies, resembling demons in some of Goya's etchings.*]

Roger [*backs away frightened*]: What are these, what birds of Death?

College Examiner [*rubbing hands*]: Precisely.

The Judge: Birds of Death—

College Examiner: These are our servants. [*He and the* JUDGE *laugh as grotesques surround them with locked wings, making big shadows, menacing, concealing the three from audience.* ROGER, *afraid and defiant, breaks through the grotesques, backing to front of stage. A cackle of dim laughter near him. Two old women are beside him. Immensely old, hobbling, one is very tall, one tiny, deformed. The former carries a stick and the latter a gavel. The resemblance to* COLLEGE EXAMINER *and* JUDGE *is suggested in spite of their scrawny, strange figures. They stand on either side of* ROGER, *twisting their bony hands, very real and very servile.*]

Tall Old Woman: This is Death's day, this is Death's feast!

Small Old Woman: We are the old women of the Law!

Tall Old Woman: We are older than time.

Roger: Oh, shadows, is Death coming to me too, with black wings shutting out the light . . . give me a moment, Death, a moment to know life!

Tall Old Woman: We clean up at funerals.

Small Old Woman: We brush, we sweep, we clean!

Tall Old Woman: Servants of Death and time!

The Old Women [*beckoning to* ROGER, *make a ridiculous whistling sound*]: Whst! . . . Pst! [*They go to either end of the bier.*]

Tall Old Woman: She died for us.

Small Old Woman: The Law took her.

Tall Old Woman [*whispering significantly*]: A beautiful corpse.

Small Old Woman: Look at the breast that never knew a child.

Tall Old Woman: Look at the swift legs that lie so still.

Small Old Woman: Only look! [*The grotesques approach close to the corpse threateningly, their wings interlocked in a great black shadow.* ROGER *stands in front. The two old women lift sheet off the body, holding white sheet high in order to conceal body from audience. They beckon to* ROGER. ROGER *moves to it and looks behind. He gives terrific scream and backs away.*]

Roger [*his voice broken and excited*]: Blood! Blood! They're tearing the white flesh to shreds, destroying, destroying . . . [*Raising both arms high in air,* ROGER *throws himself madly defensively against the bier, falling over dead body, head first, arms out, he lies there a moment. All the wings and masks have fallen from the bird-like figures. They are people in black; solemn and real, men and women with hands folded on their fronts. All of them through-*

out have air of taking part in a ferocious, formal and noisy ceremony—a sort of modernized and streamlined Black Mass. The words are jumbled together in a mad crescendo. The two old women remain unchanged. The orderly row of black figures starts to sing a hymn, very low]:

"When my last hour cometh,
Fraught with strife and pain,
When my dust returneth
To the dust again"—

[*Meanwhile the two old women lean across the bier, raising* ROGER, *one by each arm.*]

Tall Old Woman: And isn't it written that the flesh shall be destroyed?

Small Old Woman: We destroy!

Tall Old Woman: You've given us voices, now you shall hear!

Small Old Woman: You've broken into Death's feast, you've fronted Death's wings—

Tall Old Woman: Now you shall see!

Small Old Woman: Like vultures we come, like flame to devour, to feed on the white flesh made beautiful and clean, when the dangerous spark has left it and the rich muscles are flat . . . we come! we come!

People Behind [*groaningly*]: We come.

Poppin [*in a silk hat and frock coat*]: You've made us real.

Rumsey [*similarly dressed*]: You've given us a name—

Tall Old Woman [*in a sing-song litany*]: Black-winged we came.

Small Old Woman: With eyes like glass and tongues like flame . . .

Tall Old Woman: To trouble all your dreaming with white rage and red shame!

Miss Burns [*bustling around corpse*]: We make it neat and cheerful! [POPPIN *and* RUMSEY *raise their silk hats and bow to* ROGER *in unison like marionettes.*]

Poppin: I wear a frock coat to keep sin out of my heart.

Rumsey: I wear a high hat because it's a charm against passion.

Roger: There's blood on your hands! [POPPIN *and* RUMSEY *produce enormous white handkerchiefs and separate one to each side, wiping their hands carefully.* EUGENE *with a tremendous bunch of lilies, which he starts strewing poetically on the shrouded figure. The Fat Landlady peeks covetously at the corpse.*]

Landlady: Virgins is so beautiful, think of what they missed!

Both Old Women: Pst! Whst! Sin is what she missed.

Landlady [*to* ROGER]: Don't forget the old girl with the mother's heart.

Roger: The unquenched heart! Are you still looking for love? [*Indicating* EUGENE] Take him, the straw man, he's hidden love in his cigarette case, he brings it out with a snap, and says "Have one, have one!"

Landlady [*lasciviously to* EUGENE]: A little love, dearie, a little clean kiss— [EUGENE *is frightened.* LANDLADY *pursues him vigorously.*]

Small Old Woman [*on one side of* ROGER]: You hear . . .

Tall Old Woman: You see . . .

Roger: I've looked at Death face to face and I'm not afraid.

Small Old Woman: But Life you have not seen! [LANDLADY *catches* EUGENE *after chasing him madly all over stage. She shakes him like a straw man and pulls him into shadow.*]

Roger: Where does Life dwell? [*The* OLD WOMEN *laugh.*]

Both Old Women: In Samarcand, in Arabia or in Peru?

Small Old Woman: There is sand, sand on the green places, sand on the tombs of the old dead, sand in the mouths of the dreamers. . . .

Both Old Women: Whst! . . . Pst! . . . Sand! [LANDLADY *reappears red-faced, with two large bunches of straw in her hands.*]

Landlady: He won't do, nothing in him but straw! [RAGGED MAN *and* MISS BURNS *bring forward a flapping straw figure resembling* EUGENE. *They fall on it, tearing it apart.*]

Miss Burns: Pray for him, pray for the man of sawdust and straw!

Rumsey: They told him this—

Poppin: They told him that—

Small Old Woman [*to* ROGER]: But wait till we take you to pieces, you're straw too!

Tall Old Woman: Just a straw man!

Confused Voices: Sawdust and ashes . . . sawdust and ashes . . . [*They toss the limp remains of the figure in the air, covering the stage with sawdust, straw and sand.*]

Miss Burns [*to* ROGER]: Death is so sweet and soft, like a mother. . . .

Tall Old Woman: Come to our breasts, our old bony mother's breasts!

Small Old Woman: I am Death, the mother. . . .

ROGER [*shouting*]: I laugh at Death's day, there shall be no more death . . . I'm through with you ghosts, whimpering ghosts . . . [*All the dark figures menacing around him*] Here by the body of love you've killed, I ask for life!

[Second Strophe: *Change in manner of nightmare and technique of playing.*

The STREET WALKER *staggers forward, pushing people to right and left; she is staggering drunk, carrying a very large bottle.*]

Street Walker [*staggering in circle around* ROGER]: See life, lonely boy, the whole hog in a silk chemise, sweet mamma five dollars in silk, ten dollars in skin. . . . [*Drinking long from bottle, she holds it out with raucous laugh.*] Here's love in a bottle. [*All the black figures begin to sway drunkenly.*]

Small Old Woman [*on one side of* ROGER]: Love and Death are so near, so near . . .

Tall Old Woman: Out of obscenity and fear . . .

Small Old Woman: Virgin and whore, the flesh grown stale!

Tall Old Woman: Heart of dust and lips so pale— [*Wild laughter, figures sway more drunkenly. A ray of sickly yellow light falls from above on* ROGER *and* STREET WALKER *center.*]

Street Walker [*insinuatingly*]: Silk, satin, perfume, an' a sweet drink . . . [*Leaning against the bier, she raises the bottle to* ROGER. *But the bottle has suddenly grown enormous, three feet tall, and on it in big black letters "Rat Poison—Best for Pests."*]

Roger [*takes it and holds it high*]: Death comes in many forms! [*He smashes bottle to floor. A crash. Total darkness. Then a bright ray of white light falls from directly above on* ROGER. *He stands with long sword, swinging it in both hands, the light flashing on it, shouting*]: Come on, then, birds of Death . . . I'm strong and alone; come on, who's first, I take life in my hand! [*Dim laughter in blackness*]

Mocking Voices [*out of darkness around him*]: Hero! Superman! Prophet! Hero!

Small Old Woman [*bent with mocking laughter, comes behind* ROGER *in circle of light*]: You think love is a sword? Will you defy us, young hero? We are the generations of men, we are the mothers of time!

Roger: I alone against these bloody generations—

Small Old Woman: It's the sword of death in your hand! [*She*

laughs. ROGER *turns and lunges at her with the sword. It goes through her. She jumps gaily and thumbs her nose at him.*] It's all Sex! The oracle has spoken! But Sex is the sword of Death! We kill, we kill! [ROGER *holds the long sword.*]

Street Walker [*coming to him*]: My hero, ain't you strong! Hero-papa . . . sweet daddy! [*She tries to embrace him.*]

Roger [*pushing her off*]: Ghost of love, ghost of death, don't touch me!

Street Walker [*sings in quavering voice, wriggling a little*]: "Smother me with kisses, dearie, kill me with love!" [ROGER *plunges his sword into* STREET WALKER. *It sticks through her belly and with a ghostly smile she starts to wriggle on it. She is doing an Oriental dance, crooning lasciviously. A beating of Oriental music:* RUMSEY, *the* RAGGED MAN *and* POPPIN *are clashing brassy instruments. The* TWO OLD WOMEN *come on either side of* ROGER.]

Small Old Woman: My hero!

Tall Old Woman: Where's your sword now? [ROGER *wrenches back the sword, but in his hand is a big green snake writhing. With exclamation of disgust, he throws it from him.*]

Small Old Woman: Obscene thoughts in your head.

Tall Old Woman: Obscene wishes in your belly.

Small Old Woman: Here is love to tempt you. [*She brings the fat* LANDLADY *to* ROGER.]

Landlady [*in a saccharine voice*]: I am the Sacred Cow, an' I got a mother's heart.

Small Old Woman: Veil her in seven veils. [TWO OLD WOMEN *begin to wrap veils round* LANDLADY *ridiculously. Clashing of instruments continues. The* LANDLADY *and* STREET WALKER *dance around* ROGER.]

Ragged Man [*to* ROGER]: Aw, it's nuthin' to me, wimmin an' death an' garbage.

Tall Old Woman [*shouting and pointing to* LANDLADY]: She is the Sacred Queen, holy and obscene . . .

Voices [*chanting*]: Holy . . . holy . . . holy . . .

Small Old Woman: Put a shadow round me and I'll make an obscene sign.

Rumsey [*addressing* ROGER *importantly*]: The triangle of the Y.M.C.A.

Tall Old Woman: That's a harlot's sign.

Poppin: Your mother's wedding ring.

Tall Old Woman: That's a harlot's sign.

Small Old Woman: Holy and obscene . . .

Tall Old Woman: We brush, we sweep, we clean!

Voices [*chanting*]: Holy . . . holy . . . holy . . .

Poppin: Cross-eyed harlots are blinking in the sinister arc-lights.

Rumsey: Perverse people are doing perversions on park benches.

Poppin: A hundred thousand harlots, seeking love with creaky shoes, up the street, down the street, up the street, down the street. . . .

Ragged Man [*rubbing his hands, dancing about*]: Wimmin an' death an' garbage . . . [LANDLADY *has thrown her veils over the bier, one by one. Under them she appears in Oriental dancer's costume, her fat flesh in rolls, with a great many bells on her jangling. After shaking bells in front of* ROGER, *she disappears into shadow, bells still tinkling.*]

Street Walker [*beckoning to* ROGER *pitifully*]: Got mazuma for love-bird? I show you silk shimmy, silk . . . [*Suddenly her clothes drop off, a brilliant light falls on her in fancy silk chemise with sheer stockings, just like a figure in a Broadway shop window. She starts to sing in a monotonous voice,* "Just a love nest!" *On either side of stage appears a love-nest exaggeratedly garish with pink lights around it. At left,* LANDLADY *on pink seat with* RAGGED MAN *kneeling before her like colored post card. Opposite side* MISS BURNS *in a hammock in startling frilled clothes with* RUMSEY, *silk hat in one hand, stealing a kiss. The* STREET WALKER *in spotlight abruptly stops dancing. Dead silence, figures in position as if made of wax.*]

Small Old Woman [*cringing beside* ROGER]: Here is Life! Is this what you want?

Roger: A fake, a fake! I want something real; where's the real thing? [*Dim laughter and love-nests disappear.*]

Tall Old Woman: Where is peace for a tired soul?

Small Old Woman [*still beside* ROGER *in lighted space*]: Death is real! Have you smelled Death, the lecherous smell of decaying flesh!

Tall Old Woman: Kill him and show him Death! [*Confusion among black figures moving in shadow round lighted space where* ROGER *stands.*]

Roger [*quietly*]: I know you want to kill me, you stand bloody

about me. I have felt my muscles swell strong in me, I have had joy in the sweat of my body, I have taken life in my hand—

Both Old Women: Whst! . . . Pst! . . .

Tall Old Woman: Fill his mouth with straw—

Small Old Woman: Stuff his mouth with sand! [*They seize* ROGER *and stuff his mouth with straw and sand, with which stage is strewn.*]

Tall Old Woman [*raises both hands high, screaming mystically*]: Sex, the sword of Death! [*All the people have now covered themselves with veils which were around* LANDLADY. *Men veiled with great straight swords surround* ROGER. *Two old women also veil themselves. Women come forward veiled, pushing the men back wildly, their breasts against the swords.*]

A Veiled Woman [*softly beside* ROGER]: I am love . . . take me, I am a mother's love! [*Dead silence*]

Another Woman [*speaks to* ROGER *in sweet, soft voice*]: And I . . .

Another Woman [*ever so softly*]: I am a mother's love . . .

Another Woman: And I am . . . [*The straw in* ROGER'S *mouth has disappeared. He is suddenly able to speak. He seizes the woman roughly, tearing off veil.*]

Roger: I touched you and I knew, my own, my flesh-mother . . . [*It is* MRS. BLOOMER. *She speaks in an agonized voice.*]

Mrs. Bloomer: Take me, I am a mother's love! [*There is silence around them.*]

Roger: Mother, stand by me now, here's Death, help me now! I'm your son!

Mrs. Bloomer: Roger, what's the world coming to?

Roger: I love you, mother, I can't tell you, I love you so. [*Tears choke him.*]

Mrs. Bloomer: I bore you in torture, Roger . . . flesh of my flesh, your pain is my pain, your tears are my tears . . . [ROGER *looks at her fixedly, around them an awful silence, then takes both her hands.*]

Roger: Mother, there's blood on your hands, too.

Mrs. Bloomer [*softly*]: I am a mother's love, and I bring you the peace of death, relax, Roger, be a child, mesmerize yourself, softly, softly.

Roger [*violently, breaking away from his mother*]: No, no, you're a fake, singing Death's old lullaby . . . If I die, then I die like a

man . . . laughing . . . [*Bursting into great laughter*] I am ready to stand and shake the roof of the world with laughing . . . [*They all fall upon* ROGER *madly, the women with whips snapping them, men with swords.* SMALL OLD WOMAN *jumps on the bier, crowing like a cock,* "Kyry-eerie-oo . . . kyry-eerie-oo!". ROGER *stands against the bier defending himself.* POPPIN *and* RUMSEY *throw him away from it violently. He goes down on his knees. And the confusion continues, swords and whips raised against him. Then total darkness. Then a mellow light grows slowly on* ROGER, *still on his knees.* LOUISE *stands beside him, radiant as an angel. He doesn't dare look up. All the menacing figures have gone. The two old women stand stiff, one on either side of the pair.*]

Louise [*with a little choked laugh*]: You whispered my name, how could I fail you? Does love bargain? Does love ask a sacrifice?

Tall Old Woman: Pst! There's a woman beside him.

Small Old Woman: Pst! . . . Whst! He made a dream of a woman.

Louise: Shall the terrors of the night touch you, shall the old ghosts that walk in mist make you afraid!

Roger: But they're here, the bloody-handed, here to take me—

Louise: Truth like a flame and life like a garment upon you shall be between you and them!

Roger: I called love in the desert and the wind blew sand into my mouth, and the sand covered me—

Both Old Women: Pst! . . . Whst! . . .

Small Old Woman: Make an obscene sign!

Tall Old Woman: No use! She's stronger than we, she's older than we and younger, she's the dream that will not die!

Louise: Away! Away, ghosts of yesterday, for the young are coming marching, marching; can't you hear the echo of their feet, can't you hear them singing a new song?

Small Old Woman: There's a woman at the bottom of the world—

Tall Old Woman: She's pure, but men go mad looking at her smile—

Small Old Woman: Her heart's bitter-sweet—

Tall Old Woman: No man shall know her heart!

Small Old Woman: She's older and younger than we, she of the strangling hair, and you know her by the harlot's sign!

Tall Old Woman: The Virgin Harlot!

Louise: Don't mind what they say, Roger; it's only yourself that matters.

Small Old Woman: She has strangling hair—

Tall Old Woman: They that kiss her lips go mad. [*They disappear with dim laughter.*]

Louise [*softly, in a matter-of-fact way*]: They've gone, so I too must go: you see, it's true . . . I can't help you much! [*She laughs, infinitely gentle.*]

Roger: Give me a sign so that I may know the truth.

Louise: I can't. . . . I sit at the bottom of the world thinking what no one knows.

Roger: It's all a bitter joke then, to the last.

Louise: Laughter is not enough, denial is not enough.

Roger: And love?

Louise: Not enough! In yourself you must find the secret.

Roger: But I can't bear to be alone.

Louise: Oh, the passions of childhood were easy, but a man's thought is another thing.

Roger: I can't bear it, don't go—

Louise: Would you make a dream real to trouble all your dreaming? The Virgin Harlot is very tender and her dangerous touch brings life to the tired. . . . Am I not, too, alone, where the great laughter of Death sounds like the sea! It's worth it, Roger. Life and Death are one music . . .

Roger: I hear like a beating of wings . . .

Louise [*with a little laugh*]: Of course . . . Go it alone, Roger; are you ready now? [*He nods grimly, understanding at last.*] I've given you yourself, take it. . . . Face the music; what music, falling about you like rain; what splendor of broken chords, brass trumpets braying in the morning and whisper of harps in the dusk . . . and far off, listen, the tread of marching people singing a new song . . . Good-by. . . . [*She raises her hand to him, with a laugh.*] A man's luck, Roger. [*They smile at each other across a distance. Total darkness. Then the jangling of a key in a lock, and a bright ray of light from an open door. The* PRISON ATTENDANT *appears.*]

Attendant [*gruffly, with big bunch of keys jangling*]: Come on, you're free, there's the world out there. [ROGER *rises and goes toward the lighted doorway, yawning, rubbing his eyes, still full of dreams.*]

[*Curtain*]

V. Naturalism

ELMER RICE

WHEN DAVID BELASCO produced *The Return of Peter Grimm,* he designed a stage setting to resemble as accurately as possible the interior of a room. He filled the room with furniture, ornaments, knickknacks, rugs, bookcases of real books, a hatrack hung with various kinds of real hats, and a fireplace containing a snapping fire. Now and then during the play, when a door at the back of the set was opened, the audience was given a glimpse into a second room, as completely furnished as the first. That was in 1911, and the type of staging was called naturalism. An attempt to make the stage an exact imitation of real life, naturalism grew out of a reaction against the painted scenery of the nineteenth century stage, where even shadows of a door and window frames had been painted on the canvas sets.

Naturalism in the theatre, as in literature, was realism carried to extremes. Realism may be said to be an attempt to present life by suggestive, selected detail. *Naturalism,* on the other hand, attempts to imitate life itself—not to suggest the image, but to reproduce the image. In the drama, naturalism reached its height in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Naturalistic dramatists, in revolt against romantic plays about imaginary and unreal people, purported to reveal life as it really is. Since the naturalists saw inequality and suffering in the world, they usually drew their subjects from the lower strata of society, presented the struggle of the underprivileged and the exploited, and emphasized the influence of heredity and environment. Examples are Gerhart Hauptmann's

Before Sunrise, The Weavers, and *Teamster Henschel* and Maxim Gorki's *The Lower Depths.*

Originating in Europe, the naturalistic movement in the drama was furthered by the free theatres. In Berlin, Otto Brahm staged Ibsen's plays in naturalistic settings. At his theatre in Paris, André Antoine introduced Ibsen to France and acted his plays naturalistically. Antoine, for example, broke the tradition that an actor should stand when speaking and should always face the audience. Thus his acting was a sensation, and "Antoine's back" became a by-word. Stanislavsky, at the Moscow Art Theatre, produced plays in naturalistic settings, even selecting for props objects from the locality which a play represented. The high priest of the naturalists in America was David Belasco.

The error that the naturalists of the theatre fell into was ignoring the theatre as a medium of expression and attempting to represent life as it is. As a revolt against the artificial, painted sets which had long cluttered up the stage, the naturalists in emphasizing the importance of little things cluttered up their stage too. This effort to obtain complete illusion resulted in stages set as though four walls, instead of three, enclosed the room. Thus furniture would be arranged along the curtain line and faced away from the audience; andirons and fireplace tools would be put there too, and the actors would come down-stage and warm their hands at the imaginary fire over the footlights. This violation of the *fourth-wall convention* —that is, that the stage represent a room with one of the four walls removed—brought out the fallacy in the naturalists' theory; for to carry the idea to a logical conclusion, the naturalists would have had to close in their stage by four walls and permit the audience to see only through the keyhole. Life cannot be imitated completely, and the attempt only discloses how unreal the imitation is.

On the other hand, this revolt against artificiality resulted in a valuable contribution to our theatre. Well into the nineteenth century, settings for plays were represented on flat back-drops—scenes indoors or out, trees and pillars and even furniture painted in two dimensions on canvas. First, the walls of the room were brought around to enclose the room on three sides. Thus no longer did actors make their entrances as though through the walls. Now there had to be a door. Originally a painted canvas one that flapped when it closed, the door soon came to be real, rigidly swung on hinges in a real door jamb. Then instead of painted shadows, seen to be artificial when light cast real shadows in the opposite direction, reliefs.

such as frames of doors and windows, real moldings, and other three-dimensional decorations, made natural shadows and suggested the possibilities of realistic lighting. Naturalism in the drama, like expressionism, has declined. But it showed that, artistically employed, even meticulous detail can be effective in the theatre. A modern counterpart of naturalism at its height is Elmer Rice's *Street Scene.*

Elmer Rice, born Elmer Reizenstein, in New York City in 1892, studied law at the New York Law School, from which he was graduated *cum laude.* Then, while only twenty-one years old, he wrote *On Trial,* his first play—and a success. In *On Trial,* as in several of his later plays, including the popular *Counsellor-at-Law* (1931), Rice, like Pinero, showed the influence of legal training. *On Trial* created a sensation not so much because it has an effective trial scene as because in it Rice introduced the now familiar device of the *flash-back,* whereby a scene is shifted to that of a preceding time. Like Lawson, he tried his hand at expressionism and in 1923 wrote one of the most effective of the American expressionistic plays, *The Adding Machine.* A harsh satire on the mechanization of modern life, *The Adding Machine* has for its central figure the office slave Mr. Zero, who, although he rebels against the system that keeps him down, helps to support it. The play is comparable to *Roger Bloomer,* not only for its expressionistic presentation of the revolt of the average man against a humdrum existence but for its expression of the author's social consciousness.

His next important play, *Street Scene,* won the *Pulitzer Prize,* the qualifications for which had been changed, in 1928, to read, "for the original American play, performed in New York, which shall best represent the educational value and power of the stage." Rice has written more than thirty plays, most of which have been produced and most of which, like *The Adding Machine* and *Street Scene,* reflect his concern with problems of social justice.

In 1934 Rice announced his retirement from Broadway, declaring that he no longer wanted to be a part of a theatre "in the hands of businessmen, real estate operators, and entrepreneurs, whose chief interest is to capitalize the creative talents of authors and actors and turn them into dollars and cents," that he was interested in the drama as a social force and the expression of ideas but not in the theatre as a business or as an amusement, that artists attempting to express themselves in the drama were thwarted, and that the drama critics, with some exceptions, pandered to the prevailing

tastes. In thus making his valedictory he observed that there was a large potential audience for what is really fine in the drama but added that whether or not it could be organized, or whether it was worth the trouble, he did not know. That he believed that it could be organized and that it was worth the trouble was evidenced in 1938, when he joined with Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson, Sidney Howard, and S. N. Behrman to form The Playwrights' Company.

This group, which was incorporated out of common interests on the part of five of our leading playwrights, had the practical purpose of producing plays as advantageously and as effectively as possible. Realizing that often there is no relationship between the merits of a play and its success, these playwrights saw in such an organization, whereby the profits of one play might make up a deficit on another, an opportunity to avoid the risks a producer assumes when he produces a single play. They saw too that by incorporating they could create opportunities for younger and promising playwrights, actors, and directors. Accordingly the public was informed that each of the five members would put $10,000 into the producing pool, that each author would supervise the production of his own plays but that one of the group might call on any of his fellow authors for advice or assistance, and that if the plan were successful, plays by other authors would also be put on Broadway. The company, whose number was reduced to four the following year by the death of Sidney Howard, produced nine plays on Broadway during the next three seasons. Rice's contributions were *American Landscape* (1938), which was an attempt to epitomize America, past and present, in the life of a Connecticut family, and which Rice called the most emotional play he had ever written; *Two on an Island* (1940), a broader—and mellower—cross-section of life in New York City than *Street Scene;* and *Flight to the West* (1940), an anti-Fascist play with its setting the interior of a transatlantic airplane.

Rice has declared that he has done practically nothing in his plays but say the same thing over and over again, namely, that there is nothing so important in life as freedom and that the dominant concern of us all should be with "the attainment of freedom of the body and mind through liberation from political autocracy, economic slavery, religious superstition, hereditary prejudice, and herd psychology and the attainment of the freedom of the soul through liberation from fear, jealousy, hatred, possessiveness, and self-de-

lusion." In saying this one thing, Rice has used different methods of attack. "I have employed," he has said, "a considerable variety of forms—naturalism, comedy, fantasy, allegory, expressionism, satire—but actually I have never had more than one idea." In expressing this one idea in *Street Scene* he employs naturalism.

The setting for *Street Scene* represents "the exterior of a walk-up apartment house in a mean quarter of New York." It is an ugly brownstone structure, visible to the audience as far up as the window sills of the fourth tier of windows, the lowest tier being below the sidewalk level. Typical of thousands of such houses in run-down neighborhoods of the city, it is complete to details of the rusted ornamental railing guarding the cellar areaway, the stoop of four shallow stone steps, leading up to the wooden outer doors opening on the vestibule and the glass-paneled entrance door beyond, and even the glass fanlight with its half-obliterated house number. The setting is therefore not only "real" but typically naturalistic, in that it reproduces a scene in which this cross-section of life among the tenement dwellers is revealed. Rice emphasizes the oppressiveness by setting the action during a June heat wave.

In confining the action of the play to the street in front of the brownstone house and in limiting the time of the action from the evening of one day to the afternoon of the next, Rice fulfills the old dramatic requirements of unity of time and unity of place. These, with unity of action, are called *the unities.* In modern drama the unities are quite frequently disregarded. *Street Scene,* for example, violates the unity of action, since the play contains more than a single plot. The idea of the unity of time and of action originated with Aristotle, who observed that playwrights endeavored to represent the action in their plays as taking place within a day's time, that is, twenty-four hours, and who declared that the plot must be complete in itself, that is, be unified. The idea of unity of place, not mentioned by Aristotle, is, however, almost a corollary to the other two, for limiting the time of the action tends to limit the place as well. In the Greek theatre, about which Aristotle wrote, the stage was backed by an elaborate background representing in detail the façade of a building, which served as the scene of the play. Rice similarly uses the brownstone façade of the tenement as a background for *Street Scene.* In fact, in expressing admiration for the landscapes of the French painter Claude Lorrain, Rice has pointed out that Lorrain's landscapes have an architectural background with figures in the foreground, the background composing the figures.

"In the same sense," says Rice, "in the Greek drama you always had a temple or palace which was the architectural background and determined or limited the action."

As naturalistic as the setting is the cross-section of life which Rice, out of his own observation and power of mimicry, builds up to supplement this background. The play opens on one of those sweltering summer evenings that make existence in the tenements particularly unpleasant. The scene is illuminated by the white glare of a street light. Perspiring on sidewalk and stoop, the tenants talk idly about the drab details of their domestic affairs and make banal comments on the heat. Off-stage noises, heard intermittently throughout the play, contribute to the total effect—"the distant roar of 'L' trains, automobile sirens, and the whistles of boats on the river; the rattle of trucks and the indeterminate clanking of metals; fire-engines, ambulances, musical instruments, a radio, dogs barking, and human voices calling, quarreling and screaming with laughter"—all of which are effective in the theatre, for they present images with which a city audience is familiar. They constitute recognition. So, too, do bits of recognizable scenes and incidents woven into this background—the workman with his kit of tools and his tin lunchbox, the janitor banging the garbage can on the pavement, the woman wheeling the dilapidated baby carriage, the milkman with his rack of bottles, the old-clothes man crying his wares, and the sailor with the two girls. Out of this heterogeneous background certain characters and incidents emerge to form the plot, while others remain in the background, always as real, however, as the brownstone front that sets the scene.

Street Scene, Rice has declared, deals "with the slavery of poverty, of intolerance, and, most of all, of possessiveness." Rose's reason for not going away with Sam is that she does not want to belong to anybody or want anybody to belong to her. She has seen the tragedy that has resulted from possessiveness in her own family. Poverty has made many of the characters in the play intolerant; it has also made them possessive. Mrs. Jones, whose children are evidence of her failure as a mother, affirms that she expects them to look after her in her old age. Frank Maurrant, like Mr. Zero in *The Adding Machine,* defends the system that is responsible for his situation. He is intolerant of the Kaplans not only because they are Jews but because he is too ignorant to understand what Abraham Kaplan means by a "sushal revolution." "I'm makin' a good livin' an' I'm not doin' any kickin'," says Maurrant complacently.

Kaplan is the spokesman for the ideal society, and discussion of social and economic problems, of love, and of religion, expressed in terms as banal as those about the weather, is spirited. But, like Fiorentino's dispute with Olsen as to whether Columbus or Ericson discovered America, the arguments go unresolved. For the real meaning of *Street Scene* is underemphasized: the slavery which the play deals with enslaves not only the callous and the stupid but the sensitive and the understanding; not only the Frank Maurrants and the Emma Joneses of this world but the Rose Maurrants and the Sam Kaplans.

Well constructed, the play holds continuous interest from the moment the curtain goes up and an off-stage voice is heard calling "Char-lie!" until the sailor and the two girls stroll slowly across as the curtain comes down at the end. Rice solves the problem of limiting the scene to the exterior of the building, partly by creating gossipy characters, who wherever they congregated would discuss their neighbors' affairs as well as their own, and partly by designating the time as during a heat wave, which drives these people from their stifling apartments to seek relief on the sidewalk. And from this very situation the exposition can, and does, arise naturally. Furthermore, by flanking his brownstone front with the excavating on one side and the house wrecking on the other and by including as background not only the city noises but the passers-by on the sidewalk, Rice connects his scene with the life of the city which encircles it. The murder, not too obviously foreshadowed but sufficiently motivated, is more than mere melodrama, theatrical and exciting as it is. It is committed off-stage, so that the emphasis is on character, particularly on Maurrant, rather than on the deed itself or on the victim. If Rose's reason for not going away with Sam seems to be made to bear too much the meaning of the play, there is evidence in what the girl has seen and experienced to support her decision to belong to no one. As a slice-of-life drama *Street Scene* goes beyond naturalism. It is well-plotted play, utilizing the naturalistic technique to build up, in content as well as setting, a lifelike and effective background. The main action springs from character, rises to a tense climax, and falls, bringing death and change to several people. But life, as represented by the monotone of the "scene," remains the same.

The script of *Street Scene* was offered to a dozen of New York's best-known producers, all of whom rejected it, before it was accepted by William A. Brady, whose sense of theatre values made him see

its possibilities. The play was an unusual success, not only winning the praise of the critics and the Pulitzer Prize but running on Broadway for over a year. Rice himself directed the production. The naturalism of the set, designed by Jo Mielziner after a particular brownstone apartment house in the West Sixties of New York, would have appealed to David Belasco. Mielziner, who had designed the set against his will, was surprised when it won more praise than any he had designed before. Naturalism, too, included casting, the actors being of the nationalities of the parts they played. Rice watched the performances frequently through the long run of 601 performances in New York, and whenever he detected any falling down in the acting, called a rehearsal. Before the New York run was over, the play was produced in Berlin, and there have been productions of it in London, Budapest, Mainz, Stockholm, Paris, and Warsaw.

In 1931 an excellent moving picture was made of *Street Scene,* with Sylvia Sidney as Rose Maurrant and eight members of the New York production, including Beulah Bondi as Emma Jones, in their original roles. Arranged for the screen by Elmer Rice and directed by King Vidor, the picture is a faithful adaptation of the play; for while utilizing the scope of the movies in making effective shots and close-ups, Vidor kept his camera almost continuously on the "scene."

Street Scene

by

ELMER RICE

Originally produced by William A. Brady, at the Playhouse, New York City, on Thursday evening, January 10, 1929.

STAGED BY THE AUTHOR

SETTING DESIGNED BY JO MIELZINER

CAST

Abraham Kaplan	Leo Bulgakov
Greta Fiorentino	Eleanor Wesselhoeft
Emma Jones	Beulah Bondi
Olga Olsen	Hilda Bruce
Willie Maurrant	Russel Griffin
Anna Maurrant	Mary Servoss
Daniel Buchanan	Conway Washburne
Frank Maurrant	Robert Kelly
George Jones	T. H. Manning
Steve Sankey	Joseph Baird
Agnes Cushing	Jane Corcoran
Carl Olsen	John M. Qualen
Shirley Kaplan	Anna Kostant
Filippo Fiorentino	George Humbert
Alice Simpson	Emily Hamill
Laura Hildebrand	Frederica Going
Mary Hildebrand	Eileen Smith

Charlie Hildebrand	Alexander Lewis
Samuel Kaplan	Horace Braham
Rose Maurrant	Erin O'Brien-Moore
Harry Easter	Glenn Coulter
Mae Jones	Millicent Green
Dick McGann	Joseph Lee
Vincent Jones	Matthew McHugh
Dr. John Wilson	John Crump
Officer Harry Murphy	Edward Downes
A Milkman	Ralph Willard
A Letter-Carrier	Herbert Lindholm
An Iceman	Samuel S. Bonnell
Two College Girls	Rose Lerner Astrid Alwynn
A Music Student	Mary Emerson
Marshall James Henry	Ellsworth Jones
Fred Cullen	Jean Sidney
An Old-Clothes Man	Joe Cogert
An Interne	Samuel S. Bonnell
An Ambulance Driver	Anthony Pawley
A Furniture Mover	Ed. A. McHugh
Two Nurse Maids	Astrid Alwynn Nelly Neil
Policemen	Carl C. Miltner John Kelly Anthony Pawley
Two Apartment Hunters	Frances F. Golden Otto Frederick

Passers-by: Ruth Randolph, Elizabeth Goodyear, Josephine Coghlan, Emily Hamill, Jean Sidney, Samuel S. Bonnell, Robert Mack, John Cambridge, Carl C. Milter, Anthony Pawley, Herbert Lindholm, Ed. A. McHugh, Ralph Willard, Otto Frederick, Benn Trivers

SCENE: The exterior of a "walk-up" apartment house, in a mean quarter of New York.

The action takes place on an evening in June, and on the morning and afternoon of the following day.

Street Scene

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The exterior of a "walk-up" apartment house, in a mean quarter of New York. It is of ugly brownstone and was built in the '90's. Between the pavement of large, gray flagstones and the front of the house, is a deep and narrow "area-way," guarded by a rusted, ornamental iron railing. At the right, a steep flight of rotting wooden steps leads down to the cellar and to the janitor's apartment, the windows of which are just visible above the street level. Spanning the area-way is a "stoop" of four shallow, stone steps, flanked on either side by a curved stone balustrade. Beyond the broad fourth*

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step, another step leads to the double wooden outer doors of the house; and as these are open, the vestibule, and the wide, heavy glass-paneled entrance door beyond are visible. Above the outer doors is a glass fanlight, upon which appears the half-obliterated house number. At the left side of the doorway is a sign which reads: "Flat To-Let. 6 Rooms. Steam Heat."

On either side of the stoop are the two narrow windows of the ground-floor apartments. In one of the windows, at the left, is a sign bearing the legend: "Prof. Filippo Fiorentino. Music for all occasions. Also instruction." Above, are the six narrow windows of the first-floor apartments, and above that, the stone sills of the second-floor windows can just be seen.

To the left of the house, part of the adjoining building is visible: the motor entrance to a storage warehouse. Crude boarding across the large driveway and rough planks across the sidewalk and curb indicate that an excavation is in progress. On the boarding is painted in rude lettering: "Keep Out"; and at the curb is a small barrel bearing a sign with the words: "Street Closed." To the wall of the warehouse is affixed a brass plate, bearing the name: "Patrick Mulcahy Storage Warehouse Co. Inc."

To the right of the house, scaffolding and a wooden sidewalk indicate that the house next door is being demolished. On the scaffolding is a large, wooden sign reading: "Manhattan House-Wrecking Corp."

In the close foreground, below the level of the curb, is a mere suggestion of the street.

AT RISE: *The house is seen in the white glare of an arc-light, which is just off-stage to the right. The windows in the janitor's apartment are lighted, as are also those of the ground-floor apartment, at the right, and the two windows at the extreme left of the first-floor. A dim, red light is affixed to the boarding of the excavation at the left.*

In the lighted ground-floor window, at the right of the doorway, ABRAHAM KAPLAN *is seated, in a rocking-chair, reading a Yiddish newspaper. He is a Russian Jew, well past sixty: clean-shaven, thick gray hair, hooked nose, horn-rimmed spectacles. To the left of the doorway,* GRETA FIORENTINO *is leaning out of the window. She is forty, blonde, ruddy-faced and stout. She wears a wrapper of light, flowered material and a large pillow supports her left arm and her ample, uncorseted bosom. In her right hand is a folding paper fan, which she waves languidly.*

Throughout the act and, indeed, throughout the play, there is constant noise. The noises of the city rise, fall, intermingle: the distant roar of "L" trains, automobile sirens and the whistles of boats on the river; the rattle of trucks and the indeterminate clanking of metals; fire-engines, ambulances, musical instruments, a radio, dogs barking and human voices calling, quarreling and screaming with laughter. The noises are subdued and in the background, but they never wholly cease.

A moment after the rise of the curtain, an ELDERLY MAN *enters at the right and walks into the house, exchanging a nod with* MRS. FIORENTINO. A MAN, *munching peanuts, crosses the stage from left to right.*

A Voice [*off-stage*]: Char-lie! [EMMA JONES *appears at the left. She is middle-aged, tall and rather bony. She carries a small parcel.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino [*she speaks with a faint German accent*]: Good evening, Mrs. Jones.

Mrs. Jones [*stopping beneath* MRS. FIORENTINO'S *window*]: Good evenin', Mrs. F. Well, I hope it's hot enough for you.

Mrs. Fiorentino: Ain't it joost awful? When I was through with the dishes, you could take my clothes and joost wring them out.

Mrs. Jones: Me, too. I ain't got a dry stitch on me.

Mrs. Fiorentino: I took off my shoes and my corset and made myself nice and comfortable, and tonight before I go to bed, I take a nice bath.

Mrs. Jones: The trouble with a bath is, by the time you're all through, you're as hot as when you started. [*As* OLGA OLSEN, *a thin, anemic Scandinavian, with untidy fair hair, comes up the cellar steps and onto the sidewalk*] Good evenin', Mrs. Olsen. Awful hot, ain't it?

Mrs. Olsen [*coming over to the front of the stoop*]: Yust awful. Mrs. Forentiner, my hoosban' say vill you put de garbage on de doom-vaider?

Mrs. Fiorentino: Oh, sure, sure! I didn't hear him vistle. [*As* MRS. JONES *starts to cross to the stoop*] Don't go 'vay, Mrs. Jones. [*She disappears from the window.*]

Mrs. Olsen [*pushing back some wisps of hair*]: I tank is more cooler in de cellar.

Mrs. Jones [*sitting on the stoop and fanning herself with her parcel*]: Phew! I'm just about ready to pass out.

Mrs. Olsen: My baby is crying, crying all day.

Mrs. Jones: Yeah, I often say they mind the heat more'n we do. It's the same with dogs. My Queenie has jes' been layin' aroun' all day.

Mrs. Olsen: The baby get new teet'. It hurt her.

Mrs. Jones: Don't tell me! If you was to know what I went t'roo with my Vincent. Half the time, he used to have convulsions. [WILLIE MAURRANT, *a disorderly boy of twelve, appears at the left, on roller skates. He stops at the left of the stoop and takes hold of the railing with both hands.*]

Willie [*raising his head and bawling*]: Hey, ma!

Mrs. Jones [*disapprovingly*]: If you want your mother, why don't you go upstairs, instead o' yellin' like that?

Willie [*without paying the slightest attention to her, bawls louder*]: Hey, ma!

Mrs. Maurrant [*appearing at one of the lighted first-floor windows*]: What do you want, Willie? [*She is a fair woman of forty, who looks her age, but is by no means unattractive.*]

Willie: Gimme a dime, will ya? I wanna git a cone.

Mrs. Maurrant [*to* MRS. OLSEN *and* MRS. JONES]: Good evening.

Mrs. Olsen and Mrs. Jones: Good evenin', Mrs. Maurrant.

Mrs. Maurrant [*to* WILLIE]: How many cones did you have today, already?

Willie [*belligerently*]: I'm hot! All de other guys is havin' cones. Come on, gimme a dime.

Mrs. Maurrant: Well, it's the last one. [*She disappears.*]

Mrs. Jones: You certainly don't talk very nice to your mother. [*To* MRS. OLSEN] I'd like to hear one o' mine talkin' that way to me!

Mrs. Maurrant [*appearing at the window*]: Remember, this is the last one.

Willie: Aw right. T'row it down. [MRS. FIORENTINO *reappears and leans out of the window again.*]

Mrs. Maurrant: Catch it! [*She throws out a twist of newspaper.* WILLIE *scrambles for it, hastily extracts the dime, drops the newspaper on the pavement and skates off, at the left.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino [*twisting her neck upwards*]: Good evening, Mrs. Maurrant.

Mrs. Maurrant: Good evening, Mrs. Fiorentino. [*Calling after* WILLIE] And don't come home too late, Willie! [*But* WILLIE *is already out of earshot.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: Why don't you come down and be sociable?

Mrs. Maurrant: I'm keeping some supper warm for my husband. [*A slight pause*] Well, maybe I will for just a minute. [*She leaves the window. The lights in her apartment go out.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: She has her troubles with dot Willie.

Mrs. Jones: I guess it don't bother her much. [*Significantly*] She's got her mind on other things.

Mrs. Olsen [*looking about cautiously and coming over to the left of the stoop between the two women*]: He vas comin' again today to see her.

Mrs. Jones [*rising excitedly, and leaning over the balustrade*]: Who—Sankey?

Mrs. Olsen [*nodding*]: Yes.

Mrs. Fiorentino: Are you sure, Mrs. Olsen?

Mrs. Olsen: I seen him. I vas doostin' de halls.

Mrs. Fiorentino: Dot's terrible!

Mrs. Jones: Wouldn't you think a woman her age, with a grown-up daughter—!

Mrs. Olsen: Two times already dis veek, I see him here.

Mrs. Jones: I seen him, meself, one day last week. He was comin' out o' the house, jest as I was comin' in wit' de dog. "Good mornin', Mrs. Jones," he says to me, as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. "Good mornin'," says I, lookin' him straight in the eye—[*breaking off suddenly, as the vestibule door opens*] Be careful, she's comin'. [MRS. MAURRANT *comes out of the house and stops, for a moment, on the top step.*]

Mrs. Maurrant: Goodness, ain't it hot! I think it's really cooler upstairs. [*She comes down the steps to the sidewalk.*]

Mrs. Jones: Yeah, jes' what I was sayin', meself. I feel like a wet dish-rag.

Mrs. Maurrant: I would have liked to go to the Park concert tonight, if Rose had got home in time. I don't get much chance to go to concerts. My husband don't care for music. But Rose is more like me—just crazy about it.

Mrs. Jones: Ain't she home yet?

Mrs. Maurrant: No. I think maybe she had to work overtime.

Mrs. Jones: Well, all mine ever comes home for is to sleep.

Mrs. Fiorentino: The young girls nowadays—!

Mrs. Olsen: My sister was writin' me in Schweden is same t'ing—

Mrs. Jones: It ain't only the young ones, either. [*A baby is heard crying in the cellar.*]

Olsen's Voice [*from the cellar*]: Ol-ga! [*A* MAN, *in a dinner jacket and straw hat, appears at the left, whistling a jazz tune. He crosses the stage and goes off at the right.*]

Mrs. Olsen [*hurrying to the right*]: I betcha the baby, she's cryin' again.

Olsen's Voice: Ol-ga!

Mrs. Olsen: Yes. I come right away. [*She goes down the cellar steps.*]

Mrs. Jones: What them foreigners don't know about bringin' up babies would fill a book.

Mrs. Fiorentino [*a little huffily*]: Foreigners know joost as much as other people, Mrs. Jones. My mother had eight children and she brought up seven.

Mrs. Jones [*tactfully*]: Well, I'm not sayin' anythin' about the Joimans. The Joimans is different—more like the Irish. What I'm talkin' about is all them squareheads an' Polacks—[*with a glance in* KAPLAN'S *direction*]—an' Jews.

Buchanan's Voice [*from a third story window*]: Good evening, ladies.

The Women [*in unison, looking upward*]: Oh, good evening, Mr. Buchanan.

Buchanan's Voice: Well, is it hot enough for you?

Mrs. Jones: I'll say!

Buchanan's Voice: I was just saying to my wife, it's not the heat I mind as much as it is the humidity.

Mrs. Jones: Yeah, that's it! Makes everything stick to you.

Mrs. Maurrant: How's your wife feeling in this weather?

Buchanan's Voice: She don't complain about the weather. But she's afraid to go out of the house. Thinks maybe she couldn't get back in time, in case—you know.

Mrs. Jones [*to the other women*]: I was the same way, with my Vincent—afraid to take a step. But with Mae, I was up an' out till the very last minute.

Mrs. Fiorentino [*craning her neck upward*]: Mr. Buchanan, do you think she would eat some nice minestrone—good Italian vegetable-soup?

Buchanan's Voice: Why, much obliged, Mrs. F., but I really can't get her to eat a thing.

Mrs. Jones [*rising and looking upward*]: Tell her she ought to keep up her strength. She's got two to feed, you know.

Buchanan's Voice: Excuse me, she's calling.

Mrs. Jones [*crossing to the railing, at the left of* MRS. FIORENTINO]: You'd think it was him that was havin' the baby.

Mrs. Maurrant: She's such a puny little thing.

Mrs. Fiorentino [*with a sigh*]: Well, that's the way it goes. The little skinny ones have them and the big strong ones don't.

Mrs. Maurrant: Don't take it that way, Mrs. Fiorentino. You're a young woman, yet.

Mrs. Fiorentino [*shaking her head*]: Oh, well!

Mrs. Jones: My aunt, Mrs. Barclay, was forty-two—[*breaking off*] Oh, good evenin', Mr. Maurrant! [FRANK MAURRANT *appears, at the left, with his coat on his arm. He is a tall, powerfully built man of forty-five, with a rugged, grim face.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: Good evening, Mr. Maurrant.

Maurrant: 'Evenin'. [*He goes to the stoop and seats himself, mopping his face.*] Some baby of a day!

Mrs. Maurrant: Have you been working all this while, Frank?

Maurrant: I'll say I've been workin'. Dress-rehearsin' since twelve o'clock, with lights—in this weather. An' tomorra I gotta go to Stamford, for the try-out.

Mrs. Maurrant: Oh, you're going to Stamford tomorrow?

Maurrant: Yeah, the whole crew's goin'. [*Looking at her*] What about it?

Mrs. Maurrant: Why, nothing. Oh, I've got some cabbage and potatoes on the stove for you.

Maurrant: I just had a plate o' beans at the Coffee Pot. All I want is a good wash. I been sweatin' like a horse, all day. [*He rises and goes up the steps.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: My husband, too; he's sweating terrible.

Mrs. Jones: Mine don't. There's some people that just naturally do, and then there's others that don't.

Maurrant [*to* MRS. MAURRANT]: Is anybody upstairs?

Mrs. Maurrant: No. Willie's off playing with the boys. I can't keep him home.

Maurrant: What about Rose?

Mrs. Maurrant: I think maybe she's working overtime.

Maurrant: I never heard o' nobody workin' nights in a real-estate office.

Mrs. Maurrant: I thought maybe on account of the office being closed tomorrow—[*to the others*] Mr. Jacobson, the head of the firm, died Tuesday, and tomorrow's the funeral, so I thought maybe—

Mrs. Jones: Yeah. Leave it to the Jews not to lose a workin' day, without makin' up for it.

Maurrant [*to* MRS. MAURRANT]: She shouldn't be stayin' out nights without us knowin' where she is.

Mrs. Maurrant: She didn't say a word about not coming home.

Maurrant: That's what I'm sayin', ain't it? It's a mother's place to know what her daughter's doin'.

Mrs. Fiorentino [*soothingly*]: Things are different nowadays, Mr. Maurrant, from what they used to be.

Maurrant: Not in my family, they're not goin' to be no different. Not so long as I got somethin' to say.

A Girl's Voice [*off-stage*]: Red Rover! Red Rover! Let Freddie come over! [GEORGE JONES, *a short, rather plump, red-faced man, cigar in mouth, comes out of the house, as* MAURRANT *enters the vestibule.*]

Jones: Hello, Mr. Maurrant.

Maurrant [*curtly*]: 'Evenin'. [*He enters the house.* JONES *looks after him in surprise, for a moment.* MRS. MAURRANT *seats herself on the stoop.*]

Jones: Good evenin', ladies.

Mrs. Fiorentino and Mrs. Maurrant: Good evening, Mr. Jones.

Jones [*seating himself on the left balustrade*]: What's the matter with your hubby, Mrs. Maurrant? Guess he's feelin' the heat, huh?

Mrs. Maurrant: He's been working till just now and I guess he's a little tired.

Mrs. Jones: Men are all alike. They're all easy to get along with, so long as everythin's goin' the way they want it to. But once it don't—good night!

Mrs. Fiorentino: Yes, dot's true, Mrs. Jones.

Jones: Yeah, an' what about the women?

Mrs. Maurrant: I guess it's just the same with the women. I often think it's a shame that people don't get along better, together. People ought to be able to live together in peace and quiet, without making each other miserable.

Mrs. Jones: The way I look at it, you get married for better or worse, an' if it turns out to be worse, why, all you can do is make the best of it.

Mrs. Maurrant: I think the trouble is people don't make allowances. They don't realize that everybody wants a kind word, now and then. After all, we're all human, and we can't just go along by ourselves, all the time, without ever getting a kind word. [*While*

she is speaking, STEVE SANKEY *appears, at the right. He is in the early thirties, and is prematurely bald. He is rather flashily dressed, in a patently cheap, light-gray suit, and a straw hat, with a plaid band. As he appears,* MRS. JONES *and* MRS. FIORENTINO *exchange a swift, significant look.*]

Sankey [*stopping at the right of the stoop and removing his hat*]: Good evening, folks! Is it hot enough for you?

The Others: Good evening.

Mrs. Maurrant [*self-consciously*]: Good evening, Mr. Sankey. [*Throughout the scene,* MRS. MAURRANT *and* SANKEY *try vainly to avoid looking at each other.*]

Sankey: I don't know when we've had a day like this. Hottest June fifteenth in forty-one years. It was up to ninety-four at three P.M.

Jones: Six dead in Chicago. An' no relief in sight, the evenin' paper says. [MAURRANT *appears at the window of his apartment and stands there, looking out.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: It's joost awful!

Sankey: Well, it's good for the milk business. You know the old saying, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

Mrs. Maurrant: Yes. You hardly get the milk in the morning, before it turns sour.

Mrs. Jones: I'm just after pourin' half a bottle down the sink. [MAURRANT *leaves the window.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: You shouldn't throw it avay. You should make—what do you call it?—schmier-käs'.

Sankey: Oh, I know what you mean—pot-cheese. My wife makes it, too, once in a while.

Mrs. Maurrant: Is your wife all right again, Mr. Sankey? You were telling me last time, she had a cold. [MRS. JONES *and* MRS. FIORENTINO *exchange another look.*]

Sankey: Was I? Oh, sure, sure. That was a couple weeks ago. Yes, sure, she's all right again. That didn't amount to anything much.

Mrs. Jones: You got a family, too, ain't you?

Sankey: Yes. Yes, I have. Two little girls. Well, I got to be going along. [*He goes to the left of the stoop and stops again.*] I told my wife I'd go down to the drug-store and get her some nice cold ginger-ale. You want something to cool you off in this kind of weather.

Mrs. Jones [*as* SANKEY *passes her*]: If you ask me, all that gassy stuff don't do you a bit of good.

Sankey: I guess you're right, at that. Still it cools you off. Well, good night, folks. See you all again. [*He strolls off, at the left, with affected nonchalance; but when he is almost out of sight, he casts a swift look back at* MRS. MAURRANT. *A dowdy* WOMAN, *wheeling a dilapidated baby carriage, appears at the left, and crosses the stage.*]

Jones: What's his name—Sankey?

Mrs. Jones: Yeah—Mr. Sankey.

Mrs. Maurrant: He's the collector for the milk company. [AGNES CUSHING *comes out of the house. She is a thin, dried-up woman, past fifty.*]

Miss Cushing [*coming down the steps*]: Good evening.

The Others: Good evening, Miss Cushing.

Mrs. Maurrant: How is your mother today, Miss Cushing?

Miss Cushing [*pausing at the left of the stoop*]: Why, she complains of the heat. But I'm afraid it's really her heart. She's seventy-two, you know. I'm just going down to the corner to get her a little ice-cream. [*As she goes off at the left,* OLSEN, *the janitor, a lanky Swede, struggles up the cellar steps with a large, covered, tin garbage-barrel. The others look around in annoyance, as he bangs the garbage barrel upon the pavement.*]

Olsen: Phew! Hot! [*He mops his face and neck with a dingy handkerchief, then lights his pipe and leans against the railing.*]

Mrs. Jones [*significantly, as she crosses to the center of the stoop and sits*]: Between you and I, I don't think her mother's got long for this world. Once the heart starts goin' back on you—!

Mrs. Fiorentino: It's too bad.

Mrs. Maurrant: Poor soul! She'll have nothing at all when her mother dies. She's just spent her whole life looking after her mother.

Mrs. Jones: It's no more than her duty, is it?

Mrs. Fiorentino: You could not expect that she should neglect her mother.

A Voice [*off-stage*]: Char-lie!

Mrs. Maurrant: It's not a matter of neglecting. Only—it seems as if a person should get more out of life than just looking after somebody else.

Mrs. Jones: Well, I hope to tell you, after all I've done for mine, I expect 'em to look after me, in my old age.

Mrs. Maurrant: I don't know. It seems to me you might just as well not live at all, as the way she does. [*Rising, with affected casualness*] I don't know what's become of Willie. I think I'd better walk down to the corner and look for him. My husband don't like

it if he stays out late. [*She goes off, at the left. They all watch her, in dead silence, until she is out of earshot. Then the storm breaks.*]

Mrs. Jones [*rising excitedly*]: Didja get that? Goin' to look for Willie! Can ya beat it?

Mrs. Fiorentino: It's joost terrible!

Jones: You think she's just goin' out lookin' for this guy Sankey?

Mrs. Jones [*scornfully*]: Ain't men the limit? What do you think he come walkin' by here for? [*Mincingly*] Just strolled by to get the wife a little ginger-ale. A fat lot he cares whether his wife has ginger-ale!

Mrs. Fiorentino: Two little girls he's got, too!

Jones: Yeah, that ain't right—a bird like that, wit' a wife an' two kids of his own.

Mrs. Fiorentino: The way he stands there and looks and looks at her!

Mrs. Jones: An' what about the looks she was givin' him! [*Seating herself again*] You'd think he was the Prince of Wales, instead of a milk-collector. And didja get the crack about not seein' him for two weeks?

Mrs. Fiorentino: And joost today he was upstairs, Mrs. Olsen says. [OLSEN *approaches the stoop and removes his pipe from his mouth.*]

Olsen [*pointing upwards*]: Some day, her hoosban' is killing him. [*He replaces his pipe and goes back to his former position.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: Dot would be terrible!

Jones: He's li'ble to, at that. You know, he's got a wicked look in his eye, dat baby has.

Mrs. Jones: Well, it's no more than he deserves, the little rabbit—goin' around breakin' up people's homes. [*Mockingly*] Good evenin', folks! Jes' like Whozis on the radio.

Jones: D'ya think Maurrant is wise to what's goin' on?

Mrs. Jones: Well, if he ain't, there must be somethin' the matter with him. But you never can tell about men. They're as blind as bats. An' what I always say is, in a case like that, the husband or the wife is always the last one to find out. [MISS CUSHING, *carrying a small paper bag, hurries on, at the left, in a state of great excitement.*]

Miss Cushing [*breathlessly, as she comes up the left of the stoop*]: Say, what do you think! I just saw them together—the two of them!

Mrs. Jones [*rising excitedly*]: What did I tell you?

Mrs. Fiorentino: Where did you see them, Miss Cushing?

Miss Cushing: Why, right next door, in the entrance to the warehouse. They were standing right close together. And he had his hands up on her shoulders. It's awful, isn't it?

Jones: Looks to me like this thing is gettin' pretty serious.

Mrs. Jones: You didn't notice if they was kissin' or anythin', did you?

Miss Cushing: Well, to tell you the truth, Mrs. Jones, I was so ashamed for her, that I hardly looked at all.

Jones [*sotto voce, as the house door opens*]: Look out! Maurrant's comin'. [*A conspirators' silence falls upon them, as* MAURRANT, *pipe in mouth, comes out of the house.*]

Miss Cushing [*tremulously*]: Good evening, Mr. Maurrant.

Maurrant [*on the top step*]: 'Evenin'. [*To the others*] What's become of me wife?

Mrs. Jones: Why, she said she was goin' around the corner to look for Willie.

Maurrant [*grunts*]: Oh.

Mrs. Jones: They need a lot of lookin' after, when they're that age. [*A momentary silence.*]

Miss Cushing: Well, I think I'd better get back to my mother. [*She goes up the steps.*]

Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Fiorentino and Jones: Good night, Miss Cushing.

Miss Cushing: Good night. [*As she passes* MAURRANT] Good night, Mr. Maurrant.

Maurrant: 'Night. [*She looks at him swiftly, and goes into the vestibule.*]

A Boy's Voice [*off-stage*]: Red Rover! Red Rover! Let Mary come over! [*As* MISS CUSHING *enters the house,* SHIRLEY KAPLAN *appears at the ground-floor window, at the extreme right, with a glass of steaming tea in her hand. She is a dark, unattractive Jewess, past thirty. She wears a light house-dress.* KAPLAN *goes on reading.*]

Shirley [*to the neighbors outside; she speaks with the faintest trace of accent*]: Good evening.

The Others [*not very cordially*]: Good evenin'.

Shirley: It's been a terrible day, hasn't it?

Jones and Mrs. Jones: Yeah.

Shirley [*going to the other window*]: Papa, here's your tea. Haven't you finished your paper yet? It makes it so hot, with the lights on.

Kaplan [*lowering his newspaper*]: Oll right! Oll right! Put it out! Put it out! There is anahoo, notting to read in de papers. Notting

but deevorce, skendal, and moiders. [*He speaks with a strong accent, over-emphatically and with much gesticulation. He puts his paper away, removes his glasses, and starts to drink his tea.*]

Shirley: There doesn't seem to be a breath of air, anywhere. [*No one answers.* SHIRLEY *goes away from the window and puts out the lights.*]

Mrs. Jones [*sotto voce*]: You wouldn't think anybody would want to read that Hebrew writin', would ya? I don't see how they make head or tail out of it, meself.

Jones: I guess if you learn it when you're a kid—

Mrs. Jones [*suddenly*]: Well, will you look at your hubby, Mrs. F.! He's sure got his hands full! [*She looks towards the left, greatly amused.* SHIRLEY *reappears at the window at the extreme right, and seats herself on the sill.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino [*leaning far out*]: Joost look at him! [*Calling*] Lippo, be careful you don't drop any!

Lippo [*off-stage*]: 'Allo, Margherita! [*They all watch in amusement, as* FILIPPO FIORENTINO, *a fat Italian, with thick black hair and mustache, comes on at the left. He is clutching a violin in his left arm and balancing five ice-cream cones in his right hand.*]

Lippo [*shouting*]: Who wantsa da ice-cream cone? Nice fresha ice-cream cone!

Mrs. Fiorentino: Lippo, you will drop them!

Mrs. Jones [*going up to him*]: Here, gimme your violin. [*She relieves him of the violin and he shifts two of the cones to his left hand.*]

Lippo [*as* MRS. JONES *hands the violin to* MRS. FIORENTINO]: T'ank you, Meeses Jones. 'Ere's for you a nica, fresha ice-cream cone. [MRS. FIORENTINO *puts the violin on a chair behind her.*]

Mrs. Jones [*taking a cone*]: Why, thank you very much, Mr. F.

Lippo [*going up to the window*]: Meeses Fiorentino, 'ere's for you a nica, fresha ice-cream cone.

Mrs. Fiorentino [*taking the cone*]: It makes me too fat.

Lippo: Ah, no! Five, ten poun' more, nobody can tell da deef! [*He laughs aloud at his own joke and crosses to the stoop.*]

Mrs. Jones [*enjoying her cone*]: Ain't he a sketch, though?

Lippo: Meester Jones, you eata da cone, ha?

Jones: Why, yeah, I will at that. Thanks. Thanks.

Lippo: Meester Maurrant?

Maurrant: Naw; I got me pipe.

Lippo: You lika better da pipe den da ice-cream? [*Crossing the stoop*] Meesa Kaplan, nica, fresha cone, yes?

Shirley. No, thanks. I really don't want any.

Lippo: Meester Kaplan, yes?

Kaplan [*waving his hand*]: No, no! Tenks, tenks!

Mrs. Jones [*to* JONES]: You oughta pay Mr. F. for the cones.

Jones [*reluctantly reaching into his pocket*]: Why, sure.

Lippo [*excitedly*]: Ah, no, no! I don' taka da mon'. I'm treata da whole crowd. I deedn' know was gona be such a biga crowd or I bringa doz'. [*Crossing to* OLSEN] Meester Olsen, you lika da cone, ha?

Olsen: Sure. Much oblige'. [*He takes the pipe from his mouth and stolidly licks the cone.*]

Lippo [*seating himself on the stoop, with a long sigh of relaxation*]: Aaah! [*He tastes the cone and smacking his lips, looks about for approval.*] Ees tasta good, ha?

Jones [*his mouth full*]: You betcha!

Mrs. Jones: It cools you off a little.

Lippo: Sure. Dassa right. Cool you off. [*He pulls at his clothing and sits on the stoop.*] I'ma wat, wat—like I jus' come outa da bad-tub. Ees 'ota like hal in da Park. Two, t'ree t'ousan' people, everybody sweatin'—ees smal lika menageria. [*While he is speaking,* ALICE SIMPSON, *a tall, spare spinster, appears at the right. She goes up the steps, enters the vestibule, and is about to push one of the buttons on the side wall.*]

Mrs. Jones [*sotto voce*]: She's from the Charities. [*Coming over to the stoop and calling into the vestibule*] If you're lookin' for Mrs. Hildebrand, she ain't home yet.

Miss Simpson [*coming to the doorway*]: Do you know when she'll be back?

Mrs. Jones: Well, she oughta be here by now. She jus' went aroun' to the Livingston. That's the pitcher-theayter.

Miss Simpson [*outraged*]: You mean she's gone to a moving-picture show?

Olsen [*calmly*]: She's comin' now.

Lippo [*rising to his feet and calling vehemently*]: Mees Hil'-brand! Hurry up! Hurry up! Ees a lady here. [*He motions violently to her to hurry.* LAURA HILDEBRAND *appears at the right, with her two children,* CHARLIE *and* MARY. *She is a small, rather young woman, with a manner of perpetual bewilderment. Both children are chewing gum, and* MARY *comes on skipping a rope and chanting:*

"Apple, peach, pear, plum, banana." CHARLIE *carefully avoids all the cracks in the sidewalk.*]

Miss Simpson [*coming out on the steps*]: Well, good evening, Mrs. Hildebrand!

Mrs. Hildebrand [*flustered*]: Good evening, Miss Simpson.

Miss Simpson: Where have you been?—to a moving-picture show?

Mrs. Hildebrand: Yes, ma'am.

Miss Simpson: And where did you get the money?

Mrs. Hildebrand: It was only seventy-five cents.

Miss Simpson: Seventy-five cents is a lot, when you're being dispossessed and dependent upon charity. I suppose it came out of the money I gave you to buy groceries with.

Mrs. Hildebrand: We always went, Thursday nights, to the pictures when my husband was home.

Miss Simpson: Yes, but your husband isn't home. And as far as anybody knows, he has no intention of coming home.

Kaplan [*leaning forward out of his window*]: Ees dis your conception of cherity?

Shirley: Papa, why do you interfere?

Miss Simpson [*to* KAPLAN]: You'll please be good enough to mind your own business.

Kaplan: You should go home and read in your Bible de life of Christ.

Mrs. Jones [*to* MRS. FIORENTINO]: Will you listen to who's talkin' about Christ!

Miss Simpson [*turning her back on* KAPLAN *and speaking to* MRS. HILDEBRAND]: You may as well understand right now that nobody's going to give you any money to spend on moving-picture shows.

Lippo: Ah, wotsa da matter, lady? [*He thrusts his hand into his pocket and takes out a fistful of coins.*] 'Ere, you taka da mon', you go to da pitcha, ever' night. [*He forces the coins into* MRS. HILDEBRAND'S *hand.*] An' here's for da bambini. [*He gives each child a nickel.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino [*to* MRS. JONES]: Dot's why we never have money.

Mrs. Hildebrand [*bewildered*]: I really oughtn't to take it.

Lippo: Sure! Sure! I got plenta mon'.

Miss Simpson [*disgustedly*]: We'd better go inside. I can't talk to you here, with all these people.

Mrs. Hildebrand [*meekly*]: Yes, ma'am. [*She follows* MISS SIMPSON *into the house, her children clinging to her.*]

Mrs. Jones: Wouldn't she give you a pain?

Lippo: I tella you da whola troub'. She's a don' gotta nobody to sleepa wit'. [*The men laugh.*]

Mrs. Jones [*to* MRS. FIORENTINO]: Ain't he the limit!

Mrs. Fiorentino [*greatly pleased*]: Tt!

Lippo: Somebody go sleepa wit' her, she's alla right, Meester Jones, 'ow 'bout you? [SHIRLEY, *embarrassed, leaves the window.*]

Jones [*with a sheepish grin*]: Naw, I guess not.

Lippo: Wot'sa matter? You 'fraid you' wife, ha? Meester Maurrant, how 'bout you? [MAURRANT *emits a short laugh.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino [*delighted*]: Lippo, you're joost awful.

Lippo [*enjoying himself hugely*]: Alla ri'. Ahma gonna go myself! [*He laughs boisterously. The others laugh too.*]

Mrs. Jones [*suddenly*]: Here's your wife, now, Mr. Maurrant. [*A sudden silence falls upon them all, as* MRS. MAURRANT *approaches at the left. A swift glance apprises her of* MAURRANT'S *presence.*]

Lippo: 'Allo, Meeses Maurrant. Why you don' come to da concerto?

Mrs. Maurrant: Well, I was waiting for Rose, but she didn't get home. [*To* MAURRANT, *as she starts to go up the steps*] Is she home yet, Frank?

Maurrant: No, she ain't. Where you been all this while?

Mrs. Maurrant: Why, I've been out looking for Willie.

Maurrant: I'll give him a good fannin', when I get hold of him.

Mrs. Maurrant: Ah, don't whip him, Frank, please don't. All boys are wild like that, when they're that age.

Jones: Sure! My boy Vincent was the same way. An' look at him, today—drivin' his own taxi an' makin' a good livin'.

Lippo [*leaning on the balustrade*]: Ees jussa same t'ing wit' me. W'en Ahm twelva year, I run away—I don' never see my parent again.

Maurrant: That's all right about that. But it ain't gonna be that way in my family.

Mrs. Maurrant [*as* MISS SIMPSON *comes out of the house*]: Look out, Frank. Let the lady pass.

Miss Simpson: Excuse me. [*They make way for her, as she comes down the steps.* MRS. MAURRANT *seats herself on the stoop.*]

Lippo: Meeses Hil'brand, she gotta de tougha luck, ha? Tomorra, dey gonna t'row 'er out in da street, ha?

Miss Simpson [*stopping at the right of the stoop and turning towards him*]: Yes, they are. And if she has any place to sleep, it

will only be because the Charities find her a place. And you'd be doing her a much more neighborly act, if you helped her to realize the value of money, instead of encouraging her to throw it away.

Lippo [*with a deprecatory shrug*]: Ah, lady, no! I give 'er coupla dollar, maka 'er feel good, maka me feel good—dat don' 'urt nobody. [SHIRLEY *reappears at the window.*]

Miss Simpson: Yes, it does. It's bad for her character.

Kaplan [*throwing away his cigarette and laughing aloud*]: Ha! You mek me leff!

Miss Simpson [*turning, angrily*]: Nobody's asking your opinion.

Kaplan: Dot's oll right. I'm taling you wit'out esking. You hoid maybe already dot poem:

"Orgenized cherity, measured and iced,
In der name of a kushus, stetistical Christ."

Miss Simpson [*fiercely*]: All the same, you Jews are the first to run to the Charities. [*She strides angrily off at the right.* LIPPO, *affecting a mincing gait, pretends to follow her.*]

Kaplan [*leaning out of the window*]: Come back and I'll tal you somet'ing will maybe do good your kerecter.

Mrs. Fiorentino: Lippo!

Mrs. Jones [*highly amused*]: Look at him, will ya?

Lippo [*laughing and waving his hand*]: Gooda-bye, lady! [*He comes back to the stoop.*]

Kaplan [*to the others*]: Dey toin out in de street a mudder vit' two children, and dis female comes and preaches to her bourgeois morelity.

Mrs. Jones [*to* MRS. FIORENTINO]: He's shootin' off his face again.

Shirley: Papa, it's time to go to bed!

Kaplan [*irritably*]: Lat me alone, Shoiley. [*Rising and addressing the others*] Dees cherities are notting but anudder dewise for popperizing de verking-klesses. W'en de lendlords steal from de verkers a million dollars, dey give to de Cherities a t'ousand.

Maurrant: Yeah? Well, who's puttin' her out on the street? What about the lan'lord here? He's a Jew, ain't he?

Mrs. Jones: I'll say he's a Jew! Isaac Cohen!

Kaplan: Jews oder not Jews—wot has dis got to do vit' de quastion? I'm not toking releegion, I'm toking economics. So long as de ke*pit*alist klesses—

Maurrant [*interrupting*]: I'm talkin' about if you don't pay your rent, you gotta move.

Mrs. Maurrant: It doesn't seem right, though, to put a poor woman out of her home.

Mrs. Fiorentino: And for her husband to run away—dot vos not right either.

Lippo: I betcha 'e's got 'nudder woman. He find a nice blonda chicken, 'e run away.

Mrs. Jones: There ought to be a law against women goin' around, stealin' other women's husbands.

Mrs. Fiorentino: Yes, dot's right, Mrs. Jones.

Maurrant: Well, what I'm sayin' is, it ain't the landlord's fault.

Kaplan: Eet's de folt of our economic system. So long as de institution of priwate property exeests, de verkers vill be at de moicy of de property-owning klesses.

Maurrant: That's a lot o' bushwa! I'm a woikin' man, see? I been payin' dues for twenty-two years in the Stage-Hands Union. If we're not gettin' what we want, we call a strike, see?—and then we get it.

Lippo: Sure! Ees same wit' me. We gotta Musician Union. We getta pay for da rehears', we getta pay for da overtime—

Shirley: That's all right when you belong to a strong union. But when a union is weak, like the Teachers' Union, it doesn't do you any good.

Mrs. Jones [*to* MRS. FIORENTINO]: Can y' imagine that?—teachers belongin' to a union!

Kaplan [*impatiently*]: Oll dese unions eccomplish notting wotever. Oll dis does not toch de fondamental problem. So long as de tuls of industry are in de hands of de ke*pit*alist klesses, ve vill hev exploitation and sloms and—

Maurrant: T' hell wit' all dat hooey! I'm makin' a good livin' an' I'm not doin' any kickin'.

Olsen [*removing his pipe from his mouth*]: Ve got prosperity, dis coontry.

Jones: You said somethin'!

Kaplan: Sure, for de reech is planty prosperity! Mister Morgan rides in his yacht and upstairs dey toin a voman vit' two children in de street.

Maurrant: And if you was to elect a Socialist president tomorra, it would be the same thing.

Mrs. Fiorentino: Yes, dot's right, Mr. Maurrant.

Jones: You're right!

Kaplan: Who's toking about electing presidents? Ve must put de tuls of industry in de hends of de vorking-klesses and dis ken be accomplished only by a sushal revolution!

Maurrant: Yeah? Well, we don't want no revolutions in this country, see? [*General chorus of assent.*]

Mrs. Jones. I know all about that stuff—teachin' kids there ain't no Gawd an' that their gran'fathers was monkeys.

Jones [*rising, angrily*]: Free love, like they got in Russia, huh? [KAPLAN *makes a gesture of impatient disgust, and sinks back into his chair.*]

Maurrant: There's too goddam many o' you Bolshevikis runnin' aroun' loose. If you don't like the way things is run here, why in hell don't you go back where you came from?

Shirley: Everybody has a right to his own opinion, Mr. Maurrant.

Maurrant: Not if they're against law and order, they ain't. We don't want no foreigners comin' in, tellin' us how to run things.

Mrs. Fiorentino: It's nothing wrong to be a foreigner. Many good people are foreigners.

Lippo: Sure! Looka Eetalians. Looka Cristoforo Colombo! 'E'sa firs' man discov' America—'e's Eetalian, jussa like me.

Maurrant: I'm not sayin' anythin' about that—

Olsen [*removing his pipe*]: Firs' man is Leif Ericson.

Lippo [*excitedly, going towards* OLSEN]: Wassa dat?

Olsen: Firs' man is Leif Ericson.

Lippo: No! No! Colombo! Cristoforo Colomb'—'e'sa firs' man discov' America—ever'body knowa dat! [*He looks about appealingly.*]

Mrs. Jones: Why, sure, everybody knows that.

Jones: Every kid learns that in school.

Shirley: Ericson was really the first discoverer—

Lippo [*yelling*]: No! Colomb'!

Shirley: But Columbus was the first to open America to settlement.

Lippo [*happily, as he goes back to the stoop*]: Sure, dassa wot Ahm say—Colomb' is firs'.

Olsen: Firs' man is Leif Ericson. [LIPPO *taps his forehead, significantly.*]

Lippo: Looka wot Eetalian do for America—'e build bridge, 'e build railroad, 'e build subway, 'e dig sewer. Wit'out Eetalian, ees no America.

Jones: Like I heard a feller sayin': the Eye-talians built New York, the Irish run it an' the Jews own it. [*Laughter.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino [*convulsed*]: Oh! Dot's funny!

Jones [*pleased with his success*]: Yep; the Jews own it all right.

Maurrant: Yeah, an' they're the ones that's doin' all the kickin'.

Shirley: It's no disgrace to be a Jew, Mr. Maurrant.

Maurrant: I'm not sayin' it is. All I'm sayin' is, what we need in this country is a little more respect for law an' order. Look at what's happenin' to people's homes, with all this divorce an' one thing an' another. Young girls goin' around smokin' cigarettes an' their skirts up around their necks. An' a lot o' long-haired guys talkin' about free love an' birth control an' breakin' up decent people's homes. I tell you it's time somethin' was done to put the fear o' God into people!

Mrs. Jones: Good for you, Mr. Maurrant!

Jones: You're damn right.

Mrs. Fiorentino: Dot's right, Mr. Maurrant!

Mrs. Maurrant: Sometimes, I think maybe they're only trying to get something out of life.

Maurrant: Get somethin', huh? Somethin' they oughtn't to have, is that it?

Mrs. Maurrant: No; I was only thinking—

Maurrant: Yeah, you were only thinkin', huh?

Kaplan [*rising to his feet again*]: De femily is primerily an economic institution.

Mrs. Jones [*to* MRS. FIORENTINO]: He's in again.

Kaplan: W'en priwate property is ebolished, de femily will no longer hev eny reason to exeest.

Shirley: Can't you keep quiet, papa?

Maurrant [*belligerently*]: Yeah? Is that so? No reason to exist, huh? Well, it's gonna exist, see? Children respectin' their parents an' doin' what they're told, get me? An' husbands an' wives, lovin' an' honorin' each other, like they said they would, when they was spliced—an' any dirty sheeny that says different is li'ble to get his head busted open, see?

Mrs. Maurrant [*springing to her feet*]: Frank!

Shirley [*trying to restrain* KAPLAN]: Papa!

Kaplan: Oll right! I should argue vit' a low-kless gengster.

Maurrant [*raging*]: Who's a gangster? Why, you goddam—! [*He makes for the balustrade.*]

Mrs. Maurrant [*seizing his arm*]: Frank!

Jones [*seizing the other arm*]: Hey! Wait a minute! Wait a minute!

Maurrant: Lemme go!

Shirley [*interposing herself*]: You should be ashamed to talk like that to an old man! [*She slams down the window.*]

Maurrant: Yeah? [*To* MRS. MAURRANT *and* JONES] All right, lemme go! I ain't gonna do nothin'. [*They release him.* SHIRLEY *expostulates with* KAPLAN *and leads him away from the window.*]

Mrs. Jones [*who has run over to the right of the stoop*]: Maybe if somebody handed him one, he'd shut up with his talk for a while.

Lippo: 'E talka lika dat een Eetaly, Mussolini's gonna geeve 'eem da castor-oil.

Mrs. Jones [*laughing*]: Yeah? Say, that's a funny idea! [*Still chuckling, she goes back to the railing at the left of the stoop.*]

Jones: No kiddin', is that what they do?

Mrs. Fiorentino: Yes, dot's true. My husband read it to me in the Italian paper.

Mrs. Maurrant: Why must people always be hurting and injuring each other? Why can't they live together in peace?

Maurrant [*mockingly*]: Live in peace! You're always talkin' about livin' in peace!

Mrs. Maurrant: Well, it's true, Frank. Why can't people just as well be kind to each other?

Maurrant: Then let 'im go live with his own kind.

Jones [*coming down the steps*]: Yeah, that's what I say. [*As* MRS. JONES *laughs aloud*] What's eatin' you?

Mrs. Jones: I was just thinkin' about the castor-oil. [MAURRANT *seats himself on the right balustrade.*]

Lippo: Sure, 'esa funny fell', Mussolini. [*Doubling up in mock pain*] 'E geeve 'em da pain in da belly, dey no can talk. [*Suddenly*] Look! 'Eresa da boy. 'Esa walk along da street an' reada da book. Datsa da whola troub': reada too much book. [*While* LIPPO *is speaking,* SAMUEL KAPLAN *appears at the left. He is twenty-one, slender, with dark, unruly hair and a sensitive, mobile face. He is hatless, and his coat is slung over one shoulder. He walks along slowly, absorbed in a book. As he approaches the stoop,* SHIRLEY, *in a kimono, appears at the closed window, opens it, and is about to go away again, when she sees* SAM.]

Shirley [*calling*]: Sam!

Sam [*looking up*]: Hello, Shirley.

Shirley: Are you coming in?

Sam: No, not yet. It's too hot to go to bed.

Shirley: Well, I'm tired. And papa's going to bed, too. So don't make a noise when you come in.

Sam: I won't.

Shirley: Good night.

Sam: Good night. [SHIRLEY *goes away from the window.*]

Sam [*to the others, as he seats himself on the curb to the right of the stoop*]: Good evening!

Several: 'Evening.

Lippo [*approaching* SAM]: 'Ow you lika da concerto? I see you sittin' in da fronta seat.

Sam: I didn't like it. Why don't they play some real music, instead of all those Italian organ-grinder's tunes?

Lippo [*excitedly*]: Wotsa da matter? You don't lika da Verdi?

Sam: No, I don't. It's not music!

Lippo: Wot you call music—da Tschaikov', ha? [*He hums derisively a few bars from the first movement of the* Symphonie Pathétique.]

Sam: Yes, Tschaikovsky—and Beethoven. Music that comes from the soul.

Mrs. Maurrant: The one I like is— [*She hums the opening bars of Mendelssohn's* Spring Song.]

Lippo: Dotsa da *Spreeng Song* from da Mendelson.

Mrs. Maurrant: Yes! I love that. [*She goes on humming softly.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: And the walzer von Johann Strauss. [*She hums the* Wienerwald Waltz.]

Mrs. Jones: Well, gimme a good jazz band, every time.

Lippo [*protesting*]: Ah no! Ees not music, da jazz. Ees breaka your ear. [*He imitates the discordant blaring of a saxophone.*]

Jones [*bored*]: Well, I guess I'll be on me way.

Mrs. Jones: Where are *you* goin'?

Jones: Just around to Callahan's to shoot a little pool. Are you comin' along, Mr. Maurrant?

Maurrant: I'm gonna wait awhile. [*A* MAN, *with a club-foot, appears at the right and crosses the stage.*]

Mrs. Jones [*as* JONES *goes toward the right*]: Don't be comin' home lit, at all hours o' the mornin'.

Jones [*over his shoulder*]: Aw, lay off dat stuff! I'll be back in a half-an-hour. [*He goes off, at the right.*]

A Voice [*off-stage*]: Char-lie!

Mrs. Jones: Him an' his pool! Tomorra he won't be fit to go to work, again.

Sam [*who has been awaiting a chance to interrupt*]: When you hear Beethoven, it expresses the struggles and emotions of the human soul.

Lippo [*waving him aside*]: Ah, ees no good, da Beethoven. Ees alla time sad, sad. Ees wanna maka you cry. I don' wanna cry, I wanna laugh. Eetalian music ees make you 'appy. Ees make you feel good. [*He sings several bars of* Donna é mobile.]

Mrs. Maurrant [*applauding*]: Yes, I like that, too.

Lippo: Ah, ees bew-tiful! Ees maka you feela fine. Ees maka you wanna dance. [*He executes several dance steps.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino [*rising*]: Vait, Lippo, I vill give you music. [*She goes away from the window. The lights go on in the Fiorentino apartment.*]

Lippo [*calling after her*]: Playa Puccini, Margherita! [*He hums an air from* Madame Butterfly. *Then as* MRS. FIORENTINO *begins to play the waltz from* La Bohème *on the piano*] Ah! *La Bohème!* Bew-tiful! Who'sa gonna dance wit' me? Meeses Maurrant, 'ow 'bout you?

Mrs. Maurrant [*with an embarrassed laugh*]: Well, I don't know. [*She looks timidly at* MAURRANT, *who gives no sign.*]

Lippo: Ah, come on! Dansa wit' me! [*He takes her by the hand.*]

Mrs. Maurrant: Well, all right, I will.

Lippo: Sure, we hava nica dance. [*They begin to dance on the sidewalk.*]

Lippo [*to* MAURRANT]: Your wife ees dansa swell.

Mrs. Maurrant [*laughing*]: Oh, go on, Mr. Fiorentino! But I always loved to dance! [*They dance on.* SANKEY *appears, at the left, carrying a paper-bag, from which the neck of a ginger-ale bottle protrudes.* MAURRANT *sees him and rises.*]

Mrs. Jones [*following* MAURRANT'S *stare and seeing* SANKEY]: Look out! You're blockin' traffic!

Sankey [*stopping at the left of the stoop*]: I see you're having a little dance. [MRS. MAURRANT *sees him and stops dancing.* LIPPO *leans against the right balustrade, panting. The music goes on.*]

Sankey: Say, go right ahead. Don't let me stop you.

Mrs. Maurrant: Oh, that's all right. I guess we've danced about enough. [*She goes up the steps, ill at ease.*]

Sankey: It's a pretty hot night for dancing.

Mrs. Maurrant: Yes, it is.

Sankey [*going towards the right*]: Well, I got to be going along. Good night, folks.

The Others [*except* MAURRANT]: Good night.

Lippo [*as he seats himself at the left of the stoop*]: Stoppa da music, Margherita! [*The music stops.* SANKEY *goes off, at the right.* MRS. MAURRANT *goes quickly up the steps.*]

Maurrant [*stopping her*]: Who's that bird?

Mrs. Maurrant: Why, that's Mr. Sankey. He's the milk-collector.

Maurrant: Oh, he is, is he? Well, what's he hangin' around here for?

Mrs. Maurrant: Well, he lives just down the block, somewhere.

Mrs. Jones: He's just been down to the drug-store, gettin' some ginger-ale for his wife.

Maurrant: Yeah? Well, what I want to know is, why ain't Rose home yet?

Mrs. Maurrant: I told you, Frank—

Maurrant: I know all about what you told me. What I'm sayin' is, you oughta be lookin' after your kids, instead of doin' so much dancin'.

Mrs. Maurrant: Why, it's the first time I've danced, in I don't know when.

Maurrant: That's all right, about that. But I want 'em home, instead o' battin' around the streets, hear me? [*While he is speaking,* WILLIE *appears sobbing, at the left, his clothes torn and his face scratched. He is carrying his skates.*]

Mrs. Maurrant [*coming down the steps*]: Why, Willie, what's the matter? [*Reproachfully, as* WILLIE *comes up to her, sniffling*] Have you been fighting again?

Willie [*with a burst of indignation*]: Well, dat big bum ain't gonna say dat to me. I'll knock da stuffin's out o' him, dat's what I'll do!

Maurrant [*tensely, as he comes down the steps*]: Who's been sayin' things to you?

Willie: Dat big bum, Joe Connolly, dat's who! [*Blubbering*] I'll knock his goddam eye out, next time!

Mrs. Maurrant: Willie!

Maurrant [*seizing* WILLIE'S *arm*]: Shut up your swearin', do you hear?—or I'll give you somethin' to bawl for. What did he say to you, huh? What did he say to you?

Willie [*struggling*]: Ow! Leggo my arm!

Mrs. Maurrant: What difference does it make what a little street-loafer like that says?

Maurrant: Nobody's askin' you! [*To* WILLIE] What did he say? [*He and* MRS. MAURRANT *exchange a swift involuntary look; then* MAURRANT *releases the boy.*] G'wan up to bed now, an' don't let me hear no more out o' you. [*Raising his hand*] G'wan now. Beat it! [WILLIE *ducks past* MAURRANT *and hurries up the steps and into the vestibule.*]

Mrs. Maurrant: Wait, Willie, I'll go with you. [*She goes up the steps, then stops and turns.*] Are you coming up, Frank?

Maurrant: No, I ain't. I'm goin' around to Callahan's for a drink, an' if Rose ain't home, when I get back, there's gonna be trouble. [*Without another glance or word, he goes off at the right.* MRS. MAURRANT *looks after him for a moment, with a troubled expression.*]

Mrs. Maurrant [*entering the vestibule*]: Well, good night, all.

The Others: Good night. [SAM *rises. As* MRS. MAURRANT *and* WILLIE *enter the house,* MRS. FIORENTINO *reappears at the window.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: Lippo! [*She sees that something is wrong.*]

Mrs. Jones: Say, you missed it all! [SAM, *about to go up the steps, stops at the right of the stoop.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino [*eagerly*]: Vat?

Mrs. Jones [*volubly*]: Well, they was dancin',, see? An' who should come along but Sankey!

Mrs. Fiorentino: Tt! [*A light appears in the* MAURRANT *apartment.*]

Mrs. Jones: Well, there was the three o' them—Mr. Maurrant lookin' at Sankey as if he was ready to kill him, an' Mrs. Maurrant as white as a sheet, an' Sankey, as innocent as the babe unborn.

Mrs. Fiorentino: Did he say something?

Mrs. Jones: No, not till after Sankey was gone. Then he wanted to know who he was an' what he was doin' here. "He's the milk-collector," she says.

Mrs. Fiorentino: It's joost awful.

Mrs. Jones: Oh, an' then Willie comes home.

Lippo: Da boy tella 'eem 'is mamma ees a whore an' Weelie leeck 'im.

Mrs. Jones: Well, an' what else is she?

Sam [*unable longer to restrain himself*]: Stop it! Stop it! Can't you let her alone? Have you no hearts? Why do you tear her to

pieces, like a pack of wolves? It's cruel, cruel! [*He chokes back a sob, then dashes abruptly into the house.*]

Lippo [*rising to his feet and yelling after him*]: Wotsa matter you?

Mrs. Jones: Well, listen to him, will you! He must be goin' off his nut, too.

Lippo: 'Esa reada too mucha book. Ees bad for you.

Mrs. Fiorentino: I think he is loving the girl.

Mrs. Jones: Yeah? Well, that's all the Maurrants need is to have their daughter get hooked up wit' a Jew. It's a fine house to be livin' in, ain't it, between the Maurrants upstairs, an' that bunch o' crazy Jews down here. [*A* GIRL *appears at the left, glancing apprehensively, over her shoulder, at a* MAN *who is walking down the street behind her. They cross the stage and go off, at the right.*]

Mrs. Jones [*as* MRS. OLSEN *comes up the cellar steps and over to the stoop*]: Well, good night.

Mrs. Fiorentino: Good night, Mrs. Jones.

Lippo: Goo' night, Meeses Jones.

Mrs. Jones: Wait a minute, Mrs. Olsen. I'll go with you. [MRS. JONES *and* MRS. OLSEN *enter the house.* OLSEN *yawns mightily, knocks the ashes from his pipe, and goes down the cellar steps.* WILLIE MAURRANT *leans out of the window and spits into the areaway. Then he leaves the window and turns out the light. A* POLICEMAN *appears, at the right, and strolls across the stage.*]

Lippo [*who has gone up the steps*]: Margherita, eef I ever ketcha you sleepin' wit' da meelkaman, Ahm gonna breaka your neck.

Mrs. Fiorentino [*yawning*]: Stop your foolishness, Lippo, and come to bed! [LIPPO *laughs and enters the house.* MRS. FIORENTINO *takes the pillow off the window-sill, closes the window, and starts to pull down the shade.* ROSE MAURRANT *and* HARRY EASTER *appear at the left.* ROSE *is a pretty girl of twenty, cheaply but rather tastefully dressed.* EASTER *is about thirty-five, good-looking, and obviously prosperous.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: Good evening, Miss Maurrant.

Rose [*as they pass the window*]: Oh, good evening, Mrs. Fiorentino. [ROSE *and* EASTER *cross to the stoop.* MRS. FIORENTINO *looks at them a moment, then pulls down the shade and turns out the lights.*]

Rose [*stopping at the foot of the steps*]: Well, this is where I live, Mr. Easter. [*She extends her hand.*] I've had a lovely time.

Easter [*taking her hand*]: Why, you're not going to leave me like this, are you? I've hardly had a chance to talk to you.

Rose [*laughing*]: We've been doing nothing but talking since six o'clock. [*She tries gently to extricate her hand.*]

Easter [*still holding it*]: No, we haven't. We've been eating and dancing. And now, just when I want to talk to you— [*He puts his other arm around her.*] Rose—

Rose [*rather nervously*]: Please don't, Mr. Easter. Please let go. I think there's somebody coming. [*She frees herself, as the house-door opens and* MRS. OLSEN *appears in the vestibule. They stand in silence, as* MRS. OLSEN *puts the door off the latch, tries it to see that it is locked, dims the light in the vestibule and comes out on the stoop.*]

Mrs. Olsen [*as she comes down the steps*]: Goot evening, Miss Maurrant. [*She darts a swift look at* EASTER *and crosses to the cellar steps.*]

Rose: Good evening, Mrs. Olsen. How's the baby?

Mrs. Olsen: She vas cryin' all the time. I tank she vas gettin' new teet'.

Rose: Oh, the poor little thing! What a shame!

Mrs. Olsen [*as she goes down the steps*]: Yes, ma'am. Goot night, Miss Maurrant.

Rose: Good night, Mrs. Olsen. [*To* EASTER] She's got the cutest little baby you ever saw.

Easter [*rather peevishly*]: Yeah? That's great. [*Taking* ROSE'S *hand again*] Rose, listen—

Rose: I've really got to go upstairs now, Mr. Easter. It's awfully late.

Easter: Well, can't I come up with you, for a minute?

Rose [*positively*]: No, of course not!

Easter: Why not?

Rose: Why, we'd wake everybody up. Anyhow, my father wouldn't like it.

Easter: Aren't you old enough to do what you like?

Rose: It's not that. Only I think when you're living with people, there's no use doing things you know they don't like. [*Embarrassed*] Anyhow, there's only the front room and my little brother sleeps there. So good night, Mr. Easter.

Easter [*taking both her hands*]: Rose—I'm crazy about you.

Rose: Please let me go, now.

Easter: Kiss me good night.

Rose: No.

Easter: Why not, hm?

Rose: I don't want to.

Easter: Just one kiss.

Rose: No.

Easter: Yes! [*He takes her in his arms and kisses her.* ROSE *frees herself and goes to the right of the stoop.*]

Rose [*her bosom heaving*]: It wasn't nice of you to do that.

Easter [*going over to her*]: Why not? Didn't you like it? Hm?

Rose: Oh, it's not that.

Easter: Then what is it, hm?

Rose [*turning and facing him*]: You know very well what it is. You've got a wife, haven't you?

Easter: What of it? I tell you I'm clean off my nut about you.

Rose [*nervously, as the house-door opens*]: Look out! Somebody's coming. [EASTER *goes to the other side of the stoop and they fall into a self-conscious silence, as* MRS. JONES *comes out of the house, leading an ill-conditioned dog.*]

Mrs. Jones [*as she comes down the steps*]: Oh, good evenin'. [*She stares at* EASTER, *then goes towards the right.*]

Rose: Good evening, Mrs. Jones. It's been a terrible day, hasn't it?

Mrs. Jones: Yeah. Awful. [*Stopping*] I think your father's been kinda worried about you.

Rose: Oh, has he?

Mrs. Jones: Yeah. Well, I gotta give Queenie her exercise. Good night. [*She stares at* EASTER *again, then goes off at right.*]

Rose: Good night, Mrs. Jones. [*To* EASTER] I'll soon have all the neighbors talking about me.

Easter [*going over to her again*]: What can they say, hm?—that they saw you saying good night to somebody on the front doorstep?

Rose: They can say worse than that—and what's more, they will, too.

Easter: Well, why not snap out of it all?

Rose: Out of what?

Easter [*indicating the house*]: This! The whole business. Living in a dirty old tenement like this; working all day in a real-estate office, for a measly twenty-five a week. You're not going to try to tell me you like living this way, are you?

Rose: No, I can't say that I like it, especially. But maybe it

won't always be this way. Anyhow, I guess I'm not so much better than anybody else.

Easter [*taking her hand*]: Do you know what's the matter with you? You're not wise to yourself. Why, you've got just about everything, you have. You've got looks and personality and a bean on your shoulders—there's nothing you haven't got. You've got It, I tell you.

Rose: You shouldn't keep looking at me, all the time, at the office. The other girls are beginning to pass hints about it.

Easter [*releasing her hand, genuinely perturbed*]: Is that a fact? You see, that shows you! I never even knew I was looking at you. I guess I just can't keep my eyes off you. Well, we've got to do something about it.

Rose [*nervously snapping the clasp of her hand-bag*]: I guess the only thing for me to do is to look for another job.

Easter: Yes, that's what I've been thinking, too. [*As she is about to demur*] Wait a minute, honey! I've been doing a little thinking and I've got it all doped out. The first thing you do is throw up your job, see?

Rose: But—

Easter: Then you find yourself a nice, cozy little apartment somewhere. [*As she is about to interrupt again*] Just a minute, now! Then you get yourself a job on the stage.

Rose: How could I get a job on the stage?

Easter: Why, as easy as walking around the block. I've got three or four friends in the show-business. Ever hear of Harry Porkins?

Rose: No.

Easter: Well, he's the boy that put on Mademoiselle Marie last year. He's an old pal of mine, and all I'd have to say to him is: [*Putting his arm around her shoulder*] "Harry, here's a little girl I'm interested in," and he'd sign you up in a minute.

Rose: I don't think I'd be any good on the stage.

Easter: Why, what are you talking about, sweetheart? There's a dozen girls, right now, with their names up in electric lights, that haven't got half your stuff. All you got to do is go about it in the right way—put up a little front, see? Why, half the game is nothing but bluff. Get yourself a classy little apartment, and fill it up with trick furniture, see? Then you doll yourself up in a flock of Paris clothes and you throw a couple or three parties and you're all set. [*Taking her arm*] Wouldn't you *like* to be on Broadway?

Rose: I don't believe I ever could be.

Easter: Isn't it worth trying? What have you got here, hm? This is no kind of a racket for a girl like you. [*Taking her hand*] You do like me a little, don't you?

Rose: I don't know if I do or not.

Easter: Why, sure you do. And once you get to know me better, you'd like me even more. I'm no Valentino, but I'm not a bad scout. Why, think of all the good times we could have together—you with a little apartment and all. And maybe we could get us a little car—

Rose: And what about your wife?

Easter [*letting go her hand*]: The way I figure it is, she doesn't have to know anything about it. She stays up there in Bronxville, and there are lots of times when business keeps me in New York. Then, in the Summer, she goes to the mountains. Matter of fact, she's going next week and won't be back until September.

Rose [*shaking her head and going towards the stoop*]: I don't think it's the way I'd want things to be.

Easter: Why, there's nothing really wrong about it.

Rose: Maybe there isn't. But it's just the way I feel about it, I guess.

Easter: Why, you'd get over that in no time. There's lots of girls—

Rose: Yes, I know there are. But you've been telling me all along I'm different.

Easter: Sure, you're different. You're in a class by yourself. Why, sweetheart— [*He tries to take her in his arms.*]

Rose [*pushing him away*]: No. And you mustn't call me sweetheart.

Easter: Why not?

Rose: Because I'm not your sweetheart.

Easter: I want you to be— [*A sudden yell of pain is heard from upstairs. They both look up, greatly startled.*]

Easter: My God, what's that—a murder?

Rose: It must be poor Mrs. Buchanan. She's expecting a baby.

Easter: Why does she yell like that? God, I thought somebody was being killed.

Rose: The poor thing! [*With sudden impatience, she starts up the steps.*] I've got to go, now. Good night.

Easter [*taking her hand*]: But, Rose—

Rose [*freeing her hand quickly*]: No, I've got to go. [*Suddenly*] Look, there's my father. There'll only be an argument, if he sees you.

Easter: All right, I'll go. [*He goes towards the left, as* MAURRANT *appears at the right.*]

Rose [*going up to the top step*]: Good night.

Easter: Good night. [*He goes off, at the left.* ROSE *begins searching in her hand-bag for her latchkey.*]

Rose [*as* MAURRANT *approaches*]: Hello, pop.

Maurrant [*stopping at the foot of the steps*]: Who was that you was talkin' to?

Rose: That's Mr. Easter. He's the manager of the office.

Maurrant: What's he doin' here? You been out wit' him?

Rose: Yes, he took me out to dinner.

Maurrant: Oh, he did, huh?

Rose: Yes, I had to stay late to get out some letters. You see, pop, the office is closed tomorrow, on account of Mr. Jacobson's funeral—

Maurrant: Yeah, I know all about that. This is a hell of a time to be gettin' home from dinner.

Rose: Well, we danced afterwards.

Maurrant: Oh, you danced, huh? With a little pettin' on the side, is that it?

Rose [*rather angrily, as she seats herself on the left balustrade*]: I don't see why you can never talk to me in a nice way.

Maurrant: So you're startin' to go on pettin' parties, are you?

Rose: Who said I was on a petting party?

Maurrant: I suppose he didn't kiss you or nothin', huh?

Rose: No, he didn't! And if he did—

Maurrant: It's your own business, is that it? [*Going up the steps*] Well, I'm gonna make it my business, see? Is this bird married? [ROSE *does not answer.*] I t'ought so! They're all alike, them guys—all after the one thing. Well, get this straight. No married men ain't gonna come nosin' around my family, get me?

Rose [*rising agitatedly, as the house-door opens*]: Be quiet, pop! There's somebody coming.

Maurrant: I don't care! [BUCHANAN *hurries out of the house. He is a small and pasty young man—a typical "white-collar slave." He has hastily put on his coat and trousers over his pajamas and his bare feet are in slippers.*]

Buchanan [*as he comes down the steps*]: I think the baby's coming!

Rose [*solicitously*]: Can I do anything, Mr. Buchanan?

Buchanan [*as he hurries towards the left*]: No, I'm just going to phone for the doctor.

Rose [*coming down the steps*]: Let me do it, and you go back to your wife.

Buchanan: Well, if you wouldn't mind. It's Doctor John Wilson. [*Handing her a slip of paper*] Here's his number. And the other number is her sister, Mrs. Thomas. And here's two nickels. Tell them both to come right away. She's got terrible pains. [*Another scream from upstairs*] Listen to her! I better go back. [*He dashes up the steps and into the house.*]

Rose: Oh, the poor woman! Pop, tell ma to go up to her. Hurry!

Maurrant: Aw, all right. [*He follows* BUCHANAN *into the house.* ROSE *hurries off at the left, just as* MAE JONES *and* DICK MCGANN *appear.* MAE *is a vulgar shop-girl of twenty-one;* DICK, *a vacuous youth of about the same age.* MAE *is wearing* DICK'S *straw hat and they are both quite drunk.*]

Mae [*to* ROSE]: Hello, Rose. What's your hurry?

Rose [*without stopping*]: It's Mrs. Buchanan. I've got to phone to the doctor. [*She hurries off.*]

Dick [*as they approach the stoop*]: Say, who's your little friend?

Mae: Oh, that's Rose Maurrant. She lives in the house.

Dick: She's kinda cute, ain't she?

Mae [*seating herself on the stoop*]: Say, accordin' to you, anythin' in a skirt is kinda cute—providin' the skirt is short enough.

Dick: Yeah, but they ain't any of 'em as cute as you, Mae.

Mae [*yawning and scratching her leg*]: Yeah?

Dick: Honest, I mean it. How 'bout a little kiss? [*He puts his arms about her and plants a long kiss upon her lips. She submits, with an air of intense boredom.*]

Dick [*removing his lips*]: Say, you might show a little en-thoo-siasm.

Mae [*rouging her lips*]: Say, you seem to think I oughta hang out a flag, every time some bozo decides to wipe off his mouth on me.

Dick: De trouble wit' you is you need another little snifter. [*He reaches for his flask.*]

Mae: Nope! I can't swaller any more o' that rotten gin o' yours.

Dick: Why, it ain't so worse. I don't mind it no more since I had that brass linin' put in me stomach. Well, happy days! [*He takes a long drink.*]

Mae [*rising indignantly*]: Hey, for God's sake, what are you doin'—emptyin' the flask?

Dick [*removing the flask from his lips*]: I t'ought you didn't want none.

Mae: Can't you take a joke? [*She snatches the flask from him and drains it, kicking out at* DICK, *to prevent his taking it from her.*]

Dick [*snatching the empty flask*]: Say, you wanna watch your step, baby, or you're li'ble to go right up in a puff o' smoke.

Mae [*whistling*]: Phew! Boy! I feel like a t'ree alarm fire! Say, what de hell do dey make dat stuff out of?

Dick: T'ree parts dynamite an' one part army-mule. Dey use it for blastin' out West.

Mae [*bursting raucously into a jazz tune*]: Da-da-da-da-dee! Da-da-da-da-dee! [*She executes some dance steps.*]

Dick: Say, shut up, will ya? You'll be wakin' the whole neighborhood.

Mae [*boisterously*]: What the hell do I care? Da-da-da-da-dee! Da-da-da-da-dee! [*Suddenly amorous, as she turns an unsteady pirouette*] Kiss me, kid!

Dick: I'll say! [*They lock in a long embrace.* SAM, *coatless, his shirt-collar open, appears at the window, watches the pair for a moment, and then turns away, obviously disgusted. They do not see him.*]

Dick [*taking* MAE'S *arm*]: Come on!

Mae: Wait a minute! Where y' goin'?

Dick: Come on, I'm tellin' ya! Fred Hennessy gimme de key to his apartment. Dere won't be nobody dere.

Mae [*protesting feebly*]: I oughta go home. [*Her hand to her head*] Oh, baby! Say, nail down dat sidewalk, will ya?

Dick: Come on! [ROSE *appears, at the left.*]

Mae: Sweet papa! [*She kisses* DICK *noisily; then bursts into song again.*] Da-da-da-da-dee! Da-da-da-da-dee! [*As they pass* ROSE] Hello, Rose. How's de milkman?

Dick [*raising his hat with drunken politeness*]: Goo' night, sweetheart. [*They go off, at the left,* MAE'S *snatches of song dying away in the distance.* ROSE *stands still, for a moment, choking back her mortification.*]

Buchanan's Voice: Miss Maurrant, did you get them?

Rose [*looking up*]: Why, yes, I did. The doctor will be here right away. And Mrs. Thomas said it would take her about an hour. [VINCENT JONES *appears at the right and stops near the stoop. He is a typical New York taxicab driver, in a cap.* ROSE *does not see him.*]

Buchanan's Voice: She's got terrible pains. Your mother's up here,

with her. [MRS. BUCHANAN *is heard calling faintly.*] I think she's calling me. [ROSE *goes towards the stoop and sees* VINCENT.]

Vincent: Hello, Rosie.

Rose: Good evening. [*She tries to pass, but he blocks her way.*]

Vincent: What's your hurry?

Rose: It's late.

Vincent: You don' wanna go to bed, yet. Come on, I'll take you for a ride in me hack. [*He puts his arm about her.*]

Rose: Please let me pass. [SAM *appears at the window. They do not see him.*]

Vincent [*enjoying* ROSE's *struggle to escape*]: You got a lot o' stren'th, ain't you? Say, do you know, you're gettin' fat? [*He passes one hand over her body.*]

Rose: Let me go, you big tough.

Sam [*simultaneously*]: Take your hands off her! [*He climbs quickly out of the window and onto the stoop.* VINCENT, *surprised, releases* ROSE *and steps to the sidewalk.* ROSE *goes up the steps.* SAM, *trembling with excitement and fear, stands on the top step.* VINCENT *glowers up at him.*]

Vincent: Well, look who's here! [*Mockingly*] Haster gesehn de fish in de Bowery? [*Menacingly*] What de hell do you want?

Sam [*chokingly*]: You keep your hands off her!

Vincent: Yeah? [*Sawing the air with his hands*] Oi, Jakie! [*He suddenly lunges forward, seizes* SAM'S *arm, pulls him violently by the right hand down the steps and swings him about, so that they stand face to face, to the left of the stoop.* ROSE *comes down between them.*] Now what o' ya got t' say?

Rose: Let him alone!

Sam [*inarticulately*]: If you touch her again—

Vincent [*mockingly*]: If I touch her again—! [*Savagely*] Aw, shut up, you little kike bastard! [*He brushes* ROSE *aside and putting his open hand against* SAM'S *face, sends him sprawling to the pavement.*]

Rose [*her fists clenched*]: You big coward.

Vincent [*standing over* SAM]: Get up, why don't you?

Rose [*crossing to* SAM]: If you hit him again, I'll call my father.

Vincent [*as* MRS. JONES *and the dog appear at the right*]: Gee, don't frighten me like dat. I got a weak heart. [*He is sobered, nevertheless.* SAM *picks himself up.*]

Vincent [*as* MRS. JONES *approaches*]: Hello, ma.

Mrs. Jones [*with maternal pride*]: Hello, Vincent. What's goin' on here?

Vincent: Oh, jus' a little friendly argument. Ikey Finkelstein don't like me to say good evenin' to his girl friend.

Rose: You'd better keep your hands to yourself, hereafter.

Vincent: Is dat so? Who said so, huh?

Mrs. Jones: Come on, Vincent. Come on upstairs. I saved some stew for you.

Vincent: All right, I'm comin'. [*To* ROSE] Good night, dearie. [*He makes a feint at* SAM, *who starts back in terror.* VINCENT *laughs.*]

Mrs. Jones: Aw, let 'im alone, Vincent.

Vincent [*as he goes up the steps*]: Who's touchin' him? A little cockroach like dat ain't woit' my time. [*To* ROSE] Some sheik you picked out for yourself! [*He enters the vestibule and opens the door with his latchkey.*]

Mrs. Jones [*going up the steps*]: You seem to have plenty of admirers, Miss Maurrant. [*Pausing on the top step*] But I guess you come by it natural. [ROSE *does not reply.* MRS. JONES *follows* VINCENT *into the house.* ROSE *averts her head to keep back the tears.* SAM *stands facing the house, his whole body quivering with emotion. Suddenly he raises his arms, his fists clenched.*]

Sam [*hysterically, as he rushes to the foot of the stoop*]: The dirty bum! I'll kill him!

Rose [*turning and going to him*]: It's all right, Sam. Never mind.

Sam [*sobbing*]: I'll kill him! I'll kill him! [*He throws himself on the stoop and, burying his head in his arms, sobs hysterically.* ROSE *sits beside him and puts her arm about him.*]

Rose: It's all right, Sam. Everything's all right. Why should you pay any attention to a big tough like that? [SAM *does not answer.* ROSE *caresses his hair and he grows calmer.*] He's nothing but a loafer, you know that. What do you care what he says?

Sam [*without raising his head*]: I'm a coward.

Rose: Why, no, you're not, Sam.

Sam: Yes, I am. I'm a coward.

Rose: Why, he's not worth your little finger, Sam. You wait and see. Ten years from now, he'll still be driving a taxi and you—why, you'll be so far above him, you won't even remember he's alive.

Sam: I'll never be anything.

Rose: Why, don't talk like that, Sam. A boy with your brains and

ability. Graduating from college with honors and all that! Why, if I were half as smart as you, I'd be just so proud of myself!

Sam: What's the good of having brains, if nobody ever looks at you—if nobody knows you exist?

Rose [*gently*]: I know you exist, Sam.

Sam: It wouldn't take much to make you forget me.

Rose: I'm not so sure about that. Why do you say that, Sam?

Sam: Because I know. It's different with you. You have beauty—people look at you—you have a place in the world—

Rose: I don't know. It's not always so easy, being a girl—I often wish I were a man. It seems to me that when you're a man, it's so much easier to sort of—be yourself, to kind of be the way you feel. But when you're a girl, it's different. It doesn't seem to matter what you are, or what you're thinking or feeling—all that men seem to care about is just the one thing. And when you're sort of trying to find out, just where you're at, it makes it hard. Do you see what I mean? [*Hesitantly*] Sam, there's something I want to ask you—[*She stops.*]

Sam [*turning to her*]: What is it, Rose?

Rose: I wouldn't dream of asking anybody but you. [*With a great effort*] Sam, do you think it's true—what they're saying about my mother? [SAM *averts his head, without answering.*]

Rose [*wretchedly*]: I guess it is, isn't it?

Sam [*agitatedly*]: They were talking here, before—I couldn't stand it any more! [*He clasps his head and, springing to his feet, goes to the right of the stoop.*] Oh, God, why do we go on living in this sewer?

Rose [*appealingly*]: What can I do, Sam? [SAM *makes a helpless gesture.*] You see, my father means well enough, and all that, but he's always been sort of strict and—I don't know—sort of making you freeze up, when you really wanted to be nice and loving. That's the whole trouble, I guess; my mother never had anybody to really love her. She's sort of gay and happy-like—you know, she likes having a good time and all that. But my father is different. Only—the way things are now—everybody talking and making remarks, all the neighbors spying and whispering—it sort of makes me feel— [*She shudders.*] I don't know—!

Sam [*coming over to her again*]: I wish I could help you, Rose.

Rose: You do help me, Sam—just by being nice and sympathetic and talking things over with me. There's so few people you can really talk to, do you know what I mean? Sometimes, I get the feeling

that I'm all alone in the world and that— [*A scream of pain from* MRS. BUCHANAN]

Rose [*springing to her feet*]: Oh, just listen to her!

Sam: Oh, God!

Rose: The poor thing! She must be having terrible pains.

Sam: That's all there is in life—nothing but pain. From before we're born, until we die! Everywhere you look, oppression and cruelty! If it doesn't come from Nature, it comes from humanity—humanity trampling on itself and tearing at its own throat. The whole world is nothing but a blood-stained arena, filled with misery and suffering. It's too high a price to pay for life—life isn't worth it! [*He seats himself despairingly on the stoop.*]

Rose [*putting her hand on his shoulder*]: Oh, I don't know, Sam. I feel blue and discouraged, sometimes, too. And I get a sort of feeling of, oh, what's the use. Like last night. I hardly slept all night, on account of the heat and on account of thinking about—well, all sorts of things. And this morning, when I got up, I felt so miserable. Well, all of a sudden, I decided I'd walk to the office. And when I got to the Park, everything looked so green and fresh that I got a kind of feeling of, well, maybe it's not so bad, after all. And then, what do you think?—all of a sudden, I saw a big lilac-bush, with some flowers still on it. It made me think about the poem you said for me —remember?—the one about the lilacs.

Sam [*quoting*]:

"When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd and yet shall mourn, with ever-returning Spring."

[*He repeats the last line.*]

"I mourn'd and yet shall mourn, with ever-returning Spring"? Yes!

Rose: No, not that part. I mean the part about the farm-house. Say it for me, Sam. [*She sits at his feet.*]

Sam:

"In the door-yard, fronting an old farm-house, near the white-washed palings,
Stands the lilac-bush, tall-growing, with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
With many a pointed blossom, rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love,

With every leaf a miracle—and from this bush in the door-yard,
With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
A sprig with its flower I break."

Rose [*eagerly*]: Yes, that's it! That's just what I felt like doing—breaking off a little bunch of the flowers. But then I thought, maybe a policeman or somebody would see me, and then I'd get into trouble; so I didn't.

Buchanan's Voice: Miss Maurrant! Miss Maurrant! [SAM *and* ROSE *spring to their feet and look up.*]

Rose: Yes?

Buchanan's Voice: Do you mind phoning to the doctor again? She's getting worse.

Rose: Yes, sure I will. [*She starts to go.*] Wait! Maybe this is the doctor now.

Buchanan's Voice [*excitedly as* DR. WILSON *appears at the left*]: Yes, that's him. Mrs. Maurrant! Tell her the doctor's here! Doctor, I guess you're none too soon.

Dr. Wilson [*a seedy, middle-aged man in a crumpled Panama*]: Plenty of time. Just don't get excited. [*He throws away his cigarette and enters the vestibule. The mechanical clicking of the door-latch is heard as* DR. WILSON *goes into the house.*]

Rose: I hope she won't have to suffer much longer.

Maurrant [*appearing at the window, in his under-shirt*]: Rose!

Rose [*rather startled*]: Yes, pop, I'll be right up.

Maurrant: Well, don't be makin' me call you again, d'ya hear?

Rose: I'm coming right away. [MAURRANT *leaves the window.*]

Rose: I'd better go up now, Sam.

Sam: Do you have to go to bed, when you're told, like a child?

Rose: I know, Sam, but there's so much wrangling goes on, all the time, as it is, what's the use of having any more? Good night, Sam. There was something I wanted to talk to you about, but it will have to be another time. [*She holds out her hand.* SAM *takes it and holds it in his.*]

Sam [*trembling and rising to his feet*]: Rose, will you kiss me?

Rose [*simply*]: Why, of course I will, Sam. [*She offers him her lips. He clasps her in a fervent embrace, to which she submits but does not respond.*]

Rose [*freeing herself gently*]: Don't be discouraged about things, Sam. You wait and see—you're going to do big things, some day. I've got lots of confidence in you.

Sam [*turning away his head*]: I wonder if you really have, Rose?

Rose: Why, of course I have! And don't forget it! Good night. I hope it won't be too hot to sleep.

Sam: Good night, Rose. [*He watches her, as she opens the door with her latchkey and goes into the house. Then he goes to the stoop and, seating himself, falls into a reverie. A* POLICEMAN *appears at the right and strolls across, but* SAM *is oblivious to him. In the distance, a home-comer sings drunkenly. A light appears, in the Maurrant hall-bedroom, and a moment later,* ROSE *comes to the window and leans out.*]

Rose [*calling softly*]: Hoo-hoo! Sam! [SAM *looks up, then rises.*] Good night, Sam. [*She wafts him a kiss.*]

Sam [*with deep feeling*]: Good night, Rose dear. [*She smiles at him. Then she pulls down the shade.* SAM *looks up for a moment, then resumes his seat. A scream from* MRS. BUCHANAN *makes him shudder. A deep rhythmic snoring emanates from the* FIORENTINO *apartment. A steamboat whistle is heard. The snoring in the* FIORENTINO *apartment continues.* SAM *raises his clenched hands to heaven. A distant clock begins to strike twelve.* SAM'S *arms and head drop forward.*]

[*The curtain falls slowly.*]

ACT TWO

Daybreak, the next morning. It is still quite dark and comparatively quiet. The rhythmic snoring in the FIORENTINO *apartment is still heard, and now and then, a distant "L" train or speeding automobile. A moment after the rise of the curtain,* JONES *appears, at the right, on his way home from the speakeasy. He reels, slightly, but negotiates the steps and entrance-door, without too much difficulty. It grows lighter—and noisier. The street-light goes out. The* OLSEN *baby begins to cry. An alarm clock rings. A dog barks. A canary begins to sing. Voices are heard in the distance. They die out and other voices are heard. The house-door opens and* DR. WILSON *comes out, passing* JONES, *at the top of the stoop.* DR. WILSON *stands on the steps and yawns the yawn of an over-tired man. Then he lights a cigarette and goes towards the left.*

Buchanan's Voice: Doctor!

Dr. Wilson [*stopping and looking up*]: Well?

Buchanan's Voice: What if she does wake up?

Dr. Wilson [*sharply*]: She won't, I've told you! She's too exhausted. The best thing you can do is lie down and get some sleep yourself. [*As he goes off at the left,* MAE *and* DICK *appear. They walk slowly and listlessly and far apart.*]

Dick [*as they reach the stoop*]: Well, goo' night.

Mae [*with a yawn, as she finds her latchkey*]: Goo' night. [*Going up the steps and looking towards the* FIORENTINO *apartment*] Aw, shut up, you wop!

Dick [*his dignity wounded*]: How 'bout kissin' me good night?

Mae [*venomously, from the top step*]: For God's sake, ain't you had enough kissin' for one night! [*She enters the vestibule and puts the key in the lock. The ringing of an alarm clock is heard.*]

Dick [*raising his voice*]: Well, say, if that's the way you feel about it—

Mae: Aw, go to hell! [*She enters the house. The alarm clock has stopped ringing.*]

Dick: You dirty little tart! [*He stands, muttering to himself, for a moment, then goes off at the right, passing* THE POLICEMAN, *who looks at him, suspiciously. The sounds of a Swedish quarrel are heard from the janitor's apartment. The baby is still crying. As* THE POLICEMAN *goes left, a* MILKMAN *appears, whistling and carrying a rack of full milk-bottles.*]

The Policeman: Hello, Louie. [*The snoring in the* FIORENTINO *apartment stops.*]

The Milkman: Hello, Harry. Goin' to be another scorcher.

The Policeman: You said it. [*He goes off at the left.*]

[THE MILKMAN *crosses to the cellar steps.* MAE *appears, at the hall bedroom window of the* JONES *apartment, and removes her dress over her head.* THE MILKMAN, *about to go down the steps, sees her and stops to watch.* MAE, *about to slip out of her step-in, sees him, throws him an angry look and pulls down the shade.* THE MILKMAN *grins and goes down the cellar steps.* CHARLIE HILDEBRAND *comes out of the house. He is chewing gum and as he comes out to the top of the stoop, he scatters the wrappings of the stick of gum on the stoop. Then he jumps down the four steps of the stoop, in one jump, and goes off at the left, pulling the chewing-gum out in a long ribbon, and carefully avoiding all the cracks in the pavement. A* YOUNG WORKMAN, *carrying a kit of tools and a tin lunch-box, appears at the left, extinguishes the red light on the excavation, and opening the door, goes in. A* TRAMP *comes on at the right and shuffles across. He sees a cigar butt on the pavement, picks it up and pockets it, as he exits at the left.* ROSE, *in her nightgown, appears at the window, yawns slightly and disappears. It is daylight now. The baby stops crying.* MRS. OLSEN *comes up the cellar steps. She goes up the stoop, turns out the light in the vestibule, and takes the door off the latch.* THE MILKMAN *comes up the cellar steps, his tray laden with empty bottles and goes off, whistling, at the left.* SAM, *coatless, a book in his hand, appears at the window. He looks out for a moment, then climbs out on the stoop, looks up at* ROSE'S

window, then seats himself and begins to read. WILLIE *comes out of the house.*]

Willie [*chanting, as he comes down the steps*]: Fat, Fat the water-rat, Fifty bullets in his hat.

Sam: Hello, Willie. Is Rose up yet?

Willie [*without stopping or looking at him*]: Yeah. I don't know. I guess so. [*He turns a somersault and goes off at left, continuing his chanting.* SAM *glances up at* ROSE'S *window again, then resumes his book.* MRS. JONES *and her dog come out of the house.*]

Mrs. Jones [*haughtily, as she comes down the steps*]: Mornin'.

Sam [*scarcely looking up from his book*]: Good morning. [MRS. JONES *and the dog go off at the right. A* MIDDLE-AGED WORKMAN, *carrying a large coil of wire, appears at the left and goes to the door of the excavation.* MRS. OLSEN *comes out of the house and exits into the basement.*]

The Workman [*calling*]: You down there, Eddie?

A Voice [*from the depths*]: Yeah!

The Workman: All right! [*He climbs down into the excavation.* ROSE *comes to window and pulls up the shade.* WILLIE *and* CHARLIE *can be heard, off-stage left, engaged in an earnest conversation.*]

Charlie [*off-stage*]: He could not!

Willie [*off-stage*]: He could so! [*They appear at left. Each has under his arm a paper-bag, from which a loaf of bread protrudes.*]

Charlie: I'll betcha he couldn't.

Willie: I'll betcha he could.

Charlie: I'll betcha a million dollars he couldn't.

Willie: I'll betcha five million dollars he could. Hold that! [*He hands* CHARLIE *his loaf of bread and turns a cart-wheel.*] Bet you can't do it.

Charlie: Bet I can. [*He puts both loaves of bread on the pavement, attempts a cart-wheel and fails.*]

Willie [*laughing raucously*]: Haw-haw! Told you you couldn't!

Charlie: Can you do this? [*He turns a back somersault.*]

Willie: Sure—easy! [*He turns a back somersault. They pick up their loaves again.* WILLIE'S *drops out of the bag, but he dusts it, with his hand, and replaces it.*] How many steps can you jump up?

Charlie: Three. [*He jumps up three steps.*]

Willie: I can do four.

Charlie: Let's see you. [WILLIE, *the bread under his arm, jumps up the four steps, undisturbed by* SAM'S *presence. He drops the bread, and is about to replace it in the bag, but gets a better idea.*

He inflates the bag and explodes it with a blow of his fist. CHARLIE *looks on, in admiration and envy.*]

Rose [*appearing at the window*]: Willie, we're waiting for the bread.

Willie [*holding it up*]: All right! Cantcha see I got it? [*He enters the house, followed by* CHARLIE.]

Sam [*rising*]: Hello, Rose.

Rose: Hello, Sam.

Sam: Come down.

Rose: I haven't had breakfast yet. [*Calling into the room*] Yes! He's on his way up.

Miss Cushing [*coming out of the house*]: Good morning. [*She looks inquiringly from* SAM *to* ROSE.]

Sam [*impatiently*]: Good morning. [*A middle-aged* NUN *appears at the right, accompanied by a scrawny* CHILD *of about fourteen. They walk across the stage.*]

Rose: Good morning, Miss Cushing. [MISS CUSHING *goes off, at the left, glancing back at* ROSE *and* SAM.]

Rose: I'm going to Mr. Jacobson's funeral. [*Calling into the room*] Yes, I'm coming. [*To* SAM] Breakfast's ready. I'll be down as soon as the dishes are done. [*She disappears.* SAM *looks up at the window, for a moment, then begins to read again.* MRS. FIORENTINO *appears at the window, at the extreme left, with a double armful of bedding, which she deposits upon the window-sill. Then she goes away again.*]

Shirley [*appearing at the window*]: Sam, breakfast is ready.

Sam: I don't want any breakfast.

Shirley: What do you mean, you don't want any breakfast? What kind of a business is that, not to eat breakfast?

Sam: Do I have to eat breakfast, if I don't want to?

Shirley: You've got your head so full of that Rose Maurrant upstairs that you don't want to eat or sleep or anything, any more.

Sam: If I don't feel like eating, why should I eat? [*Bursting out*] You're always telling me: "Eat!" "Don't eat!" "Get up!" "Go to bed!" I know what I want to do, without being told.

Shirley: I don't see, just when you're graduating from college, why you want to get mixed up with a little batzimer like that!

Sam: It's always the same thing over again with you. You never can get over your race prejudice. I've told you a hundred times that the Jews are no better than anybody else.

Shirley: I'm not talking about that! Look at the kind of family

she comes from. What's her father? Nothing but an illiterate roughneck. And her mother—

Sam [*indignantly*]: Are you starting, too?

Kaplan's Voice: Shoi-ley!

Shirley: Wait a minute, papa's calling. [*Into the room*] All right, papa! [*To* SAM] Come in, Sam, or papa will be making long speeches again.

Sam [*impatiently*]: All right! All right! I'll come. [*A young* SHOPGIRL, *smiling to herself, appears at the right and walks across the stage.* SAM *rises and goes into the house.* SHIRLEY *leaves the window.* BUCHANAN, *emerging from the house, collarless and unshaven, encounters* SAM *in the vestibule.*]

Buchanan [*eagerly*]: Good morning!

Sam [*abruptly*]: Good morning. [*He enters the house.* BUCHANAN *looks back at him, then comes down the steps.* MRS. FIORENTINO *raises the drawn shade and opens the window.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: Good morning, Mr. Buchanan.

Buchanan: Oh, good morning, Mrs. Fiorentino. [*Going over to the left balustrade*] I guess you know that the baby came last night, don't you?

Mrs. Fiorentino: No! I did not hear a vord about it.

Buchanan: Why, I thought she'd wake up the whole neighborhood, the way she was yelling. Three-thirty this morning, the baby came. I been up the whole night. [*An old* LETTER-CARRIER, *coatless, appears at the right.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: A boy, is it?

Buchanan: No, it's a little girl. I guess we'll call her Mary, after my mother.

Letter-Carrier [*going up the steps*]: Mornin'.

Mrs. Fiorentino: Good morning. Any letters for me?

Letter-Carrier [*from the top of the steps*]: No, not a thing.

Buchanan [*turning toward him*]: I was just telling Mrs. Fiorentino, I had a little addition to my family last night.

Letter-Carrier: Your first, is it?

Buchanan [*hastening to explain*]: Well, we've only been married a little over a year.

Letter-Carrier: Well, I've had seven, an' I'm still luggin' a mailbag at sixty-two. [*He goes into the vestibule and puts the mail into the letter-boxes.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: How is your wife?

Buchanan: Well, she had a pretty hard time of it. Her sister's

up there with her. And Mrs. Maurrant was up, nearly all night. I don't know what we'd have done without her.

Letter-Carrier [*coming down the steps*]: It don't pay to let 'em have their own way, too much. That's where I made my mistake. [*As the* LETTER-CARRIER *goes off, at the left,* LIPPO *appears at the window behind his wife, and tickles her.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino [*startled*]: Lippo!

Buchanan: Morning. I was just telling your wife—

Mrs. Fiorentino: Lippo, what do you think? Mr. Buchanan has a little girl!

Lippo: Ah, dotsa fine! Margherita, why you don' have da baby, ha?

Mrs. Fiorentino [*abruptly*]: I must go and make the coffee. [*She goes away from the window.* OLSEN *comes half-way up the steps and leans against the railing, smoking his pipe.*]

A Voice [*off-stage left*]: Oh-h! Corn! Sweet corn!

Lippo: Ees funny t'ing. You gotta da leetle, skeeny wife an' she's hava da baby. My Margherita, she's beeg an' fat an' she no can hava da baby.

Buchanan: Well, that's the way o' the world, I guess. [*As he goes off, at the left, an* ICE-MAN *appears, trundling a three-wheeled cart, filled with ice.*]

Lippo: Buon giorno, Mike.

Mike: Buon giorno, signore. Come sta?

Lippo: Benissimo. Fa molto caldo ancora, oggi.

Mike: Si, si, signore. Bisognera abbastanza ghiaccio. Twen'y fi' cent, ha?

Lippo: No, no, e troppo.

Mike: Twen'y cent? Eesa melta fas'.

Lippo: Alla right. Gimme twen'y cent.

Mike: Si, si, signore. Sure. [*As he wheels the cart to the cellar-entrance and begins to chop a block of ice, a* MAN *in shirt-sleeves strides in from the left and stops at the curb, as though seeing someone in a house across the street.*]

The Man [*angrily*]: Well, what about it? We've been waiting a half an hour!

A Voice: I'll be right over!

The Man: Yeah? Well, make it snappy! [*He strides off at the left, muttering angrily.* ROSE *comes out of the house and stands in the doorway, looking for* SAM. *Then she comes out on the stoop*

and peers into the KAPLAN *apartment. As she turns away, she sees* LIPPO.]

Rose [*crossing to the left of the stoop*]: Good morning.

Lippo: Gooda mornin', Meesa Maurrant. [MIKE *goes down into the cellar, with a chunk of ice.*]

Rose: It's awful hot again, isn't it?

Lippo: You don' like?

Rose: I don't sleep very well, when it's so hot.

Lippo: No? Ahm sleepa fine. Een Eetaly, where Ahm born, is much more 'ot like 'ere. Een summer, ees too 'ot for workin'. Ees too 'ot only for sleepin'. W'en Ahm leetla boy, Ahm sleepa, sleepa, whola day. I don't wear no clo's—nawthin' only leetle short pair pants. I lay down on groun' under da lemon-tree, Ahm sleepa whola day.

Rose: Under a lemon-tree! That must have been nice.

Lippo: Ees smella sweet, lemon-tree. Where Ahm born ees t'ousan' lemon-tree. Lemon an' olive an' arancia.

Rose: Oh, that must be lovely!

Lippo: Ah, ees bew-tiful! Ees most bewtiful place in whole worl'. You hear about Sorrent', ha?

Rose: No, I don't think I ever did.

Lippo [*incredulously*]: You never hear about Sorrent'?

Rose: No, I don't know much about geography. Is it a big place?

Lippo: Ees not vera beeg—but ever'body know Sorrent'. Sorrento gentile! La bella Sorrento! You hear about Napoli—Baia di Napoli?

Rose: Oh, yes, the Bay of Naples! Is it near there?

Lippo: Sure, ees on Bay of Napoli. Ees bew-tiful! Ees alla blue. Sky blue, water blue, sun ees shine alla time.

Rose: Oh, how lovely. [MIKE *comes up the cellar-steps, chops another block of ice, and goes down the cellar-steps with it.*]

Lippo: An' ees Vesuvio, too. You hear about Vesuvio?—ees beeg volcano.

Rose: Oh, yes, sure. I saw a picture once, called The Last Days of Pompeii, and it showed Mount Vesuvius, with smoke coming out of the top.

Lippo: Da's right. An' night-time, ees fire come out, maka da sky red.

Rose: Didn't it frighten you?

Lippo: Ah no, ees nawthin' to be afraid. Ees jus' volcano.

Rose: I'd love to go to Italy. It must be awfully pretty. But I don't suppose I ever will.

Lippo: W'y sure! Some day you gonna marry reech fella; 'e's taka you Eetaly—ever'where.

Rose: I guess there's not much chance of that. Rich fellows aren't going around looking for girls like me to marry. Anyhow, I don't think money is everything, do you?

Lippo: Ees good to hava money. Da's w'y Ahm come to America. Een Eetaly, ees bewtiful, but ees no money. 'Ere ees not bewtiful, but ees plenty money. Ees better to 'ave money. [*An* ELDERLY MAN, *in the gray uniform of a special officer, comes out of the house, filling his pipe from a tobacco-box.*]

The Man: Good mornin'.

Rose: Good morning, Mr. Callahan. [THE MAN *drops the empty tobacco-tin on the sidewalk and goes off slowly at the left.*] I don't think I'd be happy, just marrying a man with money, if I didn't care for him, too.

Lippo [*laughing*]: Wotsa matter, ha? You lova da leetla kike, ha?

Rose: Why, no, I don't. I don't love anybody—at least, I don't think I do. But it's not on account of his being a Jew.

Lippo: No, ees no good—Jew. 'E's only t'ink about money, money —alla time money.

Rose: But Sam isn't like that, a bit. He's only interested in poetry and things like that. [*The* ICE-MAN *comes up out of the cellar and trundles off his cart at the right.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino [*calling*]: Lippo! Breakfast!

Lippo [*calling*]: Alla right, Marghérita! [*To* ROSE] You marry fella wit' lot o' money. Ees much better. [*He goes away from the window, as* MISS CUSHING *appears, at the left, carrying a paper-bag.*]

Rose: How's your mother today, Miss Cushing?

Miss Cushing: She's not feeling so good today.

Rose: It's too bad she's not feeling well.

Miss Cushing: I'm afraid it's her heart. At her age, you know—! [*As she enters the house,* TWO COLLEGE GIRLS *of nineteen appear at the right.*]

First Girl [*as they appear*]: I don't understand it.

Second Girl: Convex is this way; and concave is this way.

First Girl: That I know.

Second Girl: When you're near-sighted, they give you convex glasses, and when you're far-sighted, they give you concave.

First Girl: That I didn't know.

Second Girl: Of course, you know it. Didn't we have it in psychology?

First Girl [*as they disappear at the left*]: I don't remember. [WILLIE *comes out of the house, on his way to school. He is hatless, and carries his books under his arm.*]

Rose [*intercepting him at the top of the stoop*]: Why, Willie, the way you look! Your collar's all open.

Willie: I know it! De button came off.

Rose: Why didn't you ask ma to sew it on for you?

Willie: She ain't dere. She's up at Buchanan's.

Rose: Well, wait till I see if I have a pin. [*She searches in her hand-bag.*]

Willie [*starting down the steps*]: Aw, it's all right de way it is.

Rose [*following him to the sidewalk*]: No, it isn't. You can't go to school like that. [*Producing a safety-pin*] Now, hold still, while I fix it.

Willie [*squirming*]: Aw, fer de love o' Mike—!

Rose: You'll get stuck, if you don't hold still. There, that looks better, now. And you didn't comb your hair, either.

Willie [*trying to escape*]: Say, lemme alone, cantcha?

Rose [*taking a comb out of her hand-bag and combing his hair*]: You can't go to school looking like a little street-loafer.

Willie: Aw, you gimme a pain in de—

Rose: You're getting big enough to comb your own hair, without being told. There! Now you look very nice.

Willie: So's your old man! [*He runs towards the left kicking the empty tobacco tin ahead of him, then stops, turns and deliberately rumples his hair.*]

Rose [*indignantly, as* WILLIE *runs off*]: Why, Willie! [MRS. JONES *and the dog appear at the right.* OLSEN *knocks the ashes out of his pipe and goes down into the cellar.* MRS. MAURRANT *comes out of the house.*]

Rose: Hello, ma.

Mrs. Jones [*at the steps*]: Good mornin'.

Rose and Mrs. Maurrant: Good morning, Mrs. Jones.

Mrs. Jones: How's little Mrs. Buchanan gettin' on?

Mrs. Maurrant: Well, she's sleeping now, poor thing. She was so worn out, she just went off into a sound sleep. I really didn't think, last night, she'd have the strength to pull through it.

Mrs. Jones: Well, it's somethin' we all got to go through. I been

through enough with mine, I hope to tell you. Not that they didn't turn out all right.

Mrs. Maurrant: I wouldn't give up having mine for anything in the world.

Mrs. Jones: Well, after all, what more does any woman want than watchin' her kids grow up an' a husband to look out for her?

Mrs. Maurrant: Yes, that's true.

Mrs. Jones: Yes, and the world would be a whole lot better off, if there was more that lived up to it. [*Starting up the steps*] Well, I gotta get my Mae up out o' bed. Gawd knows what time she got in, this mornin'. [*She enters the vestibule, then stops and turns.*] If you don't mind my bein' so bold, Mrs. Maurrant—an' I don't mind sayin' it in front of your daughter, either—I'd think twice before I'd let any child o' mine bring a Jew into the family.

Rose [*with a show of temper*]: I don't see what it has to do with you, Mrs. Jones.

Mrs. Jones: There's no need to get huffy about it. I'm only advisin' you for your own good. I'm sure it don't make no difference to me what you do. Come on, Queenie. [*She goes into the house.*]

Rose: Well, of all the nerve I ever heard in my life—! She and those wonderful children of hers!

Mrs. Maurrant [*coming half way down the steps*]: The best way is not to pay any attention to her. There's lots of people like that, in the world—they never seem to be happy, unless they're making trouble for somebody. Did Willie go to school?

Rose: Yes, he did. It's awful the way he goes around, looking like a little tough. And the language he uses, too.

Mrs. Maurrant: I know. I just don't seem able to manage him, any more.

Rose: I sometimes wonder if it wouldn't be better for us all, if we moved out to the suburbs somewhere—you know, some place in Jersey or Staten Island.

Mrs. Maurrant: I don't think pop would do it. [*As* MAURRANT *comes out of the house, carrying a much-battered satchel*] Are you leaving now, Frank?

Maurrant [*from the top of the stoop*]: Looks like it, don't it? Where you been all this while?

Mrs. Maurrant: Why, you know where I've been, Frank—up to Mrs. Buchanan's.

Maurrant: Yeah? An' where you goin' now?

Mrs. Maurrant: Just around to Kraus's to get a chicken. I thought I'd make her some chicken-soup, to give her strength.

Maurrant: Say, how about lookin' after your own home an' lettin' the Buchanans look after theirs?

Mrs. Maurrant: All I'm trying to do is to be a little neighborly. It's the least anybody can do, with the poor thing hardly able to lift her hand.

Maurrant: That's all right about that! [*Coming down the steps*] A woman's got a right to stay in her own home, lookin' after her husband an' children.

Mrs. Maurrant [*going towards him*]: What else have I been doing all these years, I'd like to know?

Maurrant: Well, just see that you don't forget it, that's all—or there's li'ble to be trouble.

Mrs. Maurrant [*putting her hand on his arm*]: All right, Frank. Don't say any more, please. When will you be back—tomorrow?

Maurrant: I don' know when I'll be back. Whenever I'm t'roo wit' me work—that's when. What are you so anxious to know for, huh?

Mrs. Maurrant: Why, I just asked, that's all.

Maurrant: Oh, you just asked, huh? Just in case somebody wanted to come aroun' callin', is that it?

Mrs. Maurrant: No, it isn't. It isn't anything of the kind. You got no right to talk to me like that, in front of my own daughter. You got no right. No, you haven't! [*She turns away and hurries off, abruptly, at the left.*]

Rose: Ma! [*She starts to run after her mother.*]

Maurrant [*imperiously*]: Come back here, you! [Rose *hesitates.*] Come back, hear me? [Rose *turns and comes slowly back.*] You stay right here. [*He puts down his satchel and takes a flask from his pocket.*]

Rose: Why do you talk to her like that?

Maurrant: Nobody's askin' you.

Rose: If you were only a little nicer to her, maybe everything would be different.

Maurrant: Yeah? Where's she got any kick comin'. Ain't I always been a good husband to her? Ain't I always looked after her? [*He takes a drink.*]

Rose: It's not that, pop. It's somebody to be sort of nice to her that she wants—sort of nice and gentle, the way she is to you. That's all it is.

Maurrant [*turning to her*]: So she's got you headed the same way, has she? Goin' out nights with married men, huh?

Rose: You don't need to worry about me, pop. I can take care of myself, all right.

Maurrant: No daughter o' mine ain't gonna go that way. I seen too many o' those kind around the theayter.

Rose: Things are different, nowadays, pop. I guess maybe you don't realize that. Girls aren't the way they used to be—sort of soft and helpless. A girl nowadays knows how to look out for herself. But not her, pop; she needs somebody to look after her.

Maurrant: Aw, can all that talk! You been listenin' to them bolshevikis, that's the trouble. But I'm gonna keep you straight, by God, or I'll know the reason why.

Rose: I guess I've got a right to think about things for myself.

Maurrant: Yeah? Well, don't let me ketch that other bozo comin' around here, either—that's all I got to say.

Rose [*hesitantly, going up to him*]: Pop, listen—couldn't we get a little house somewhere—Queens or somewhere like that?

Maurrant: What's the idea?

Rose: Well, I don't know. I sort of thought it would be nice for all of us. And maybe if ma had a nice little home and some real nice neighbors—do you see what I mean?

Maurrant: This place suits me all right.

Rose: You can get some real nice little houses, that don't cost such an awful lot. And I wouldn't mind helping to pay for it. And once we had it all fixed up—

Maurrant: Forget it! I don' know when I'll be back. [*As he starts to go right*] An' remember what I tol' you, hear?

Mrs. Jones [*appearing at her window, with a tin dust-pan*]: Good mornin', Mr. Maurrant. You off on a little trip?

Maurrant [*curtly*]: Yeah. [*He goes off.* MRS. JONES *empties the dust-pan out of the window and goes away.* KAPLAN *comes out of the house, a bundle of newspapers under his arm. He walks slowly and painfully, with the aid of a heavy stick.*]

Kaplan [*at the foot of the steps*]: Vy do you look so sed, hm?

Rose [*turning, and sitting on the right balustrade*]: Oh, good morning, Mr. Kaplan.

Kaplan: A young girl, like you, should not look so sed.

Rose: I'm not sad, especially, only—

Kaplan: You got troubles, hm?

Rose: I don't know. It's just sort of everything.

Kaplan: Velt-schmerz you got, hm? Vit' my boy Sem is de same t'ing. Dees vay you feel only ven you are yong. Ven you gat old like me, you tink only: "Moch longer I von't be here."

Rose: Why should things be the way they are, Mr. Kaplan? Why must people always be fighting and having troubles, instead of just sort of being happy together?

Kaplan: My dear yong leddy, ef I could enser dis quastion, I would be de greatest benefactor thet de verld hes ever known. Dees is som't'ing, vich all de philosophers hev been unable to enser. De ones thet believe in God, say de davil is responsible; and de ones thet don't believe in God, say 'uman nature is responsible. It is my opinion thet most unheppiness can be traced to economic cosses and thet— [CHARLIE *and* MARY HILDEBRAND *have come out of the house, carrying their school-books.*]

Mary: Hello.

Rose: Hello, Mary. Hello, Charlie.

Charlie: Hello.

Mary [*chattily, as they reach the sidewalk*]: We're going to be dispossessed today.

Rose: What a shame!

Mary: Yes, ma'am. My father went away and so we couldn't pay the rent.

Charlie [*tugging at her arm*]: Aw, come on, Mary.

Rose: Have you another place to live, Mary?

Mary: No, ma'am. But Miss Simpson, from the Charities, says she'll find us a place. She says we must learn to be less extravagant.

Charlie: Come ahead, will you?

Mary: I'm going to school now. Good-by.

Rose: Good-by. [*The children go off, at the left.*]

Kaplan: More trobles!

Rose: I know. Isn't it awful to think of them being turned out in the street like that?

Kaplan: In a ciwilized verld, soch t'ings could not heppen.

Rose: You mean if there were different laws?

Kaplan: Not laws! We got already too many laws. Ve must hev ection, not laws. De verking-klesses must t'row off de yoke of ke*pit*alism, and ebolish wage-slavery.

Rose: But wouldn't people still be unkind to each other and fight and quarrel among themselves?

Kaplan: My dear young leddy, so long as ve keep men in slevery,

dey vill behave like sleves. But wance ve establish a verld based upon 'uman needs and not upon 'uman greed—

Rose: You mean people will begin being nice to each other and making allowances and all?

Kaplan: All dees vill come. Wot ve hev now is a wicious soicle. On de one hend, ve hev a rotten economic system—

Rose: Excuse me, here's my mother. [*She goes towards the left, as* MRS. MAURRANT *approaches, a paper package in her hand.* KAPLAN *goes off, at the right.*]

Mrs. Maurrant [*as* ROSE *comes up to her*]: Did he go? [*They stop on the pavement, at the left of the stoop.*]

Rose: Yes.

Mrs. Maurrant: I got a little chicken, to make Mrs. Buchanan some soup.

Rose: He had a flask with him, ma. I hope he doesn't start drinking.

Mrs. Maurrant: What did he say—anything?

Rose: No, only the way he always talks. I tried to talk to him about buying a house, somewheres, but he wouldn't listen.

Mrs. Maurrant: No, I knew he wouldn't.

Rose: It doesn't seem to be any use trying to get him to listen to anything.

Mrs. Maurrant: It's always been that way. I've always tried to be a good wife to him, Rose. But it never seemed to make any difference to him.

Rose: I know, ma.

Mrs. Maurrant: And I've tried to be a good mother, too.

Rose: I know, ma. I know just the way you feel about it.

Mrs. Maurrant [*appealingly*]: Do you, Rose?

Rose: Yes, ma, I do. Honest I do.

Mrs. Maurrant: I've always tried to make a nice home for him and to do what's right. But it doesn't seem to be any use.

Rose: I know, ma. [*Hesitantly*] But it's on account of— [*She stops.*]

Mrs. Maurrant: Are you going to start, too? Are you going to start like all the others? [*She turns away and bursts into tears.*]

Rose [*fondling her*]: Don't, ma. Please don't.

Mrs. Maurrant: I thought you'd be the one that would feel different.

Rose: I do, ma—really I do.

Mrs. Maurrant: What's the good of being alive, if you can't get a little something out of life? You might just as well be dead.

Rose: Look out, ma. Somebody's coming. [*A* SMARTLY-DRESSED GIRL, *with one side of her face covered with cotton and adhesive tape, appears at the left and crosses the stage. At the same time,* JONES *comes out of the house.* ROSE *and* MRS. MAURRANT *stand in awkward silence, as he comes down the stoop and approaches them.*]

Jones: Well, is it hot enough for you today?

Rose: It's awful, isn't it?

Jones [*as he goes towards the left*]: You said it. Still along about January, we'll all be wishin' we had a little o' this weather. [*He exits.* MRS. MAURRANT *goes towards the stoop.*]

Rose: Ma, listen. If I say something, will you listen to me?

Mrs. Maurrant: Yes, sure I will, Rose. I'll listen to anything you say, only—

Rose: Well, what I was thinking was, if he didn't come around here so much, maybe. Do you see what I mean, ma?

Mrs. Maurrant [*constrainedly*]: Yes, Rose.

Rose [*putting her arm around her*]: It's on account of all that's going around—everybody in the whole house. You see what I mean, don't you, ma?

Mrs. Maurrant: Every person in the world has to have somebody to talk to. You can't live without somebody to talk to. I'm not saying that I can't talk to you, Rose, but you're only a young girl and it's not the same thing.

Rose: It's only on account of pop. I'm scared of what he's likely to do, if he starts drinking.

Mrs. Maurrant: Well, I'll see, Rose. Sometimes I think I'd be better off if I was dead.

Rose: If there was only something I could do.

Mrs. Maurrant: There isn't anything anybody could do. It's just the way things are, that's all. [BUCHANAN *appears at the left. They turn and face him, as he approaches.*]

Mrs. Maurrant: Oh, Mr. Buchanan, I got a little chicken, so that I could make her some good, nourishing soup.

Buchanan: Well, say, you got to let me pay you for it.

Mrs. Maurrant: Oh, never mind about that. We'll have the chicken for supper tonight. Did you have her medicine made up?

Buchanan: Yes, I got it right here. I called up the office and they told me not to come down today.

Mrs. Maurrant: Well, that's very nice. It'll be a comfort to her to have you around.

Buchanan: Yes, that's what I thought, too. Well, I'd better be getting upstairs. [*He goes up the steps.*]

Mrs. Maurrant: I'll be up later, with the soup.

Buchanan: Well, thanks. [*Stopping at the top of the stoop and turning to her*] You've been a mighty good neighbor, Mrs. Maurrant. [*He enters the house.*]

Mrs. Maurrant: He's an awful nice young feller—so nice and gentle. And he's always trying to be so helpful. It makes you feel sort of sorry for him. [SHIRLEY *comes out of the house, carrying a large wicker bag, which contains her lunch and school-books. She takes a post-card out of the mail-box.*]

Mrs. Maurrant [*going up the steps*]: Well, I'd better go and start this chicken. Are you coming home for lunch, Rose?

Rose: Yes. I'll be back, as soon as the funeral's over.

Mrs. Maurrant: Oh, all right. [*As she sees* SHIRLEY] Good morning.

Shirley [*coming out of the vestibule, reading the post-card*]: Good morning.

Rose: Good morning. [MRS. MAURRANT *goes into the house. The shade of* MAE'S *window flies up and she is seen, for an instant, dressed only in her step-in. She yawns noisily and turns away from the window.*]

Rose [*seating herself on the stoop*]: It's another awful day, isn't it?

Shirley: Yes, and when you have to keep forty children quiet—! Well, thank goodness, in two weeks, school closes. Otherwise, I think I'd go crazy.

Rose: Well, you get a nice, long vacation, anyhow.

Shirley: Not much vacation for me. I'm taking summer courses at Teachers' College. [*She looks at* ROSE *a moment, hesitates, and then comes down the steps.*] Miss Maurrant, if you don't mind, I want to talk to you about my brother, Sam.

Rose: Why, certainly, Miss Kaplan.

Shirley: I guess you know he's only finishing college, this month—

Rose: Yes, of course, I do.

Shirley: Then he has to go three years to law-school and pass the bar examination, before he can be a full-fledged lawyer.

Rose: Yes, it takes a long time.

Shirley: A long time and lots of money. And before a young

lawyer begins to make his own living, that takes a long time, too. It will be ten years, maybe, before he's making enough to support himself and a family. [*Looking away*] Then, it's time enough for him to think about marriage.

Rose: You don't mean me and Sam, Miss Kaplan?

Shirley: Yes, that's just what I mean.

Rose: Why, we're just good friends, that's all.

Shirley: I know how it is with a boy like Sam, Miss Maurrant. He thinks he's a man, already; but he's nothing but a boy. If you're such a good friend, you shouldn't take his mind away from his work.

Rose: But I haven't meant to, Miss Kaplan—honest I haven't.

Shirley: I've had to work hard enough to get him as far as he is. And I have my father to take care of, too. The few dollars he makes, writing for the radical papers, don't even pay the rent. Believe me, every dollar I make goes.

Rose: I know. Sam's often told me how much he owes to you.

Shirley: He doesn't owe me anything. I don't care about the money. Only he should be thinking about his work and not about other things.

Rose: Yes, he should be thinking about his work. But don't you think there are other things in the world, too, besides just work?

Shirley: Don't you think I know that? I know that just as well as you do. Maybe, you think I'm only an old-maid school-teacher, without any feelings.

Rose: Oh, I don't—really I don't!

Shirley [*turning her head away*]: Maybe I'm not a movie vamp, with dimples—but I could have had my chances, too. Only, I wanted to give Sam an education.

Rose: I haven't tried to vamp Sam, honestly I haven't. We just seemed sort of naturally to like each other.

Shirley: Why must you pick out Sam? You could get other fellows. Anyhow, it's much better to marry with your own kind. When you marry outside your own people, nothing good ever comes of it. You can't mix oil and water.

Rose: I don't know. I think if people really care about each other—

Shirley: He's nothing but a baby. He sees a pretty face and, right away, he forgets about everything else.

Rose [*with a flash of temper*]: I know I haven't as much brains as Sam, or as you, either, if that's what you mean.

Shirley [*contritely, going towards her*]: I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I haven't got anything against you. Only, he's all I've got in the world. What else have I got to live for?

Sam [*appearing at the extreme right window, with a cup of coffee and a piece of coffee-cake*]: Hello, Rose.

Rose: Hello, Sam.

Shirley [*in a low tone*]: Please don't tell him what I said. [SAM *goes to the other window.*]

Rose: Oh, no, I won't. [SHIRLEY *hurries off, at the left.*]

Rose [*rising and turning towards* SAM]: Sam—

Sam [*holding out the coffee-cake*]: Want some coffee-cake?

Rose: No. [*Going up the steps*] Sam, there's something I want to ask you, before I forget. Is there any special way you have to act in a synagogue?

Sam [*eating throughout*]: In a synagogue?

Rose: Yes. The funeral I'm going to, is in a synagogue, and I thought there might be some special thing you have to do. Like in church, you know, a girl is always supposed to keep her hat on.

Sam: I don't know. I've never in my life been in a synagogue.

Rose: Didn't you ever go to Sunday-school, or anything like that?

Sam: No.

Rose: That's funny. I thought everybody went, once in a while. How about when your mother died?

Sam: She was cremated. My parents were always rationalists.

Rose: Didn't they believe in God or anything?

Sam: What do you mean by God?

Rose [*puzzled*]: Well—you know what I mean. What anybody means—God. Somebody that sort of loves us and looks after us, when we're in trouble.

Sam [*sitting on the window-sill*]: That's nothing but superstition —the lies that people tell themselves, because reality is too terrible for them to face.

Rose: But, Sam, don't you think it's better to believe in something that makes you a little happy than not to believe in anything and be miserable all the time?

Sam: There's no such thing as happiness. That's an illusion, like all the rest.

Rose: Then, what's the use of living?

Sam [*brushing the last crumbs off his hands*]: Yes, what is the use?

Rose: Why, you oughtn't to talk like that, Sam—a person with all the talent and brains that you've got. I know things aren't just the way you want them to be. But they aren't for anybody. They aren't for me, either.

Sam: Then, why don't we get out of it, together?

Rose: I don't see just how we could do that, Sam.

Sam: It would be easy enough—ten cents' worth of carbolic acid.

Rose: Why, Sam, you don't mean kill ourselves!

Sam: Is your life so precious to you that you want to cling to it?

Rose: Well, yes. I guess it is.

Sam: Why? Why? What is there in life to compensate for the pain of living?

Rose: There's a lot. Just being alive—breathing and walking around. Just looking at the faces of people you like and hearing them laugh. And seeing the pretty things in the store-windows. And rough-housing with your kid brother. And—oh, I don't know—listening to a good band, and dancing— Oh, I'd hate to die! [*Earnestly*] Sam, promise you won't talk about killing yourself, any more.

Sam: What difference would it make to you if I did?

Rose: Don't talk like that, Sam! You're the best friend I've ever had. [*She puts her hand on his.*]

Sam: I can't think of anything but you.

Rose: There's something I want to ask your advice about, Sam. It's about what I started to tell you about last night. A man I know wants to put me on the stage.

Sam [*releasing her hand and drawing back*]: What man?

Rose: A man that works in the office. He knows a manager and he says he'll help me get started. You see, what I thought was, that if I could only get out of here and have a decent place to live and make a lot of money, maybe everything would be different, not only for me, but for ma and pop and Willie.

Sam: But don't you know what he wants, this man?

Rose: Nobody gives you anything for nothing, Sam. If you don't pay for things in one way, you do in another.

Sam: Rose, for God's sake, you mustn't! [VINCENT JONES *comes out of the house.*]

Rose [*seeing* VINCENT *in the vestibule*]: Look out, Sam, here's that tough from upstairs. [*She goes over to the left of the stoop.*]

Vincent [*in the doorway*]: Hello, Rosie. Been here, all night, talkin' to the little yit? [ROSE *does not answer.*]

Vincent [*turning to* SAM]: Hello, motzers! Shake! [*He leans over the balustrade and seizes* SAM'S *hand, in a crushing grip.*]

Sam [*writhing with pain*]: Let me go!

Rose: Let him alone! [VINCENT *gives* SAM'S *hand another vicious squeeze and then releases him.* SAM *cowers back in the window, nursing his hand.*]

Vincent [*waving his hand about in mock pain*]: Jesus, what a grip dat little kike's got! I'd hate to get into a mix-up wit' him. [*To* ROSE] Got a date for tonight, kid?

Rose: Yes, I have.

Vincent: Yeah? Gee, ain't dat too bad. I'll give you two dollars, if you let me snap your garter.

Rose: Shut up, you! [VINCENT *laughs.* SAM *makes an inarticulate sound.*]

Vincent [*threateningly*]: Whadja say? I t'ought I hoid you say sumpin. [*He makes a threatening gesture.* SAM *shrinks back.*]

Vincent [*with a loud laugh, as he goes down the steps*]: Fightin' Kaplan, de pride o' Jerusalem! [*He looks at them both, then laughs again.*] Fer cryin' out loud! [*He goes off at the left.*]

Rose: Oh, if there was only some way of getting out of here! [SAM *puts the back of his hand to his forehead and turns away.*] I sometimes think I'd just like to run away.

Sam [*without turning*]: Yes!

Rose: Anywhere—it wouldn't matter where—just to get out of this.

Sam [*turning*]: Why shouldn't we do it?

Rose [*rather startled, coming over to the right balustrade*]: Would you go with me, Sam?

Sam: Yes—anywhere.

Rose: I've heard that people are much nicer and friendlier, when you get outside of New York. There's not so much of a mad rush, other places. And being alone, you could sort of work things out for yourself. [*Suddenly*] Only, what would you do, Sam?

Sam: I could get a job, too.

Rose: And give up your law-work?

Sam: I'd give up everything, to be with you.

Rose: No. I wouldn't let you do that, Sam. It's different with me— [EASTER *appears at the right.*]

Easter [*stopping at the right of the stoop*]: Good morning, Miss Maurrant. [*Startled,* ROSE *turns and sees him, for the first time.*]

Rose [*none too pleased*]: Oh, good morning, Mr. Easter. What brings you in this neighborhood?

Easter [*not very plausibly*]: Well, I just happened to have a little business right around the corner. So, I thought as long as you were going to the funeral, we might just as well go together.

Rose: Well, I hardly expected to see you around here. [*An awkward pause*] Oh, I'd like you to meet my friend, Mr. Kaplan.

Easter: How do you do, Mr. Kaplan? Glad to know you. [SAM *murmurs something inaudible. An awkward silence.*]

Rose [*to* SAM]: Mr. Easter is the manager of the office. [SAM *does not reply. Another silence.*]

Rose [*to* EASTER]: It's awful hot again, isn't it?

Easter: Worse than yesterday. [*Approaching the stoop*] Tell you what I was thinking. I was thinking that after the funeral we might take a run down to the beach, somewhere, and cool off a little.

Rose: I can't today. I've got a lot of things I want to do.

Easter: Oh, you can do 'em some other day.

Rose: No, really, I can't. [*Looking at her watch*] Well, I guess it's time we got started. [*She comes down the steps.*]

Easter: Yes, it is. We'll pick up a cab at the corner. [MRS. MAURRANT *appears at her window, looks out, and sees* ROSE *and* EASTER.]

Rose: Why, I thought I'd walk. It's not far.

Easter: Too hot today for any walking.

Rose [*starting to go towards the left*]: Not if you keep in the shade.

Easter: Much more comfortable taking a cab.

Rose: I'd rather walk.

Easter: Well, whatever you say. Good morning, Mr. Kaplan. Glad to have met you. [SAM *murmurs an inaudible reply.*]

Rose: Good-by, Sam. I'll see you, later. [SAM *does not answer.* ROSE *and* EASTER *go towards the left, in silence.* SAM *watches them, intently, trembling with jealousy.* MRS. MAURRANT, *surprised and disturbed, watches* ROSE *and* EASTER.]

Rose [*to* EASTER, *as they disappear*]: It's a lucky thing my father wasn't around. [SAM *suddenly turns and goes into the house.* MRS. MAURRANT *remains at the window, looking out, with obvious expectancy.*]

A Distant Voice [*off-stage left*]: *Straw*-berries! Straw-*berries!* [*An anemic girl of eighteen, with a music-roll under her arm, appears at the left. She enters the house and pushes one of the buttons,*

in the vestibule, then goes to the entrance-door and waits. A moment later, MRS. FIORENTINO *appears hastily, at the window, and whisks away the bed-clothes. After another moment, the latch clicks and the girl enters the house.*]

The Voice [*a little nearer*]: *Oh-h! Straw*-berries! Straw-*berries!* [SANKEY *appears at the right. He carries a pencil behind his ear, wears a round cap with a metal-name-plate and a stiff visor, and carries a large black-covered bill-holder. He and* MRS. MAURRANT *see each other and both become tense with excitement.* MRS. MAURRANT *beckons to him and he comes over to the railing, under her window.*]

Mrs. Maurrant [*in a low, tense voice*]: Come up.

Sankey [*looking about, nervously*]: Now?

Mrs. Maurrant: Yes. I got to talk to you.

Sankey: Is it all right?

Mrs. Maurrant: Yes. He's gone to Stamford.

Sankey: How about later?

Mrs. Maurrant: No. Rose'll be home in a hour. She's not working today.

Sankey: All right. [*He looks about again, then goes quickly towards the steps.* SAM *appears, at the entrance-door. He is about to step out, when he sees* SANKEY. *He stops and looks at him.* SANKEY *sees* SAM, *hesitates a moment, then goes quickly into the house. Meanwhile,* MRS. MAURRANT *has closed both windows and pulled down the shades.* SAM *takes a periodical out of the mail-box, then comes out of the house and down the steps. He looks up at the* MAURRANT *windows, sees the drawn shades, and looks about, in perturbed perplexity, not knowing what to do. At length, he sits down on the steps of the stoop, tears the wrapper off the periodical—the* Nation—*and begins to read. The girl in* LIPPO'S *apartment begins playing the piano. This continues throughout the scene. Two untidy and rather coarse-looking men appear at the left and approach the stoop:* JAMES HENRY, *a city-marshal, and* FRED CULLEN, *his assistant. They stop in front of the house.* SAM *pays no attention to them.*]

The Marshal [*crossing to the left of the stoop, and taking a paper from his pocket*]: Dis is it. [*To* SAM] Hildebrand live here?

Sam [*startled*]: What?

The Marshal: I'm askin' you if Hildebrand lives here.

Sam: Yes. Fourth floor.

The Marshal: Better give de janitor a buzz, Fred. [FRED *goes up*

the steps and rings the janitor's bell, then leans over the left balustrade.]

Fred [*bawling*]: Hey, janitor.

Olsen [*below*]: Vell?

Fred: Come on out, a minute. [*As* OLSEN *appears below*] We got a warrant for Hildebrand.

Olsen: Fourt' floor—Hildebrand.

Fred: Yeah, I know. We got a warrant for her.

The Marshal: I'm City Marshal Henry. We got a dispossess warrant.

Olsen [*coming up the steps*]: Oh, sure. You gonna put 'em out?

The Marshal: Yeah, dat's it. Has she got anybody to take de foinicher away?

Olsen [*with a shrug*]: I don' know.

The Marshal: Well, we'll have t' dump it on de side-walk, den. Go ahead, Fred. [*They enter the house.* OLSEN *leans his elbows on the coping, and smokes his pipe.* SAM *sits on the steps, deep in troubled thought. A* GROCERY BOY, *with a full basket, appears at the right, and goes down the cellar-steps.* MAE JONES *comes out of the house. She stands on the top step, yawns noisily, and goes off, at left. She and* SAM *do not pay the slightest attention to each other.*]

A Voice [*a little nearer*]: *Straw*-berries! Straw-*berries!* [MRS. OLSEN *comes up the cellar-steps, with a heavy pail of water.* OLSEN *leans forward to make room for her. She staggers over to the stoop, almost dropping the pail, and goes up the steps, into the vestibule.* OLSEN *yawns and goes down into the cellar.* MRS. JONES *appears, at the window, her hair wet and stringy, a towel pinned about her shoulders, and leans out to dry her hair.*]

An Old-Clothes Man [*appearing at left*]: I kesh ko! I kesh ko! [*He wears a battered derby and carries a folded newspaper under his arm.* MRS. OLSEN, *on her knees, begins washing up the vestibule.* FRED *comes out of the house, carrying a worn chair and a large gilt-framed picture, which he deposits on the side-walk, against the railing, to the left of the stoop.*]

The Old-Clothes Man [*as if to someone across the street*]: Kesh ko? [*To* SAM] Any old klose, mister? [SAM *pays no attention to him.* FRED *re-enters the house.*]

The Old-Clothes Man [*to* MRS. JONES]: Any ol' klose, leddy?

Mrs. Jones: Naw, nawthin'.

The Old-Clothes Man: Hets? Shoes? Ol' stockings?

Mrs. Jones: Nawthin', I tell you. [*As* THE OLD-CLOTHES MAN

goes off, at the right, MAURRANT *appears, still carrying his satchel.*]

Mrs. Jones: Why, hello, Mr. Maurrant. [MAURRANT *looks up without replying and comes over to the stoop.*] I thought you was off to Stamford.

Maurrant: I changed me— [*He stops, to the right of the stoop, and looks up at the drawn shades of his apartment.* SAM *rises, slowly and rigidly, his eyes glued in fascination, upon* MAURRANT. MAURRANT'S *movements take on a lithe and cat-like quality. Then, slowly and deliberately, he goes towards the steps, his back arched, like a tiger ready to spring.*]

Sam [*suddenly blocking the steps*]: No! No! For God's sake—!

Maurrant [*raging*]: Out o' me way, you goddam little rat! [*He flings* SAM *violently aside, almost knocking him down.* MRS. OLSEN, *terrified, rises and shrinks into a corner, as* MAURRANT *with swift stealthiness, enters the house.* MRS. JONES *leans out, to see what is wrong.* SAM *rushes down the steps and stands under the* MAURRANT *windows.* THE MARSHAL *comes out of the house, carrying a wash-boiler, filled with pots.*]

Sam [*hysterically*]: Mrs. Maurrant! Mrs. Maurrant!

Mrs. Jones: What's the matter? [THE MARSHAL *puts the wash-boiler on the balustrade and looks on, in amazement.*]

Sam [*to* MRS. JONES]: Quick! Run and tell her! Quick!

Mrs. Jones: What is it? [*Suddenly*] Oh, Gawd, is he in there? [*She leaves the window, hastily.*]

Sam: Yes! Mrs. Maurrant! Mrs. Maurrant! [*A scream of terror is heard, from the* MAURRANT *apartment.*]

Mrs. Maurrant's Voice: Frank! Frank!

[*Two shots are heard, in quick succession, and then a heavy fall.* MRS. OLSEN *runs out of the vestibule and down into the cellar.* SANKEY'S *voice is heard, inarticulate with fear. Then, one of the shades shoots up, and* SANKEY *appears at the window, coatless, his face deformed by terror. He tries to open the window, but succeeds only in shattering the pane with his elbow.* MAURRANT *appears behind him and pulls him away from the window. Then another shot is heard.*]

The Marshal: For Chris' sake, what's happenin'? Get an ambulance, you! [*He pushes* SAM *towards the left, then hurries off, at the right. As* SAM *runs off, a crowd begins to form.* OLSEN *comes up from the cellar, followed by* THE GROCERY-BOY. *The two workmen come up, out of the excavation. Two or three of the workmen from the demolished building run on at the right.*]

A Workman: What's happening?

A Man: What is it? A murder?

[*Still others join the crowd: A huckster, a janitor from a neighboring house, a mulatto girl, six or eight women of the neighborhood, some in street-dresses, others in house-dresses or dingy wrappers.* LIPPO'S PUPIL *appears, at the window, badly frightened. The crowd surges about, uncertainly, not knowing what has happened, and buzzing with questions, which nobody can answer. While the crowd is still forming.* FRED, THE MARSHAL'S *assistant, appears at the broken window.*]

Fred [*excitedly*]: Grab dat boid! He's comin' down!

A Workman: What boid?

A Man: Here he is, now! [*The crowd murmurs with excitement and surges about the stoop, as the house-door opens and* MAURRANT *appears. His coat is open and his shirt is torn almost to shreds. His face, hands and clothing are covered with blood. He stands, in the door-way, for a moment, surveying the crowd, his eyes glaring.*]

Fred: Grab him! Don't let him get away! [*As the crowd makes a concerted movement towards* MAURRANT, *he whips out an automatic revolver and levels it. The crowd shrinks back. Some of the women scream.*]

Maurrant: Git back! Git back, all o' you! [*The crowd falls back towards the left, to make way for him. With his back to the balustrade, he comes quickly down the steps, and still leveling his revolver at the crowd, retreats backwards to the cellar steps. A man, approaching at the right, comes stealthily up behind him, but* MAURRANT *senses his presence in time, wheels quickly, menaces the man with his revolver, then rushes down the cellar steps. While all this is happening, the other shade in the* MAURRANT *apartment flies up and* MISS CUSHING *opens the window and leans out.*]

Miss Cushing: Hurry up! Get an ambulance! [*No one pays any attention to her, as they are all watching* MAURRANT. *As* MAURRANT *runs down the cellar steps, the crowd surges forward to the railing, on both sides of the stoop and leans over. A scream from* MRS. OLSEN *is heard from the basement.* FRED *goes away from the window.*]

Miss Cushing: Get an ambulance, somebody! [*Unable to attract anyone's attention, she leaves the window.*]

Olsen: Olga! [*He hurries down the cellar steps.*]

A Man [*calling*]: Here's a cop! [*The crowd looks to the right.*] Hey! Hurry up! [*A* POLICEMAN *runs on from the right.*]

The Policeman: Where is he?

Voices in the Crowd: He's down the cellar! He ran down the cellar! He went down the steps!

The Policeman: Get out of the way! [THE POLICEMAN *and* TWO MEN *in the crowd go down the cellar steps.*]

Voices in the Crowd: Watch yourself! Look out, he's got a gun! He's a big guy with his shirt torn! [*The rest of the crowd peers over the railing.*]

Miss Cushing [*leaning out of* ROSE'S *window*]: Hey, don't you hear me? Get an ambulance!

Another Man [*looking up*]: What's de matter? You want de ambulance?

Miss Cushing: Yes! Right away!

Another Man [*to* THE GROCERY-BOY]: Run aroun' de corner to de horspital, Johnny, an' tell 'em to send de ambulance!

The Grocery-Boy: Sure!

Miss Cushing: Run! [THE GROCERY-BOY *runs off swiftly at the left.* MISS CUSHING *leaves the window. Meanwhile, as* THE POLICEMAN *and* THE TWO MEN *have gone down the cellar steps,* THE MARSHAL *has run on, from the right, panting.*]

The Marshal [*as* THE GROCERY-BOY *runs off*]: Did dey git 'm?

A Man: He beat it down de cellar.

A Workman: De cop's gone after him.

The Marshal: Why de hell didn' you stop 'im? [FRED *comes out of the house.*]

A Workman: He had a gun.

Fred: Did somebody go for de ambulance?

A Man: Yeah. De kid went.

A Woman: It's only aroun' de corner.

Another Man: Dey'll be here, right away. [*The crowd moves over towards* FRED.]

The Marshal [*pushing his way through the crowd and up the steps*]: What de hell happened, Fred?

Fred [*as the crowd moves toward the stoop*]: It's a moider. Dis boid's wife an' some other guy. Jesus, you oughta see de blood. [*Another* POLICEMAN *runs up, at the left, closely followed by* SAM.]

Fred: Upstairs, officer! Dere's two of 'em got shot.

The Policeman [*elbowing his way through the crowd*]: Look out o' de way, youse! [*He goes up the stoop and crosses to the door.*] Where's de guy dat did it?

Voices in the Crowd: Down de cellar! He beat it down de steps!

Fred: Dere's another cop after 'im. You better look after dem, upstairs. Foist floor.

Sam [*agonized*]: Are they dead? [*No one pays any attention to him.*]

The Marshal [*stopping* THE POLICEMAN, *and exhibiting his badge*]: I'm City Marshal Henry. Kin I do anythin'?

Policeman: Don' let anybody in or out! Hear?

The Marshal: Yeah, sure! [THE POLICEMAN *exits quickly, into the house.*]

Sam: Are they dead? [*No one notices him.* THE MARSHAL *takes up his position in the doorway.*]

Buchanan [*appearing at the* MAURRANT *window*]: Where's the ambulance?

The Marshal: It'll be here, right away. Dere's a cop on his way up.

Sam: Mr. Buchanan! Mr. Buchanan! Are they dead? [*But* BUCHANAN *has already disappeared. The* TWO MEN, *who followed the first* POLICEMAN *into the cellar, now come up the steps. The crowd moves over to the railing, at the right.*]

The Marshal: Did you get him, boys?

One of the Men: He must be hidin', somewheres. De cop's lookin' for 'im.

Another Man: Somebody better call de resoives. [SAM *runs up the steps and tries to enter the house.*]

The Marshal [*seizing him roughly*]: You can't get in now! Get back dere! [*He pushes* SAM *back into the crowd, at the foot of the steps.*]

The Policeman [*appearing at the* MAURRANT *window*]: Hey, call up headquarters an' tell 'em to send the resoives. Make it quick! [*He goes away from the window.*]

The Marshal: You go, Fred.

Fred: Sure!

A Man: Dere's a phone in de warehouse. [*An ambulance bell is heard at the left, as* FRED *goes quickly towards the left. Another spectator hurries on and joins the crowd.*]

Voices in the Crowd: Dere it is! Dere's de ambulance now! Here dey come! [*The crowd moves over towards the left.*]

A Man: Dey won't be able to git past.

The Policeman [*reappearing at the window*]: Is dat de ambulance?

The Marshal: Yeah. [BUCHANAN *and* MRS. JONES *crowd to the*

window, behind the POLICEMAN, *and, at the other window,* LIPPO, MISS CUSHING *and* MRS. HILDEBRAND *appear. A* HOSPITAL INTERNE *and an* AMBULANCE-DRIVER *come on at the left.*]

The Policeman: Hurry up, Doc! She's still breathin'.

The Interne [*forcing his way through the crowd*]: All right! Better bring the stretcher, Harry.

The Ambulance-Driver: Yes, sir. [*He hurries off, at the left.* THE INTERNE *goes quickly into the house. The crowd attempts to follow, several of its members going up the steps.*]

The Marshal [*pushing them back*]: Keep back, now! Back off de stoop, everybody! [*The crowd forms a compact mass, about the foot of the steps. The persons at the* MAURRANT *windows have disappeared.* FRED *hurries on, at the left.*]

Fred [*pushing his way through the crowd and up the steps*]: I got 'em. Dey'll be right up. Anudder cop jes' wen' in t'roo de warehouse cellar.

The Marshal: Dey'll git 'im all right. [*Looking at his watch*] Better git busy wit' dat foinicher, Fred. We got two udder jobs today.

Fred: Yeah, sure, Jimmy. [*He enters the house.* THE AMBULANCE-DRIVER *appears at the left, carrying a canvas stretcher.*]

The Ambulance-Driver: Get out o' the way!

The Marshal: Git back, can't youse? What de hell's de matter wit' youse? [*He comes down the steps and violently pushes the crowd back.* THE AMBULANCE-DRIVER *enters the house.*]

The Policeman [*at the window*]: Are dey bringin' dat stretcher?

The Marshal: On de way up! [*To the crowd*] Keep back! [THE POLICEMAN *leaves the window.* LIPPO'S PUPIL, *her music-roll under her arm, appears timidly in the doorway.*]

The Marshal [*grabbing her arm roughly*]: Where you goin'?

The Girl [*nervously*]: I'm going home.

The Marshal: Home? Where do you live?

The Girl: Ninety-first Street.

The Marshal: What are you doin' here?

The Girl: I just came for a music-lesson, that's all.

The Marshal: Yeah? Well, you can't go now.

The Girl [*beginning to whimper*]: I want to go home.

The Marshal: You can't go now. Nobody can't leave de house now.

The Policeman [*coming out of the house*]: Who's dis kid?

The Marshal: Says she come here to take a music-lesson an' she wants to go home.

The Policeman [*to* THE GIRL]: Do you know anythin' about this killin'?

The Girl: No, I don't. I just heard some shooting, that's all. My mother will be worried, if I don't come home.

The Policeman: Well, you can't go, now. Get inside dere, out o' de way. Dey'll be bringin' her down, in a minute. [*He pushes the girl inside the house and comes down the steps.*]

The Policeman: Come on, git back from dem steps! Back now, all o' youse! [*He and* THE MARSHAL *push the crowd back to the right of the stoop, leaving the steps and the sidewalk in front of them clear. Then he goes up the steps again.*]

The Marshal: What did he do? Shoot two of 'em?

The Policeman: I'll say he did! His wife an' her sweetie. A guy named Sankey. He was dead when I got up dere.

The Marshal: I seen him tryin' to climb out t'roo de winder. An' dis guy grabs 'im an' pulls 'im back.

The Interne [*from the* MAURRANT *window*]: Officer! come on up! [*He leaves the window, as* THE POLICEMAN *exits into the house. Suddenly* SAM *utters an exclamation of anguish and, pushing his way out of the crowd, hurries over to the left.*]

The Marshal: Hey you! Where you goin'? [SAM *ignores him and hurries on.*]

A Woman: Look! There's the Maurrant girl!

Another Woman: Who?

A Woman: It's her daughter. [*The crowd murmurs, excitedly, as* ROSE *comes on quickly, at the left.*]

Rose: What's the matter, Sam? What's the ambulance for? Did anybody get hurt?

Sam: Go away, Rose. Go away.

Rose: Who is it, Sam? What's the matter? Is it my mother? It's not my mother, is it? [*Clinging to him*] Sam, is it?

Sam: There's been an accident. Go away, Rose. [*He tries to force her away.*]

Rose: Tell me what's happened! Tell me!

Miss Cushing [*appearing at the window*]: They're bringing her down!

Rose [*with a cry*]: It *is* my mother!

Miss Cushing [*seeing her*]: Oh, my God, there's Rose! [MRS.

FIORENTINO, MRS. JONES, MRS. HILDEBRAND, LIPPO *and* BU CHANAN *crowd to the* MAURRANT *windows.*]

Sam: Rose! Go away! [*She pays no attention to him, but stand watching the door, transfixed.* THE INTERNE *comes briskly out of the house.*]

The Interne [*to* THE MARSHAL]: Hold the door open, will you [*He comes down the steps.*]

The Marshal: Sure, doc! [*He hurries into the vestibule.*]

The Interne [*to the crowd*]: Keep back, now!

Rose [*seizing* THE INTERNE'S *arm*]: Doctor! Is she dead?

The Interne: Who are you? Her daughter?

Rose: Yes, sir. I'm her daughter.

The Interne: She's pretty badly hurt. Step aside, now! [*They step aside, as* THE AMBULANCE-DRIVER *and* THE POLICEMAN *come out of the house, carrying* MRS. MAURRANT *on the stretcher. There is a low murmur from the crowd.*]

The Ambulance-Driver: Easy, now.

The Policeman: All right. [*They come down the steps and go towards the left.*]

Rose [*running forward and gripping the side of the stretcher*] Mother! Mother!

Mrs. Maurrant [*opening her eyes, feebly*]: Rose! [*She tries to lift her hand, but it falls back.*]

The Interne [*pulling* ROSE *back*]: You mustn't talk to her, now [SAM *takes her about the shoulders. They and* THE INTERNE *follow the stretcher off, at the left. The crowd swarms after them.* FRE *comes out of the house, carrying one end of an iron bedstead.*]

[*Curtain*]

ACT THREE

Mid-afternoon of the same day. At the left of the stoop, is a large roll of bedding. Before the rise of the curtain, and continuing faintly thereafter, a woman can be heard singing scales. OLSEN, *pipe in mouth, is leaning against the railing.* TWO MEN, *furniture-movers, appear at the left.*

One of the Men [*picking up the bedding*]: All right. Dat's all, Charlie! [*The* MEN *exit left. A* POLICEMAN *comes out of the house, carrying the blood-stained dress of* MRS. MAURRANT, *and* SANKEY'S *coat, cap, and bill-holder. He comes down the steps, and exits at the right. At the left,* TWO YOUNG NURSE-MAIDS, *in smart uniforms, appear, each wheeling a de-luxe baby-carriage.*]

First Nurse-Maid [*seeing the house-number*]: This must be the place, right here—346. [*They stop, under the* MAURRANT *windows.*]

Second Nurse-Maid: Yes, I guess it is.

First Nurse-Maid: Yes, this is it, all right. [*Looking up*] Must be right up there, on the first floor, see?

Second Nurse-Maid: Yes, sure. [*Excitedly*] Say, look! You can see where the glass is out of the window. That's where this feller What's-his-name tried to climb out.

First Nurse-Maid: Oh, yes, I see it! Say, what do you know about that!

Second Nurse-Maid [*taking a pink tabloid newspaper from under the hood of the baby-buggy*]: Wait! There's a picture of it, somewhere. [*Turning the pages*] Here it is. [*They excitedly examine it together, as she reads.*] "Composograph showing Sankey, scantily clad, in a last vain attempt to escape the vengeance of the jealousy-crazed husband, whose home he had destroyed." And there's Maurrant pulling him back. And Mrs. Maurrant trying to get the pistol away from him, see? Look at the blood running down her face, will you?

First Nurse-Maid: It's worse than awful! Can you *imagine* what those two must have felt like, when he walked in on them like that?

Second Nurse-Maid: Well, he just happened to be one of the ones that finds out! Believe me, there's lots and lots of husbands that don't know the half of what goes on up-town, while they're down-town making a living.

First Nurse-Maid: Say, you're not telling me, are you? If I was to spill all I know, there'd be many a happy home busted up. I wonder if they caught him.

Second Nurse Maid [*as her* BABY *begins a thin wailing*]: Oh, God, he's in again! [*To the unseen* BABY] Shut up, a little while, can't you? [*She shakes the carriage.*]

A Policeman [*appearing at the* MAURRANT *windows, a tabloid in his hand*]: Keep movin', ladies. No loiterin' aroun' here.

First Nurse-Maid [*eagerly*]: Say, have they caught him yet?

The Policeman: Why, ain't you hoid? He was last seen flyin' over Nova Scotia, on his way to Paris.

First Nurse-Maid: Who are you trying to string, anyhow?

Second Nurse-Maid [*coquettishly*]: Say, will you let us come up and look around?

The Policeman: Why, sure, sure! Bring de babies, too. De commissioner is soivin' tea, up here, at four-thoity.

Second Nurse-Maid: You're awful smart, aren't you?

The Policeman: Yeah, dat's why dey put me on de entertainment committee. I'm Handsome Harry Moiphy, de boy comedian o' Brooklyn.

First Nurse-Maid [*looking at her watch*]: Oh, say, I ought to be getting back. [*Turning her carriage*] Clarice darling would throw a duck-fit, if she knew I brought her precious Dumplings to a neighborhood like this.

Second Nurse-Maid [*turning her carriage*]: There's not so much

to see, anyhow. It's nothing but a cheap, common dump. [*They go towards the left.*]

The Policeman: Over de river, goils. See you in de funny paper.

Second Nurse-Maid: Don't you get so fresh.

The Policeman: Drop in again, when you're in de neighborhood. An' tell Mrs. Vanderbilt, Harry was askin' for her. [*As the* NURSE-MAIDS *go off, at the left,* EASTER *hurries on at the right, several folded newspapers under his arm.*]

Easter [*to* THE POLICEMAN, *going to the left of the stoop*]: Is Miss Maurrant up there, officer?

The Policeman: No. There ain't nobody up here but me.

Easter: You don't happen to know where she is, do you?

The Policeman: No, I don't. Are you a reporter?

Easter: Who, me? I'm just a friend of hers. I've got to see her.

The Policeman: Well, I ain't seen her since she went off to the horspital this mornin'. She ain't been back since. [*He starts to leave the window.*]

Easter: Oh, officer!

The Policeman: Yeah?

Easter: Have they caught him yet?

The Policeman: Naw, not yet. But we'll get 'im, all right! [*He leaves the window.* EASTER *remains at the left of the stoop, uncertain whether to go or not.* MRS. JONES *appears, at the right, carrying several newspapers.*]

Mrs. Jones [*to* OLSEN]: Have they caught him yet?

Olsen [*shaking his head*]: No.

Mrs. Jones: I been down at Police Headquarters, all this while— [*breaking off, as she notices* EASTER] Say, what's he want here? [OLSEN *shrugs his shoulders.*]

Easter [*approaching them*]: Pardon me, but maybe you can tell me where I can find Miss Maurrant? [OLSEN *shakes his head.*]

Mrs. Jones: Why, no, I can't. I jus' this minute got back from Police Headquarters. Maybe she's aroun' at the horspital.

Easter: No, I just came from there.

Mrs. Jones: Well, I really couldn't say where she is. Was there somethin' special you wanted to see her about?

Easter: I'm a friend of hers—

Mrs. Jones: Yeah, I noticed you talkin' to her, last night, when I took the dog out. [*Staring at him*] Well, I guess she'll need all the friends she's got, now. Imagine a thing like that happenin' right here in this house, at ten o'clock in the mornin'! Everythin' goin'

on just as usual, and then, all of a sudden, before you know it, there's two people murdered.

Olsen: I tal everybody some day he kill her.

Mrs. Jones: Well, I ain't sayin' it's right to kill anybody, but if anybody had a reason, he certainly had. You oughta heard some o' the questions they was askin' me down at the Police. I could feel myself gettin' redder an' redder. "Say," I says, "how do you expect me to know things like that?" [*Suddenly, as she looks left*] Here's Rose now!

Easter: Where? [*He turns quickly and hurries to the left, as* ROSE *appears, carrying four or five packages.*]

Mrs. Jones [*to* OLSEN]: He seems to take a pretty friendly interest in her. [OLSEN *nods.*]

Rose [*anxiously, as she comes up to* EASTER, *at the left of the stoop*]: Have they caught him yet?

Easter: Why, no, they haven't. I just asked the officer, upstairs.

Rose: Oh, I hope he got away! If they get him, there's no telling what they'll do to him. And what would be the good of that? He never would have done it, if he'd been in his right mind.

Easter: I only heard about it, a little while ago. So I went right around to the hospital. But they said you'd left.

Rose [*going to the steps*]: She never opened her eyes again. They did everything they could for her, but it didn't help.

Easter: Here, let me take your bundles.

Rose: No, it's all right. I think I'll just sit down for a minute. [*She sits on the stoop and puts the packages beside her.*]

Easter: Can't I get you something? A drink or something?

Rose: No, I'm all right. It's so hot. [*She puts her hand to her head.*] And all those people asking me a lot of questions.

Mrs. Jones [*approaching the stoop*]: Are you feelin' dizzy or anythin'?

Rose: No, I'll be all right in a minute.

Mrs. Jones: Well, I was gonna say, if you want to go up to my flat an' lay down for a minute—

Rose: No, thanks; I don't want to lie down. I've got to go upstairs to get some things.

Easter: Why, say, you don't want to go up there!

Rose: I've got to; there's some things I need.

Easter: Well, let me get them for you. Or this lady here.

Mrs. Jones: Yeah, sure. The place is a sight, up there. You're li'ble to go into a faint or somethin'.

Rose: I guess nothing can be any worse than what's happened already. [*Indicating the bundles*] I got to change my dress. I bought a white dress for her. And white silk stockings. I want her to look pretty.

Mrs. Jones: Yeah, white is the nicest.

Rose: She looks so quiet and natural. You'd think she was asleep.

Mrs. Jones: It was the same way with my mother. You'd of thought she was gonna get up, the next minute. [*Starting to go up the steps*] Well, I gotta go up an' get me some lunch. Between everythin' happenin' an' goin' down to Police Headquarters an' all, I ain't had a bite to eat since breakfast. [*Stopping on the top step, and looking from* ROSE *to* EASTER] Well, you certainly never know, when you get up in the mornin', what the day is gonna bring. [*She enters the house.*]

Rose [*rising*]: Well, I'd better be going up, too. There's a lot of things to attend to.

Easter: You better let me come up with you.

Rose: Why, thanks, Mr. Easter. But I'd rather go alone, if you don't mind.

Easter: But, listen here—you can't go through all this alone—a kid like you. That's why I came around. I knew you'd be needing a helping hand.

Rose: That's awfully nice of you, Mr. Easter. But I don't need any help, honest I don't. [*She opens one of the packages.*]

Easter: Why, you can't handle everything yourself! What about a place to live and all that?

Rose [*taking a rosette of black crape out of the package*]: Well, I don't exactly know, yet. I'll have to find some place where Willie and I can live. I'd like it to be some place where he wouldn't be running around the streets all the time. You see, there's nobody but me to look out for him, now. [OLSEN *crosses to the cellar.* MRS. JONES *appears at her window and furtively peeps out at* ROSE *and* EASTER.]

Rose [*as she sees that* OLSEN *is about to descend the cellar steps*]: Oh, Mr. Olsen!

Olsen [*stopping*]: Yes, ma'am.

Rose: Would you mind lending me a hammer and some tacks? I want to put up this crape.

Olsen: Yes, ma'am; I bring 'em right away. [*He goes down into the cellar.* MRS. JONES *leaves the window.*]

Easter [*insistently*]: But why won't you let me help you out?

Rose: It's terribly nice of you, Mr. Easter. But I'll be able to manage alone, really I will. It isn't as if I wasn't young and strong and able to take care of myself, But as it is, I'd sort of rather not be under obligations.

Easter: Why, you wouldn't be under any obligations. I just mean it in a friendly way, that's all.

Rose: You've been very nice to me and all that, Mr. Easter. But —well, I've been sort of thinking things over—you know, about what we talked about last night and all. And I honestly don't think I'd care about going on the stage.

Easter: Say, you've got me all wrong, Rose! Just forget all about that, will you? I just want to help you out, that's all. [*Taking a step towards her*] I think you're one swell kid, and I want to do something for you. I'm not trying to put anything over on you. [SHIRLEY *appears, at the left, carrying her school-bag, from which a newspaper protrudes.*]

Rose: Well, that's nice and friendly of you, Mr. Easter. And if I ever do need any help—

Shirley [*catching sight of* ROSE]: Rose! You poor thing! [*She runs up to* ROSE *and throws her arms about her.*] It's terrible—terrible!

Rose: Yes, it is. But I sort of had a feeling, all along, that something terrible was going to happen. [OLSEN *comes up the steps, with a hammer and a box of tacks.*]

Shirley: How could he do such a thing! I couldn't believe it when I read it.

Rose: He was out of his mind, when he did it. Oh, I only hope he got away! [*As* OLSEN *approaches*] Oh, thanks, Mr. Olsen.

Olsen: I do it.

Rose [*giving him the crape*]: Oh, would you, please? Right up there, I think. [*She indicates the left of the doorway.*]

Olsen [*going up the steps*]: Sure.

Rose [*going to* EASTER *and extending her hand*]: Thanks for coming around, Mr. Easter. I don't know when I'll be able to get back to the office.

Easter: Why, that's all right about that. Only, in the meantime, I wish—

Rose: If I need any help, I'll let you know. [*With a tone of finality in her voice*] Good-by.

Easter: All right; but don't forget. [*He hesitates, then decides to go.*] Well, good-by. [*He goes off at left.*]

Rose: I've got to go up and get some things that Willie and I need. Sam went to call for him at school and take him around to my aunt's. You see, I didn't want him coming back here. He's only a little kid, after all.

Shirley: Oh, it's such a terrible thing! I can't believe it yet.

Olsen [*holding up the crape*]: Dis vay?

Rose: Yes, like that. [*Hesitantly, as she picks up her bundles*] Miss Kaplan, it's sort of silly of me, I guess. But I'm kind of afraid to go up there alone. I wonder if you'd mind coming up with me. [OLSEN *tacks up the crape.*]

Shirley: Anything I can do for you, poor child! [*She and* ROSE *go up the steps.*]

Rose: Thanks ever so much. [*To* OLSEN] Thanks, Mr. Olsen. It's awfully nice of you. [*She and* SHIRLEY *enter the house.* OLSEN *exits down the cellar steps.* KAPLAN *appears, at his window, and seating himself, begins to read a newspaper. An under-sized* MAN *and a tall, athletic* WOMAN *appear at the right. They are dressed for tennis, and carry tennis-rackets.*]

The Man [*as they cross*]: He *would* say that.

The Woman: So I just looked at him for a moment, without saying anything. And then, I said: "My dear boy," I said. "What do you expect anyhow, in this day and age?" I said, "Why, even Frankl has to do a black bathroom, occasionally," I said.

The Man [*as they disappear at the left*]: Exactly! And what did he say to that? [BUCHANAN *comes out of the house, and, seeing* KAPLAN *at the window, stops at the right balustrade.*]

Buchanan: Well, there's been *some* excitement around here today.

Kaplan [*looking up from his paper*]: Dees is a terrible t'ing vich hes heppened.

Buchanan: I'll say it is! You know, the way I look at it, he didn't have a right to kill the both of them like that. Of course I'm not saying what she did was right, either.

Kaplan: How ken ve call ourselves ciwilized, ven ve see thet sax jealousy hes de power to avaken in us de primitive pessions of de sevege?

Buchanan [*rather bewildered by this*]: Yes, that's true, too. Of course, you can't expect a man to stand by and see his home broken up. But murdering them, like that, is going a little too far. Well, I got to go and phone the doctor. This thing's given my wife a kind of a *re*lapse. She thought a lot of Mrs. Maurrant. [*He goes down the steps, and off at the left, as* LIPPO *appears, at the right.*]

Lippo [*stopping in front of* KAPLAN'S *window*]: Dey don' ketcha Maurrant, ha?

Kaplan: I hevn't hoid anyt'ing foider.

Lippo: He'sa gonna gat da 'lectrica-chair, ha?

Kaplan: De blood-lust of our enlightened population must be setisfied! De Chreestian state will kerry out to de last letter de Mosaic law.

Lippo: Eef Ahm ketcha my wife sleepin' wit' 'nudder man, Ahm gonna keela 'er, too. [SAM *hurries on at the left.*]

Kaplan: So you t'ink thet merriage should give to de hosband de power of life and det' and thet—

Sam [*going up the steps*]: Papa, is there any news of Maurrant?

Kaplan: I hev heard notting.

Sam: The police are going to make me testify against him. What can I do, papa?

Kaplan: You ken do notting.

Sam: How can I send a man to the electric-chair? How can I? I tried to stop him, papa. I tried to warn her— [*He stops short, as several shots are heard off-stage, at the left.*] What's that?

Lippo [*excitedly*]: Dey finda 'im! [*He runs off, at the left, followed by* SAM. KAPLAN *leans out of the window. At the same moment,* MRS. JONES *leans out of her window and, a moment later,* MRS. FIORENTINO *out of hers. In the* MAURRANT *apartment, the* POLICEMAN *leans out and* ROSE *and* SHIRLEY *appear in the hall bed-room window.* ROSE *is wearing a mourning-dress.* OLSEN *comes up the cellar steps and runs off at the left.* MRS. OLSEN *comes up the steps. Several* MEN *and* WOMEN *appear, at the right, and run off, at the left.*]

Rose [*agitatedly*]: Is that him?

The Policeman: Must be! [VOICES *are heard shouting, in the distance, and then another shot.* THE POLICEMAN *leaves the window.*]

Rose: Oh, God! They wouldn't shoot him, would they? [*She leaves the window.*]

Shirley [*following her*]: Rose! [*Two or three more persons appear at the right and run off at the left.* THE POLICEMAN *runs out of the house, as* BUCHANAN *appears at the left.*]

Buchanan [*excitedly*]: They got him! [THE POLICEMAN *runs off, at the left.* SHIRLEY *reappears at the* MAURRANT *window.*]

Mrs. Jones [*calling*]: Have they got him?

Buchanan: Yes! He was hiding in the furnace, down at 322. [*As*

ROSE *comes out of the house*] They found him, Miss Maurrant!

Rose [*her hand to her heart*]: Oh! Is he hurt?

Buchanan: I don't know. He fired at the cops and they fired back at him. I was just passing the house, when it happened.

Mrs. Jones [*leaning far out*]: Here they come! [*She leaves the window. The low murmur of the approaching crowd can be heard, off-stage left.*]

Rose: Where? [*She comes down the stoop and looks off, at the left.*] Oh! [*She covers her eyes and turns away.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: You better come inside.

Shirley: Come up, Rose.

Buchanan: Yes, you better. [*He takes her by the arm.*]

Rose [*resisting*]: No. No. Please let me alone. I want to see him. [*She leans against the railing. Meanwhile, the murmur and tramp of the approaching crowd has grown nearer and nearer.*]

Mrs. Fiorentino: Look at him, vill you! [MISS CUSHING *comes out of the house, and stands on the stoop, followed a moment later by* MRS. JONES. MAURRANT *appears at the left, between* TWO POLICEMEN. *Behind him a third* POLICEMAN *holds back a swarming crowd, which includes* SAM *and* LIPPO. MAURRANT'S *clothes are torn, and his right arm is in a crude sling. Sweat, blood and grime have made him almost unrecognizable.* THE POLICEMEN, *too, show evidences of a struggle.*]

Rose [*running forward*]: Pop! Are you hurt?

Maurrant [*seeing her for the first time*]: Rose!

One of the Policemen [*to whom* MAURRANT *is manacled*]: Keep back, miss!

Maurrant: It's me daughter! Fer Chris' sake, boys, lemme talk to me daughter! Maybe I'll never be seein' her again!

First Policeman: Give 'im a woid wit' her. [*He is the officer who was on duty in the* MAURRANT *apartment.*]

Second Policeman [*after a moment's hesitation*]: Well, all right. [*Savagely to* MAURRANT] But don't try to pull nothin', hear? [*There is a forward movement in the crowd.*]

First Policeman [*to the crowd*]: Keep back, youse!

Maurrant: Rose! You're wearin' a black dress, Rose!

Rose: Oh, pop, why did you do it? Why did you?

Maurrant: I must o' been out o' me head, Rose. Did she say anythin'?

Rose: She never opened her eyes again.

Maurrant: I'd been drinkin', Rose—see what I mean?—an' all

the talk that was goin' around. I just went clean off me nut, that's all.

Rose: What'll they do to you, pop?

Maurrant: It's the chair for me, I guess. But I don't care—let 'em give me the chair. I deserve it all right. But it's her I'm thinkin' of, Rose—the way she looked at me. I oughtn't to done it, Rose.

Rose: She was always so good and sweet.

Maurrant: Don't I know it? I ain't no murderer—you ought to be the one to know that, Rose. I just went out o' me head, that's all it was.

Second Policeman: All right, that's all now. Come on!

Maurrant: Gimme a minute, can't you? She's me daughter. Gimme a chance, can't you? What's gonna happen to you, Rose?

Rose: I'll be all right, pop. You don't need to worry about me.

Maurrant: I ain't been a very good father, have I?

Rose: Don't worry about that, pop.

Maurrant: It ain't that I ain't meant to be. It's just the way things happened to turn out, that's all. Keep your eye on Willie, Rose. Don't let Willie grow up to be a murderer, like his pop.

Rose: I'm going to do all I can for him, pop.

Maurrant: You're a good girl, Rose. You was always a good girl.

Rose [*breaking down*]: Oh, pop! [*She throws her arms about his neck and buries her head against him.* MAURRANT *sobs hoarsely.*]

First Policeman [*gently*]: Come on, now, miss. [*He and* SAM *take* ROSE *away from* MAURRANT.]

Second Policeman: All right. Come on, Charlie. [*They go towards the right, the crowd swarming behind them. Straggling along at the very end of the crowd is an unkempt* WOMAN, *wheeling a ramshackle baby-carriage.* MRS. JONES *and* MISS CUSHING *fall in with the crowd.* ROSE *gradually recovers her self-control, and stands at the stoop, with* SAM *beside her. The others watch the receding crowd for a moment. Then* KAPLAN *and* MRS. FIORENTINO *leave their windows. The* FIRST POLICEMAN *enters the house, followed by* LIPPO. MRS. OLSEN *goes to the cellar.* SHIRLEY *looks down at* ROSE *and* SAM, *for a moment, then abruptly leaves the window.*]

Sam [*taking* ROSE *by the arm*]: Rose, you better come inside.

Rose: No, I'm all right again, Sam—honestly I am. [*Trying to regain her self-composure*] What about Willie, Sam?

Sam: I told him an accident had happened.

Rose: It's better to break it to him that way. But I'll have to tell him, I guess. He'd only find it out himself, tomorrow, with the

papers all full of it. I saw Mrs. Sankey, down at Police Headquarters. It's terrible for her, with two little children.

Shirley [*appearing at the* MAURRANT *window, a covered pot in her hand*]: Rose!

Rose [*looking up*]: Yes, Miss Kaplan?

Shirley: There's a chicken here, that I found on the gas-stove.

Rose: A chicken?

Shirley: Yes. The policeman says he smelt it cooking, this morning, so he turned out the gas.

Rose: Oh, I remember, now. My mother said she was going to make some soup for poor Mrs. Buchanan, upstairs.

Shirley: It won't keep long, in this weather.

Rose: No. I really think Mrs. Buchanan ought to have the good of it.

Shirley: All right. I'll take it up to her.

Rose: Thanks ever so much, Miss Kaplan. [SHIRLEY *leaves the window.*] It's only a few hours ago that she was standing right here, telling me about the chicken. And then, she went upstairs, and the next I saw of her, they were carrying her out. [*Abruptly, as she starts to go up the steps*] Well, I've got to go up and get my things.

Sam: I must talk to you! What are you going to do, Rose?

Rose: Well, I haven't really had any time to do much thinking. But I really think the best thing I could do would be to get out of New York. You know, like we were saying, this morning—how things might be different, if you only had a chance to breathe and spread out a little. Only when I said it, I never dreamt it would be this way.

Sam: If you go, I'll go with you.

Rose: But, Sam dear—

Sam: I don't care anything about my career. It's you—you—I care about. Do you think I can stay here, stifling to death, in this slum, and never seeing you? Do you think my life means anything to me without you?

Rose: But, Sam, we've got to be practical about it. How would we manage?

Sam: I don't care what I do. I'll be a day-laborer; I'll dig sewers —anything. [*Taking her passionately in his arms*] Rose, don't leave me!

Rose: I like you so much, Sam. I like you better than anybody I know.

Sam: I love you, Rose. Let me go with you!

Rose: It would be so nice to be with you. You're different from anybody I know. But I'm just wondering how it would work out.

Sam: If we have each other, that's the vital thing, isn't it? What else matters but that?

Rose: Lots of things, Sam. There's lots of things to be considered. Suppose something was to happen—well, suppose I was to have a baby, say. That sometimes happens, even when you don't want it to. What would we do, then? We'd be tied down then, for life, just like all the other people around here. They all start out loving each other and thinking that everything is going to be fine—and before you know it, they find out they haven't got anything and they wish they could do it all over again—only it's too late.

Sam: It's to escape all that that we must be together. It's only because we love each other and belong to each other that we can find the strength to escape.

Rose [*shaking her head*]: No, Sam.

Sam: Why do you say no?

Rose: It's what you said just now—about people belonging to each other. I don't think people ought to belong to anybody but themselves. I was thinking that if my mother had really belonged to herself, and that if my father had really belonged to himself, it never would have happened. It was only because they were always depending on somebody else, for what they ought to have had inside themselves. Do you see what I mean, Sam? That's why I don't want to belong to anybody, and why I don't want anybody to belong to me.

Sam: You want to go through life alone?—never loving anyone, never having anyone love you?

Rose: Why, of course not, Sam! I want love more than anything else in the world. But loving and belonging aren't the same thing. [*Putting her arms about him*] Sam dear, listen. If we say good-by, now, it doesn't mean that it has to be forever. Maybe some day, when we're older and wiser, things will be different. Don't look as if it was the end of the world, Sam!

Sam: It *is* the end of my world.

Rose: It isn't, Sam! If you'd only believe in yourself, a little more, things wouldn't look nearly so bad. Because once you're sure of yourself, the things that happen to you, aren't so important. The way I look at it, it's not what you do that matters so much; it's what you are. [*Warmly*] I'm so fond of you, Sam. And I've got such a lot of confidence in you. [*Impulsively*] Give me a nice kiss!

[SAM *takes her in his arms and kisses her, passionately. A gawky* GIRL *of seventeen—one of* LIPPO'S *pupils—appears at the left, and looks at them, scandalized. Then she goes into the vestibule and rings the bell. The door clicks and she enters the house, as* SHIRLEY *comes out, carrying a wicker suitcase.* SHIRLEY *looks at* SAM *and* ROSE.]

Rose [*to* SHIRLEY]: I was just telling Sam that I think I'll soon be going away from New York. [SAM *looks at her, for a moment, in agony, then goes abruptly into the house.*]

Shirley: I put your things in this suitcase. [*She comes down to the pavement. The* GIRL, *in the* FIORENTINO *apartment, begins tuning her violin.*]

Rose [*taking the suitcase*]: You've been awfully nice to me. Don't worry about Sam, Miss Kaplan. Everything will be all right with him.

Shirley: I hope so. [*From the* FIORENTINO *apartment come the strains of Dvořák's* Humoresque, *jerkily played on a violin.*]

Rose: Oh, I just know it will! [*Extending her hand*] Good-by, Miss Kaplan.

Shirley: Good-by, Rose. [*Impulsively*] You're a sweet girl! [*She hugs and kisses her.*]

Rose: I hope I'll see you again.

Shirley [*crying*]: I hope so, Rose. [ROSE *takes up the suitcase and goes off at the left.* SHIRLEY *stands watching her.*]

Kaplan [*reappearing at his window*]: Shoiley, vot's de metter again vit Sem? He's crying on de bed.

Shirley: Let him alone, papa, can't you? [*She turns and enters the house.* KAPLAN *sighs and, seating himself at the window, opens a newspaper. A shabby, middle-aged* COUPLE *appear at the right, and approach the stoop.*]

The Man [*reading the To-Let sign*]: Here's a place. Six rooms. Want to take a look at it? [A GROUP OF CHILDREN *off-stage left begin singing* The Farmer in the Dell. *This continues until after the curtain is down.*]

The Woman: All right. No harm lookin'. Ring for the janitor. [THE MAN *goes up the stoop and rings the janitor's bell.*] Somebody must o' just died.

The Man: Yeah, maybe that's why they're movin' out. [*Wiping his face with a handkerchief*] Phoo! Seems to be gettin' hotter every minute. [MRS. FIORENTINO *seats herself at her window, a sewing-*

basket in her lap. MRS. JONES *and* MISS CUSHING *appear at the right, busily engaged in conversation.*]

Miss Cushing: The poor little thing!

Mrs. Jones [*as they go up the steps*]: Well, you never can tell with them quiet ones. It wouldn't surprise me a bit, if she turned out the same way as her mother. She's got a gentleman friend that I guess ain't hangin' around for nothin'. I seen him, late last night, and this afternoon, when I come home from the police— [*She is still talking, as they enter the house.* MRS. OLSEN *comes up the cellar steps.* A SAILOR *appears at the left, with* TWO GIRLS, *an arm about the waist of each. They stroll slowly across.*]

[*The Curtain Falls.*]

VI. The Morality Play

THORNTON WILDER

THORNTON WILDER said that he wrote *Our Town* "out of a deep admiration for those little white towns in the hills and from a deep devotion to the theatre." This is a significant statement, because it testifies to Wilder's concern not only with the meaning of a play but with the very practical problem of how to present the meaning on the stage. *Our Town* exemplifies a proper collaboration of staging and content, of theatre and drama. Although this play is not essentially expressionistic, Wilder could not have written it if his devotion to the theatre had not implied an appreciation of the work of playwrights like John Howard Lawson and the other expressionists, who had shown how the stage can express meanings beyond reality—meanings which cannot be expressed by realism in scenery, stage properties, and acting.

Thornton Wilder, who comes of New England stock, was born in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1897. At Yale, from which he was graduated in 1920, he wrote one-act plays for the dramatic association. He has written several novels, including *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927), *The Woman of Andros* (1930), and *Heaven's My Destination* (1935). His work for the theatre includes, besides several plays of his own, a translation of Obey's *Lucrece* for Katharine Cornell's production of that play in 1932 and a version of Ibsen's *A Doll's House,* in which Ruth Gordon and Paul Lucas appeared in 1937. When Guthrie McClintic was directing Miss Cornell in *Lucrece,* Wilder attended the rehearsals, not interfering with the directing but taking notes and sending McClintic many suggestions. *Our Town*

was the author's first full-length play to reach Broadway. It won the Pulitzer Prize. Wilder himself has since appeared in it in summer-theatre productions, playing the leading part, that of the Stage Manager. Because of the importance of the New England background to *Our Town* it is relevant to observe not only that Wilder has a New England ancestry but that he has lived in the MacDowell colony at Peterboro, New Hampshire, in the vicinity of the fictitious Grover's Corners, the scene of his play.

Our Town is a morality play. Originating in the fifteenth century, the *morality play,* or *morality,* depicted man's life in terms of abstract characters, such as Good Deeds, Strength, Discretion, Knowledge, etc., and showed man's struggle with the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. An example of the original morality play is *Everyman,* in which the hero, Everyman, having lived a thoughtless life, is called upon to make his pilgrimage to the grave. As its prologue points out, *Everyman* is a play "of our lives and endings." *Our Town,* depicting man on this same journey, shows "the way we were . . . in our living and in our dying." *Everyman* dramatizes man's life. *Our Town* begins with a birth and ends with a death. The moral of *Everyman* is to "take good heed to the ending"; that of *Our Town,* to take good heed to living. Emily discovers, only after reaching the grave, that human beings never "realize life while they live it."

The abstract quality of the morality play was carried out in its setting. Unlike the miracle play, which preceded it, the morality had no definite scene or time. The scene was universal—the world—and the time timeless. A bare platform, with a trapdoor for the grave, was the only staging necessary. Although for the scene of *Our Town* Wilder has named a particular town and placed it in a particular state and at a particular time, he has not done so to make his scene and time any less universal than the scene and time of the original morality play. *Our Town* is a play about life, and to dramatize life, Wilder has chosen a section of it as little encumbered with non-essentials as possible. He might have made his locale a great city, as Elmer Rice does in *Street Scene.* But the complexity of city life would only put in his way unnecessary complications. He might have chosen his characters from the sophisticated society which peoples Noel Coward's plays. But that kind of society implies the veneer of artificiality which Wilder would only have had to chip away to reveal fundamentals. The time of the play too, the early part of the century, enables him to present the daily life of a small town when life was simpler than it is today, even in a Grover's Corners.

Our Town has been criticized for its romantic treatment of small-town life. Wilder does not, for the most part, present unpleasant aspects of Grover's Corners. "Is there no one in town aware of social injustice and industrial inequality?" asks the Tall Man at Back of Auditorium. "Oh, yes," replies Mr. Webb, "everybody is,—somethin' terrible. . . ." "Then why don't they do something about it?" asks the Tall Man. And the answer is "Well, we're ready to listen to everybody's suggestion as to how you can see that the diligent and sensible 'll rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome sink to the bottom. We'll listen to anybody. Meantime until that's settled, we try to take care of those that can't help themselves, and those that can we leave alone.—Are there any more questions?" The answer is superficial, but if Wilder were to depict the life of a village realistically, for example, making the play social criticism, he would be injecting a problem. *Our Town* is not intended to be a problem play. It is a morality play, which is more universal. In *Our Town* Wilder is asking, What is trivial in the life of a human being, and what is significant? Emily, permitted to relive a day in her life, is advised by Mrs. Gibbs to choose an unimportant day. "Choose the least important day in your life," Mrs. Gibbs tells her. "It will be important enough." And so it is that Emily discovers, too late, that the important things in life are what the living think of as trivial—or do not think of at all.

If written a few years earlier, *Our Town* would have been staged against a realistic background of New England small-town scenes. In fact, the moving picture version of the play made that concession to reality. This, however, is as it should be, for the camera can obtain effects impossible even by the most realistic attempts on the stage to make canvas and paint and artificial light represent what they are not. On the other hand, the province of the theatre includes those realms of suggestion and illusion which no camera can photograph. And the expressionists having demonstrated that a stage stripped of its neatly confining walls can somehow project meaning beyond reality, Wilder had at hand the very pattern for staging his broad canvas in the spirit in which he had created it—with realism and with generality. The generality is expressed through the lack of conventional scenery and properties, a distortion of time and space, and through other devices which expressionism had established. After all, the most realistic of symbols on the stage are accepted by the audience as symbols. Even the naturalistic set Jo Mielziner de-

signed for *Street Scene* no one takes to be a real brownstone front. It only represents one. It is a symbol. The buildings adjoining the brownstone front are also symbols. They serve not only to frame the scene but to stretch it out to include the great city which surrounds it. They symbolize the city, which the most naturalistic of settings could not represent on any stage. Nor would anyone in the audience at *Street Scene* believe that the actor representing Maurrant kills the actor representing Sankey. Like the settings, the actors are symbols too. The expressionists pointed out that other symbols not so closely resembling what the symbols stand for may be used as well. This principle Wilder adopts for *Our Town*. Why, for example, if the canvas buildings which frame the set for *Street Scene* are symbols, cannot the very lack of confining walls in *Our Town* symbolize the unconfined earth? Wilder does not ask his audience to grant him freedom merely in using symbols less in imitation of the things they stand for than more realistic symbols do. *Our Town* is an outstanding example of the proper and peculiar function of the stage in expressing the meaning of the play.

The scenery is not the only expressionistic device by means of which Wilder has stripped away what he considers nonessentials. The time is 1901 to 1913. But another time is expressed too, namely, all time. The play presents, as Wilder has said, "the life of a village against the life of the stars." "The First Act," announces the Stage Manager, "shows a day in our town. The day is May 7, 1901." But before the end of Act I we are in the future looking back. The time at the beginning of Act II is 1904—July 7th. A little later we are carried back to 1903, then on to March of 1904, and finally up to July 7th again. In Act III time is similarly distorted, in fact, more so, for we see time from the point of view of the dead.

Wilder finds the monologue and the aside suitable to his purpose too. Much of the exposition is effected by monologue. The Stage Manager introduces Professor Willard, of the State University, and Editor Webb, of the Grover's Corners *Sentinel,* who address the audience. In fact, the entire play might be considered a monologue—the monologue of the Stage Manager, illustrated by the acting of other characters and, in the drugstore and the wedding scenes, by the Stage Manager himself. The aside is used freely, particularly in the wedding scene. When *Our Town* was being prepared for the movies Wilder, in pointing out to the director that a realistic wedding would not be interesting, mentioned among the unrealistic

details the thinking-aloud passages. The Stage Manager says, "There are a lot of things to be said about a wedding; there are a lot of thoughts that go on during a wedding." Thereupon as the wedding proceeds, the characters express these thoughts directly to the audience. On his way to the church George is made sport of by the Baseball Players. Concerning the filming of this incident Wilder warned against a realistic treatment. "I don't think," he wrote the director, "that realistic boys in a realistic village would hoot and guy a friend on his way to his wedding." Just before the ceremony begins, the groom first and then the bride express in asides their true feelings about getting married. And the wedding itself is interrupted by Mrs. Soames' shrill comments.

Other expressionistic devices break the illusion of reality in the projection of the stage. Pantomime is emphasized in the lack of stage properties as the housewives simultaneously prepare and serve breakfasts in their respective kitchens, as Mr. Webb mows his imaginary lawn with an imaginary lawnmower, or as Howie Newsome delivers imaginary milk. The stage is actually extended to include the whole theatre as characters speak from the balcony, the back of the auditorium, and a box, as the church choir sings in the orchestra pit, and at the close of the wedding scene, as the bride and groom make their exit up the aisle. The extension of the acting area is suggested too by the absence of a curtain. "The audience, arriving, sees an empty stage in half-light."

On the other hand, it is inaccurate to describe *Our Town* as a play without scenery. Some of the symbols for scenery in the play, it is true, are less like the objects they symbolize than scenery in more realistic plays, but the symbols in *Our Town* are none the less effective. For example, ordinary chairs, like those used in the kitchen scenes, serve also as supports for the counter in the drugstore scene, as pews in the church, and even as graves in the cemetery. A more realistic play would call for a trapdoor to represent a grave. In *Our Town* a chair serves the same purpose—and serves it better. Consider the stepladders which indicate the second story in the Gibbs and Webb houses. Compare them, for example, with the elaborate set called for in Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms,* in which the upstairs and downstairs of a farmhouse are represented in cross sections so that there may be simultaneous action in two or three rooms. The staging for O'Neill's play is considered realistic and yet when the front wall of one of the upstairs rooms is removed so that

the audience can look in, the actors must not come too near the edge or they will fall off. In *Our Town* characters go upstairs in the two houses merely by ascending the stepladders. In both plays "upstairs" is a symbol. The difference in realism is only one of degree. In *Our Town* the symbols become more realistic when two arched trellises are pushed out to represent the back doors of the two houses and almost conventionally so when for the wedding scene a stereopticon slide effects a stained-glass window in the background. The danger in realistic scenery is that the scenery can exist for its own sake. In *Our Town* it never does. However, although it does not obtrude beyond its proper function of interpreting meaning, it performs this function so smoothly and so simply that the play illustrates, more distinctly than any other, one of the most significant contributions of expressionism—an harmonious collaboration of drama and theatre. An outstanding example is the use of the screen of black umbrellas from behind which Emily emerges in the cemetery scene.

Some of the realistic details are represented by conventional staging. Changes in time of day—dawn, sunrise, moonlight, etc.—are effected by lighting as realistic as any that David Belasco might have plotted. Realistic sound effects are called for too—a rooster crows, train and factory whistles blow, the school bell rings, and a clock strikes. And the costuming is realistic throughout.

The simplicity which distinguishes *Our Town* includes its language. The problem of the playwright in writing serious dialogue is to make the dialogue not only interesting but germane, to make his characters say the things that people in their situations would say and say them as if they had his power of expression. The characters in *Our Town* say what Grover's Corners folk would say, and in the native idiom, but they speak with the eloquence of Thornton Wilder. Because of the choice of words, the imagery, and the rhythm of the lines, the dialogue is literary, but never literary for its own sake. It shows Wilder to be a poet, and its proper sublimation in the play shows him to be a playwright.

After a tryout in Princeton, New Jersey, and a short run in Boston, Massachusetts, *Our Town* opened in New York on February 4, 1938. It played on Broadway for 336 performances, running through the summer and not closing until late the following fall. For two weeks during its New York run Thornton Wilder himself took over the role created by Frank Craven, that of the Stage

Manager. The next summer Wilder played this role in a revived production for summer theatres in New England. The role has since been played by Christopher Morley and even by Sinclair Lewis. *Our Town* is popular with summer theatres, Little Theatres, and college and university dramatic organizations. It is not chance that the play reads well.

Our Town

by

THORNTON WILDER

Originally produced by Jed Harris at McCarter's Theatre, Princeton, New Jersey, on Saturday evening, January 22, 1938, and then at the Henry Miller Theatre, New York City, on Friday evening, February 4, 1938.

TECHNICAL DIRECTION BY RAYMOND SOVEY

COSTUMES DESIGNED BY HELEN PONS

MUSIC ARRANGED AND ORGAN PLAYED BY BERNICE RICHMOND

BIRD AND ANIMAL EFFECTS BY WILLIAM CARY

CAST

Stage Manager	Frank Craven
Dr. Gibbs	Jay Fassett
Joe Cromwell	Raymond Roe
Howie Newsome	Tom Fadden
Mrs. Gibbs	Evelyn Varden
Mrs. Webb	Helen Carew
George Gibbs	John Craven
Rebecca Gibbs	Marilyn Erskine
Wally Webb	Charles Wiley, Jr.
Emily Webb	Martha Scott
Professor Willard	Arthur Allen

Mr. Webb	Thomas W. Ross
Woman in the Balcony	Carrie Weller
Man in the Auditorium	Walter O. Hill
Lady in the Box	Aline McDermott
Simon Stimson	Philip Coolidge
Mrs. Soames	Dora Merande
Constable Warren	E. Irving Locke
Si Crowell	Billy Redfield
Baseball Players	Alfred Ryder William Roehrick Thomas Coley
Sam Craig	Francis G. Cleveland
Joe Stoddard	William Wadsworth
Assistant Stage Managers	Thomas Morgan Alfred Ryder

People of the Town: Carrie Weller, Alice Donaldson, Walter O. Hill, Arthur Allen, Charles Mellody, Katharine Raht, Mary Elizabeth Forbes, Dorothy Nolan, Jean Platt, Barbara Brown, Alida Stanley, Barbara Burton, Lynn Swann, Dorothy Ryan, Shirley Osborn, Emily Boileau, Ann Weston, Leon Rose, John Irving Finn, Van Shem, Charles Walters, William Short, Frank Howell, Max Beck, James Malaidy, Bernice Silver, Charles Wiley, Sr., Willard Cary

The entire play takes place in Grover's Corners, N. H., 1901 to 1913.

Our Town

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DIRECTOR

It is important to maintain a continual *dryness* of tone,—the New England understatement of sentiment, of surprise, of tragedy. A shyness about emotion. These significances are conveyed by the eyes and a sharpening and distinctness of the voice. (So in the Stage-Manager on the Civil War veterans: "All they knew was the name, friends,—the United States of America. The United States of America." And in all the dealings of the mothers with their children where a matter-of-factness overlays the concern.)

It has already been proven that absence of scenery does not constitute a difficulty and that the co-operative imagination of the audience is stimulated by that absence. There remain, however, two ways of producing the play. One, with a constant subtle adjustment of lights and sound effects; and one through a still bolder acknowledgment of artifice and make-believe: the rooster's crow, the train and factory whistles and school bells frankly man-made and in the spirit of "play." I am inclined to think that this latter approach, though apparently "amateurish" and rough at first, will prove the more stimulating in the end, and will prepare for the large claim on attention and imagination in the last act. The scorn of verisimilitude throws all the greater emphasis on the ideas which the play hopes to offer.

It seems advisable that at the opening of the play where the audience is first introduced to pantomime and imaginary props, that Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb in the preparation of breakfast perform much of their business with their backs to the audience, and do not

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distract and provoke its attention with too distinct and perhaps puzzling a picture of the many operations of coffee-grinding, porridge-stirring, etc.

At the beginning of the wedding scene there is an abrupt change of approach. The audience is hearing the thoughts of the characters and is seeing a symbolical statement of attitudes which never were consciously expressed by the characters in their daily life. This change is greatly aided by the entrance of the bride and groom through the aisles of the auditorium; and by the fact that it is accompanied by the very soft singing of the hymns by the congregation. It would be well that George on arriving on the stage draws back well toward the proscenium, indicating that this scene does not literally take place in the church or before the church. After Mrs. Gibbs's line: "George! If anyone should hear you! Now stop! Why, I'm ashamed of you!" George passes his hand over his forehead, as though emerging from a dream, and with a complete change of manner, returning to realism, exclaims: "What? Where's Emily?" Mrs. Gibbs and George do not touch each other during the scene until she straightens his tie, and the strong emotion is indicated by tension, not by weeping. In the following scene between Emily and her father, however, Emily is in tears and flings herself into her father's arms.

The Stage-Manager-Clergyman's speech: "I've married two hundred couples in my day," etc., is not delivered to the village congregation before him, but across their heads, an almost dreamy meditation, during which the tableau on the stage "freezes."

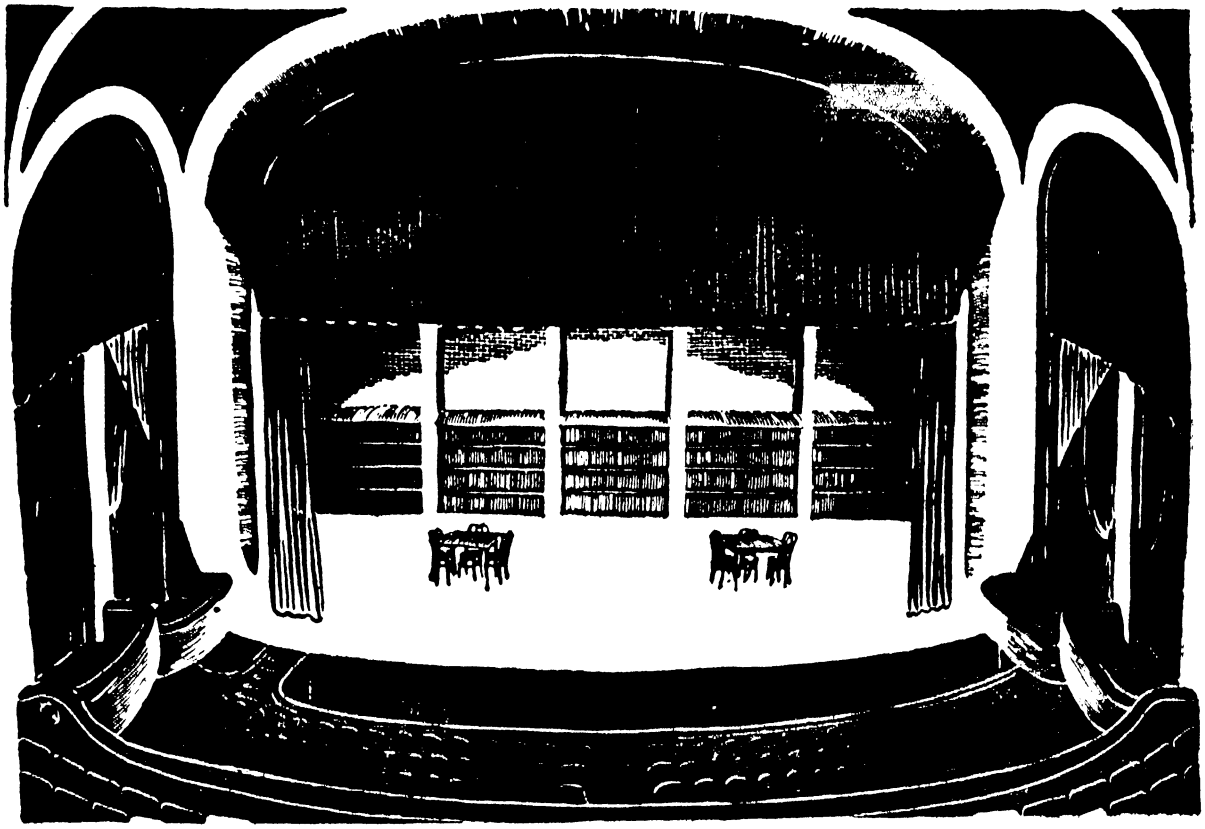
In the last act it is important to remove from the picture of the seated dead any suggestion of the morbid or lugubrious. They sit easily; there is nothing of the fixed and unwinking about their eyes. The impression is of patient composed waiting.

Emily's revisiting her home and her farewell to the world is under strong emotion, but the emotion is that of wonder rather than of sadness. Even the "I love you all, everything!" is realization and discovery as much as it is poignancy.

T. W.

ACT ONE

No curtain. No scenery. The audience, arriving, sees an empty stage in half-light.



Presently the STAGE MANAGER, *hat on and pipe in mouth, enters and begins placing a table and several chairs down stage left, and a table and chairs down stage right.*

"Left" and "right" are from the point of view of the actor facing the audience. "Up" is towards the back wall.

As the house lights go down he has finished setting the stage and leaning against the right proscenium pillar watches the late arrivals in the audience. When the auditorium is in complete darkness he speaks:

Stage Manager: This play is called "Our Town." It was written by Thornton Wilder; produced and directed by A. . . . [or: produced by A. . . .; directed by B. . . .]. In it you will see Miss C. . . .; Miss D. . . .; Miss E. . . .; and Mr. F. . . .; Mr. G. . . .; Mr. H. . . .; and many others.

The name of the town is Grover's Corners, New Hampshire,—just

across the Massachusetts line: longitude 42 degrees 40 minutes; latitude 70 degrees 37 minutes.

The First Act shows a day in our town. The day is May 7, 1901. The time is just before dawn. [*A rooster crows.*]

The sky is beginning to show some streaks of light over in the east there, behind our mount'in.

The morning star always gets wonderful bright the minute before it has to go. [*He stares at it for a moment, then goes up stage.*]

Well, I'd better show you how our town lies. Up here—[*that is: parallel with the back wall*]—is Main Street. Way back there is the railway station; tracks go that way. Polish Town's across the tracks and some Canuck families. [*Toward the left*]

Over there is the Congregational Church; across the street's the Presbyterian. Methodist and Unitarian are over there. Baptist is down in the holla' by the river. Catholic Church is over beyond the tracks.

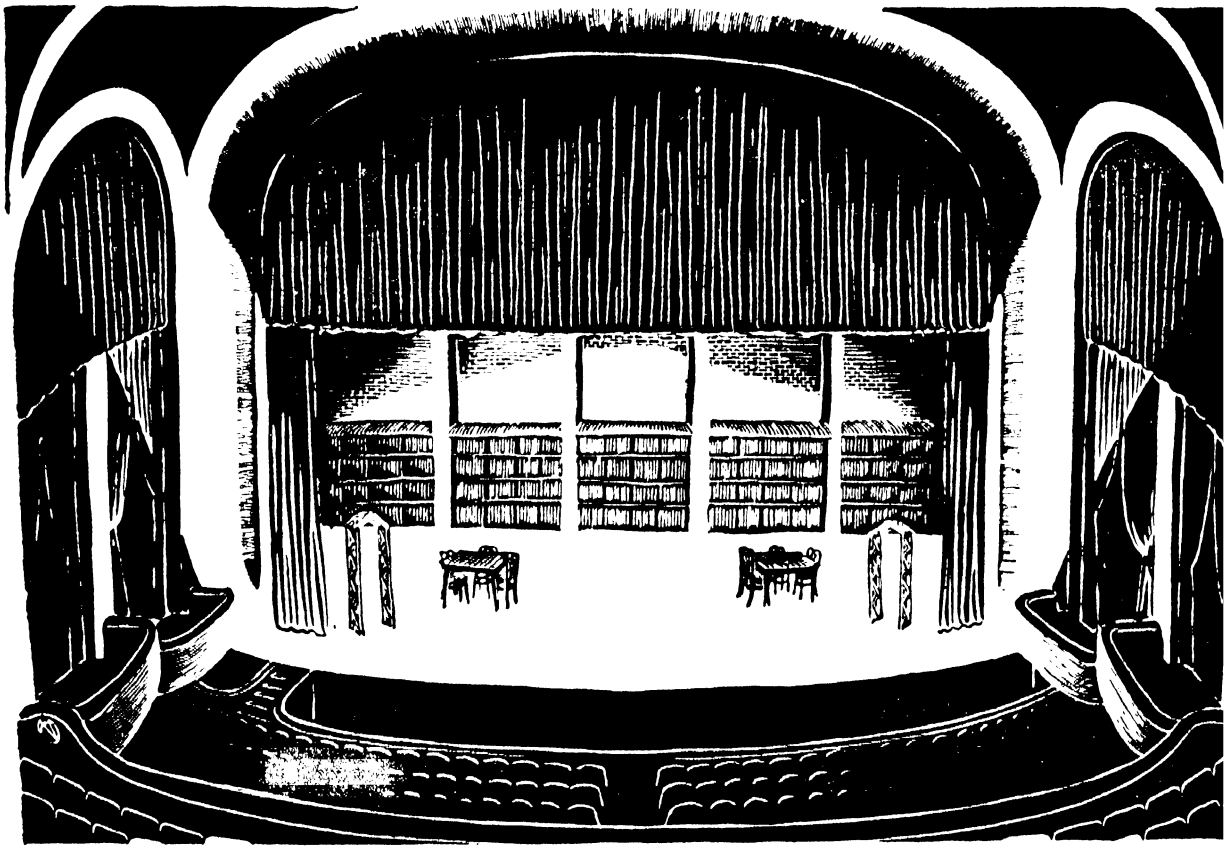
Here's the Town Hall and Post Office combined; jail's in the basement. Bryan once made a speech from these steps here.

Along here's a row of stores. Hitching-posts and horse blocks in front of them. First automobile's going to come along in about five years,—belonged to Banker Cartwright, our richest citizen . . . lives in the big white house up on the hill.

Here's the grocery store and here's Mr. Morgan's drugstore. Most everybody in town manages to look into those two stores once a day.

Public School's over yonder. High School's still farther over. Quarter of nine mornings, noontimes, and three o'clock afternoons, the hull town can hear the yelling and screaming from those schoolyards. [*He approaches the table and chairs down stage right.*]

This is our doctor's house,—Doc Gibbs's. This is the back door.



[*Two arched trellises are pushed out, one by each proscenium pillar.*]

There's some scenery for those who think they have to have scenery.

There's a garden here. Corn . . . peas . . . beans . . . hollyhocks . . . heliotrope . . . and a lot of burdock. [*Crosses the stage*]

In those days our newspaper come out twice a week,—the Grover's Corners *Sentinel,*—and this is Editor Webb's house.

And this is Mrs. Webb's garden. Just like Mrs. Gibbs's, only it's got a lot of sunflowers, too. Right here,—big butternut tree. [*He returns to his place by the right proscenium pillar and looks at the audience for a minute.*]

Nice town, y'know what I mean? Nobody very remarkable ever come out of it,—s'far as we know. The earliest tombstones in the cemetery up there on the mountain say 1670-1680—they're Grovers and Cartwrights and Gibbses and Herseys—same names as are around here now.

Well, as I said: it's about dawn. The only lights on in town are in a cottage over by the tracks where a Polish mother's just had twins. And in the Joe Crowell house, where Joe Junior's getting up

is gettin' ready to flag the 5:45 for Boston. [*A train whistle is heard. The* STAGE MANAGER *takes out his watch and nods.*] Naturally, out in the country—all around—they've been lights on for some time, what with milkin's and so on. But town people sleep late.

So—another day's begun. There's Doc Gibbs comin' down Main Street now, comin' back from that baby case. And here's his wife comin' downstairs to get breakfast. Doc Gibbs died in 1930. The new hospital's named after him. Mrs. Gibbs died first—long time ago in fact. She went out to visit her daughter, Rebecca, who married an insurance man in Canton, Ohio, and died there—pneumonia—but her body was brought back here. She's up in the cemetery there now—in with a whole mess of Gibbses and Herseys—she was Julia Hersey 'fore she married Doc Gibbs in the Congregational Church over there.

In our town we like to know the facts about everybody.—That's Doc Gibbs. And there comes Joe Crowell, Jr., delivering Mr. Webb's *Sentinel.* [DR. GIBBS *has been coming along Main Street from the left. At the point where he would turn to approach his house, he stops, sets down his—imaginary—black bag, takes off his hat, and rubs his face with fatigue, using an enormous handkerchief.* MRS. GIBBS *has entered her kitchen, gone through the motions of putting wood into a stove, lighting it, and preparing breakfast. Suddenly,* JOE CROWELL, JR., *starts down Main Street from the right, hurling imaginary newspapers into doorways.*]

Joe Crowell, Jr.: Morning, Doc Gibbs.

Dr. Gibbs: Morning, Joe.

Joe Crowell, Jr.: Somebody been sick, Doc?

Dr. Gibbs: No. Just some twins born over in Polish Town.

Joe Crowell, Jr.: Do you want your paper now?

Dr. Gibbs: Yes, I'll take it.—Anything serious goin' on in the world since Wednesday?

Joe Crowell, Jr.: Yessir. My schoolteacher, Miss Foster, 's getting married to a fella over in Concord.

Dr. Gibbs: I declare.—How do you boys feel about that?

Joe Crowell, Jr.: Well, of course, it's none of my business,—but I think if a person starts out to be a teacher, she ought to stay one.

Dr. Gibbs: How's your knee, Joe?

Joe Crowell, Jr.: Fine, Doc, I never think about it at all. Only like you said, it always tells me when it's going to rain.

Dr. Gibbs: What's it telling you today? Goin' to rain?

Joe Crowell, Jr.: No, sir.

Dr. Gibbs: Sure?

Joe Crowell, Jr.: Yessir.

Dr. Gibbs: Knee ever make a mistake?

Joe Crowell, Jr.: No, sir. [JOE *goes off.* DR. GIBBS *stands reading his paper.*]

Stage Manager: Here comes Howie Newsome delivering the milk. [HOWIE NEWSOME *comes along Main Street, passes* DR. GIBBS, *comes down the center of the stage, leaves some bottles at* MRS. WEBB'S *back door, and crosses the stage to* MRS. GIBBS'S.]

Howie Newsome: Git-ap, Bessie. What's the matter with you?—Morning, Doc.

Dr. Gibbs: Morning, Howie.

Howie Newsome: Somebody sick?

Dr. Gibbs: Pair of twins over to Mrs. Goruslawski's.

Howie Newsome: Twins, eh? This town's gettin' bigger every year.

Dr. Gibbs: Going to rain, Howie?

Howie Newsome: No, no. Fine day—that'll burn through. Come on, Bessie.

Dr. Gibbs: Hello, Bessie. [*He strokes her.*] How old is she, Howie?

Howie Newsome: Going on seventeen. Bessie's all mixed up about the route ever since the Lockharts stopped takin' their quart of milk every day. She wants to leave 'em a quart just the same—keeps scolding me the hull trip. [*He reaches* MRS. GIBBS'S *back door. She is waiting for him.*]

Mrs. Gibbs: Good morning, Howie.

Howie Newsome: Morning, Mrs. Gibbs. Doc's just comin' down the street.

Mrs. Gibbs: Is he? Seems like you're late today?

Howie Newsome: Yes. Somep'n went wrong with the separator. Don't know what 'twas. [*He goes back to Main Street, clucks for Bessie and goes off right.* DR. GIBBS *reaches his home and goes in.*]

Mrs. Gibbs: Everything all right?

Dr. Gibbs: Yes. I declare—easy as kittens.

Mrs. Gibbs: Bacon'll be ready in a minute. Set down and drink your coffee. Child-*run!* Child-*run!* Time to get up.—George! Rebecca!—You can catch a couple hours' sleep this morning, can't you?

Dr. Gibbs: Hm! . . . Mrs. Wentworth's coming at eleven. Guess I know what it's about, too. Her stummick ain't what it ought to be.

Mrs. Gibbs: All told, you won't get more'n three hours' sleep.

Frank Gibbs, I don't know what's goin' to become of you. I do wish I could get you to go away some place and take a rest. I think it would do you good.

Mrs. Webb: Emileeee! Time to get up! Wally! Seven o'clock!

Mrs. Gibbs: I declare, you got to speak to George. Seems like something's come over him lately. He's no help to me at all. I can't even get him to cut me some wood.

Dr. Gibbs: Is he sassy to you?

Mrs. Gibbs: No. He just whines! All he thinks about is that baseball— George! Rebecca! You'll be late for school.

Dr. Gibbs: M-m-m. . . .

Mrs. Gibbs: George!

Dr. Gibbs: George, look sharp!

George's Voice: Yes, Pa!

Dr. Gibbs [*as he goes off the stage*]: Don't you hear your mother calling you?

Mrs. Webb: Walleee! Emileee! You'll be late for school! Walleee! You wash yourself good or I'll come up and do it myself.

Rebecca Gibbs's Voice: Ma! What dress shall I wear?

Mrs. Gibbs: Don't make a noise. Your father's been out all night and needs his sleep. I washed and ironed the blue gingham for you special.

Rebecca: Ma, I hate that dress.

Mrs. Gibbs: Oh, hush-up-with-you.

Rebecca: Every day I go to school dressed like a sick turkey.

Mrs. Gibbs: Now, Rebecca, don't be impossible. You always look *very* nice.

Rebecca: Mamma, George's throwing soap at me.

Mrs. Gibbs: I'll come up and slap the both of you,—that's what I'll do. [*A factory whistle sounds.* THE CHILDREN *enter and take their places at the breakfast tables:* EMILY *and* WALLY WEBB; GEORGE *and* REBECCA GIBBS.]

Stage Manager: We've got a factory in our town too,—hear it? Makes blankets. Cartwrights own it and it brung 'em a fortune.

Mrs. Webb: Children! Now I won't have it. Breakfast is just as good as any other meal and I won't have you gobbling like wolves. It'll stunt your growth,—that's a fact. Put away your book, Wally.

Wally: Aw, Ma!

Mrs. Webb: You know the rule's well as I do—no books at table. As for me, I'd rather have my children healthy than bright.

Emily: I'm both, Mamma: you know I am. I'm the brightest girl in school for my age. I have a wonderful memory.

Mrs. Webb: Eat your breakfast.

Wally: I'm bright, too, when I'm looking at my stamp collection.

Mrs. Gibbs: I'll speak to your father about it when he's rested. Seems to me twenty-five cents a week's enough for a boy your age. I declare I don't know how you spend it all.

George: Aw, Ma,—I gotta lotta things to buy.

Mrs. Gibbs: Strawberry phosphates—that's what you spend it on.

George: I don't see how Rebecca comes to have so much money. She has more'n a dollar.

Rebecca [*spoon in mouth, dreamily*]: I've been saving it up gradual.

Mrs. Gibbs: Well, dear, I think it's a good thing every now and then to spend some.

Rebecca: Mamma, do you know what I love most in the world—do you?—Money.

Mrs. Gibbs: Eat your breakfast. [*The school bell is heard.*]

The Children: Mamma, there's first bell.—I gotta hurry.—I don't want any more.

Mrs. Webb: Walk fast, but you don't have to run. Wally, pull up your pants at the knee. Stand up straight, Emily.

Mrs. Gibbs: Tell Miss Foster I send her my best congratulations —can you remember that?

Rebecca: Yes, Ma.

Mrs. Gibbs: You look real nice, Rebecca. Pick up your feet.

All: Good-by. [THE CHILDREN *from the two houses join at the center of the stage and go up to Main Street, then off left.* MRS. GIBBS *fills her apron with food for the chickens and comes down to the footlights.*]

Mrs. Gibbs: Here, chick, chick, chick. No, go away, you. Go away. Here, chick, chick, chick. What's the matter with *you?* Fight, fight, fight,—that's all you do. Hm . . . *you* don't belong to me. Where'd you come from? [*She shakes her apron.*] Oh, don't be so scared. Nobody's going to hurt you. [MRS. WEBB *is sitting by her trellis, stringing beans.*]

Mrs. Gibbs: Good morning, Myrtle. How's your cold?

Mrs. Webb: Well, it's better; but I told Charles I didn't know as I'd go to choir practice tonight. Wouldn't be any use.

Mrs. Gibbs: Just the same, you come to choir practice, Myrtle, and try it.

Mrs. Webb: Well, if I don't feel any worse than I do now I probably will. While I'm resting myself I thought I'd string some of these beans.

Mrs. Gibbs [*rolling up her sleeves as she crosses the stage for a chat*]: Let me help you. Beans have been good this year.

Mrs. Webb: I've decided to put up forty quarts if it kills me. The children say they hate 'em but I notice they're able to get 'em down all winter. [*Pause.*]

Mrs. Gibbs: Now, Myrtle. I've got to tell you something, because if I don't tell somebody I'll burst.

Mrs. Webb: Why, Julia Gibbs!

Mrs. Gibbs: Here, give me some more of those beans. Myrtle, did one of those second-hand furniture men from Boston come to see you last Friday?

Mrs. Webb: No-o.

Mrs. Gibbs: Well, he called on me. First I thought he was a patient wantin' to see Dr. Gibbs. 'N he wormed his way into my parlor, and, Myrtle Webb, he offered me three hundred and fifty dollars for Grandmother Wentworth's highboy, as I'm sitting here!

Mrs. Webb: Why, Julia Gibbs!

Mrs. Gibbs: He did! That old thing! Why, it was so big I didn't know where to put it and I almost give it to Cousin Hester Wilcox.

Mrs. Webb: Well, you're going to take it, aren't you?

Mrs. Gibbs: I don't know.

Mrs. Webb: You don't know—three hundred and fifty dollars. What's come over you?

Mrs. Gibbs: Well, if I could get the Doctor to take the money and go away some place on a real trip I'd sell it like that.—Myrtle, ever since I was *that* high I've had the thought that I'd like to see Paris, France. I suppose I'm crazy.

Mrs. Webb: Oh, I know what you mean.—How does the Doctor feel about it?

Mrs. Gibbs: Well, I did beat about the bush a little and said that if I got a legacy—that's the way I put it—I'd make him take me somewhere.

Mrs. Webb: M-m-m. . . . What did he say?

Mrs. Gibbs: You know how he is. I haven't heard a serious word out of him, ever since I've known him. No, he said, it might make him discontented with Grover's Corners to go traipsin' about Europe; better let well enough alone, he says. Every two years he

makes a trip to the battlefields of the Civil War and that's enough treat for anybody, he says.

Mrs. Webb: Well, Mr. Webb just *admires* the way Dr. Gibbs knows everything about the Civil War. Mr. Webb's a good mind to give up Napoleon and move over to the Civil War, only Dr. Gibbs being one of the greatest experts in the country just makes him despair.

Mrs. Gibbs: It's a fact! Doctor Gibbs is never so happy as when he's at Antietam or Gettysburg. The times I've walked over those hills, Myrtle, stopping at every bush and pacing it all out, like we was going to buy it.

Mrs. Webb: Well, if that second-hand man's really serious about buyin' it, Julia, you sell it. And then you'll get to see Paris, all right.

Mrs. Gibbs: Oh, I'm sorry I mentioned it. Only it seems to me that once in your life before you die you ought to see a country where they don't talk and think in English and don't even want to. [*The* STAGE MANAGER *returns to the center of the stage.*]

Stage Manager: That'll do. That'll do. Thank you very much, ladies. [MRS. GIBBS *and* MRS. WEBB *gather up their things, return into their homes and disappear.*] Now we're going to skip a few hours in the day at Grover's Corners. But before we go on I want you to know some more things about the town,—all kinds of things. So I've asked Prof. Willard of our State University to come down here and sketch in a few details of our past history,—kind of scientific account, you might say. Is Prof. Willard here? [PROF. WILLARD, *a rural savant, pince-nez on a wide satin ribbon, enters from the right with some notes in his hand.*]

May I introduce Prof. Willard of our University. A few brief notes, thank you, Professor,—unfortunately our time is limited.

Prof. Willard: Grover's Corners . . . let me see . . . Grover's Corners lies on the old Archaeozoic granite of the Appalachian range. I may say it's some of the oldest land in the world. We're very proud of that. A shelf of Devonian basalt crosses it with vestiges of Mesozoic shale, and some sandstone outcroppings; but that's all more recent: two hundred, three hundred million years old.

Some highly interesting fossils have been found. . . . I may say: unique fossils . . . two miles out of town, in Silas Peckham's cow pasture. They can be seen at the museum in our University at any time. Did you wish the meteorological conditions?

Stage Manager: Thank you. We would.

Prof. Willard: The mean precipitation is 40 inches. The mean annual temperature is 43 degrees, ranging between 102 degrees in the shade, and 38 degrees below zero in winter. The . . . the . . . uh . . .

Stage Manager: Thank you, Professor. And have you Prof. Gruber's notes on the history of human life here?

Prof. Willard: Hm . . . yes . . . anthropological data: Early Amerindian stock. Cotahatchee tribes . . . no evidence before the Tenth Century of this era . . . hm . . . now entirely disappeared . . . possible traces in three families. Migration toward the end of the Seventeenth Century of English brachycephalic blue-eyed stock . . . for the most part. Since then some influx of Slav and Mediterranean types. . . .

Stage Manager: And the population, Prof. Willard?

Prof. Willard: Within the town limits: 2,640. The postal district brings in 507 more. Mortality and birth-rates are constant; by MacPherson's gauge: 6.032.

Stage Manager: Thank you *very* much, Professor. We're all very much obliged to you, I'm sure.

Prof. Willard: Not at all, sir; not at all.

Stage Manager: This way, Professor, and thank you again. [*Exit* PROF. WILLARD.]

Now the political and social report: Editor Webb.—Oh, Mr. Webb? [MRS. WEBB *appears at her back door.*]

Mrs. Webb: He'll be here in a minute. . . . He just cut his hand while he was eatin' an apple.

Stage Manager: Thank you, Mrs. Webb.

Mrs. Webb: Charles! Everybody's waitin'. [*Exit* MRS. WEBB.]

Stage Manager: Mr. Webb is Publisher and Editor of the Grover's Corners *Sentinel.* That's our local paper, y'know. [MR. WEBB *enters from his house, pulling on his coat. His finger is bound in a handkerchief.*]

Mr. Webb: Hm. . . . I don't have to tell you that we're run here by a Board of Selectmen.—All males vote at the age of 21. Women vote indirect. We're lower middle-class, sprinkling of professional men . . . 10% illiterate laborers. Politically, we're 86% Republicans; 6% Democrats; 4% Socialists; rest, indifferent. Religiously, we're 85% Protestants; 12% Catholics; rest, indifferent. Do you want the poverty and insanity statistics?

Stage Manager: Thank you, no. Have you any comments, Mr. Webb?

Mr. Webb: Very ordinary town, if you ask me. Little better behaved than most. Probably a lot duller. But our young people here seem to like it well enough: 90% of 'em graduating from High School settle down right here to live—even when they've been away to college.

Stage Manager: Thank you, Mr. Webb. Now, is there anyone in the audience who would like to ask Editor Webb anything about the town?

Woman in the Balcony: Is there much drinking in Grover's Corners?

Mr. Webb: Well, ma'am, I wouldn't know what you'd call *much.* Satiddy nights the farmhands meet down in Ellery Greenough's stable and holler some. Fourth of July I've been known to taste a drop myself—and Decoration Day, of course. We've got one or two town drunks, but they're always having rémorses every time an evangelist comes to town. No, ma'am, I'd say likker ain't a regular thing in the home here, except in the medicine chest. Right good for snake-bite, y'know—always was.

Tall Man at Back of Auditorium: Is there no one in town aware of—

Stage Manager: Come forward, will you, where we can all hear you— What were you saying?

Tall Man: Is there no one in town aware of social injustice and industrial inequality?

Mr. Webb: Oh, yes, everybody is,—somethin' terrible. Seems like they spend most of their time talking about who's rich and who's poor.

Tall Man: Then why don't they do something about it?

Mr. Webb: Well, we're ready to listen to everybody's suggestion as to how you can see that the diligent and sensible 'll rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome sink to the bottom. We'll listen to anybody. Meantime until that's settled, we try to take care of those that can't help themselves, and those that can we leave alone.—Are there any more questions?

Lady in a Box: Oh, Mr. Webb? Mr. Webb, is there any culture or love of beauty in Grover's Corners?

Mr. Webb: Well, ma'am, there ain't much—not in the sense you mean. Come to think of it, there's some girls that play the piano at High School Commencement; but they ain't happy about it. Yes,

and I see where my daughter's been made to read "The Merchant of Venice" over to the school. Seems all pretty remote to 'em, y'know what I mean. No, ma'am, there isn't much culture; but maybe this is the place to tell you that we've got a lot of pleasures of a kind here: we like the sun comin' up over the mountain in the morning, and we all notice a good deal about the birds. We pay a lot of attention to them, and trees and plants. And we watch the change of the seasons: yes, everybody knows about them. But those other things—you're right, ma'am—there ain't much—"Robinson Crusoe" and the Bible; and Handel's "Largo," we all know that; and Whistler's "Mother"—those are just about as far as we go.

Lady in a Box: So I thought. Thank you, Mr. Webb.

Stage Manager: All right! All right! Thank you, everybody. [MR. WEBB *retires.*]

We'll go back to the town now. It's middle of the afternoon. All 2,642 have had their dinners and all the dishes have been washed. There's an early afternoon calm in our town: a buzzin' and a hummin' from the school buildings; only a few buggies on Main Street—the horses dozing at the hitching-posts; you all remember what it's like. Doc Gibbs is in his office, tapping people and making them say "ah." Mr. Webb's cuttin' his lawn over there; one man in ten thinks it's a privilege to push his own lawn mower.

No, sir. It's later than I thought. There are the children coming home from school already. [EMILY WEBB *comes sedately down Main Street carrying some schoolbooks. There are some signs that she is imagining herself to be a lady of striking elegance. Her father's movements to and fro with the lawn mower bring him into her vicinity.*]

Emily: I *can't,* Lois. I've got to go home and help my mother. I *promised.*

Mr. Webb: Emily, walk simply. Who do you think you are today?

Emily: Papa, you're terrible. One minute you tell me to stand up straight and the next minute you call me names. I just don't listen to you. [*She gives him an abrupt kiss.*]

Mr. Webb: Golly, I never got a kiss from such a great lady before. [*He goes out of sight.* EMILY *leans over and picks some flowers by the gate of her house.* GEORGE GIBBS *comes careening down Main Street. He is throwing a ball up to dizzying heights, and waiting to catch it again. This sometimes requires his taking six steps backward.*]

George: Excuse me, Mrs. Forrest.

Stage Manager [*as* MRS. FORREST]: Go out and play in the fields, young man. You got no business playing baseball on Main Street.

George: Awfully sorry, Mrs. Forrest.—Hello, Emily.

Emily: H'lo.

George: You made a fine speech in class.

Emily: Well . . . I was really ready to make a speech about the Monroe Doctrine, but at the last minute Miss Corcoran made me talk about the Louisiana Purchase instead. I worked an awful long time on both of them.

George: Gee, it's funny, Emily. From my window up there I can just see your head nights when you're doing your homework over in your room.

Emily: Why, can you?

George: You certainly do stick to it, Emily. I don't see how you can sit still that long. I guess you like school.

Emily: Well, I always feel it's something you have to go through.

George: Yeah.

Emily: I don't mind it really. It passes the time.

George: Yeah.—Emily, what do you think? We might work out a kinda telegraph from there to there; and once in a while you could give me a kinda hint or two about one of those Algebra problems. I don't mean the answers, Emily, of course not . . . just some little hint. . . .

Emily: Oh, I think *hints* are allowed.—So-ah—if you get stuck, George, you whistle to me; and I'll give you some hints.

George: Emily, you're just naturally bright, I guess.

Emily: I figure that it's just the way a person's born.

George: Yeah. But, you see, I want to be a farmer, and my Uncle Luke says whenever I'm ready I can come over and work on his farm and if I'm any good I can just gradually have it.

Emily: You mean the house and everything? [*Enter* MRS. WEBB.]

George: Yeah. Well, thanks . . . I better be getting out to the baseball field. Thanks for the talk, Emily.—Good afternoon, Mrs. Webb.

Mrs. Webb: Good afternoon, George.

George: So-long, Emily.

Emily: So-long, George.

Mrs. Webb: Emily, come and help me string these beans for the winter. George Gibbs let himself have a real conversation, didn't he? Why, he's growing up. How old would George be?

Emily: I don't know.

Mrs. Webb: Let's see. He must be almost sixteen.

Emily: Mamma, I made a speech in class today and I was very good.

Mrs. Webb: You must recite it to your father at supper. What was it about?

Emily: The Louisiana Purchase. It was like silk off a spool. I'm going to make speeches all my life.—Mamma, are these big enough?

Mrs. Webb: Try and get them a little bigger if you can.

Emily: Mamma, will you answer me a question, serious?

Mrs. Webb: Seriously, dear—not serious.

Emily: Seriously,—will you?

Mrs. Webb: Of course, I will.

Emily: Mamma, am I good-looking?

Mrs. Webb: Yes, of course you are. All my children have got good features; I'd be ashamed if they hadn't.

Emily: Oh, Mamma, that's not what I mean. What I mean is: am I *pretty?*

Mrs. Webb: I've already told you, yes. Now that's enough of that. You have a nice young pretty face. I never heard of such foolishness.

Emily: Oh, Mamma, you never tell us the truth about anything.

Mrs. Webb: I *am* telling you the truth.

Emily: Mamma, were *you* pretty?

Mrs. Webb: Yes, I was, if I do say it. I was the prettiest girl in town next to Mamie Cartwright.

Emily: But, Mamma, you've got to say *some*thing about me. Am I pretty enough . . . to get anybody . . . to get people interested in me?

Mrs. Webb: Emily, you make me tired. Now stop it. You're pretty enough for all normal purposes. Come along now and bring that bowl with you.

Emily: Oh, Mamma, you're no help at all.

Stage Manager: Thank you. Thank you! That'll do. We'll have to interrupt again here. Thank you, Mrs. Webb; thank you, Emily. [MRS. WEBB *and* EMILY *withdraw.*]

There are some more things we've got to explore about this town. This time we're going to go about it in another way: we're going to look back on it from the future. I'm not going to tell you what became of these two families we're seeing most of, because the rest of the play will tell you about them.

But take some of these others: Take Joe Crowell, Jr.: Joe was a very bright fellow. He graduated with honors and got a scholarship to Boston Tech.,—M.I.T., that is. But the War broke out and Joe died in France. All that education for nothing.

Howie Newsome's still delivering milk at Grover's Corners. He's an old man now, has a lot of help, but he still delivers it himself. Says he gets the feel of the town that way. Carries all the accounts in his head; never has to write down a word.

Mr. Morgan's drugstore ain't the same,—it's all citified. Mr. Morgan retired and went out to live in San Diego, California, where his daughter married a real estate man, name of Kerby. Mr. Morgan died there in 1935 and was buried in a lot of palm trees. Kinda lost his religion at the end and took up New Thought or something. They read some new-fangled poetry over him and cre-mated him. The New Hampshire in him sort of broke down in him in that climate, seems like.

The Cartwrights got richer and richer. The house is closed most of the year. They're off eating big dinners in hotels now,—in Virginia Hot Springs and Miami Beach. They say the winters are cold here. I see where they've become 'Piscopalians.

The Cartwright interests have just begun building a new bank in Grover's Corners—had to go to Vermont for the marble, sorry to say. And they've asked a friend of mine what they should put in the cornerstone for people to dig up a thousand years from now. Of course, they've put in a copy of the New York *Times* and a copy of Mr. Webb's *Sentinel*. We're kind of interested in this because some scientific fellas have found a way of painting all that reading matter with a kind of glue—silicate glue—that'll make it keep a thousand—two thousand years. We're putting in a Bible . . . and the Constitution of the United States and a copy of William Shakespeare's plays. What do you say, folks? What do you think? Y'know —Babylon once had two million people in it, and all we know about 'em is the names of the kings and some copies of wheat contracts and . . . the sales of slaves. Yes, every night all those families sat down to supper, and the father came home from his work, and the smoke went up the chimney,—same as here. And even in Greece and Rome, all we know about the real life of the people is what we can piece together out of the joking poems and the comedies they wrote for the theatre back then.

So I'm going to have a copy of this play put in the cornerstone

and the people a thousand years from now'll know a few simple facts about us—more than the Treaty of Versailles and the Lindbergh flight. See what I mean?

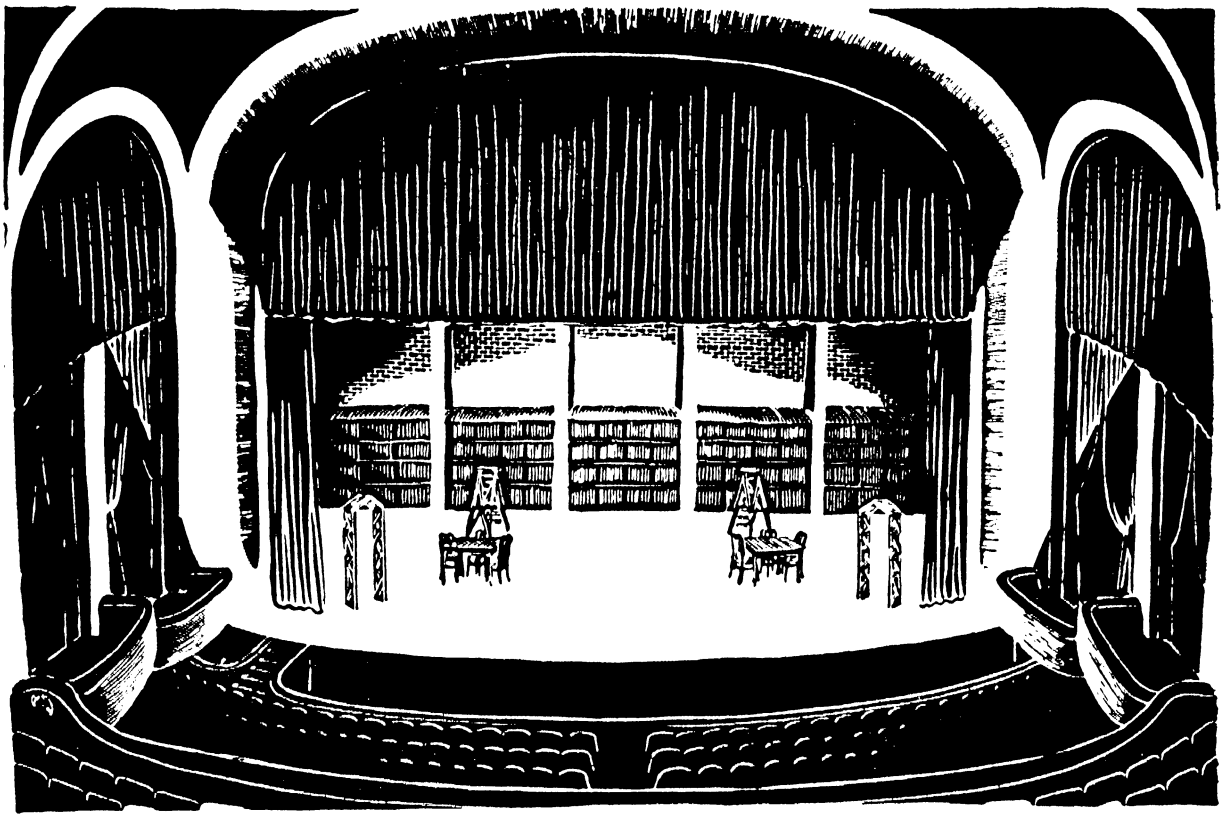
Well,—you people a thousand years from now,—in the provinces north of New York at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, people et three times a day: soon after sunrise; at noon; and at sunset. Every seventh day, by law and by religion, was a day of rest and all work come to a stop. The religion at that time was Christianity. I guess you have some other records about Christianity. The domestic set-up was marriage: a binding relation between a male and one female that lasted for life. Christianity strictly forbade killing, but you were allowed to kill animals, and you were allowed to kill human beings in war and government punishings.

I guess we don't have to tell you about the government and business forms, because that's the kind of thing people seem to hand down first of all.

Let me see now if there's anything else. Oh, yes—at death people were buried in the ground just as they are.

So, friends, this is the way we were in our growing up and in our marrying and in our doctoring and in our living and in our dying.

Now we'll return to our day in Grover's Corners. A lot of time has gone by. It's evening. You can hear choir practice going on in the Congregational Church. All the children are at home doing their school work. The day is running down like a tired clock. [*A choir partially concealed in the orchestra pit has begun singing "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds."* SIMON STIMSON *stands directing them.*



Two ladders have been pushed on to the stage; they serve as indication of the second story in the Gibbs and Webb houses. GEORGE *and* EMILY *mount them, and apply themselves to their school work.* DR. GIBBS *has entered and is seated in his kitchen reading.*]

Simon Stimson: Now look here, everybody. Music come into the world to give pleasure.—Softer! Softer! Get it out of your heads that music's only good when it's loud. You leave loudness to the Methodists. You couldn't beat 'em, even if you wanted to. Now again. Tenors!

George: Hssst! Emily!

Emily: Hello.

George: Hello!

Emily: I can't work at all. The moonlight's so *terrible.*

George: Emily, did you get the third problem?

Emily: Which?

George: The *third?*

Emily: Why, yes, George—that's the easiest of them all.

George: I don't see it. Emily, can you give me a hint?

Emily: I'll tell you one thing: the answer's in yards.

George: !!! In yards? How do you mean?

Emily: In *square* yards.

George: Oh . . . in square yards.

Emily: Yes, George, don't you see?

George: Yeah.

Emily: In square yards of *wallpaper.*

George: Wallpaper,—oh, I see. Thanks a lot, Emily.

Emily: You're welcome. My, isn't the moonlight *terrible?* And choir practice going on.—I think if you hold your breath you can hear the train all the way to Contookuck. Hear it?

George: M-m-m— What do you know!

Emily: Well, I guess I better go back and try to work.

George: Good night, Emily. And thanks.

Emily: Good night, George.

Simon Stimson: Before I forget it: how many of you will be able to come in Tuesday afternoon and sing at Fred Hersey's wedding,—show your hands. That'll be fine; that'll be right nice. We'll do the same music we did for Jane Trowbridge's last month.

—Now we'll do: "Art thou weary; art thou languid?" It's a question, ladies and gentlemen, make it talk. Ready.

Dr. Gibbs: Oh, George, can you come down a minute?

George: Yes, Pa. [*He descends the ladder.*]

Dr. Gibbs: Make yourself comfortable, George; I'll only keep you a minute. George, how old are you?

George: I? I'm sixteen, almost seventeen.

Dr. Gibbs: What do you want to do after school's over?

George: Why, you know, Pa, I want to be a farmer on Uncle Luke's farm.

Dr. Gibbs: You'll be willing, will you, to get up early and milk and feed the stock . . . and you'll be able to hoe and hay all day?

George: Sure, I will. What are you . . . what do you mean, Pa?

Dr. Gibbs: Well, George, while I was in my office today I heard a funny sound . . . and what do you think it was? It was your mother chopping wood. There you see your mother—getting up early; cooking meals all day long; washing and ironing;—and still she has to go out in the back yard and chop wood. I suppose she just got tired of asking you. She just gave up and decided it was easier to do it herself. And you eat her meals, and put on the clothes she keeps nice for you, and you run off and play baseball,—like she's some hired girl we keep around the house but that we don't like very much. Well, I knew all I had to do was call your attention to it. Here's a handkerchief, son. George, I've decided to raise your spending money twenty-five cents a week. Not, of course, for chopping wood for your mother, because that's a present you give her,

but because you're getting older—and I imagine there are lots of things you must find to do with it.

George: Thanks, Pa.

Dr. Gibbs: Let's see—tomorrow's pay day. You can count on it—Hmm. Probably Rebecca'll feel she ought to have some more too. Wonder what could have happened to your mother. Choir practice never was as late as this before.

George: It's only half-past eight, Pa.

Dr. Gibbs: I don't know why she's in that old choir. She hasn't any more voice than an old crow. . . . Traipsin' around the streets at this hour of the night. . . . Just about time you retired, don't you think?

George: Yes, Pa. [GEORGE *mounts to his place on the ladder. Laughter and good nights can be heard on stage left and presently* MRS. GIBBS, MRS. SOAMES *and* MRS. WEBB *come down Main Street. When they arrive at the center of the stage they stop.*]

Mrs. Soames: Good night, Martha. Good night, Mr. Foster.

Mrs. Webb: I'll tell Mr. Webb; I *know* he'll want to put it in the paper.

Mrs. Gibbs: My, it's late!

Mrs. Soames: Good night, Irma.

Mrs. Gibbs: Real nice choir practice, wa'n't it? Myrtle Webb! Look at that moon, will you! Tsk-tsk-tsk. Potato weather, for sure.

Mrs. Soames: Naturally I didn't want to say a word about it in front of those others, but now we're alone—really, it's the worst scandal that ever was in this town!

Mrs. Gibbs: What?

Mrs. Soames: Simon Stimson!

Mrs. Gibbs: Now, Louella!

Mrs. Soames: But, Julia! To have the organist of a church drink and drunk year after year. You know he was drunk tonight.

Mrs. Gibbs: Now, Louella! We all know about Mr. Stimson, and we all know about the troubles he's been through, and Dr. Ferguson knows too, and if Dr. Ferguson keeps him on there in his job the only thing the rest of us can do is just not to notice it.

Mrs. Soames: Not to notice it! But it's getting worse.

Mrs. Webb: No, it isn't, Louella. It's getting better. I've been in that choir twice as long as you have. It doesn't happen anywhere near so often. . . . My, I hate to go to bed on a night like this.—I better hurry. Those children'll be sitting up till all hours. Good

night, Louella. [*She hurries down stage, enters her house and disappears.*]

Mrs. Gibbs: Can you get home safe, Louella?

Mrs. Soames: It's as bright as day. I can see Mr. Soames scowling at the window now. You'd think we'd been to a dance the way the menfolk carry on. [*Repeated good nights.* MRS. GIBBS *arrives at her home.*]

Mrs. Gibbs: Well, we had a real good time.

Dr. Gibbs: You're late enough.

Mrs. Gibbs: Why, Frank, it ain't any later 'n usual.

Dr. Gibbs: And you stopping at the corner to gossip with a lot of hens.

Mrs. Gibbs: Now, Frank, don't be grouchy. Come out and smell my heliotrope in the moonlight. [*They stroll out arm in arm along the footlights.*]

Isn't that wonderful? What did you do all the time I was away?

Dr. Gibbs: Oh, I read—as usual. What were the girls gossiping about tonight?

Mrs. Gibbs: Well, believe me, Frank—there is something to gossip about.

Dr. Gibbs: Hmm! Simon Stimson far gone, was he?

Mrs. Gibbs: Worst I've ever seen him. How'll that end, Frank? Dr. Ferguson can't forgive him forever.

Dr. Gibbs: I guess I know more about Simon Stimson's affairs than anybody in this town. Some people ain't made for small town life. I don't know how that'll end; but there's nothing we can do but just leave it alone. Come, get in.

Mrs. Gibbs: No, not yet. . . . Oh, Frank, I'm worried about you.

Dr. Gibbs: What are you worried about?

Mrs. Gibbs: I think it's my duty to make plans for you to get a real rest and change. And if I get that legacy, well, I'm going to insist on it.

Dr. Gibbs: Now, Julia, there's no sense in going over that again.

Mrs. Gibbs: Frank, you're just *unreasonable!*

Dr. Gibbs: Come on, Julia, it's getting late. First thing you know you'll catch cold. I gave George a piece of my mind tonight. I reckon you'll have your wood chopped for a while anyway. No, no, start getting upstairs.

Mrs. Gibbs: Oh, dear. There's always so many things to pick up, seems like. You know, Frank, Mrs. Fairchild always locks her front door every night. All those people up that part of town do.

Dr. Gibbs: They're all getting citified, that's the trouble with them. They haven't got nothing fit to burgle and everybody knows it. [*They disappear.* REBECCA *climbs up the ladder beside* GEORGE.]

George: Get out, Rebecca. There's only room for one at this window. You're always spoiling everything.

Rebecca: Well, let me look just a minute.

George: Use your own window.

Rebecca: I did; but there's no moon there. . . . George, do you know what I think, do you? I think maybe the moon's getting nearer and nearer and there'll be a big 'splosion.

George: Rebecca, you don't know anything. If the moon were getting nearer, the guys that sit up all night with telescopes would see it first and they'd tell about it, and it'd be in all the newspapers.

Rebecca: George, is the moon shining on South America, Canada and half the whole world?

George: Well—prob'ly is. [*The* STAGE MANAGER *strolls on.*]

Stage Manager: Nine-thirty. Most of the lights are out. No, there's Constable Warren trying a few doors on Main Street. And here comes Editor Webb, after putting his newspaper to bed.

Mr. Webb: Good evening, Bill.

Constable Warren: Evenin', Mr. Webb.

Mr. Webb: Quite a moon!

Constable Warren: Yepp.

Mr. Webb: All quiet tonight?

Constable Warren: Simon Stimson is rollin' around a little. Just saw his wife movin' out to hunt for him so I looked the other way—there he is now. [SIMON STIMSON *comes down Main Street from the left, only a trace of unsteadiness in his walk.*]

Mr. Webb: Good evening, Simon. . . . Town seems to have settled down for the night pretty well. . . . [SIMON STIMSON *comes up to him and pauses a moment.*] Good evening. . . . Yes, most of the town's settled down for the night, Simon. . . . I guess we better do the same. Can I walk along a ways with you? [SIMON STIMSON *continues on his way without a word and disappears at the right.*] Good night.

Constable Warren: I don't know how that's goin' to end, Mr. Webb.

Mr. Webb: Well, he's seen a peck of trouble, one thing after another. . . . Oh, Bill . . . if you see my boy smoking cigarettes, just give him a word, will you? He thinks a lot of you, Bill.

Constable Warren: I don't think he smokes no cigarettes, Mr.

Webb. Leastways, not more'n two or three a year. He don't belong to that crowd that hangs out down by the gully.

Mr. Webb: Hm. . . . I hope not.—Well, good night, Bill.

Constable Warren: Good night, Mr. Webb. [*Exit*]

Mr. Webb: Who's that up there? Is that you, Myrtle?

Emily: No, it's me, Papa.

Mr. Webb: Why aren't you in bed?

Emily: I don't know. I just can't sleep yet, Papa. The moonlight's so *won*-derful. And the smell of Mrs. Gibbs' heliotrope. Can you smell it?

Mr. Webb: Hm. . . . Yes. Haven't any troubles on your mind, have you, Emily?

Emily: Troubles, Papa. *No.*

Mr. Webb: Well, enjoy yourself, but don't let your mother catch you. Good night, Emily.

Emily: Good night, Papa. [MR. WEBB *crosses into the house, whistling "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds" and disappears.*]

Rebecca: I never told you about that letter Jane Crofut got from her minister when she was sick. The minister of her church in the town she was in before she came here. He wrote Jane a letter and on the envelope the address was like this: It said: Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America.

George: What's funny about that?

Rebecca: But listen, it's not finished: the United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God,—that's what it said on the envelope.

George: What do you know!

Rebecca: And the postman brought it just the same.

George: What do you know!

Stage Manager: That's the end of the First Act, friends. You can go and smoke now, those that smoke.

ACT TWO

The tables and chairs of the two kitchens are still on the stage. The ladders have been withdrawn.

The STAGE MANAGER *has been at his accustomed place watching the audience return to its seats.*

Stage Manager: Three years have gone by. Yes, the sun's come up over a thousand times. Summers and winters have cracked the mountains a little bit more and the rains have brought down some of the dirt.

Some babies that weren't even born before have begun talking regular sentences already; and a number of people who thought they were right young and spry have noticed that they can't bound up a flight of stairs like they used to, without their heart fluttering a little.

Some older sons are sitting at the head of the table, and some people I know are having their meat cut up for them.—All that can happen in a thousand days. Nature's been pushing and contriving in other ways, too: a number of young people fell in love and got married. Yes, the mountain got bit away a few fractions of an inch; millions of gallons of water went by the mill; and here and there a new home was set up under a roof. Almost everybody in the world gets married,—you know what I mean? In our town there aren't hardly any exceptions. Most everybody in the world climbs into their graves married.

The First Act was called the Daily Life. This Act is called Love and Marriage. There's another Act coming after this: I reckon you can guess what that's about.

So: It's three years later. It's 1904. It's July 7th, just after High School Commencement. That's the time most of our young people jump up and get married. Soon as they've passed their last examinations in solid geometry and Cicero's Orations, looks like they suddenly feel themselves fit to be married.

It's early morning. Only this time it's been raining. It's been pouring and thundering. Mrs. Gibbs's garden, and Mrs. Webb's here: drenched. All those bean poles and pea vines: drenched. All yesterday over there on Main Street, the rain looked like curtains being blown along. Hm . . . it may begin again any minute.

There! You can hear the 5:45 for Boston. And here comes Howie Newsome delivering the milk. And there's Si Crowell delivering the papers like his brother before him.—You remember about his brother?—all that education he's going to get and that'll be wasted. And there's Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb come down to make breakfast, just as though it were an ordinary day. I don't have to point out to the women in my audience that those ladies they see before them, both those ladies cooked three meals a day,—one of 'em for twenty years, the other for forty,—and no summer vacation. They brought up two children apiece; washed; cleaned the house,—and never a nervous breakdown. Never thought themselves hard-used, either.

It's like what one of those Middle West poets said: You've got to love life to have life, and you've got to have life to love life. . . . It's what they call a vicious circle. [SI CROWELL *has entered hurling imaginary newspapers into doorways;* HOWIE NEWSOME *has come along Main Street with Bessie.*]

Howie Newsome: Git-ap, Bessie.

Si Crowell: Morning, Howie.

Howie Newsome: Morning, Si.—Anything in the papers I ought to know?

Si Crowell: Nothing much, except we're losing about the best baseball pitcher Grover's Corners ever had.

Howie Newsome: Reckon he was. He's been standing off the whole of South New Hampshire single-handed, looks like.

Si Crowell: He could hit and run bases, too.

Howie Newsome: Yep. Mighty fine ball player.—Bessie! I guess I can stop and talk if I've a mind to!

Si Crowell: I don't see how he could give up a thing like that just to get married. Would you, Howie?

Howie Newsome: Can't tell, Si. Never had no talent that way. [CONSTABLE WARREN *enters. They exchange mornings.*] You're up early, Bill.

Constable Warren: Seein' if there's anything I can do to prevent a flood. River's been risin' all night.

Howie Newsome: Si Crowell's all worked up here about George Gibbs' retiring from baseball.

Constable Warren: Yes, sir; that's the way it goes. Back in '84 we had a player, Si,—even George Gibbs couldn't touch him. Name of Hank Todd. Went down to Maine and became a parson. Wonderful ball player.—Howie, how did the weather look to you?

Howie Newsome: No, 'tain't bad. Think maybe it'll clear up for good. [CONSTABLE WARREN *and* SI CROWELL *continue on their way.* HOWIE NEWSOME *brings the milk first to* MRS. GIBBS'S *house. She meets him by the trellis.*]

Mrs. Gibbs: Good morning, Howie. Do you think it's going to rain again?

Howie Newsome: Morning, Mrs. Gibbs. It rained so heavy, I think maybe it'll clear up.

Mrs. Gibbs: Certainly hope it will.

Howie Newsome: How much did you want today?

Mrs. Gibbs: I guess I'll need three-a-milk and two-a-cream, Howie. I'm going to have a house full of relations.

Howie Newsome: My wife says to tell you we both hope they'll be very happy, Mrs. Gibbs. Know they *will.*

Mrs. Gibbs: Thanks a lot, Howie. Tell your wife I hope she gits there to the wedding.

Howie Newsome: Yes, she'll be there; she'll be there if she kin. [HOWIE NEWSOME *crosses to* MRS. WEBB'S *house.*] Morning, Mrs. Webb.

Mrs. Webb: Oh, good morning, Mr. Newsome. I told you four quarts of milk, but I hope you can spare me another.

Howie Newsome: Yes'm . . . and the two of cream.

Mrs. Webb: Will it rain all day, Mr. Newsome?

Howie Newsome: No'm. Just sayin' to Mrs. Gibbs as how it may lighten up. Mrs. Newsome told me to tell you as how we hope they'll both be very happy, Mrs. Webb. Know they *will.*

Mrs. Webb: Thank you, and thank Mrs. Newsome and we hope to see you all at the wedding.

Howie Newsome: Yes, Mrs. Webb. We hope to git there. Couldn't miss that. Chck! Bessie! [*Exit* HOWIE NEWSOME. DR. GIBBS *descends in shirt sleeves, and sits down at his breakfast table.*]

Dr. Gibbs: Well, Ma, the day has come. You're losin' one of your chicks.

Mrs. Gibbs: Frank Gibbs, don't you say another word. I feel like crying every minute. Sit down and drink your coffee.

Dr. Gibbs: The groom's up shaving himself. Whistling and singing, like he's glad to leave us.—Every now and then he says "I do" to the mirror, but it don't sound convincing to me.

Mrs. Gibbs: I declare I don't know how he'll get along. I've arranged his clothes and seen to it he's put warm things on,—Frank! they're too young. Emily won't think of such things. He'll catch

his death of cold within a week.—Here's something I made for you.

Dr. Gibbs: Why, Julia Hersey! French toast!

Mrs. Gibbs: 'Tain't hard to make, and I had to do something.

Dr. Gibbs: I remember my wedding morning, Julia.

Mrs. Gibbs: Now don't start that, Frank Gibbs. I tell you I can't stand it.

Dr. Gibbs: I was the scardest young fella in the State of New Hampshire. I thought I'd made a mistake for sure. And when I saw you comin' down that aisle I thought you were the prettiest girl I'd ever seen, but the only trouble was that I'd never seen you before. There I was in the Congregational Church marryin' a total stranger.

Mrs. Gibbs: And how do you think I felt!—Did you hear Rebecca stirring about upstairs?

Dr. Gibbs: Only morning in the year she hasn't been managing everybody's business. She's shut up in her room. I got the impression that maybe she's crying.

Mrs. Gibbs: Good Lord! This has got to stop.—Rebecca! Rebecca! Everything's getting cold down here. [GEORGE *comes rattling down the stairs, very brisk.*]

George: Good morning, everybody. Only five more hours to live. [*Makes the gesture of cutting his throat.*]

Mrs. Gibbs: Where are you going?

George: Just stepping across the grass to see my girl.

Mrs. Gibbs: Now, George! You take an umbrella or I won't let you out of this house.

George: Aw, Ma. It's just a *step!*

Mrs. Gibbs: From tomorrow on you can kill yourself in all weathers, but while you're in my house you live wisely, thank you. There are your overshoes right there in the hall. And here's an umbrella.

George: Aw, Ma!

Dr. Gibbs: George, do as your mother tells you.

Mrs. Gibbs: Maybe Mrs. Webb isn't used to callers at seven in the morning. Take a cup-a coffee first.

George: Be back in a minute. [*He crosses the stage, leaping over the puddles.*] Good morning, Mother Webb.

Mrs. Webb: Goodness! You frightened me!—Now, George, you can come in a minute out of the wet, but you know I can't ask you in.

George: Why not—?

Mrs. Webb: George, you know's well as I do: the groom can't see his bride on his wedding day, not until he sees her in church.

George: Aw!—that's just a superstition. [*Enter* MR. WEBB.]

Mr. Webb: Good morning, George.

George: Mr. Webb, you don't believe in that superstition, do you?

Mr. Webb: There's a lot of common sense in some superstitions, George.

Mrs. Webb: Millions have folla'd it, George, and you don't want to be the first to fly in the face of custom.

George: How is Emily?

Mrs. Webb: She hasn't waked up yet. I haven't heard a sound out of her.

George: Emily's *asleep!!!*

Mrs. Webb: No wonder! We were up 'til all hours,—sewing and packing. I'll tell you what I'll do; you set down here a minute with Mr. Webb and drink this cup of coffee; and I'll go upstairs and see she doesn't come down and surprise you. There's some bacon, too; but don't be long about it. [*Exit* MRS. WEBB. *Embarrassed silence*]

Mr. Webb: Well, George, how are you?

George: Oh, fine. I'm fine. [*Pause*] Mr. Webb, what sense could there be in a superstition like that?

Mr. Webb: Well, you see,—on her wedding morning a girl's head's apt to be full of . . . clothes and things like that. Don't you think that's probably it?

George: Ye-e-s. I never thought of that.

Mr. Webb: A girl's apt to be a mite nervous on her wedding day. [*Pause*]

George: I wish a fellow could get married without all that marching up and down.

Mr. Webb: Well, every man that's ever lived has felt that way about it, George; but it hasn't done much good. It's the women that have built up weddings, my boy. From now on they have it pretty much as they like. . . . All those good women standing shoulder to shoulder making sure that the knot's tied in a mighty public way.

George: But . . . you *believe* in it, don't you, Mr. Webb?

Mr. Webb: Oh, yes; oh, yes. Don't you misunderstand me, my boy. Marriage is a wonderful thing,—wonderful thing. And don't you forget that, George.

George: No, sir.—Mr. Webb, how old were you when you got married?

Mr. Webb: Well, you see: I'd been to college and I'd taken a

little time to get settled. But Mrs. Webb,—she wasn't much older than what Emily is. Oh, age hasn't much to do with it, George,—not compared to other things.

George: What were you going to say, Mr. Webb?

Mr. Webb: Oh, I don't know,—was I going to say something? [*Pause*] George, I was thinking the other night of some advice my father gave me when I got married. Charles, he said, Charles, start out early showing who's boss, he said. Best thing to do is to give an order, even if it don't make sense; just so she'll learn to obey. And he said: if anything about your wife irritates you,—her conversation, or anything,—just get up and leave the house. That'll make it clear to her, he said. And, oh, yes! he said never, *never* let your wife know how much money you have, never.

George: Well, Mr. Webb . . . I don't think I could . . .

Mr. Webb: So I took the opposite of my father's advice and I've been happy ever since. And let that be a lesson to you, George, never to ask advice on personal matters.—George, are you going to raise chickens on your farm?

George: What?

Mr. Webb: Are you going to raise chickens on your farm?

George: Uncle Luke's never been much interested, but I thought—

Mr. Webb: A book came into my office the other day, George, on the Philo System of raising chickens. I want you to read it. I'm thinking of beginning in a small way in the back yard, and I'm going to put an incubator in the cellar— [*Enter* MRS. WEBB.]

Mrs. Webb: Charles, are you talking about that old incubator again? I thought you two'd be talking about things worth while.

Mr. Webb: Well, Myrtle, if you want to give the boy some good advice, I'll go upstairs and leave you alone with him.

Mrs. Webb: Now, George, I'm sorry, but I've got to send you away so that Emily can come down and get some breakfast. She told me to tell you that she sends you her love but that she doesn't want to lay eyes on you. So good-by, George. [GEORGE *crosses the stage to his own home and disappears.*]

Mr. Webb: Myrtle, I guess you don't know about that older superstition.

Mrs. Webb: What do you mean, Charles?

Mr. Webb: Since the cave-men: the groom shouldn't be left alone with his father-in-law on the day of the wedding, or near it. Now don't forget that!

Stage Manager: Thank you. Thank you, everybody.

Now I have to interrupt again here. You see, we want to know how all this began,—this wedding, this plan to spend a lifetime together. I'm awfully interested in how big things like that begin. You know how it is: you're twenty-one or twenty-two and you make some decisions; then whisssh! you're seventy: you've been a lawyer for fifty years, and that white-haired lady at your side has eaten over fifty thousand meals with you.

How do such things begin? George and Emily are going to show you now the conversation they had when they first knew that . . . that . . . as the saying goes . . . they were meant for one another. But before they do it I want you to try and remember what it was like when you were young, when you were fifteen or sixteen. For some reason it is very hard to do: those days when even the little things in life could be almost too exciting to bear. And particularly the days when you were first in love; when you were like a person sleep-walking, and you didn't quite see the street you were in, and didn't quite hear everything that was said to you. You're just a little bit crazy. Will you remember that, please?

Now they'll be coming out of High School at three o'clock. George has just been elected President of the Junior Class, and as it's June, that means he'll be President of the Senior Class all next year. And Emily's just been elected Secretary and Treasurer. I don't have to tell you how important that is. [*He places a board across the backs of two chairs, parallel to the footlights, and places two high stools behind it. This is the counter of* MR. MORGAN'S *drugstore.*] All ready! [EMILY, *carrying an armful of—imaginary—schoolbooks, comes along Main Street from the left.*]

Emily: I can't, Louise. I've got to go home. Good-by. Oh, Earnestine! Earnestine! Can you come over tonight and do Algebra? I did the first and third in Study Hall. No, they're not hard. But, Earnestine, that Caesar's awful hard. I don't see why we have to do a thing like that. Come over about seven. Tell your mother you *have* to. G'by, G'by, Helen. G'by, Fred. [GEORGE, *also carrying books, catches up with her.*]

George: Can I carry your books home for you, Emily?

Emily [*coldly*]: Thank you. [*She gives them to him.*]

George: Excuse me a minute, Emily.—Say, Bob, get everything ready. I'll be there in a quarter of an hour. If I'm a little late start practice anyway. And give Herb some long high ones. His eye needs a lot of practice. Seeya later.

Emily: Good-by, Lizzy.

George: Good-by, Lizzy.—I'm awfully glad you were elected, too, Emily.

Emily: Thank you. [*They have been standing on Main Street, almost against the back wall.* GEORGE *is about to take the first steps towards the audience when he stops again and says:*]

George: Emily, why are you mad at me?

Emily: I'm not mad at you.

George: You . . . you treat me so funny.

Emily: Well, I might as well say it right out, George. I don't like the whole change that's come over you in the last year. I'm sorry if that hurts your feelings, but I've just got to tell the truth and shame the devil.

George: I'm awfully sorry, Emily. Wha-a-what do you mean?

Emily: Well, up to a year ago I used to like you a lot. And I used to watch you as you did everything . . . because we'd been friends so long . . . and then you began spending all your time at baseball . . . and you never even spoke to anybody any more; not even to your own family you didn't . . . and, George, it's a fact, you've got awful conceited and stuck-up, and all the girls say so. They may not say so to your face, but that's what they say about you behind your back, and it hurts me to hear them say it, but I've got to agree with them a little. I'm sorry if it hurts your feelings . . . but I can't be sorry I said it.

George: I . . . I'm glad you said it, Emily. I never thought that such a thing was happening to me. I guess it's hard for a fella not to have faults creep into his character. [*They take a step or two in silence, then stand still in misery.*]

Emily: I always expect a man to be perfect and I think he should be.

George: Oh . . . I don't think it's possible to be perfect, Emily.

Emily: Well, my father is, and as far as I can see your father is. There's no reason on earth why you shouldn't be, too.

George: Well, Emily . . . I feel it's the other way round. That men aren't naturally good; but girls are. Like you and your mother and my mother.

Emily: Well, you might as well know right now that I'm not perfect. It's not as easy for a girl to be perfect as a man, because we girls are more nervous.—Now I'm sorry I said all that about you. I don't know what made me say it.

George: No, no,—I guess if it's the truth you ought to say it. You stick to it, Emily.

Emily: I don't know if it's the truth or not. And I suddenly feel that it isn't important at all.

George: Emily, would you like an ice-cream soda, or something, before you go home?

Emily: Well, thank you. . . . I would. [*They come into the drugstore and seat themselves on the stools.*]

Stage Manager [*as* MR. MORGAN]: Hello, George. Hello, Emily. What'll you have? Why, Emily Webb, what've you been crying about?

George [*he gropes for an explanation*]: She . . . she just got an awful scare, Mr. Morgan. She almost got run over by that hardware store wagon. Everybody always says that Tom Huckins drives like a crazy man.

Stage Manager: Here, take a drink of water, Emily. You look all shook up. There!—Now, what'll you have?

Emily: I'll have a strawberry phosphate, thank you, Mr. Morgan.

George: No, no. You go and have an ice-cream soda with me, Emily.—Two strawberry ice-cream sodas, Mr. Morgan.

Stage Manager [*working the faucets*]: Yes, sir. I tell you, you've got to look both ways before you cross Main Street these days. Gets worse every year. There are a hundred and twenty-five horses in Grover's Corners this minute I'm talking to you. State Inspector was in here yesterday. And now they're bringing in these auto-mo-biles, the best thing to do is to just stay home. Why, I can remember the time when a dog could lie down all day in the middle of Main Street and nothing would come to disturb him.—Yes, Miss Ellis; be with you in a minute. Here are your sodas. Enjoy 'em. [*He goes off.*]

Emily: They're so expensive.

George: No, no,—don't you think of that. We're celebrating. First, we're celebrating our election. And then do you know what else I'm celebrating?

Emily: No.

George: I'm celebrating because I've got a friend who tells me all the things that ought to be told me.

Emily: George, *please* don't think of that. I don't know why I said it. It's not true. You're—

George: No, you stick to it, Emily. I'm glad you spoke to me like you did. But you'll see: I'm going to change so quick—you bet I'm going to change. And, Emily, I want to ask you a favor.

Emily: What?

George: Emily, if I go away to State Agriculture College next year, will you write me a letter once in a while?

Emily: I certainly will. I certainly will, George. . . . [*Pause*] It certainly seems like being away three years you'd get out of touch with things.

George: No, no. I mustn't do that. You see I'm not only going to be just a farmer. After a while maybe I'll run for something to get elected. So your letters'll be very important to me; you know, telling me what's going on here and everything. . . .

Emily: Just the same, three years is a long time. Maybe letters from Grover's Corners wouldn't be so interesting after a while. Grover's Corners isn't a very important place when you think of all New Hampshire; but I think it's a very nice town.

George: The day wouldn't come when I wouldn't want to know everything that's happening here. I know *that's* true, Emily.

Emily: Well, I'll try to make my letters interesting. [*Pause.*]

George: Y'know, Emily, whenever I meet a farmer I ask him if he thinks it's important to go to Agriculture School to be a good farmer.

Emily: Why, George—

George: Yeah, and some of them say that it's even a waste of time. You can get all those things, anyway, out of the pamphlets the government sends out. And Uncle Luke's getting old,—he's about ready for me to start in taking over his farm tomorrow, if I could.

Emily: My!

George: And, like you say, being gone all that time . . . in other places and meeting other people . . . If anything like that can happen I don't want to go away. I guess new people aren't any better than old ones. I'll bet they almost never are. Emily, . . . I feel that you're as good a friend as I've got. I don't need to go and meet the people in other towns.

Emily: But, George, maybe it's very important for you to go and learn all that about cattle-judging and soils and those things. And if you're going into politics, maybe you ought to meet people from other parts of the State . . . of course, I don't know.

George [*after a pause*]: Emily, I'm going to make up my mind right now. I won't go. I'll tell Pa about it tonight.

Emily: Why, George, I don't see why you have to decide right now. It's a whole year away.

George: Emily, I'm glad you spoke to me about that . . . that

fault in my character. And what you said was right; but there was *one* thing wrong in it, and that was when you said that for a year I wasn't noticing people, and . . . you, for instance. Listen, Emily . . . you say you were watching me when I did everything. . . . Why, I was doing the same about you all the time. Why, sure,—I always thought about you as one of the chief people I thought about. I always made sure where you were sitting on the bleachers, and who you were with. And we've always had lots of talks . . . and joking, in the halls; and they always meant a lot to me. Of course, they weren't as good as the talk we're having now. Lately I'd been noticing that you'd been acting kind of funny to me, and for three days I've been trying to walk home with you, but something's always got in the way. Yesterday I was standing over against the wall waiting for you, and you walked home with Miss Corcoran.

Emily: George! . . . Life's awful funny! How could I have known that? Why, I thought—

George: Listen, Emily, I'm going to tell you why I'm not going to Agriculture School. I think that once you've found a person that you're very fond of . . . I mean a person who's fond of you, too,—at least enough to be interested in your character . . . Well, I think that's just as important as college is, and even more so. That's what I think.

Emily: I think it's awfully important, too.

George: Emily.

Emily: Yes, George.

George: Emily, if I improve and make a big change . . . would you be . . . I mean: *could* you be . . .

Emily: I . . . I am now; I always have been.

George [*pause*]: So I guess this is an important talk we've been having.

Emily: Yes.

George [*takes a deep breath and straightens his back*]: Wait just a minute and I'll take you home. [*He rises and goes to the* STAGE MANAGER *who appears and comes toward him.*] Mr. Morgan, I'll have to go home and get the money to pay you for this. It'll only take me a minute.

Stage Manager: What's that? George Gibbs, do you mean to tell me—!

George: Yes, but I had reasons, Mr. Morgan.—Look, here's my gold watch to keep until I come back with the money.

Stage Manager: That's all right. Keep your watch. I'll trust you.

George: I'll be back in five minutes.

Stage Manager: I'll trust you ten years, George,—not a day more. —Got all over your shock, Emily?

Emily: Yes, thank you, Mr. Morgan. It was nothing.

George [*taking up the books from the counter*]: I'm ready. [*They walk in grave silence down the stage, turn, and pass through the trellis at the Webbs' back door and disappear.*]

Stage Manager: Thank you, Emily. Thank you, George.

Now before we go on to the wedding, there are still some more things we ought to know about this—about this marriage. I want to know some more about how the parents took it; but what I want to know most of all is: oh, you know what I mean,—what Grover's Corners thought about marriage anyway. You know's well as I do: people are never able to say right out what they think of money, or death, or fame, or marriage. You've got to catch it between the lines; you've got to *over*-hear it.

Oh, Doctor! Mrs. Gibbs! [*They appear at their side of the stage and exchange a glance of understanding with him. The* STAGE MANAGER *lays the same plank across two chairs that served as a drug-store counter and it has now become* MRS. GIBBS'S *ironing board.* DR. GIBBS *sits down in a rocker and smokes.* MRS. GIBBS *irons a moment in silence; then goes to the foot of the stairs and calls:*]

Mrs. Gibbs: Rebecca! It's time you turned out your light and went to sleep. George, you'd better get some sleep, too.

Rebecca's Voice: Ma, I haven't finished my English.

Mrs. Gibbs: What? Well, I bet you haven't been working, Rebecca. You've been reading that Sears, Roebuck catalogue, that's what you've been doing.—All right, I'll give you ten more minutes. If you haven't finished by then you'll just have to fail the course and be a disgrace to your father and me.—George, what are you doing?

George's Voice [*hurt*]: I'm doing history.

Mrs. Gibbs: Well, you'd better go to bed. You're probably sleeping at the desk as it is. [*She casts an amused eye at her husband and returns to her ironing.*]

Dr. Gibbs: I had a long talk with the boy today.

Mrs. Gibbs: Did you?

Dr. Gibbs: I tell you, Mrs. G., there's nothing so terrifying in the world as a son. The relation of a father to a son is the damnedest,

awkwardest— I always come away feeling like a soggy sponge of hypocrisy.

Mrs. Gibbs: Well, a mother and a daughter's no picnic, let me tell you.

Dr. Gibbs: George is set on it: he wants to marry Emily 'soon as school's out and take her right on to the farm. [*Pause*] He says he can sit up nights and learn agriculture from government pamphlets, without going to college for it.

Mrs. Gibbs: He always was crazy about farming. Gets that from my people.

Dr. Gibbs: At a pinch, I guess he could start in farming;—but I swear I think he's too young to get married. Julia, he's just a green half-grown kid. He isn't ready to be a family man.

Mrs. Gibbs: No, he ain't. You're right.—But he's a good boy and I wouldn't like to think of him being alone out there . . . coming into town Satiddy nights, like any old farm hand, tuckered out from work and looking for excitement. He might get into bad ways. It wouldn't be enough fun for him to come and sit by our stove—and holding hands with Emily for a year mightn't be enough either. He might lose interest in her.

Dr. Gibbs: Hm.

Mrs. Gibbs: Frank, I been watching her. George is a lucky boy when you think of all the silly girls in the world.

Dr. Gibbs: But, Julia,—George *married.* That great gangling selfish nincompoop.

Mrs. Gibbs: Yes, I know. [*She takes up a collar and examines it.*] Frank, what do you do to your collars? Do you gnaw 'em? I never saw such a man for collars.

Dr. Gibbs: Julia, when I married you, do you know what one of my terrors was in getting married?

Mrs. Gibbs: Pshaw! Go on with you!

Dr. Gibbs: I was afraid we weren't going to have material for conversation more'n 'ld last us a few weeks. I was afraid we'd run out and eat our meals in silence, that's a fact. You and I've been conversing for twenty years now without any noticeable barren spells.

Mrs. Gibbs: Well, good weather, bad weather, 'tain't very choice, but I always manage to find something to say. [*Pause.*]

Dr. Gibbs: What do you think? What do you think, Julia? Shall we tell the boy he can go ahead and get married?

Mrs. Gibbs: Seems like it's up to us to decide. Myrtle and Charles

Webb are willing. They think it's a good idea to throw the young people into the sea and let 'em sink or swim, as soon as they're ready.

Dr. Gibbs: What does that mean? Must we decide right now? This minute?

Mrs. Gibbs: There you go putting the responsibility on me!

Dr. Gibbs: Here it is, almost April.—I'll go up and say a word to him right now before he goes to bed. [*He rises.*] You're sure, Julia? You've nothing more to add?

Mrs. Gibbs [*stops ironing a moment*]: I don't know what to say. Seems like it's too much to ask, for a big outdoor boy like that to go and get shut up in classrooms for three years. And once he's on the farm, he might just as well have a companion, seeing he's found a fine girl like Emily. . . . People are meant to live two by two in this world. . . . Yes, Frank, go up and tell him it's all right.

Dr. Gibbs [*crosses and is about to call when*—]

Mrs. Gibbs [*her hands on her cheeks, staring into the audience, in sharp alarm*]: Wait a minute! Wait a minute!— [*Then resuming her ironing*] No,—go and tell him.

Dr. Gibbs: Why did you stop then, Julia?

Mrs. Gibbs: Oh, you know: I thought of all those times we went through in the first years when George and Rebecca were babies,—you walking up and down with them at three in the morning; the whooping-cough; the time George fell off the porch. You and I were twenty-five years old, and more. It's wonderful how one forgets one's troubles, like that.—Yes, Frank, go upstairs and tell him. . . . It's worth it.

Dr. Gibbs: Yes, they'll have a lot of troubles, but that's none of our business. Let'm. Everybody has a right to his own troubles.—You ought to be present, Julia,—important occasion like that. I'll call him.—George! Oh, George!

George's Voice: Yes, Pa.

Dr. Gibbs: Can you come down a minute? Your mother and I want to speak to you.

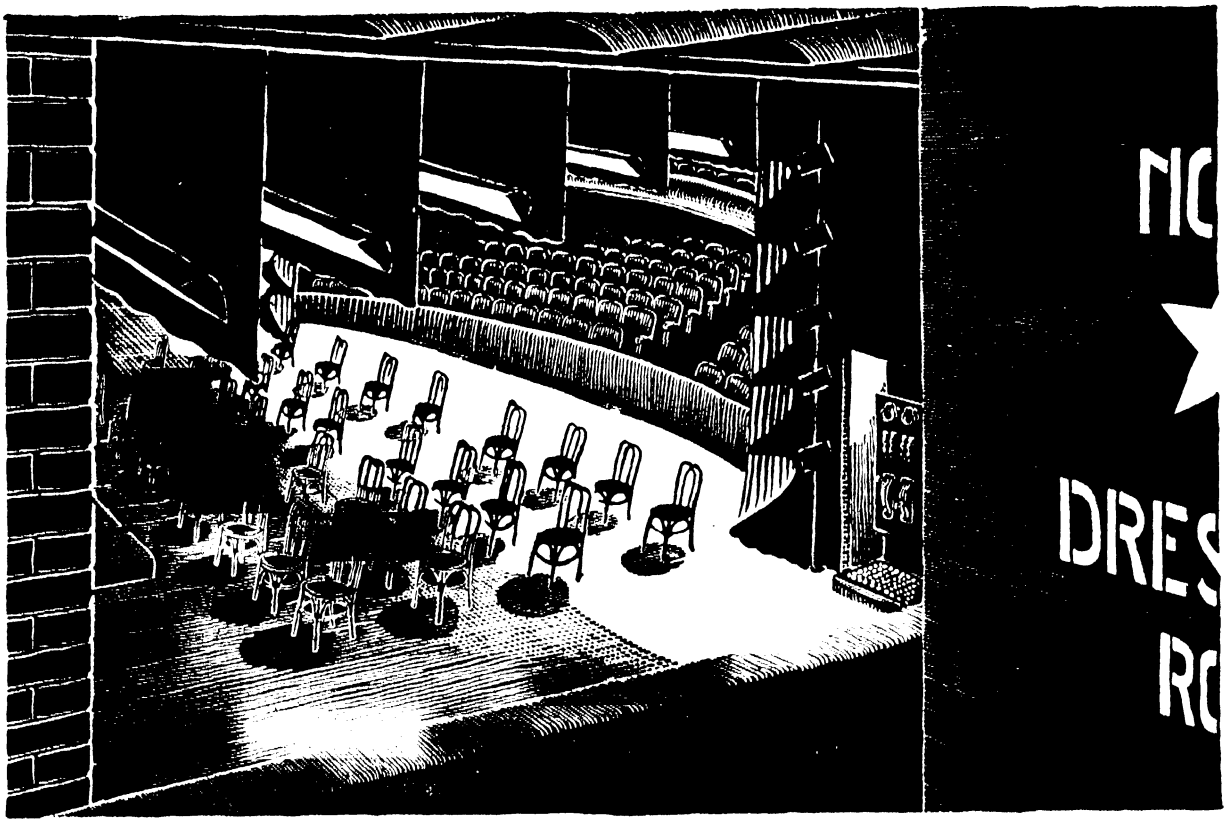
George: Yeah, sure.

Mrs. Gibbs [*putting her arm through her husband's*]: Lord, what a fool I am: I'm trembling all over. There's nothing to tremble about.

Stage Manager: Thank you! Thank you!

Now we're ready to go on with the wedding. [*While he talks, the*

actors remove the chairs and tables and trellises from the Gibbs and Webb homes.



They arrange the pews for the church in the back of the stage. The congregation will sit facing the back wall. The aisle of the church is in the middle of the scene. A small platform is placed against the back wall on which the STAGE MANAGER *as Minister can stand.*]

There are a lot of things to be said about a wedding; there are a lot of thoughts that go on during a wedding. We can't get them all into one wedding, naturally, and especially not into a wedding at Grover's Corners where they're awfully plain and short.

In this wedding I play the minister. That gives me the right to say a few more things about it. For a while now, the play gets pretty serious. Y'see, some churches say that marriage is a sacrament. I don't quite know what that means, but I can guess. Like Mrs. Gibbs said a few minutes ago: People were made to live two-by-two.

This is a good wedding, but people are so put together that even at a good wedding there's a lot of confusion way down deep in people's minds and we thought that that ought to be in our play, too.

The real hero of this scene isn't on the stage at all, and you know who that is. It's like what one of those European fellas said: every child born into the world is Nature's attempt to make a perfect human being. Well, we've seen nature pushing and contriving for some time now. We all know that Nature's interested in quantity; but I think she's interested in quality, too,—that's why I'm in the ministry.—Maybe she's trying to make another good governor for New Hampshire.

And don't forget the other witnesses at this wedding,—the ancestors. Millions of them. Most of them set out to live two-by-two, also. Millions of them.

Well, that's all my sermon. 'Twan't very long, anyway. [*The organ starts playing Handel's "Largo." The congregation streams into the church and sits in silence.* MRS. WEBB, *on the way to her place, turns back and speaks to the audience.*]

Mrs. Webb: I don't know why on earth I should be crying. I suppose there's nothing to cry about. It came over me at breakfast this morning; there was Emily eating her breakfast as she's done for seventeen years and now she's going off to eat it in someone else's house. I suppose that's it. And Emily! She suddenly said: I can't eat another mouthful, and she put her head down on the table and *she* cried. [*She starts toward her seat in the church, but turns back and adds:*] Oh, I've got to say it: you know, there's something downright cruel about sending our girls out into marriage this way.

I hope some of her girl friends have told her a thing or two. It's cruel, I know, but I couldn't bring myself to say anything. I went into it blind as a bat myself. The whole world's wrong, that's what's the matter. There they come. [*She hurries to her place in the pew.* GEORGE *starts to come down the right aisle of the theatre, through the audience. Suddenly three members of his baseball team appear by the right proscenium pillar and start whistling and catcalling to him. They are dressed for the ball field.*]

The Baseball Players: Eh, George, George! Hsst—yaow! If things don't go right, call us in. We know what to do. Eh, fellas? Yaow! George, don't look so innocent, you old geezer. We know what you're thinking. Don't disgrace the team, big boy. Whoo-oo-oo.

Stage Manager: All right! All right! That'll do. That's enough of that. [*Smiling, he pushes them off the stage. They lean back to shout a few more catcalls.*]

There used to be an awful lot of that kind of thing at weddings in the old days,—Rome, and later. We're more civilized now,—so they

say. [*The choir starts singing "Love Divine, All Love Excelling—."* GEORGE *has reached the stage. He stares at the congregation a moment, then takes a few steps of withdrawal, toward the right proscenium pillar.*]

George [*darkly, to himself*]: I wish I were back at school. . . . I don't want to get married. [*His mother has left her seat and come toward him. She stops, looking at him anxiously.*]

Mrs. Gibbs: George, what's the matter?

George: Ma, I don't want to grow *old.* Why's everybody pushing me so?

Mrs. Gibbs: Why, George . . . you wanted it.

George: Why do I have to get married at all? Listen, Ma, for the last time I ask you—

Mrs. Gibbs: No, no, George . . . you're a man now.

George: Listen, Ma, you never listen to me. All I want to do is to be a fella . . . why do—

Mrs. Gibbs: George! If anyone should hear you! Now stop. Why, I'm ashamed of you!

George [*passing his hand over his forehead*]: What's the matter? I've been dreaming. Where's Emily?

Mrs. Gibbs: Gracious! You gave me such a turn.

George: Cheer up, Ma. What are you looking so funny for? Cheer up; I'm getting married.

Mrs. Gibbs: Let me catch my breath a minute.

George: Now, Ma, you save Thursday nights. Emily and I are coming over to dinner every Thursday night . . . you'll see. Ma, what are you crying for? Come on; we've got to get ready for this. [*In the meantime,* EMILY, *in white and wearing her wedding veil, has come through the audience and mounted on to the stage. She too draws back when she sees the congregation in the church. The choir begins: "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds."*]

Emily: I never felt so alone in my whole life. And George over there, looking so . . . ! I *hate* him. I wish I were dead. Papa! Papa!

Mr. Webb [*leaves his seat in the pews and comes toward her anxiously*]: Emily! Emily! Now don't get upset. . . .

Emily: But, Papa,—I don't want to get married. . . .

Mr. Webb: Sh-sh—Emily. Everything's all right.

Emily: Why can't I stay for a while just as I am? Let's go away.

Mr. Webb: No, no, Emily. Now stop and think.

Emily: Don't you remember that you used to say,—all the time

you used to say that I was *your* girl. There must be lots of places we can go to. Let's go away. I'll work for you. I could keep house.

Mr. Webb: Sh. . . . You mustn't think of such things. You're just nervous, Emily. Now, now,—you're marrying the best young fellow in the world. George is a fine fellow.

Emily: But, Papa,—

Mr. Webb: George! George! [MRS. GIBBS *returns to her seat.* GEORGE *hears* MR. WEBB *and looks up.* MR. WEBB *beckons to him. They move to the center of the stage.*] I'm giving away my daughter, George. Do you think you can take care of her?

George: Mr. Webb, I want to . . . I want to try. Emily, I'm going to do my best. I love you, Emily. I need you.

Emily: Well, if you love me, help me. All I want is someone to love me.

George: I will, Emily.

Emily: If ever I'm sick or in trouble, that's what I mean.

George: Emily, I'll try. I'll try.

Emily: And I mean for *ever.* Do you hear? For ever and ever. [*They fall into each other's arms. The "March" from* Lohengrin *is heard.*]

Mr. Webb: Come, they're waiting for us. Now you know it'll be all right. Come, quick. [GEORGE *slips away and takes his place beside the* STAGE MANAGER-CLERGYMAN. EMILY *proceeds up the aisle on her father's arm.*]

Stage Manager: Do you, George, take this woman, Emily, to be your wedded wife, to have . . . [MRS. SOAMES *has been sitting in the last row of the congregation. She now turns to her neighbors and in a shrill voice says:*]

Mrs. Soames: Perfectly lovely wedding! Loveliest wedding I ever saw. Oh, I do love a good wedding, don't you? Doesn't she make a lovely bride?

George: I do.

Stage Manager: Do you, Emily, take this man, George, to be your wedded husband,—

Mrs. Soames: Don't know *when* I've seen such a lovely wedding. But I always cry. Don't know why it is, but I always cry. I just like to see young people happy, don't you? Oh, I think it's lovely. [*The ring. The kiss. The stage is suddenly arrested into silent tableau.*]

[*The* STAGE MANAGER, *his eyes on the distance, says to the audience:*] I've married two hundred couples in my day. Do I believe in it? I don't know. M. . . . marries N. . . . millions of them. The

cottage, the gocart, the Sunday afternoon drives in the Ford, the first rheumatism, the grandchildren, the second rheumatism, the deathbed, the reading of the will,— Once in a thousand times it's interesting. Well, let's have Mendelssohn's "Wedding March"! [*The organ picks up the March. The bride and groom come down the aisle, radiant, but trying to be very dignified.*]

Mrs. Soames: Aren't they a lovely couple? Oh, I've never been to such a nice wedding. I'm sure they'll be happy. I always say: *happiness,* that's the great thing! The important thing is to be happy. [*The bride and groom reach the steps leading into the audience. A bright light is thrown upon them. They descend into the auditorium and run up the aisle joyously.*]

Stage Manager: That's all the Second Act. Ten minutes' intermission, folks.

ACT THREE

During the intermission the audience has seen the actors arranging the stage. On the right-hand side, a little right of the center,

ten or twelve ordinary chairs have been placed in three openly spaced rows facing the audience. These are graves in the cemetery.

Towards the end of the intermission the actors enter and take their places. The front row contains: toward the center of the stage, an empty chair; then MRS. GIBBS; SIMON STIMSON. *The second row contains, among others,* MRS. SOAMES. *The third row has* WALLY WEBB. *The dead sit in a quiet without stiffness, and in a patience without listlessness.*

The STAGE MANAGER *takes his accustomed place and waits for the house-lights to go down.*

Stage Manager: This time nine years have gone by, friends—summer, 1913. Gradual changes in Grover's Corners. Horses are getting rarer. Farmers coming into town in Fords. Chief difference is in the young people, far as I can see. They want to go to the moving pictures all the time. They want to wear clothes like they see there . . . want to be citified.

Everybody locks their house doors now at night. Ain't been any burglars in town yet, but everybody's heard about 'em. But you'd be surprised though—on the whole, things don't change much at Grover's Corners.

Guess you want to know what all these chairs are here fur. Smarter ones have guessed it already. I don't know how you feel about such things; but this certainly is a beautiful place. It's on a hilltop—a windy hilltop—lots of sky, lots of clouds,—often lots of sun and moon and stars. You come up here on a fine afternoon and you can see range on range of hills—awful blue they are—up there by Lake Sunapee and Lake Winnapassaukee . . . and way up, if you've got a glass, you can see the White Mountains and Mt. Washington—where North Conway and Conway is. And, of course, our favorite mountain, Mt. Monadnock's, right here—and all around it lie these towns—Jaffrey, 'n East Jaffrey, 'n Peterborough, 'n Dublin and [*then pointing down in the audience*] there, quite a ways down is Grover's Corners. Yes, beautiful spot up here. Mountain laurel and li-lacks. I often wonder why people like to be buried in Woodlawn and Brooklyn when they might pass the same time up here in New Hampshire.

Over in that corner—[*pointing to stage left*]—are the old stones, —1670, 1680. Strong-minded people that come a long way to be independent. Summer people walk around there laughing at the funny words on the tombstones . . . it don't do any harm. And

genealogists come up from Boston—get paid by city people for looking up their ancestors. They want to make sure they're Daughters of the American Revolution and of the *Mayflower*. . . . Well, I guess that don't do any harm, either. Wherever you come near the human race, there's layers and layers of nonsense. . . .

Over there are some Civil War veterans too. Iron flags on their graves. . . . New Hampshire boys . . . had a notion that the Union ought to be kept together, though they'd never seen more than fifty miles of it themselves. All they knew was the name, friends—the United States of America. The United States of America. And they went and died about it.

This here is the new part of the cemetery. Here's your friend, Mrs. Gibbs. 'N let me see— Here's Mr. Stimson, organist at the Congregational Church. And over there's Mrs. Soames who enjoyed the wedding so—you remember? Oh, and a lot of others. And Editor Webb's boy, Wallace, whose appendix burst while he was on a Boy Scout trip to Crawford Notch.

Yes, an awful lot of sorrow has sort of quieted down up here. People just wild with grief have brought their relatives up to this hill. We all know how it is . . . and then time . . . and sunny days . . . and rainy days . . . 'n snow . . . tz-tz-tz. We're all glad they're in a beautiful place and we're coming up here ourselves when our fit's over.

This certainly is an important part of Grover's Corners. A lot of thoughts come up here, night and day, but there's no post office.

Now I'm going to tell you some things you know already. You know'm as well as I do; but you don't take'm out and look at'm very often.

I don't care what they say with their mouths—everybody knows that *something* is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars . . . everybody knows in their bones that *something* is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being. [*Pause*]

You know as well as I do that the dead don't stay interested in us living people for very long. Gradually, gradually, they let hold of the earth . . . and the ambitions they had . . . and the pleasures they had . . . and the things they suffered . . . and the

people they loved. They get weaned away from earth—that's the way I put it,—weaned away.

Yes, they stay here while the earth-part of 'em burns away, burns out, and all that time they slowly get indifferent to what's goin' on in Grover's Corners. They're waitin'. They're waitin' for something that they feel is comin'. Something important and great. Aren't they waitin' for the eternal part in them to come out clear?

Some of the things they're going to say maybe'll hurt your feelings —but that's the way it is: mother 'n daughter . . . husband 'n wife . . . enemy 'n enemy . . . money 'n miser . . . all those terribly important things kind of grow pale around here. And what's left? What's left when memory's gone, and your identity, Mrs. Smith? [*He looks at the audience a minute, then turns to the stage.*]

Well! There are some *living* people. There's Joe Stoddard, our undertaker, supervising a new-made grave. And here comes a Grover's Corners boy that left town to go out West. [JOE STODDARD *has hovered about in the background.* SAM CRAIG *enters left, wiping his forehead from the exertion. He carries an umbrella and strolls front.*]

Sam Craig: Good afternoon, Joe Stoddard.

Joe Stoddard: Good afternoon, good afternoon. Let me see now: do I know you?

Sam Craig: I'm Sam Craig.

Joe Stoddard: Gracious' sakes alive! Of all people! I should'a knowed you'd be back for the funeral. You've been away a long time, Sam.

Sam Craig: Yes, I've been away over twelve years. I'm in business out in Buffalo now, Joe. But I was in the East when I got news of my cousin's death, so I thought I'd combine things a little and come and see the old home. You look well.

Joe Stoddard: Yes, yes, can't complain. Very sad, our journey today, Samuel.

Sam Craig: Yes.

Joe Stoddard: Yes, yes. I always say, I hate to supervise when a young person is taken. I see you brought your umbrella. It's going to rain and make it sadder still, seems like. They'll be here in a few minutes now. I had to come here early today—my son's supervisin' at the home.

Sam Craig [*reading stones*]: Old Farmer McCarty, I used to do chores for him—after school. He had the lumbago.

Joe Stoddard: Yes, we brought Farmer McCarty here a number of years ago now.

Sam Craig [*staring at* MRS. GIBBS'S *knees*]: Why, this is my Aunt Julia. . . . I'd forgotten that she'd . . . of course, of course.

Joe Stoddard: Yes, Doc Gibbs lost his wife two-three years ago . . . about this time. And today's another pretty bad blow for him, too.

Mrs. Gibbs [*to* SIMON STIMSON *in an even voice*]: That's my sister Carey's boy, Sam. . . . Sam Craig.

Simon Stimson: I'm always uncomfortable when *they're* around.

Mrs. Gibbs: Simon.

Simon Stimson: They and their nonsense and their damned glee at being alive. . . .

Mrs. Gibbs: Simon, be patient. . . .

Sam Craig: Do they choose their own verses much, Joe?

Joe Stoddard: No . . . not usual. Mostly the bereaved pick a verse.

Sam Craig: Doesn't sound like Aunt Julia. There aren't many of those Hersey sisters left now. Let me see: where are . . . I wanted to look at my father's and mother's . . .

Joe Stoddard: Over there with the Craigs. . . . Avenue F.

Sam Craig [*reading* SIMON STIMSON'S *epitaph*]: He was organist at church, wasn't he?—Hm, drank a lot, we used to say.

Joe Stoddard: Nobody was supposed to know about it. He'd seen a peck of trouble. Those musical fellas ain't like the rest of us, I reckon. [*Behind his hand*] Took his own life, y' know?

Sam Craig: Oh, did he?

Joe Stoddard: Hung himself in the attic. They tried to hush it up, but of course it got around. His wife's just married Senator Barstow. Many a time I've seen her, eleven o'clock at night, goin' around the streets huntin' for her husband. Think o' that! Now she's married to Senator Barstow over at Manchester. He chose his own epy-taph. You can see it there. It ain't a verse exactly.

Sam Craig: Why, it's just some notes of music—what is it?

Joe Stoddard: Oh, I wouldn't know. It was wrote up in the Boston papers at the time.

Sam Craig: Joe, what did she die of?

Joe Stoddard: Who?

Sam Craig: My cousin.

Joe Stoddard: Oh, didn't you know? Had some trouble bringing

a baby into the world. Let's see, today's Friday—'twas almost a week ago now.

Sam Craig [*putting up his umbrella*]: Did the baby live?

Joe Stoddard [*raising his coat collar*]: No. 'Twas her second, though. There's a little boy 'bout four years old.

Sam Craig: The grave's going to be over there?

Joe Stoddard: Yes, there ain't much more room over here among the Gibbses, so they're opening up a whole new Gibbs section over by Avenue B. You'll excuse me now. I see they're comin'.

The Dead [*not lugubrious; and strongly New England in accent*]: Rain'll do a lot of good.—Yes, reckon things were gettin' downright parched. Don't look like it's goin' to last long, tho'.—Lemuel, you remember the floods of '79? Carried away all the bridges but one. [*From left to right, at the back of the stage, comes a procession. Four men carry a casket, invisible to us. All the rest are under umbrellas. One can vaguely see:* DR. GIBBS, GEORGE, *the* WEBBS, *etc. They gather about a grave in the back center of the stage, a little to the left of center.*]

Mrs. Soames: Who is it, Julia?

Mrs. Gibbs [*without raising her eyes*]: My daughter-in-law, Emily Webb.

Mrs. Soames [*a little surprised, but no emotion*]: Well, I declare! The road up here must have been awful muddy. What did she die of, Julia?

Mrs. Gibbs: In childbirth.

Mrs. Soames: Childbirth. [*Almost with a laugh*] I'd forgotten all about that! My, wasn't life awful—[*with a sigh*]—and wonderful.

Simon Stimson [*with a sideways glance*]: Wonderful, was it?

Mrs. Gibbs: Simon! Now, remember!

Mrs. Soames: I remember Emily's wedding. Wasn't it a lovely wedding! And I remember her reading the class poem at Graduation Exercises. Emily was one of the brightest girls ever graduated from High School. I've heard Principal Wilkins say so time after time. I called on them at their new farm, just before I died. Perfectly beautiful farm.

A Woman from Among the Dead: It's on the same road we lived on.

A Man Among the Dead: Yes, just near the Elks' picnic grounds. Remember, Joe? By the lake where we always used to go Fourth

of July? Right smart farm. [*They subside. The group by the grave starts singing "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds."*]

A Woman Among the Dead: I always liked that hymn. I was hopin' they'd sing a hymn.

A Man Among the Dead: My wife—my second wife—knows all the verses of about every hymn there is. It just beats the Dutch . . . she can go through them all by heart. [*Pause. Suddenly* EMILY *appears from among the umbrellas. She is wearing a white dress. Her hair is down her back and tied by a white ribbon like a little girl. She comes slowly, gazing wonderingly at the dead, a little dazed. She stops halfway and smiles faintly.*]

Emily: Hello.

Voices Among the Dead: Hello, Emily. H'lo, M's. Gibbs.

Emily: Hello, Mother Gibbs.

Mrs. Gibbs: Emily.

Emily: Hello. [*The hymn continues.* EMILY *looks back at the funeral. She says dreamily:*] It's raining.

Mrs. Gibbs: Yes. . . . They'll be gone soon, dear. Just rest yourself. [EMILY *sits down in the empty chair by* MRS. GIBBS.]

Emily: It seems thousands and thousands of years since I . . . How stupid they all look. They don't have to look like that!

Mrs. Gibbs: Don't look at them now, dear. They'll be gone soon.

Emily: Oh, I wish I'd been here a long time. I don't like being new here.—How do you do, Mr. Stimson?

Simon Stimson: How do you do, Emily. [EMILY *continues to look about her with a wan and wondering smile; but for a moment her eyes do not return to the funeral group. As though to shut out from her mind the thought of that group she starts speaking to* MRS. GIBBS *with a touch of nervousness.*]

Emily: Mother Gibbs, George and I have made that farm into just the best place you ever saw. We thought of you all the time. We wanted to show you the new barn and a great long ce-ment drinking fountain for the stock. We bought that out of the money you left us.

Mrs. Gibbs: I did?

Emily: Don't you remember, Mother Gibbs—the legacy you left us? Why, it was over three hundred and fifty dollars.

Mrs. Gibbs: Yes, yes, Emily.

Emily: Well, there's a patent device on this drinking fountain so that it never overflows, Mother Gibbs, and it never sinks below a certain mark they have there. It's fine. [*Her voice trails off and her*

eyes return to the funeral group.] It won't be the same to George without me, but it's a lovely farm. [*Suddenly she looks directly at* MRS. GIBBS.] Live people don't understand, do they?

Mrs. Gibbs: No, dear—not very much.

Emily: They're sort of shut up in little boxes, aren't they? I feel as though I knew them last a thousand years ago. . . . My boy is spending the day at Mrs. Carter's. [*She sees* MR. CARTER *among the dead.*] Oh, Mr. Carter, my little boy is spending the day at your house.

Mr. Carter: Is he?

Emily: Yes, he loves it there.—Mother Gibbs, we have a Ford, too. Never gives any trouble. I don't drive, though. Mother Gibbs, when does this feeling go away?—Of being . . . one of *them?* How long does it . . . ?

Mrs. Gibbs: Sh! dear. Just wait and be patient.

Emily [*with a sigh*]: I know.—Look, they're finished. They're going.

Mrs. Gibbs: Sh—. [*The umbrellas leave the stage.* DR. GIBBS *comes over to his wife's grave and stands before it a moment.* EMILY *looks up at his face.* MRS. GIBBS *does not raise her eyes.*]

Emily: Look! Father Gibbs is bringing some of my flowers to you. He looks just like George, doesn't he? Oh, Mother Gibbs, I never realized before how troubled and how . . . how in the dark live persons are. From morning till night, that's all they are—troubled. [DR. GIBBS *goes off.*]

The Dead: Little cooler than it was.—Yes, that rain's cooled it off a little. Those North East winds always do the same thing, don't they? If it isn't a rain, it's a three-day blow.—Reckon it may clear up before night; often does. [*A patient calm falls on the stage. The* STAGE MANAGER *appears at his proscenium pillar, smoking.* EMILY *sits up abruptly with an idea.*]

Emily: But, Mother Gibbs, one can go back; one can go back there again . . . into living. I feel it. I know it. Why, just then for a moment I was thinking about . . . about the farm . . . and for a minute I *was* there, and my baby was on my lap as plain as day.

Mrs. Gibbs: Yes, of course you can.

Emily: I can go back there and live all those days over again . . . why not?

Mrs. Gibbs: All I can say is, Emily, don't.

Emily [*takes a few steps toward the* STAGE MANAGER]: But it's true, isn't it? I can go and live . . . back there . . . again.

Stage Manager: Yes, some have tried—but they soon come back here.

Mrs. Gibbs: Don't do it, Emily.

Mrs. Soames: Emily, don't. It's not what you think it'd be.

Emily: But I won't live over a sad day. I'll choose a happy one—I'll choose the day I first knew that I loved George. Why should that be painful? [*They are silent. Her question turns to the* STAGE MANAGER.]

Stage Manager: You not only live it; but you watch yourself living it.

Emily: Yes?

Stage Manager: And as you watch it, you see the thing that they—down there—never know. You see the future. You know what's going to happen afterwards.

Emily: But is that—painful? Why?

Mrs. Gibbs: That's not the only reason why you shouldn't do it, Emily. When you've been here longer you'll see that our life here is our hope that soon we'll forget all that, and think only of what's ahead, and be ready for what's ahead. When you've been here longer you'll understand.

Emily [*softly*]: But, Mother Gibbs, how can I ever forget that life? It's all I know. It's all I had. [MRS. GIBBS *does not answer.*] Mr. Stimson, did you go back?

Simon Stimson [*sharply*]: No.

Emily: Did you, Mrs. Soames?

Mrs. Soames: Oh, Emily. It isn't wise. Really, it isn't. All we can do is just warn you. It won't be what you expect.

Emily [*slowly*]: But it's a thing I must know for myself. I'll choose a happy day, anyway.

Mrs. Gibbs: No. At least, choose an unimportant day. Choose the least important day in your life. It will be important enough.

Emily [*to the* STAGE MANAGER]: Then it can't be since I was married; or since the baby was born. I can choose a birthday at least, can't I?—I choose my twelfth birthday.

Stage Manager: All right. February 11th, 1899. A Tuesday.—Do you want any special time of day?

Emily: Oh, I want the whole day.

Stage Manager: We'll begin at dawn. You remember it had been snowing for several days; but it had stopped the night before, and they had begun clearing the roads. The sun's coming up.

Emily [*with a cry*]: There's Main Street . . . why, that's Mr.

Morgan's drugstore before he changed it! . . . And there's the livery stable. [*She walks toward the back of the stage.*]

Stage Manager: Yes, it's 1899. This is fourteen years ago.

Emily: Oh, that's the town I knew as a little girl. And, look, there's the old white fence that used to be around our house. Oh, I'd forgotten that! Oh, I love it so! Are *they* inside?

Stage Manager: Yes, your mother'll be coming downstairs in a minute to make breakfast.

Emily [*softly*]: Will she?

Stage Manager: And you remember: your father had been away for several days; he came back on the early morning train.

Emily: No . . . ?

Stage Manager: He'd been back to his college to make a speech—in Western New York, at Clinton.

Emily: Look! There's Howie Newsome. There's our policeman. But he's *dead;* he *died.* [*The* STAGE MANAGER *retires to his corner. The voices of* HOWIE NEWSOME, CONSTABLE WARREN *and* JOE CROWELL, JR., *are heard at the left of the stage.*]

Howie Newsome: Whoa, Bessie!—Bessie! 'Morning, Bill.

Bill: Morning, Howie.

Howie Newsome: You're up early.

Bill: Been rescuin' a party; darn near froze to death, down by Polish Town thar. Got drunk and lay out in the snowdrifts. Thought he was in bed when I shook'm.

Emily: Why, there's Joe Crowell. . . .

Joe Crowell: Good morning, Mr. Warren. 'Morning, Howie. [MRS. WEBB *has appeared in her kitchen, but* EMILY *does not see her until she calls.*]

Mrs. Webb: Chil-*dren!* Wally! Emily! . . . Time to get up.

Emily: Mamma, here I am! Oh! how young Mamma looks! I didn't know Mamma was ever that young. Oh!

Mrs. Webb: You can come and dress by the kitchen fire, if you like; but hurry. [HOWIE NEWSOME *has entered along Main Street and brings the milk to* MRS. WEBB'S *door.*] Good morning, Mr. Newsome. Whhhh—it's cold.

Howie Newsome: Ten below by my barn, Mrs. Webb.

Mrs. Webb: Think of it! Keep yourself wrapped up. [*She takes her bottles in, shuddering.*]

Emily [*with an effort*]: Mamma, I can't find my blue hair ribbon anywhere.

Mrs. Webb: Just open your eyes, dear, that's all. I laid it out for

you special—on the dresser, there. If it were a snake it would bite you.

Emily: Yes, yes. . . . [*She puts her hand on her heart.* MR. WEBB *comes along Main Street, where he meets* CONSTABLE WARREN.]

Mr. Webb: Good morning, Bill.

Bill: Good morning, Mr. Webb. You're up early.

Mr. Webb: Yes, just been back to my old college in New York State. Been any trouble here?

Bill: Well, I was called up this mornin' to rescue a Polish fella—darn near froze to death he was.

Mr. Webb: We must get it in the paper.

Bill: 'Twan't much.

Emily [*whispers*]: Papa. [MR. WEBB *shakes the snow off his feet and enters his house.*]

Mr. Webb: Good morning, Mother.

Mrs. Webb: How did it go, Charles?

Mr. Webb: Oh, fine, I guess. I told'm a few things.

Mrs. Webb: Did you sit up on the train all night?

Mr. Webb: Yes. Never could sleep on a Pullman anyway.

Mrs. Webb: Charles, seems to me—we're rich enough so that you could sleep in a train once in a while.

Mr. Webb: Everything all right here?

Mrs. Webb: Yes—can't think of anything that's happened, special. Been right cold. Howie Newsome says it's ten below over to his barn.

Mr. Webb: Yes, well, it's colder than that at Hamilton College. Students' ears are falling off. It ain't Christian.—Paper have any mistakes in it?

Mrs. Webb: None that I noticed. Coffee's ready when you want it. [*He starts upstairs.*] Charles! Don't forget; it's Emily's birthday. Did you remember to get her something?

Mr. Webb [*patting his pocket*]: Yes, I've got something here.

Mrs. Webb: Goodness' sakes! I hope she likes what I got for her. I hunted hard enough for it. Child*ren!* Hurry up! Hurry up!

Mr. Webb: Where's my girl? Where's my birthday girl? [*He goes off left.*]

Mrs. Webb: Don't interrupt her now, Charles. You can see her at breakfast. She's slow enough as it is. Hurry up, children! It's seven o'clock. Now, I don't want to call you again.

Emily [*softly, more in wonder than in grief*]: I can't bear it.

They're so young and beautiful. Why did they ever have to get old? Mamma, I'm here. I'm grown up. I love you all, everything.—I can't look at everything hard enough. There's the butternut tree. [*She wanders up Main Street.*]

There's Mr. Morgan's drugstore. And there's the High School, for ever and ever, and ever. And there's the Congregational Church where I got married. Oh, dear. Oh, dear. Oh, dear! [*The* STAGE MANAGER *beckons partially to her. He points to the house. She says a breathless "yes" and goes to the house.*] Good morning, Mamma.

Mrs. Webb [*at the foot of the stairs, kissing her in a matter-of-fact way*]: Well, now, dear, a very happy birthday to my girl and many happy returns. There are some surprises waiting for you on the kitchen table.

Emily: Oh, Mamma, you *shouldn't* have. [*She throws an anguished glance at the* STAGE MANAGER.] I can't—I can't.

Mrs. Webb [*facing the audience, over her stove*]: But birthday or no birthday, I want you to eat your breakfast good and slow. I want you to grow up and be a good strong girl. [*She goes to the stairs and calls.*] Wally! Wally, wash yourself good. Everything's getting cold down here. [*She returns to the stove with her back to* EMILY. EMILY *opens her parcels.*] That in the blue paper is from your Aunt Carrie and I reckon you can guess who brought the post card album. I found it on the doorstep when I brought in the milk—George Gibbs . . . must have come over in the cold pretty early . . . right nice of him.

Emily [*to herself*]: Oh, George! I'd forgotten that. . . .

Mrs. Webb: Chew that bacon slow. It'll help keep you warm on a cold day.

Emily [*beginning softly but urgently*]: Oh, Mamma, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. Mamma, fourteen years have gone by. I'm dead. You're a grandmother, Mamma. I married George Gibbs, Mamma. Wally's dead, too. Mamma, his appendix burst on a camping trip to North Conway. We felt just terrible about it—don't you remember? But, just for a moment now we're all together. Mamma, just for a moment we're happy. Let's look at one another.

Mrs. Webb: That in the yellow paper is something I found in the attic among your grandmother's things. You're old enough to wear it now, and I thought you'd like it.

Emily: And this is from you. Why, Mamma, it's just lovely and it's just what I wanted. It's beautiful! [*She flings her arms around*

her mother's neck. Her mother goes on with her cooking, but is pleased.]

Mrs. Webb: Well, I hoped you'd like it. Hunted all over. Your Aunt Norah couldn't find one in Concord, so I had to send all the way to Boston. [*Laughing*] Wally has something for you, too. He made it at Manual Training class and he's very proud of it. Be sure you make a big fuss about it.—Your father has a surprise for you, too; don't know what it is myself. Sh—here he comes.

Mr. Webb [*off stage*]: Where's my girl? Where's my birthday girl?

Emily [*in a loud voice to the* STAGE MANAGER]: I can't. I can't go on. Oh! Oh. It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another. [*She breaks down sobbing. At a gesture from the* STAGE MANAGER, MRS. WEBB *disappears.*] I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed. Take me back—up the hill—to my grave. But first: Wait! One more look. Good-by, good-by, world. Good-by, Grover's Corners . . . Mamma and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking . . . and Mamma's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths . . . and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you. [*She looks toward the* STAGE MANAGER *and asks abruptly, through her tears:*] Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every, every minute?

Stage Manager: No. [*Pause*] The saints and poets, maybe—they do some.

Emily: I'm ready to go back. [*She returns to her chair beside* MRS. GIBBS.] Mother Gibbs, I should have listened to you. Now I want to be quiet for a while.—Oh, Mother Gibbs, I saw it all. I saw your garden.

Mrs. Gibbs: Did you, dear?

Emily: That's all human beings are!—Just blind people.

Mrs. Gibbs: Look, it's clearing up. The stars are coming out.

Emily: Oh, Mr. Stimson, I should have listened to them.

Simon Stimson [*with mounting violence; bitingly*]: Yes, now you know. Now you know! That's what it was to be alive. To move about in a cloud of ignorance; to go up and down trampling on the feelings of those . . . of those about you. To spend and waste time as though you had a million years. To be always at the mercy of one self-centered passion, or another. Now you know—that's the happy existence you wanted to go back and see. Did you shout to 'em? Did you call to 'em?

Emily: Yes, I did.

Simon Stimson: Now you know them as they are: in ignorance and blindness.

Mrs. Gibbs [*spiritedly*]: Simon Stimson, that ain't the whole truth and you know it. [*The dead have begun to stir.*]

The Dead: Lemuel, wind's coming up, seems like.—Oh, dear,—I keep remembering things tonight.—It's right cold for June, ain't it?

Mrs. Gibbs: Look what you've done, you and your rebellious spirit stirring us up here.—Emily, look at that star. I forget its name.

The Dead: I'm getting to know them all, but I don't know their names.—My boy Joel was a sailor,—knew 'em all. He'd set on the porch evenings and tell 'em all by name. Yes, sir, it was wonderful. —A star's mighty good company.—Yes, yes.—Yes, 'tis.

Simon Stimson: Here's one of *them* coming.

The Dead: That's funny. 'Tain't no time for one of them to be here.—Goodness' sakes.

Emily: Mother Gibbs, it's George.

Mrs. Gibbs: Sh, dear. You just rest yourself.

Emily: It's George. [GEORGE *enters from the left, and slowly comes toward them.*]

A Man from Among the Dead: And my boy, Joel, who knew the stars—he used to say it took millions of years for that speck o' light to git to the earth. Don't seem like a body could believe it, but that's what he used to say—millions of years.

Another: That's what they say. [GEORGE *flings himself on* EMILY'S *grave.*]

The Dead: Goodness! That ain't no way to behave!—He ought to be home.

Emily: Mother Gibbs?

Mrs. Gibbs: Yes, Emily?

Emily: They don't understand much, do they?

Mrs. Gibbs: No, dear, not very much.

[*The* STAGE MANAGER *appears at the right, one hand on a dark curtain which he slowly draws across the scene. In the distance a clock is heard striking the hour very faintly.*]

Stage Manager: Most everybody's asleep in Grover's Corners. There are a few lights on: Shorty Hawkins, down at the depot, has just watched the Albany train go by. And at the livery stable somebody's setting up late and talking.—Yes, it's clearing up. There are the stars—doing their old, old criss-cross journeys in the sky.

Scholars haven't settled the matter yet, but they seem to think there are no living beings up there. They're just chalk . . . or fire. Only this one is straining away, straining away all the time to make something of itself. The strain's so bad that every sixteen hours everybody lies down and gets a rest. [*He winds his watch.*] Hm. . . . Eleven o'clock in Grover's Corners.—You get a good rest, too. Good night.

VII. Comedy

NOEL COWARD

THEORIES differ as to why we laugh. Aristotle defined the ludicrous as a kind of shortcoming or ugliness which does no one harm, citing for an example the comic mask worn by actors in the Greek theatre, and pointing out that the mask is ugly and distorted without causing pain. Kant thought the source of the comic to be an expectation that comes to nothing, that is, expecting something and being disappointed. According to Freud, laughter arises through a release from inhibitions—an explanation for laughter provoked by the risqué story. And Henri Bergson wrote a book proving that laughter is social; that is, we laugh at a person or group deviating from what society believes to be normal. Painless ugliness, disappointment, freedom from inhibition, eccentricity—these theories may be summed up in the one word "incongruity." But this compact definition does not satisfy all of the critics. Max Eastman, for example, contends that "incongruity" is not inclusive enough, because it includes, he says, only funny perceptions and not wit. In a sense, though, wit may be included in the incongruous, for wit implies a ready appreciation of the incongruous, in words or in ideas.

Because the comic is closely bound up with our lives—with much that we do and say, even in our serious and solemn moments—it is natural that comedy should have an important place in the drama. And so it has, and has had from the time that individual actors began interpreting roles in the *tropes,* those bits of Bible narrative originally sung by cathedral choirs as part of the Mass a thousand years ago. For as soon as these little stories were dramatized, it was

inevitable that an actor with a sense of humor would recognize something comic in the role he had to portray. A domestic quarrel, for example, is a subject for comedy. Thus Noah, in the play about the Flood, was burlesqued as he beat his wife to get her into the Ark. A man in a rage is often funny. So the actor playing King Herod, angry because a new king is born, wore a red beard, brandished a wooden scimitar, and ranted up and down out-heroding Herod.

Comedy came into its own in Queen Elizabeth's age, when the first public theatres were built in England, when playgoing became the popular diversion of all classes of people, and playwriting the occupation of many of the talented men of the time. Playwrights became aware that it paid to make people laugh. Consequently they began to concern themselves with theories of comedy. One of the Elizabethan playwrights, George Chapman, adapted to comedy a medical belief about the composition of the human body. This belief was that the body contained four fluids, or humors: namely, blood, phlegm, choler (or yellow bile), and melancholy (or black bile), and that the proportion in which these humors mixed in one's body determined one's health. A preponderance of blood made one sanguine; of phlegm, phlegmatic, etc. Chapman's theory is that characters are what they are because of their humors, and that they act accordingly. Ben Jonson popularized the theory in *Every Man in His Humor* and *Every Man out of His Humor,* comedies in which the actions of the characters are motivated by their humors. Of course Jonson exaggerated the proportion of the humors in a character to make him act in a particularly ludicrous way. The characters in this kind of comedy, called *comedy of humor,* do what they do because of what they are, not merely because they are manipulated by the playwright. Jonson said he wrote plays to reveal the follies of the times. To do this, he chose comedy, his method being to hold up the weaknesses of mankind to ridicule on the stage. This method of reforming, not by preaching against evil but by making fun of it, is *satire.*

Satire, too, is the note of the Restoration, when playwrights wrote comedies ridiculing the decadent society which stemmed from the court of Charles II. The source of the mirth in this comedy being the affected manners of the leisure class, the comedy came to be called *comedy of manners.* It is an unmoral kind of comedy presenting without censure the pursuit of unprincipled ladies by the rakish courtiers of the Merry Monarch, but making fun of the

studied way in which the pursuit is followed. Depending on a sophisticated society for its characters, it is the most sophisticated of all comedy. Its typical scene is the coffee house or the park. Its plot is usually unimportant or almost non-existent. Its action is the studied manners of highly civilized ladies and gentlemen. It is restrained, polished, elegant. Its scope is limited, for its subject is not mankind, but only part of it.

Today writers of comedy use devices and situations that have proved effective on the stage in the past. A domestic disagreement, for example, has always been a stock subject for comic treatment. The guffaws with which an audience in the theatre today responds to the knock-down, slap-stick quarrelings in Noel Coward's *Private Lives* are of the same kind that must have greeted the antics of Noah and his wife in the mystery plays. Shakespeare used the situation again and again, and in *The Taming of the Shrew* wrote a whole play about nothing else. At the other extreme the situation is presented urbanely by playwrights like Somerset Maugham and S. N. Behrman, whose comedies of manners make their appeal less to the emotions than to the intellect. They are not intended to evoke guffaws. Their test is rather that they shall, as Meredith said, "awaken thoughtful laughter." Accordingly comedy tends to be of two kinds: comedy of character and farce. *Comedy of character* represents action as resulting from character; that is, characters in this kind of comedy do what they do because of what they are. Thus comedy of character is akin to comedy of humor. *Farce,* on the other hand, represents character only broadly, action being more important. In farce the incongruous is represented by such externals as slap-stick movement, odd costumes, and improbable situations. However, both comedy of character and farce depend on the incongruous.

The incongruous implies two elements that are at variance. Incongruity in character means a kind of eccentricity—something that sets the comic character apart from average man. Chapman and Jonson called it a "humor." It is an erratic characteristic, a comic abnormality, motivating the actions of its possessor, the comic character, and thereby seeming to determine the working out of the plot. It is comparable to the tragic flaw of the hero in tragedy. The comic abnormality is usually pointed up by contrasting the comic, or eccentric, character with a normal one. This device is sometimes graphically exemplified in farce, as for example in the "comedy team" composing characters of opposite physical appear-

ances, the tall thin man beside the short fat man. Two thin men or two fat men would not be so funny. So in comedy of character, a play full of comic characters is less amusing than a play in which there are normal characters for foils to the comic ones. In *Private Lives* Noel Coward created the normal Sibyl and Victor as foils to the eccentric Amanda and Elyot. It is true, of course, that to emphasize the contrast Coward has made Sibyl and Victor more stupid than normal persons, just as he has made Amanda and Elyot correspondingly more brilliant. Sibyl and Victor represent society as it is organized and accepted, with its customs, its manners, its morals, that is, its normality—all of which, through the eccentric characters, Coward is laughing at. "I'm glad I'm normal," says Victor smugly. And Amanda's retort epitomizes the attitude of all comic characters toward a normal world: "What an odd thing to be glad about."

Comic characters tend, more than tragic characters, to be types. The tragic character is an individual, alone. The comic character represents many people of the same kind. To underline the types, the writer of comedy sometimes arranges his characters in groups. In *Private Lives* Elyot is paired with Amanda, who is eccentric in the same way that he is, and Victor has a stupid counterpart in Sibyl. In *Hay Fever* Coward contrasts the four eccentric members of the Bliss family with their four comparatively normal guests.

Comedy delights because it provides us with a vicarious release from social restraint. We sympathize with the comic rogue—we like to associate ourselves with him—although we realize that in real life there would be no place for his kind. We are happy, for example, to see Bassanio win Portia in *The Merchant of Venice,* but we would have to admit that his marriage with the beautiful heiress could hardly be a successful one: the careless young fortune hunter would make an improvident husband. Falstaff, the greatest character in all comedy—the unknightly knight who is all that he is not, the most incongruous of men—is amusing in the play *Henry IV;* in real life he would be revolting. And the normal Victor of *Private Lives* would be better fitted to take his place in our real world than the much more interesting and sympathetically drawn Elyot. Whereas the environment in which the hero of tragedy finds himself is a world governed by immutable law which, as we have seen, provides severe punishment, usually death, for him who violates it, the world of comedy is more flexible, not only permitting its hero to transgress but winking at the transgression.

Comedy is not so universal as tragedy. Tragedy, more often than comedy, runs the gamut of human life and experience; comedy tends to be restricted to a particular group or a certain time. Comedy, a kind of social criticism, is concerned with the here and now, with the temporal. Tragedy usually has to do with values that are eternal. Thus comedies have a greater tendency than tragedies to become *dated,* that is, depend for effect on characters or problems of one age only. The situations which provided humor in the Restoration comedies are not so laughable today as they were in the Restoration. Much of the wit in the comedies of Shakespeare falls unappreciated on the ears of a modern audience. With the aid of a glossary we can interpret Elizabethan puns—but by then it is too late to laugh. It is difficult to explain the jokes of our ancestors. If comedy depends on the present for its effect, this dependence is particularly true of the comedy of manners, for manners change with the times. Congreve in the Restoration, Sheridan in the eighteenth century, and Wilde in the 1890's derived comedy by ridiculing the studied manners of their respective eras. No playwright has held up a more polished mirror to modern manners than Noel Coward.

The society which peoples Coward's plays is not one into which this heir of Congreve, Sheridan, and Wilde was born. He was born (on December 16, 1899) into a middle-class English family, living at the time in the little suburb of Teddington, on the Thames. His mother took in roomers to eke out the salary earned by his father, who worked for a music publisher in London. His mother was fond of the theatre, and from the time he was five she used to take him to a play on his birthday. When he was ten, he made his first appearance on the stage—as a court jester in a play called *The Goldfish.* Thereafter his schooling was being constantly interrupted by engagements in one play after another. Thus, like many other playwrights, he came to know the theatre from the back-stage side. Before he was twenty-one his first play, *I'll Leave It to You,* was produced in London, and in 1924 *The Vortex* established him as a dramatist. It also established him as an actor. Within ten years his occupation with the theatre is reputed to have made him five million dollars. No other dramatist had ever met with such success. Today the announcement of a Noel Coward opening is the signal for long queues to line up at the box office and the assurance that elegant motor cars will soon be unloading fashionable audiences to pack the theatre.

The society which these audiences represent is the material for the twentieth-century comedy of manners. And Noel Coward has come to know this society intimately. But his association in real life with the kind of people he mirrors in his plays has not made him unaware of their artificiality. In fact, if he were unable to view them—and himself in association with them—objectively, he could not recognize them as subjects of comedy. To Noel Coward, life in the fashionable circle is itself a comedy of manners. In *Present Indicative* he records his first association with these people and his recognizing their manners as a kind of game, or as a play in which he and they were actors. "I think possibly what surprised them," he writes, "was that I could play the game as well as they could, but then after all, I had learned many different parts by heart long before I had ever met them."

The year after *The Vortex* saw the production of *Easy Virtue,* which, as the author himself says, is similar in theme to *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.* He has written revues and musical comedies. *Post-Mortem,* which he wrote in 1930 but which has not been produced, is an anti-war play, employing expressionistic devices. *Cavalcade* (1931) plays out a pageant of English life—New Year's Eve, 1899, to New Year's Eve, 1930—against a background of popular melodies. *Tonight at 8:30* (1935), a series of nine one-act satires, was produced in a series of three a performance, achieving successful runs in the United States and England.

Noel Coward is not only a playwright. Sometimes he directs his own plays. Sometimes he produces them too. Frequently he acts in them. Some of his plays are "with music." Some call for dancing. Because he is a musician he can, and does, fill roles requiring more than only acting ability. And he dances well, having been coached by Fred Astaire. He has written poetry. He writes novels. In 1934 he appeared in the moving picture *The Scoundrel.* And in 1942 he wrote, produced, directed, and acted the leading role in the moving picture *In Which We Serve.* Many of the songs from his plays have been the popular tunes of the year. *To Step Aside* (1939) is an excellent collection of his short stories. *Present Indicative* (1937) is an entertaining autobiography of his first thirty years. Playwright and scenarist; actor, director, and producer for the moving pictures as well as for the stage; dancer, poet, novelist, short-story writer, song writer, musician, and autobiographer—it is obvious why Noel Coward is the most versatile worker in the theatre today.

Although it was a serious play that won Coward fame and a di-

versity of occupation that has made him the most spectacular figure in the modern theatre, it is his inimitability in writing comedy that has secured him significance in the history of the drama. Much of his comedy is comedy of manners. That society in the twentieth century is characterized by a carelessness of manners does not make it any less a subject for this kind of comedy. In fact, much of the humor in comedy today consists in mirroring an age in which smartness consists not so much in studied manners as in a studied lack of manners. In *Hay Fever* (1925), *Private Lives* (1930), and *Design for Living* (1932) Coward catches the spirit of a society which at present holds the position formerly occupied by the people ridiculed in earlier comedies of manners. *Hay Fever,* like Sheridan's *The Rivals* and Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer,* is a satire on sentimentality. Not very much "happens" in *Hay Fever.* Four guests arrive for a week-end with the Bliss family, are baffled by their unconventional hosts, and leave, apparently unnoticed, early the following morning. The three acts are bound together not so much by this slight plot as by a series of extremely amusing situations, which frequently go over into sheer farce. Stripped of these and the witty lines, the plot is a little dull. But so would be the plots of many excellent comedies. Much of the comedy in *Hay Fever* is effected by contrast of characters, the comparatively fatuous guests serving as foils for the eccentric Blisses, as in *Private Lives* the absurdly stupid Sibyl and Victor are set over against the superficially brilliant Amanda and Elyot. *Private Lives* resembles *Hay Fever* too in its lack of plot; interest is kept up instead by a series of quarrels arising out of highly amusing invective and becoming farcically violent. Characteristic of Coward's comedy is Amanda and Elyot's laughing at themselves as well as at the conventional world represented by Sibyl and Victor. This characteristic is particularly evident in *Design for Living,* in which the final curtain leaves the three eccentrics groaning and weeping with laughter, not so much at Gilda's enraged husband as at themselves. It is obvious why the adjectives most frequently used to describe a Cowardian play are *tenuous, brittle, thin, iridescent, superficial, daring, sophisticated, light, giddy,* adjectives which characterize, however, the society which Coward dramatizes. None of his plays carries these characteristics to such extremes as *Blithe Spirit.*

"An improbable farce," the redundant subtitle of *Blithe Spirit,* is suggestive, for whereas there is considerable farce in Coward's other comedies, in this one improbability has been carried to an extreme

that the playwright had not reached before and that no other playwright could effect more successfully. Coward has a genius for making the slightest of substance highly entertaining. In *Blithe Spirit* he dares to move his comedy over into the realm of the supernatural. And he is successful there too. One of the characters is a ghost, and another becomes a ghost before the play is over. Madame Arcati, the medium with the school-girl enthusiasm and the bromidic jargon, represents Noel Coward's satire at its best. But except for this character and the startling innovation of the supernatural, *Blithe Spirit* is cut according to the typical Coward pattern. Even some of the lines are borrowed almost verbatim from his other plays. Its comedy turns on domestic quarrels, violently farcical action, and general invective. It is marked, too, by the familiar Cowardian wit, particularly in lines depending for effect on situation.

Most comedies act better than they read, and this is particularly true of *Blithe Spirit*. In the first place, the dialogue is extremely real rather than literary. Like Pinero, Coward writes for the actors, his experience on the stage having given him a sense of sound and rhythm that enables him, as he composes the lines, to hear them as they will be spoken in the theatre. Then, too, much in this play depends on stage business, gestures, facial expression, the mere lifting of an eyebrow or the slightest movement of the hand, all of which requires considerable imagination to obtain in the reading. Furthermore, since much of the effect in *Blithe Spirit* depends on situation, entrances and exits, and the groupings of actors on the stage, the acting must not only be minutely timed but be expertly pointed up by appeals to the eye as much as to the ear. In comparison to the considerable stage movement and stage business the play demands, there are few stage directions. Noel Coward expects the actors to know what to do without being told. Finally, *Blithe Spirit* is singularly lacking in epigrams, those pithy observations which, even apart from their context, provoke laughter and which characterize *Private Lives* and *Design for Living*. Much of the laughter in *Blithe Spirit* is provoked instead by comments which if detached from the circumstances under which they are uttered would be only commonplace. Thus to appreciate the play through the printed page is a test of one's feeling for sheer theatre.

After a tryout in Manchester *Blithe Spirit* opened on July 2, 1941, at the Piccadilly Theatre in London. Four months later a second company opened in the play in New York, and within a few weeks a road company was taking it on tour throughout the United States.

In the spring of 1942 the New York Drama Critics Circle awarded Noel Coward the Circle's plaque for *Blithe Spirit* as the best foreign play of the season. In 1945 it was made into a moving picture. During a single week in June, 1945, while the play was about to enter its fifth year in London, five summer theatres produced it in the United States. By the preceding Christmas the London production had had a longer continuous run than any other play in London's history. In its second year, when it left the Piccadilly, *Blithe Spirit* moved to the St. James, the theatre where on a May evening half a century before, a fashionable audience had gathered to see the première of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.*

Blithe Spirit

An Improbable Farce

In Three Acts

by

NOEL COWARD

Originally produced by H. M. Tennent, Ltd., in association with John C. Wilson, at the Opera House, Manchester, on Monday evening, June 16, 1941, and then at the Piccadilly Theatre, London, on Wednesday evening, July 2, 1941, with the following cast:

Ruth Condomine	Fay Compton
Charles Condomine	Cecil Parker
Elvira	Kay Hammond
Dr. Bradman	Martin Lewis
Mrs. Bradman	Moya Nugent
Madame Arcati	Margaret Rutherford
Edith	Ruth Reeves

STAGED BY THE AUTHOR

SETTING DESIGNED BY GLADYS CALTHROP

Produced by John C. Wilson at the Morosco Theatre, New York, on Wednesday evening, November 5, 1941, with the following cast:

Ruth Condomine	Peggy Wood
Charles Condomine	Clifton Webb
Elvira	Leonora Corbett
Dr. Bradman	Philip Tonge
Mrs. Bradman	Phyllis Joyce
Madame Arcati	Mildred Natwick
Edith	Jacqueline Clarke

STAGED BY MR. WILSON

SETTING DESIGNED BY STEWART CHANEY

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: Before dinner on a summer evening
SCENE 2: After dinner

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: The next morning
SCENE 2: Late the following afternoon
SCENE 3: Early evening. A few days later

ACT THREE

SCENE 1: After dinner. A few days later
SCENE 2: Several hours later

The action of the play takes place in the living-room of Charles Condomine's house in Kent.

Blithe Spirit

ACT ONE

SCENE I

The scene is the living-room of the Condomines' house in Kent. The room is light, attractive and comfortably furnished. The arrangement of it may be left to the discretion of the producer.

On the right there are French windows opening on to the garden. On the left there is an open fireplace. At the back there are double doors leading to the hall, the dining-room, the stairs, and the servants' quarters.

When the curtain rises it is about eight o'clock on a summer evening. There is a wood fire burning because it is an English summer evening.

EDITH *comes to table with tray of drinks.* RUTH *comes in. She is a smart-looking woman in the middle thirties. She is dressed for dinner but not elaborately.*

From BLITHE SPIRIT, by Noel Coward, copyright, 1941, reprinted by permission from Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc.

Ruth: That's right, Edith.

Edith: Yes'm.

Ruth: Now you'd better fetch me the ice bucket.

Edith: Yes'm.

Ruth: Did you manage to get the ice out of those little tin trays?

Edith: Yes'm—I 'ad a bit of a struggle though—but it's all right.

Ruth: And you filled the little trays up again with water?

Edith: Yes'm.

Ruth: Very good, Edith—you're making giant strides.

Edith: Yes'm.

Ruth: Madame Arcati, Mrs. Bradman and I will have our coffee in here after dinner and Mr. Condomine and Dr. Bradman will have theirs in the dining-room—is that quite clear?

Edith: Yes'm.

Ruth: And when you're serving dinner, Edith, try to remember to do it calmly and methodically.

Edith: Yes'm.

Ruth: As you are not in the Navy it is unnecessary to do everything at the double.

Edith: Very good, 'M.

Ruth: Now go and get the ice.

Edith [*straining at the leash*]: Yes'm. [*She starts off at full speed.*]

Ruth: Not at a run, Edith.

Edith [*slowing down*]: Yes'm. [EDITH *goes.* CHARLES *comes in. He is a nice-looking man of about forty wearing a loose-fitting velvet smoking jacket.*]

Charles: No sign of the advancing hordes?

Ruth: Not yet.

Charles [*going to the cocktail tray*]: No ice.

Ruth: It's coming. I've been trying to discourage Edith from being quite so fleet of foot. You mustn't mind if everything is a little slow motion tonight.

Charles: I shall welcome it. The last few days have been extremely agitating. What do you suppose induced Agnes to leave us and go and get married?

Ruth: The reason was becoming increasingly obvious, dear.

Charles: Yes, but in these days nobody thinks anything of that sort of thing—she could have popped into the cottage hospital, had it, and popped out again.

Ruth: Her social life would have been seriously undermined.

Charles: We must keep Edith in the house more. [EDITH *comes in slowly with the ice bucket.*]

Ruth: That's right, Edith—put it down on the table.

Edith: Yes'm. [*She does so.*]

Charles: I left my cigarette case on my dressing table, Edith—would you get it for me?

Edith: Yes, sir. [*She runs out of the room.*]

Charles: There now!

Ruth: You took her by surprise.

Charles [*at the cocktail table*]: A dry Martini I think, don't you?

Ruth: Yes, darling—I expect Madame Arcati will want something sweeter.

Charles: We'll have this one for ourselves anyhow.

Ruth [*taking a cigarette and sitting down*]: Oh, dear!

Charles: What's the matter?

Ruth: I have a feeling that this evening's going to be awful.

Charles: It'll probably be funny, but not awful.

Ruth: You must promise not to catch my eye—if I giggle—and I'm very likely to—it will ruin everything.

Charles: You mustn't—you must be dead serious and if possible a little intense. We can't hurt the old girl's feelings however funny she is.

Ruth: But why the Bradmans, darling? He's as skeptical as we are—he'll probably say the most dreadful things.

Charles: I've warned him. There must be more than three people and we couldn't have the Vicar and his wife because (a) they're dreary, and (b) they probably wouldn't have approved at all. It had to be the Bradmans. [EDITH *rushes into the room with* CHARLES' *cigarette case. Taking it*] Thank you, Edith. Steady does it.

Edith [*breathlessly*]: Yes, sir. [EDITH, *with an obvious effort, goes out slowly.*]

Charles: We might make her walk about with a book on her head like they do in deportment lessons. [CHARLES *gives* RUTH *cocktail.*] Here, try this.

Ruth [*sipping it*]: Lovely—dry as a bone.

Charles [*raising his glass to her*]: To *The Unseen!*

Ruth: I must say that's a wonderful title.

Charles: If this evening's a success I shall start on the first draft tomorrow.

Ruth: How extraordinary it is.

Charles: What?

Ruth: Oh, I don't know—being in right at the beginning of something—it gives one an odd feeling.

Charles: Do you remember how I got the idea for "The Light Goes Out"?

Ruth: Suddenly seeing that haggard, raddled woman in the hotel at Biarritz—of course I remember—we sat up half the night talking about it—

Charles: She certainly came in very handy—I wonder who she was.

Ruth: And if she ever knew, I mean ever recognized, that description of herself—poor thing . . . here's to her, anyhow . . . [*She finishes her drink.*]

Charles [*takes her glass and goes to drinks table*]: Have another.

Ruth: Darling—it's most awfully strong.

Charles [*pouring it*]: Never mind.

Ruth: Used Elvira to be a help to you—when you were thinking something out, I mean?

Charles [*pouring out another cocktail for himself*]: Every now and then—when she concentrated—but she didn't concentrate very often.

Ruth: I do wish I'd known her.

Charles: I wonder if you'd have liked her.

Ruth: I'm sure I should—as you talk of her she sounds enchanting—yes, I'm sure I should have liked her because you know I have never for an instant felt in the least jealous of her—that's a good sign.

Charles: Poor Elvira.

Ruth: Does it still hurt—when you think of her?

Charles: No, not really—sometimes I almost wish it did—I feel rather guilty—

Ruth: I wonder if I died before you'd grown tired of me if you'd forget me so soon?

Charles: What a horrible thing to say . . .

Ruth: No—I think it's interesting.

Charles: Well, to begin with, I *haven't* forgotten Elvira—I *remember* her very distinctly indeed—I remember how fascinating she was, and how maddening— [*Sits*] I remember how badly she played all games and how cross she got when she didn't win—I remember her gay charm when she had achieved her own way over something and her extreme acidity when she didn't—I remember her physical

attractiveness, which was tremendous—and her spiritual integrity which was nil . . .

Ruth: You can't remember something that was nil.

Charles: I remember how morally untidy she was . . .

Ruth: Was she more physically attractive than I am?

Charles: That was a very tiresome question, dear, and fully deserves the wrong answer.

Ruth: You really are very sweet.

Charles: Thank you.

Ruth: And a little naïve, too.

Charles: Why?

Ruth: Because you imagine that I mind about Elvira being more physically attractive than I am.

Charles: I should have thought any woman would mind—if it were true. Or perhaps I'm old-fashioned in my views of female psychology. . . .

Ruth: Not exactly old-fashioned, darling, just a bit didactic.

Charles: How do you mean?

Ruth: It's didactic to attribute to one type the defects of another type—for instance, because you know perfectly well that Elvira would mind terribly if you found another woman more attractive physically than she was, it doesn't necessarily follow that I should. Elvira was a more physical person than I—I'm certain of that—it's all a question of degree.

Charles [*smiling*]: I love you, my love.

Ruth: I know you do—but not the wildest stretch of imagination could describe it as the first fine careless rapture.

Charles: Would you like it to be?

Ruth: Good God, no!

Charles: Wasn't that a shade too vehement?

Ruth: We're neither of us adolescent, Charles, we've neither of us led exactly prim lives, have we? And we've both been married before—careless rapture at this stage would be incongruous and embarrassing.

Charles: I hope I haven't been in any way a disappointment, dear.

Ruth: Don't be so idiotic.

Charles: After all your first husband was a great deal older than you, wasn't he? I shouldn't like to think that you'd missed out all along the line.

Ruth: There are moments, Charles, when you go too far.

Charles: Sorry, darling.

Ruth: As far as waspish female psychology goes, there's a strong vein of it in you.

Charles: I've heard that said about Julius Caesar.

Ruth: Julius Caesar is neither here nor there.

Charles: He may be for all we know—we'll ask Madame Arcati.

Ruth: You're awfully irritating when you're determined to be witty at all costs—almost supercilious.

Charles: That's exactly what Elvira used to say.

Ruth: I'm not at all surprised—I never imagined—physically triumphant as she was—that she was entirely lacking in perception.

Charles: Darling Ruth!

Ruth: There you go again . . .

Charles [*kissing her lightly*]: As I think I mentioned before—I love you, my love.

Ruth: Poor Elvira.

Charles: Didn't that light, comradely kiss mollify you at all?

Ruth: You're very annoying, you know you are—when I said "Poor Elvira" it came from the heart—you must have bewildered her so horribly.

Charles: Don't I ever bewilder you at all?

Ruth: Never for an instant—I know every trick.

Charles: Well, all I can say is that we'd better get a divorce immediately . . .

Ruth: Put my glass down, there's a darling.

Charles [*taking it*]: She certainly had a great talent for living—it was a pity that she died so young.

Ruth: Poor Elvira.

Charles: That remark is getting monotonous.

Ruth: Poor Charles, then.

Charles: That's better.

Ruth: And later on, poor Ruth, I expect.

Charles: You have no faith, Ruth. I really do think you should try to have a little faith.

Ruth: I shall strain every nerve.

Charles: Life without faith is an arid business.

Ruth: How beautifully you put things, dear.

Charles: I *aim* to please.

Ruth: If I died, I wonder how long it would be before you married again?

Charles: You won't die—you're not the dying sort.

Ruth: Neither was Elvira.

Charles: Oh, yes, she was, now that I look back on it—she had a certain ethereal, not quite of this world quality—nobody could call you even remotely ethereal.

Ruth: Nonsense—she was of the earth earthy.

Charles: Well, she is now, anyhow.

Ruth: You know that's the kind of observation that shocks people.

Charles: It's discouraging to think how many people are shocked by honesty and how few by deceit.

Ruth: Write that down, you might forget it.

Charles: You underrate me.

Ruth: Anyhow it was a question of bad taste more than honesty.

Charles: I was devoted to Elvira. We were married for five years. She died. I missed her very much. That was seven years ago. I have now, with your help, my love, risen above the whole thing.

Ruth: Admirable. But if tragedy should darken our lives, I still say—with prophetic foreboding—poor Ruth! [*Bell.*]

Charles: That's probably the Bradmans.

Ruth: It might be Madame Arcati.

Charles: No, she'll come on her bicycle—she always goes everywhere on her bicycle.

Ruth: It really is very spirited of the old girl.

Charles: Shall I go, or shall we let Edith have her fling?

Ruth: Wait a minute and see what happens. [*There is a slight pause.*]

Charles: Perhaps she didn't hear.

Ruth: She's probably on one knee in a pre-sprinting position waiting for cook to open the kitchen door. [*There is the sound of a door banging and* EDITH *is seen scampering across the hall.*]

Charles: Steady, Edith.

Edith [*dropping to a walk*]: Yes, sir. [MRS. BRADMAN *comes to* RUTH—*shakes hands.* DR. BRADMAN *shakes hands with* CHARLES. DR. BRADMAN *is a pleasant-looking middle-aged man.* MRS. BRADMAN *is fair and rather faded.*]

Edith: Dr. and Mrs. Bradman.

Dr. Bradman: We're not late, are we? I only got back from the hospital about half an hour ago.

Charles: Of course not—Madame Arcati isn't here yet.

Mrs. Bradman: That must have been her we passed coming down the hill—I said I thought it was.

Ruth: Then she won't be long. I'm so glad you were able to come.

Mrs. Bradman: We've been looking forward to it—I feel really quite excited . . .

Dr. Bradman [*shaking hands with* RUTH]: I guarantee that Violet will be good—I made her promise.

Mrs. Bradman: There wasn't any need—I'm absolutely thrilled. I've only seen Madame Arcati two or three times in the village—I mean I've never seen her do anything at all peculiar, if you know what I mean.

Charles: Dry Martini?

Dr. Bradman: By all means.

Charles: She certainly is a strange woman. It was only a chance remark of the Vicar's about seeing her up on the Knoll on Midsummer Eve dressed in sort of Indian robes that made me realize that she was psychic at all. Then I began to make inquiries—apparently she's been a professional in London for years.

Mrs. Bradman: It is funny, isn't it? I mean anybody doing it as a profession.

Dr. Bradman: I believe it's very lucrative.

Mrs. Bradman: Do you believe in it, Mrs. Condomine—do you think there's anything really genuine about it at all?

Ruth: I'm afraid not—but I do think it's interesting how easily people allow themselves to be deceived . . .

Mrs. Bradman: But she must believe in herself, mustn't she—or is the whole business a fake?

Charles: I suspect the worst. A real professional charlatan. That's what I am hoping for anyhow—the character I am planning for my book must be a complete impostor, that's one of the most important factors of the whole story.

Dr. Bradman: What exactly are you hoping to get from her?

Charles [*handing* DR. *and* MRS. BRADMAN *cocktails*]: Jargon, principally—a few of the tricks of the trade—it's many years since I went to a séance. I want to refresh my memory.

Dr. Bradman: Then it's not entirely new to you?

Charles: Oh, no—when I was a little boy an aunt of mine used to come and stay with us—she imagined that she was a medium and used to go off into the most elaborate trances after dinner. My mother was fascinated by it.

Mrs. Bradman: Was she convinced?

Charles [*gets cocktail for himself*]: Good heavens, no—she just naturally disliked my aunt and loved making a fool of her.

Dr. Bradman [*laughing*]: I gather that there were never any tangible results?

Charles: Oh, sometimes she didn't do so badly. On one occasion when we were all sitting round in the pitch dark with my mother groping her way through Chaminade at the piano, my aunt suddenly gave a shrill scream and said that she saw a small black dog by my chair, then someone switched on the lights and sure enough there was.

Mrs. Bradman: But how extraordinary.

Charles: It was obviously a stray that had come in from the street. But I must say I took off my hat to Auntie for producing it, or rather for utilizing—even Mother was a bit shaken.

Mrs. Bradman: What happened to it?

Charles: It lived with us for years.

Ruth: I sincerely hope Madame Arcati won't produce any live-stock—we have so very little room in this house.

Mrs. Bradman: Do you think she tells fortunes? I love having my fortune told.

Charles: I expect so—

Ruth: I was told once on the pier at Southsea that I was surrounded by lilies and a golden seven—it worried me for days. [ALL *laugh.*]

Charles: We really must all be serious, you know, and pretend that we believe implicitly, otherwise she won't play.

Ruth: Also, she might really mind—it would be cruel to upset her.

Dr. Bradman: I shall be as good as gold.

Ruth: Have you ever attended her, Doctor—professionally, I mean?

Dr. Bradman: Yes—she had influenza in January—she's only been here just over a year, you know. I must say she was singularly unpsychic then—I always understood that she was an authoress.

Charles: Oh, yes, we originally met as colleagues at one of Mrs. Wilmot's Sunday evenings in Sandgate . . .

Mrs. Bradman: What sort of books does she write?

Charles: Two sorts. Rather whimsical children's stories about enchanted woods filled with highly conversational flora and fauna, and enthusiastic biographies of minor royalties. Very sentimental, rever-

ent and extremely funny. [*There is the sound of the front door bell.*]

Ruth: Here she is.

Dr. Bradman: She knows, doesn't she, about tonight? You're not going to spring it on her.

Charles: Of course—it was all arranged last week—I told her how profoundly interested I was in anything to do with the occult, and she blossomed like a rose.

Ruth: I really feel quite nervous—as though I were going to make a speech. [EDITH *is seen sedately going towards the door.*]

Charles: You go and meet her, darling. [EDITH *has opened the door, and* MADAME ARCATI'S *voice, very high and clear, is heard.*]

Madame Arcati: I've leant my bike up against that little bush, it will be *perfectly* all right if no one touches it.

Edith: Madame Arcati.

Ruth: How nice of you to have come all this way. [RUTH *and* CHARLES *greet her simultaneously.* MADAME ARCATI *enters. She is a striking woman, dressed not too extravagantly but with a decided bias towards the barbaric. She might be any age between forty-five and sixty-five.* RUTH *ushers her in.*]

Charles [*advancing*]: My dear Madame Arcati!

Madame Arcati: I'm afraid I'm rather late, but I had a sudden presentiment that I was going to have a puncture so I went back to fetch my pump, and then of course I didn't have a puncture at all. [MADAME ARCATI *takes off cloak and hands it to* RUTH.]

Charles: Perhaps you will on the way home.

Madame Arcati: Doctor Bradman—the man with the gentle hands!

Dr. Bradman: I'm delighted to see you looking so well. This is my wife.

Madame Arcati: We are old friends— [*Shakes hands with* MRS. BRADMAN.] We meet coming out of shops.

Charles: Would you like a cocktail?

Madame Arcati [*peeling off some rather strange-looking gloves*]: If it's a dry Martini, yes—if it's a concoction, no. Experience has taught me to be very wary of concoctions.

Charles: It is a dry Martini.

Madame Arcati: How delicious. It was wonderful cycling through the woods this evening—I was deafened with bird-song.

Ruth: It's been lovely all day.

Madame Arcati: But the evening's the time—mark my words.

[*She takes the cocktail* CHARLES *gives her. To others*] Thank you. Cheers! Cheers!

Ruth: Don't you find it very tiring bicycling everywhere?

Madame Arcati: On the contrary—it stimulates me—I was getting far too sedentary in London, that horrid little flat with the dim lights—they had to be dim, you know, the clients expect it.

Mrs. Bradman: I must say I find bicycling very exhausting.

Madame Arcati: Steady rhythm—that's what counts. Once you get the knack of it you need never look back—on you get and away you go.

Mrs. Bradman: But the hills, Madame Arcati—pushing up those awful hills—

Madame Arcati: Just knack again—down with your head, up with your heart, and you're over the top like a flash and skimming down the other side like a dragon-fly. This is the best dry Martini I've had for years.

Charles: Will you have another?

Madame Arcati [*holding out her glass*]: Certainly. [CHARLES *takes her glass and refills it at drinks table.*] You're a very clever man. Anybody can write books, but it takes an artist to make a dry Martini that's dry enough.

Ruth: Are you writing anything nowadays, Madame Arcati?

Madame Arcati: Every morning regular as clockwork, seven till one.

Charles [*gives* MADAME ARCATI *cocktail*]: Is it a novel or a memoir?

Madame Arcati: It's a children's book—I have to finish it by the end of October to catch the Christmas sales. It's mostly about very small animals, the hero is a moss beetle. [MRS. BRADMAN *laughs nervously.*] I had to give up my memoir of Princess Palliatini because she died in April—I talked to her about it the other day and she implored me to go on with it, but I really hadn't the heart.

Mrs. Bradman [*incredulously*]: You *talked* to her about it the other day?

Madame Arcati: Yes, through my control, of course. She sounded very irritable.

Mrs. Bradman: It's funny to think of people in the spirit world being irritable, isn't it? I mean, one can hardly imagine it, can one?

Charles: We have no reliable guarantee that the after life will be any less exasperating than this one, have we?

Mrs. Bradman [*laughing*]: Oh, Mr. Condomine, how *can* you!

Ruth: I expect it's dreadfully ignorant of me not to know—but who was Princess Palliatini?

Madame Arcati: She was originally a Jewess from Odessa of quite remarkable beauty. It was an accepted fact that people used to stand on the seats of railway stations to watch her whizz by.

Charles: She was a keen traveler?

Madame Arcati: In her younger days, yes—later on she married a Mr. Clarke in the Consular Service and settled down for a while . . .

Ruth: How did she become Princess Palliatini?

Madame Arcati: That was years later. Mr. Clarke passed over and left her penniless with two strapping girls—

Ruth: How unpleasant.

Madame Arcati: And so there was nothing for it but to obey the beckoning finger of adventure and take to the road again—so off she went, bag and baggage, to Vladivostok.

Charles: What an extraordinary place to go!

Madame Arcati: She had cousins there. Some years later she met old Palliatini who was returning from a secret mission in Japan. He was immediately staggered by her beauty and very shortly afterwards married her. From then on her life became really interesting.

Dr. Bradman: I should hardly have described it as dull before.

Ruth: What happened to the girls?

Madame Arcati: She neither saw them nor spoke to them for twenty-three years.

Mrs. Bradman: How extraordinary.

Madame Arcati: Not at all. She was always very erratic emotionally. [*The double doors of the dining-room open and* EDITH *comes in.*]

Edith [*nervously*]: Dinner is served, Mum.

Ruth: Thank you, Edith. Shall we? [EDITH *retires backwards into the dining-room.*]

Madame Arcati: No red meat, I hope?

Ruth: There's meat, but I don't think it will be very red—would you rather have an egg or something?

Madame Arcati [*she and* RUTH *rise*]: No, thank you—it's just that I make it a rule never to eat red meat before I work—it sometimes has an odd effect . . .

Charles: What sort of effect?

Madame Arcati: Oh, nothing of the least importance—if it isn't very red it won't matter much—anyhow, we'll risk it.

Ruth [MRS. BRADMAN *rises.* MADAME ARCATI *goes out first with* RUTH *followed by* MRS. BRADMAN, DR. BRADMAN *and* CHARLES]: Come along, then—Mrs. Bradman—Madame Arcati—you're on Charles's right . . . [*They all move into the dining-room as the lights fade on the scene.*]

SCENE II

When the lights go up again, dinner is over, and RUTH, MRS. BRADMAN *and* MADAME ARCATI *are sitting having their coffee.*

Madame Arcati: . . . on her mother's side she went right back to the Borgias which I think accounted for a lot one way and another—even as a child she was given to the most violent destructive tempers—very inbred, you know.

Mrs. Bradman: Yes, she must have been.

Madame Arcati: My control was quite scared the other day when we were talking—I could hear it in her voice—after all, she's only a child . . .

Ruth: Do you always have a child as a control?

Madame Arcati: Yes, they're generally the best—some mediums prefer Indians, of course, but personally I've always found them unreliable.

Ruth: In what way unreliable?

Madame Arcati: Well, for one thing they're frightfully lazy and also, when faced with any sort of difficulty, they're rather apt to go off into their own tribal language which is naturally unintelligible—that generally spoils everything and wastes a great deal of time. No, children are undoubtedly more satisfactory, particularly when they get to know you and understand your ways. Daphne has worked for me for years.

Mrs. Bradman: And she still goes on being a child—I mean, she doesn't show signs of growing any older?

Madame Arcati [*patiently*]: Time values on the "Other Side" are utterly different from ours.

Mrs. Bradman: Do you feel funny when you go off into a trance?

Madame Arcati: In what way funny?

Ruth [*hastily*]: Mrs. Bradman doesn't mean funny in its comic implication, I think she meant odd or strange—

Madame Arcati: The word was an unfortunate choice.

Mrs. Bradman: I'm sure I'm very sorry.

Madame Arcati: It doesn't matter in the least—please don't apologize.

Ruth: When did you first discover that you had these extraordinary powers?

Madame Arcati: When I was quite tiny. My mother was a medium before me, you know, and so I had every opportunity of starting on the ground floor as you might say. I had my first trance when I was four years old and my first protoplasmic manifestation when I was five and a half—what an exciting day that was, I shall never forget it—of course the manifestation itself was quite small and of very short duration, but, for a child of my tender years, it was most gratifying.

Mrs. Bradman: Your mother must have been so pleased.

Madame Arcati [*modestly*]: She was.

Mrs. Bradman: Can you foretell the future?

Madame Arcati: Certainly not. I disapprove of fortunetellers most strongly.

Mrs. Bradman [*disappointed*]: Oh, really—why?

Madame Arcati: Too much guesswork and fake mixed up with it—even when the gift is genuine—and it only very occasionally is—you can't count on it.

Ruth: Why not?

Madame Arcati: Time again—time is the reef upon which all our frail mystic ships are wrecked.

Ruth: You mean because it has never yet been proved that the past and the present and the future are not one and the same thing.

Madame Arcati: I long ago came to the conclusion that nothing has ever been definitely proved about anything.

Ruth: How very wise. [EDITH *comes in with a tray of drinks. This she brings over to the table by* RUTH. RUTH *moves a coffee cup and a vase to make room for it.*]

Ruth: Edith, we don't want to be disturbed for the next hour or so for any reason whatsoever—is that clear?

Edith: Yes'm.

Ruth: And if anyone should telephone, just say we are out and take a message.

Mrs. Bradman: Unless it's an urgent call for George.

Ruth: Unless it's an urgent call for Dr. Bradman.

Edith: Yes'm. [EDITH *goes out swiftly.*]

Ruth: There's not likely to be one, is there?

Mrs. Bradman: No, I don't think so.

Madame Arcati: Once I am off it won't matter, but an interruption during the preliminary stages might be disastrous.

Mrs. Bradman: I wish the men would hurry up—I'm terribly excited.

Madame Arcati: Please don't be—it makes everything very much more difficult. [CHARLES *and* DR. BRADMAN *come out of the dining-room. They are smoking cigars.*]

Charles [*cheerfully*]: Well, Madame Arcati—the time is drawing near.

Madame Arcati: Who knows? It may be receding!

Charles: How very true.

Dr. Bradman: I hope you feel in the mood, Madame Arcati.

Madame Arcati: It isn't a question of mood—it's a question of concentration.

Ruth: You must forgive us being impatient. We can perfectly easily wait though, if you're not quite ready to start . . .

Madame Arcati: Nonsense, my dear, I'm absolutely ready— [*She rises.*] Heigho, heigho, to work we go!

Charles: Is there anything you'd like us to do?

Madame Arcati: Do?

Charles: Yes—hold hands or anything?

Madame Arcati: All that will come later— [*She goes to the window.*] First a few deep, deep breaths of fresh air— [*Over her shoulder*] You may talk if you wish, it will not disturb me in the least. [*She flings open the windows wide and inhales deeply and a trifle noisily.*]

Ruth [*with a quizzical glance at* CHARLES]: Oh, dear!

Charles [*putting his finger to his lips warningly*]: An excellent dinner, darling—I congratulate you.

Ruth: The mousse wasn't quite right.

Charles: It looked a bit hysterical but it tasted delicious.

Madame Arcati: That cuckoo is very angry.

Charles: I beg your pardon?

Madame Arcati: I said that cuckoo is very angry . . . listen . . . [*They all listen obediently.*]

Charles: How can you tell?

Madame Arcati: Timbre . . . No moon—that's as well, I think—there's mist rising from the marshes— [*A thought strikes her.*]

There's no need for me to light my bicycle lamp, is there? I mean, nobody is likely to fall over it?

Ruth: No, we're not expecting anybody else.

Madame Arcati: Good night, you foolish bird. You have a table?

Charles: Yes. We thought that one would do.

Madame Arcati [*closing the window. She comes over to the table and touches it lightly with her finger*]: I think the one that has the drinks on it would be better.

Dr. Bradman [*lifting off the tray*]: Change over.

Charles [*to* RUTH]: You told Edith we didn't want to be disturbed?

Ruth: Yes, darling.

Madame Arcati [*walking about the room—twisting and untwisting her hands*]: This is a moment I always hate.

Ruth: Are you nervous?

Madame Arcati: Yes. When I was a girl I always used to be sick.

Dr. Bradman: How fortunate that you grew out of it.

Ruth [*hurriedly*]: Children are always much more prone to be sick than grownups, though, aren't they? I know I could never travel in a train with any degree of safety until I was fourteen.

Madame Arcati [*still walking*]: Little Tommy Tucker sings for his supper, what shall he have but brown bread and butter? I despise that because it doesn't rhyme at all—but Daphne loves it.

Dr. Bradman: Who's Daphne?

Ruth: Daphne is Madame Arcati's control—she's a little girl.

Dr. Bradman: Oh, I see—yes, of course.

Charles: How old is she?

Madame Arcati: Rising seven when she died.

Mrs. Bradman: And when was that?

Madame Arcati: February the sixth, 1884.

Mrs. Bradman: Poor little thing.

Dr. Bradman: She must be a bit long in the tooth by now, I should think.

Madame Arcati: You should think, Dr. Bradman, but I fear you don't—at least, not profoundly enough.

Mrs. Bradman: Do be quiet, George—you'll put Madame Arcati off. [CHARLES *brings piano chair down to table.*]

Madame Arcati: Don't worry, my dear—I am quite used to skeptics—they generally turn out to be the most vulnerable and receptive in the long run.

Ruth: You'd better take that warning to heart, Dr. Bradman.

Dr. Bradman: Please forgive me, Madame Arcati—I assure you I am most deeply interested.

Madame Arcati: It is of no consequence—will you all sit round the table please and place your hands downwards on it? [RUTH, MRS. BRADMAN *and* DR. BRADMAN *are seated at table.*]

Charles: What about the lights?

Madame Arcati: All in good time, Mr. Condomine. [*The four of them sit down at each side of a small square table.* MADAME ARCATI *surveys them critically, her head on one side. She is whistling a little tune.*] The fingers should be touching . . . that's right . . . I presume that that is the gramophone, Mr. Condomine?

Charles: Yes—would you like me to start it? It's an electric one.

Madame Arcati: Please stay where you are—I can manage—[*She goes over to the gramophone and looks over the records.*] Now let me see—what have we here—Brahms—oh, dear me, no—Rachmaninoff—too florid—where is the dance music?

Ruth: They're the loose ones on the left.

Madame Arcati: I see. [*She stoops down and produces a pile of dance records—these she sorts rapidly on the piano.*]

Charles: I'm afraid they're none of them very new.

Madame Arcati: Daphne is really more attached to Irving Berlin than anybody else—she likes a tune she can hum—ah, here's one—"Always"—

Charles [*half jumping up again*]: "Always"!

Ruth: Do sit down, Charles—what is the matter?

Charles [*subsiding*]: Nothing—nothing at all.

Madame Arcati: The light switch is by the door?

Ruth: Yes, all except the small one on the desk, and the gramophone.

Madame Arcati: Very well—I understand.

Ruth: Charles, do keep still.

Mrs. Bradman: Fingers touching, George—remember what Madame Arcati said.

Madame Arcati: Now there are one or two things I should like to explain, so will you all listen attentively?

Ruth: Of course.

Madame Arcati: Presently, when the music begins, I am going to switch out the lights. I may then either walk about the room for a little or lie down flat—in due course I shall draw up this dear little stool and join you at the table—I shall place myself between you and your wife, Mr. Condomine, and rest my hands lightly upon

yours—I must ask you not to address me or move or do anything in the least distracting—is that quite, quite clear?

Charles: Perfectly.

Madame Arcati: Of course I cannot guarantee that anything will happen at all—Daphne may be unavailable—she had a head cold very recently, and was rather under the weather, poor child. On the other hand, a great many things might occur—one of you might have an emanation, for instance, or we might contact a poltergeist which would be extremely destructive and noisy . . .

Ruth [*anxiously*]: In what way destructive?

Madame Arcati: They throw things, you know.

Ruth: No—I didn't know.

Madame Arcati: But we must cross that bridge when we come to it, mustn't we?

Charles: Certainly—by all means.

Madame Arcati: Fortunately an Elemental at this time of the year is most unlikely . . .

Ruth: What do Elementals do?

Madame Arcati: Oh, my dear, one can never tell—they're dreadfully unpredictable—usually they take the form of a very cold wind . . .

Mrs. Bradman: I don't think I shall like that—

Madame Arcati: Occasionally reaching almost hurricane velocity—

Ruth: You don't think it would be a good idea to take the more breakable ornaments off the mantelpiece before we start?

Madame Arcati [*indulgently*]: That really is not necessary, Mrs. Condomine—I assure you I have my own methods of dealing with Elementals.

Ruth: I'm so glad.

Madame Arcati: Now then—are you ready to empty your minds?

Dr. Bradman: Do you mean we're to try to think of nothing?

Madame Arcati: Absolutely nothing, Dr. Bradman. Concentrate on a space or a nondescript color. That's really the best way . . .

Dr. Bradman: I'll do my damnedest.

Madame Arcati: Good work!—I will now start the music. [*She goes to the gramophone, puts on the record of "Always," and begins to walk about the room; occasionally she moves into an abortive little dance step, and once, on passing a mirror on the mantelpiece, she surveys herself critically for a moment and adjusts her hair.*

Then, with sudden speed, she runs across the room and switches off the lights.]

Mrs. Bradman: Oh, dear!

Madame Arcati: Quiet—please . . . [*Presently in the gloom* MADAME ARCATI, *after wandering about a little, draws up a stool and sits at the table between* CHARLES *and* RUTH. The *gramophone record comes to an end. There is dead silence.*] Is there anyone there? . . . [*A long pause*] Is there anyone there? [*Another long pause*] One rap for yes—two raps for no—now then—is there anyone there? . . . [*After a shorter pause the table gives a little bump.*]

Mrs. Bradman [*involuntarily*]: Oh!

Madame Arcati: Shhhh! . . . Is that you, Daphne? [*The table gives a louder bump.*] Is your cold better, dear? [*The table gives two loud bumps very quickly.*] Oh, I'm so sorry—are you doing anything for it? [*The table bumps several times.*] I'm afraid she's rather fretful . . . [*There is a silence.*] Is there anyone there who wishes to speak to anyone here? [*After a pause the table gives one bump.*] Ah! Now we're getting somewhere. No, Daphne, don't do that, dear, you're hurting me . . . Daphne, dear, please . . . Oh, oh, oh! . . . be good, there's a dear child . . . You say there is someone there who wishes to speak to someone here? [*One bump*] Is it I? [*Two bumps*] Is it Dr. Bradman? [*Two bumps*] Is it Mrs. Bradman? [*Two bumps*] Is it Mrs. Condomine? [*Several very loud bumps, which continue until* MADAME ARCATI *shouts it down.*] Stop it! Behave yourself! Is it Mr. Condomine? [*There is a dead silence for a moment, and then a very loud single bump.*] There's someone who wishes to speak to you, Mr. Condomine . . .

Charles: Tell them to leave a message. [*The table bangs about loudly.*]

Madame Arcati: I really must ask you not to be flippant, Mr. Condomine . . .

Ruth: Charles, how can you be so idiotic? You'll spoil everything.

Charles: I'm sorry—it slipped out.

Madame Arcati: Do you know anybody who has passed over recently?

Charles: Not recently, except my cousin in the Civil Service, and he wouldn't be likely to want to communicate with me—we haven't spoken for years.

Madame Arcati [*mystically*]: Are you Mr. Condomine's cousin in the Civil Service? [*The table bumps violently several times.*]

I'm afraid we've drawn a blank . . . Can't you think of anyone else? Rack your brains . . .

Ruth [*helpfully*]: It might be old Mrs. Plummet, you know—she died on Whit Monday . . .

Charles: I can't imagine why old Mrs. Plummet should wish to talk to me—we had very little in common.

Ruth: It's worth trying, anyhow.

Madame Arcati: Are you old Mrs. Plummet? [*The table remains still.*]

Ruth: She was very deaf—perhaps you'd better shout—

Madame Arcati [*shouting*]: Are you old Mrs. Plummet? [*Nothing happens.*] There's nobody there at all.

Mrs. Bradman: How disappointing—just as we were getting on so nicely.

Dr. Bradman: Violet, be quiet.

Madame Arcati [*rising*]: Well, I'm afraid there's nothing for it but for me to go into a trance. I had hoped to avoid it because it's so exhausting—however, what must be must be. Excuse me a moment while I start the gramophone again.

Charles [*in a strained voice*]: Not "Always"—don't play "Always"—

Ruth: Why ever not, Charles? Don't be absurd.

Madame Arcati [*gently*]: I'm afraid I must—it would be unwise to change horses in midstream if you know what I mean . . . [*She restarts the gramophone.*]

Charles: Have it your own way. [MADAME ARCATI *comes slowly back toward the table and sits down again. After a few moments she begins to moan—then in the darkness a child's voice is heard reciting rather breathily "Little Tommy Tucker."*]

Dr. Bradman: That would be Daphne—she ought to have had her adenoids out.

Mrs. Bradman: George—please— [MADAME ARCATI *suddenly gives a loud scream and falls off the stool on to the floor.*]

Charles: Good God!

Ruth: Keep still, Charles . . . [CHARLES *subsides. Everyone sits in silence for a moment, then the table starts bouncing about.*]

Mrs. Bradman: It's trying to get away . . . I can't hold it . . .

Ruth: Press down hard. [*The table falls over with a crash.*]

Ruth: There now!

Mrs. Bradman: Ought we to pick it up or leave it where it is?

Dr. Bradman: How the hell do I know?

Mrs. Bradman: There's no need to snap at me. [*A perfectly strange and very charming voice says, "Leave it where it is!"*]

Charles: Who said that?

Ruth: Who said what?

Charles: Somebody said, "Leave it where it is."

Ruth: Nonsense, dear.

Charles: I heard it distinctly.

Ruth: Well, nobody else did—did they?

Mrs. Bradman: I never heard a sound.

Charles: It was you, Ruth—you're playing tricks.

Ruth: I'm not doing anything of the sort. I haven't uttered. [*There is another pause, and then the voice says, "Good evening, Charles."*]

Charles [*very agitated*]: Ventriloquism—that's what it is—ventriloquism . . .

Ruth [*irritably*]: What is the matter with you?

Charles: You must have heard *that*—one of you must have heard *that!*

Ruth: Heard *what?*

Charles: You mean to sit there solemnly and tell me that none of you heard anything at all?

Dr. Bradman: I certainly didn't.

Mrs. Bradman: Neither did I—I wish I had. I should love to hear something.

Ruth: It's you who are playing the tricks, Charles—you're acting to try to frighten us . . .

Charles [*breathlessly*]: I'm not—I swear I'm not. [*The voice speaks again. It says, "It's difficult to think of what to say after seven years, but I suppose good evening is as good as anything else."*]

Charles [*intensely*]: Who are you? [*The voice says, "Elvira, of course—don't be so silly."*] I can't bear this for another minute . . . [*He rises violently.*] Get up, everybody—the entertainment's over . . .

Ruth: Oh, Charles, how tiresome you are—just as we were beginning to enjoy ourselves. What on earth is the matter with you?

Charles: Nothing's the matter with me—I'm just sick of the whole business, that's all.

Dr. Bradman: Did you hear anything that we didn't hear really?

Charles [*with a forced laugh*]: Of course not—I was only pretending . . .

Ruth: I knew you were . . .

Mrs. Bradman: Oh, dear . . . look at Madame Arcati! [MADAME ARCATI *is lying on the floor with her feet up on the stool from which she fell. She is obviously quite unconscious.*]

Ruth: What are we to do with her?

Charles: Bring her round—bring her round as soon as possible.

Dr. Bradman [*going over and kneeling down beside her*]: I think we'd better leave her alone.

Ruth: But she might stay like that for hours.

Dr. Bradman [*after feeling her pulse and examining her eye*]: She's out all right.

Charles [*almost hysterically*]: Bring her round! It's dangerous to leave her like that . . .

Ruth: Really, Charles, you are behaving most peculiarly.

Charles [*going to* MADAME ARCATI *and shaking her violently*]: Wake up, Madame Arcati—wake up—it's time to go home!

Dr. Bradman: Here—go easy, old man . . .

Charles: Get some brandy—give her some brandy—lift her into the chair—help me, Bradman . . . [RUTH *pours out some brandy while* CHARLES *and* DR. BRADMAN *lift* MADAME ARCATI *laboriously into an armchair. Leaning over her*] Wake up, Madame Arcati—Little Tommy Tucker, Madame Arcati!

Ruth: Here's the brandy. [MADAME ARCATI *gives a slight moan and a shiver.*]

Charles [*forcing some brandy between her lips*]: Wake up!—[MADAME ARCATI *gives a prolonged shiver and chokes slightly over the brandy.*]

Mrs. Bradman: She's coming round.

Ruth: Be careful, Charles—you're spilling it all down her dress.

Madame Arcati [*opening her eyes*]: Well, that's that.

Ruth [*solicitously*]: Are you all right?

Madame Arcati: Certainly I am—never felt better in my life.

Charles: Would you like some more brandy?

Madame Arcati: So that's the funny taste in my mouth—well, really! Fancy allowing them to give me brandy! Dr. Bradman, you ought to have known better—brandy on top of trance might have been catastrophic. Take it away, please—I probably shan't sleep a wink tonight as it is.

Charles: I know I shan't.

Ruth: Why on earth not?

Charles: The whole experience has unhinged me.

Madame Arcati: Well, what happened—was it satisfactory?

Ruth: Nothing much happened, Madame Arcati, after you went off.

Madame Arcati: Something happened all right. I can feel it. [*She rises and sniffs.*] No poltergeist, at any rate—that's a good thing. Any apparitions?

Dr. Bradman: Not a thing.

Madame Arcati: No protoplasm?

Ruth: I'm not quite sure what it is, but I don't think so.

Madame Arcati: Very curious. I feel as though something tremendous had taken place.

Ruth: Charles pretended he heard a voice, in order to frighten us.

Charles: It was only a joke.

Madame Arcati: A very poor one, if I may say so— [*She walks about a little more.*] Nevertheless, I am prepared to swear that there is someone else psychic in this room apart from myself.

Ruth: I don't see how there can be really, Madame Arcati.

Madame Arcati: I do hope I haven't gone and released something —however, we are bound to find out within a day or two—if any manifestation should occur or you hear any unexpected noises—you might let me know at once.

Ruth: Of course we will—we'll telephone immediately.

Madame Arcati: I think I really must be on my way now.

Ruth: Wouldn't you like anything before you go?

Madame Arcati: No, thank you—I have some Ovaltine all ready in a saucepan at home—it only needs hotting up.

Dr. Bradman: Wouldn't you like to leave your bicycle here and let us drive you?

Mrs. Bradman: I honestly do think you should, Madame Arcati, after that trance and everything—you can't be feeling quite yourself.

Madame Arcati: Nonsense, my dear, I'm as fit as a fiddle—always feel capital after a trance—rejuvenates me. Good night, Mrs. Condomine.

Ruth: It was awfully sweet of you to take so much trouble.

Madame Arcati: I'm sorry so little occurred—it's that cold of Daphne's, I expect—you know what children are when they have anything wrong with them. We must try again some other evening.

Ruth: That would be lovely.

Madame Arcati: Good night, Mrs. Bradman—

Mrs. Bradman: It was thrilling, it really was—I felt the table absolutely shaking under my hands.

Madame Arcati: Good night, Doctor.

Dr. Bradman: Congratulations, Madame Arcati.

Madame Arcati: I am fully aware of the irony in your voice, Dr. Bradman. As a matter of fact you'd be an admirable subject for telepathic hypnosis—a great chum of mine is an expert—I should like her to look you over.

Dr. Bradman: I'm sure I should be charmed.

Madame Arcati: Good night, everyone—next time we must really put our backs into it! [*With a comprehensive smile and a wave of the hand, she goes out followed by* CHARLES. RUTH *sinks down into a chair, laughing helplessly.*]

Ruth: Oh, dear! . . . Oh, dear! . . .

Mrs. Bradman [*beginning to laugh too*]: Be careful, Mrs. Condomine—she might hear you.

Ruth: I can't help it—I really can't—I've been holding this in for ages.

Mrs. Bradman: She certainly put you in your place, George, and serves you right.

Ruth: She's raving mad, of course—mad as a hatter.

Mrs. Bradman: But do you really think she *believes?*

Dr. Bradman: Of course not—the whole thing's a put-up job—I must say, though, she shoots a more original line than they generally do.

Ruth: I should think that she's probably half convinced herself by now.

Dr. Bradman: Possibly—the trance was genuine enough—but that, of course, is easily accounted for.

Ruth: Hysteria?

Dr. Bradman: Yes—a form of hysteria, I should imagine.

Mrs. Bradman: I do hope Mr. Condomine got all the atmosphere he wanted for his book.

Ruth: He might have got a great deal more if he hadn't spoiled everything by showing off . . . I'm really very cross with him. [*At this moment* ELVIRA *comes in through the closed French windows. She is charmingly dressed in a sort of negligee. Everything about her is gray: hair, skin, dress, hands, so we must accept the fact that she is not quite of this world. She passes between* DR. *and* MRS. BRADMAN *and* RUTH *while they are talking. None of them sees her. She goes upstage and sits soundlessly on a chair. She re-*

gards them with interest, a slight smile on her face.] I suddenly felt a draught—there must be a window open.

Dr. Bradman [*looking*]: No—they're shut.

Mrs. Bradman [*laughing*]: Perhaps it was one of those what you may call 'ems that Madame Arcati was talking about.

Dr. Bradman: Elementals.

Ruth [*also laughing again*]: Oh, no, it couldn't be—she distinctly said that it was the wrong time of the year for Elementals. [CHARLES *comes in again.*]

Charles: Well, the old girl's gone pedaling off down the drive at the hell of a speed—we had a bit of trouble lighting her lamp.

Mrs. Bradman: Poor thing.

Charles: I've got a theory about her, you know—I believe she is completely sincere.

Ruth: Charles! How could she be?

Charles: Wouldn't it be possible, Doctor? Some form of self-hypnotism?

Dr. Bradman: It might be . . . as I was explaining to your wife just now, there are certain types of hysterical subjects . . .

Mrs. Bradman: George dear—it's getting terribly late, we really must go home—you have to get up so early in the morning.

Dr. Bradman: You see? The moment I begin to talk about anything that really interests me, my wife interrupts me . . .

Mrs. Bradman: You know I'm right, darling—it's past eleven.

Dr. Bradman [*to* CHARLES]: I'll do a little reading up on the whole business—just for the fun of it.

Charles: You must have a drink before you go.

Dr. Bradman: No, really, thank you—Violet's quite right, I'm afraid. I have got to get up abominably early tomorrow—I have a patient being operated on in Canterbury.

Mrs. Bradman [*to* RUTH]: It has been a thrilling evening—I shall never forget—it was sweet of you to include us.

Dr. Bradman: Good night, Mrs. Condomine—thank you so much.

Charles: You're sure about the drink?

Dr. Bradman: Quite sure, thanks.

Ruth: We'll let you know if we find any poltergeists whirling about.

Dr. Bradman: I should never forgive you if you didn't.

Mrs. Bradman: Come along, darling . . . [CHARLES *leads the* BRADMANS *out into the hall.* RUTH, *passing close to* ELVIRA, *goes over to the fire and turns over a log with her foot. Then she takes a*

cigarette and is lighting it as CHARLES *comes back into the room.*]

Ruth: Well, darling?

Charles [*absently*]: Well?

Ruth: Would you say the evening had been profitable?

Charles: Yes—I suppose so.

Ruth: I must say it was extremely funny at moments.

Charles: Yes—it certainly was.

Ruth: What's the matter?

Charles: The matter?

Ruth: Yes—you seem odd somehow—do you feel quite well?

Charles: Perfectly. I think I'll have a drink. Do you want one?

Ruth: No, thank you, dear.

Charles [*pouring himself out a drink*]: It's rather chilly in this room.

Ruth: Come over by the fire.

Charles: I don't think I'll make any notes tonight—I'll start fresh in the morning. [*He is bringing his drink over to the fire when he sees* ELVIRA.] My God! [*He drops the drink on the floor.* RUTH *jumps up.*]

Ruth: Charles!

Elvira: That was very clumsy, Charles dear.

Charles: Elvira!—then it's true—it was you!

Elvira: Of course it was.

Ruth [*coming to him*]: Charles—darling Charles—what are you talking about?

Charles [*to* ELVIRA]: Are you a ghost?

Elvira: I suppose I must be—it's all very confusing.

Ruth [*becoming agitated*]: Charles—what do you keep looking over there for? Look at me—what's happened?

Charles: Don't you see?

Ruth: See what?

Charles: Elvira.

Ruth [*staring at him incredulously*]: Elvira!!

Charles [*with an effort at social grace*]: Yes—Elvira dear, this is Ruth—Ruth, this is Elvira.

Ruth [*with forced calmness*]: Come and sit down, darling.

Charles: Do you mean to say you can't see her?

Ruth: Listen, Charles—you just sit down quietly by the fire and I'll mix you another drink. Don't worry about the mess on the carpet—Edith can clean it up in the morning. [*She takes him by the arm.*]

Charles [*breaking away*]: But you must be able to see her—she's there—look—right in front of you—there—

Ruth: Are you mad? What's happened to you?

Charles: You can't see her?

Ruth: If this is a joke, dear, it's gone quite far enough. Sit down, for God's sake, and don't be idiotic.

Charles [*clutching his head*]: What am I to do—what the hell am I to do!

Elvira: I think you might at least be a little more pleased to see me—after all, you conjured me up.

Charles: I didn't do any such thing. I did nothing of the sort.

Elvira: Nonsense, of course you did. That awful child with the cold came and told me you wanted to see me urgently.

Charles: It was all a mistake—a horrible mistake.

Ruth: Stop talking like that, Charles—as I told you before, the *joke's* gone far enough.

Charles [*aside*]: I've gone mad, that's what it is—I've just gone raving mad.

Ruth [*going to the table and quickly pouring him out some neat brandy*]: Here—let me get you a drink.

Charles [*mechanically—taking it*]: This is appalling!

Ruth: Relax.

Charles: How can I relax? I shall never be able to relax again as long as I live.

Ruth: Drink some brandy.

Charles [*drinking it at a gulp*]: There now—are you satisfied?

Ruth: Now sit down.

Charles: Why are you so anxious for me to sit down—what good will that do?

Ruth: I want you to relax—you can't relax standing up.

Elvira: African natives can—they can stand on one leg for hours.

Charles: I don't happen to be an African native.

Ruth: You don't happen to be a *what?*

Charles [*savagely*]: An African native!

Ruth: What's that got to do with it?

Charles: It doesn't matter, Ruth—really it doesn't matter—we'll say no more about it. [*He sits down.*] See, I've sat down.

Ruth: Would you like some more brandy?

Charles: Yes, please.

Elvira: Very unwise—you always had a weak head.

Charles: I could drink you under the table.

Ruth: There's no need to be aggressive, Charles—I'm doing my best to help you.

Charles: I'm sorry.

Ruth [*bringing him some more brandy*]: Here—drink this—and then we'll go to bed.

Elvira: Get rid of her, Charles—then we can talk in peace.

Charles: That's a thoroughly immoral suggestion, you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

Ruth: What is there immoral in that?

Charles: I wasn't talking to you.

Ruth: Who were you talking to, then?

Charles: Elvira, of course.

Ruth: To hell with Elvira!

Elvira: There now—she's getting cross.

Charles: I don't blame her.

Ruth: What don't you blame her for?

Charles: Oh, God!

Ruth: Now look here, Charles—I gather you've got some sort of plan behind all this. I'm not quite a fool. I suspected you when we were doing that idiotic séance.

Charles: Don't be so silly—what plan could I have?

Ruth: I don't know—it's probably something to do with the characters in your book—how they, or one of them, would react to a certain situation—I refuse to be used as a guinea pig unless I'm warned beforehand what it's all about.

Charles [*patiently*]: Ruth, Elvira is here—she's standing a few yards away from you.

Ruth [*sarcastically*]: Yes, dear, I can see her distinctly—under the piano with a horse.

Charles: But, Ruth . . .

Ruth: I am not going to stay here arguing any longer . . .

Elvira: Hurray!

Charles: Shut up.

Ruth [*incensed*]: How dare you speak to me like that!

Charles: Listen, Ruth—please listen—

Ruth: I will not listen to any more of this nonsense—I am going up to bed now. I'll leave you to turn out the lights. I shan't be asleep—I'm too upset—so you can come in and say good night to me if you feel like it.

Elvira: That's big of her, I must say.

Charles: Be quiet—you're behaving like a guttersnipe.

Ruth [*icily—at door*]: That is all I have to say. Good night, Charles. [RUTH *walks swiftly out of the room without looking at him again.*]

Charles: Ruth . . .

Elvira: That was one of the most enjoyable half-hours I have ever spent.

Charles: Oh, Elvira—how could you!

Elvira: Poor Ruth.

Charles [*staring at her*]: This is obviously an hallucination, isn't it?

Elvira: I'm afraid I don't know the technical term for it.

Charles [*rising and walking about the room*]: What am I to do?

Elvira: What Ruth suggested—relax.

Charles: Where have you come from?

Elvira: Do you know, it's very peculiar, but I've sort of forgotten.

Charles: Are you here to stay indefinitely?

Elvira: I don't know that either.

Charles: Oh, my God!

Elvira: Why, would you hate it so much if I did?

Charles: Well, you must admit it would be embarrassing.

Elvira: I don't see why, really—it's all a question of adjusting yourself—anyhow I think it's horrid of you to be so unwelcoming and disagreeable.

Charles: Now look here, Elvira . . .

Elvira [*near tears*]: I do—I think you're mean.

Charles: Try to see my point, dear—I've been married to Ruth for five years, and you've been dead for seven . . .

Elvira: Not dead, Charles—"passed over." It's considered vulgar to say "dead" where I come from.

Charles: Passed over, then.

Elvira: At any rate, now that I'm here, the least you can do is to make a pretense of being amiable about it . . .

Charles: Of course, my dear, I'm delighted in one way . . .

Elvira: I don't believe you love me any more.

Charles: I shall always love the memory of you.

Elvira [*rising and walking about*]: You mustn't think me unreasonable, but I really am a little hurt. You called me back—and at great inconvenience I came—and you've been thoroughly churlish ever since I arrived.

Charles [*gently*]: Believe me, Elvira, I most emphatically did not send for you—there's been some mistake.

Elvira [*irritably*]: Well, somebody did—and that child said it was you—I remember I was playing backgammon with a very sweet old Oriental gentleman—I think his name was Genghis Khan—and I'd just thrown double sixes, and then that child paged me and the next thing I knew I was in this room . . . perhaps it was your subconscious.

Charles: Well, you must find out whether you are going to stay or not, and we can make arrangements accordingly.

Elvira: I don't see how I can.

Charles: Well, try to think—isn't there anyone that you know, that you can get in touch with over there—on the other side, or whatever it's called—who could advise you?

Elvira: I can't think—it seems so far away—as though I'd dreamed it . . .

Charles: You must know somebody else beside Genghis Khan.

Elvira: Oh, Charles . . .

Charles: What is it?

Elvira: I want to cry, but I don't think I'm able to . . .

Charles: What do you want to cry for?

Elvira: It's seeing you again—and you being so irascible like you always used to be . . .

Charles: I don't mean to be irascible, Elvira . . .

Elvira: Darling—I don't mind really—I never did.

Charles: Is it cold—being a ghost?

Elvira: No—I don't think so.

Charles: What happens if I touch you?

Elvira: I doubt if you can. Do you want to?

Charles: Oh, Elvira . . . [*He buries his face in his hands.*]

Elvira: What is it, darling?

Charles: I really do feel strange, seeing you again . . .

Elvira: That's better.

Charles [*looking up*]: What's better?

Elvira: Your voice was kinder.

Charles: Was I ever unkind to you when you were alive?

Elvira: Often . . .

Charles: Oh, how can you! I'm sure that's an exaggeration.

Elvira: Not at all—you were an absolute pig that time we went to Cornwall and stayed in that awful hotel—you hit me with a billiard cue—

Charles: Only very, very gently . . .

Elvira: I loved you very much.

Charles: I loved you too . . . [*He puts out his hand to her and then draws it away.*] No, I can't touch you—isn't that horrible?

Elvira: Perhaps it's as well if I'm going to stay for any length of time . . .

Charles: I feel strangely peaceful—I suppose I shall wake up eventually . . .

Elvira: Put your head back.

Charles [*doing so*]: Like that?

Elvira [*stroking his hair*]: Can you feel anything . . . ?

Charles: Only a very little breeze through my hair. . . .

Elvira: Well, that's better than nothing.

Charles [*drowsily*]: I suppose if I'm really out of my mind they'll put me in an asylum.

Elvira: Don't worry about that—just relax—

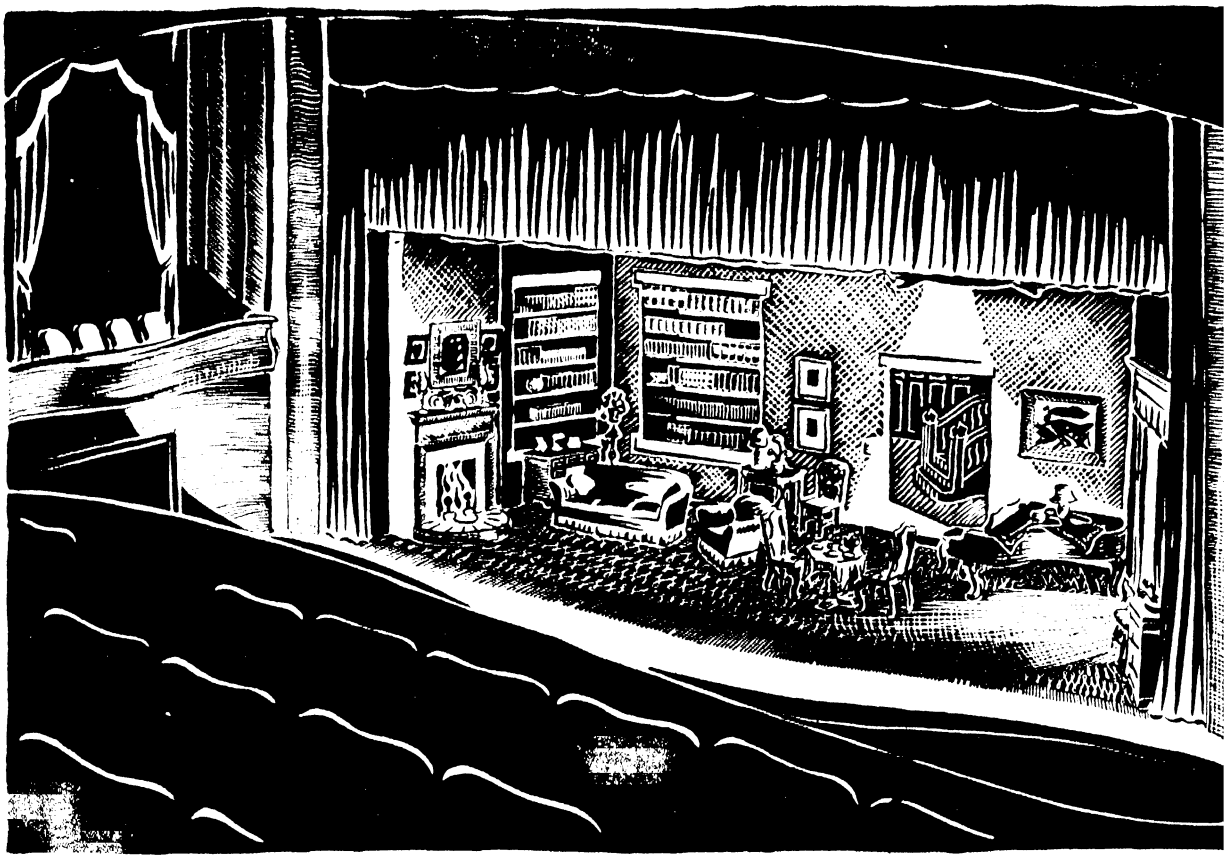
Charles [*very drowsily indeed*]: Poor Ruth . . .

Elvira [*gently and sweetly*]: To hell with Ruth.

[*The Curtain Falls.*]

ACT TWO

SCENE I



It is about nine-thirty the next morning. The sun is pouring in through the open French windows.

RUTH *is sitting at the breakfast table, drinking coffee and reading the* Times. *After a few moments* CHARLES *comes in. He kisses her.*

Charles: Good morning, darling.

Ruth [*with a certain stiffness*]: Good morning, Charles.

Charles [*going to the open window and taking a deep breath*]: It certainly is.

Ruth: What certainly is what?

Charles: A good morning—a tremendously good morning—there isn't a cloud in the sky and everything looks newly washed.

Ruth [*turning a page of the* Times]: Edith's keeping your breakfast hot—you'd better ring.

Charles [*pressing the bell by the fireplace*]: Anything interesting in the *Times?*

Ruth: Don't be silly, Charles.

Charles [*coming to the table*]: I intend to work all day.

Ruth: Good.

Charles: It's extraordinary about daylight, isn't it?

Ruth: How do you mean?

Charles: The way it reduces everything to normal.

Ruth: Does it?

Charles [*sits. Firmly*]: Yes—it does.

Ruth: I'm sure I'm very glad to hear it.

Charles: You're very glacial this morning.

Ruth: Are you surprised?

Charles: Frankly—yes. I expected more of *you.*

Ruth: Well, really!

Charles: I've always looked upon you as a woman of perception and understanding.

Ruth: Perhaps this is one of my off days. [EDITH *comes in with some bacon and eggs and toast.*]

Charles [*cheerfully*]: Good morning, Edith.

Edith: Good morning, sir.

Charles: Feeling fit?

Edith: Yes, sir—thank you, sir.

Charles: How's cook?

Edith: I don't know, sir—I haven't asked her.

Charles: You should. You should begin every day by asking everyone how they are—it oils the wheels.

Edith: Yes, sir.

Charles: Greet her for me, will you?

Edith: Yes, sir.

Ruth: That will be all for the moment, Edith.

Edith: Yes'm. [EDITH *goes out.*]

Ruth: I wish you wouldn't be facetious with the servants, Charles—it confuses them and undermines their morale.

Charles: I consider that point of view retrogressive, if not downright feudal.

Ruth: I don't care what you consider it, I have to run the house and you don't.

Charles: Are you implying that I couldn't?

Ruth: You're at liberty to try.

Charles: I take back what I said about it being a good morning—it's a dreadful morning.

Ruth: You'd better eat your breakfast while it's hot.

Charles: It isn't.

Ruth [*putting down the* Times]: Now look here, Charles—in your younger days this display of roguish flippancy might have been alluring—in a middle-aged novelist it's nauseating.

Charles: Would you like me to writhe at your feet in a frenzy of self-abasement?

Ruth: That would be equally nauseating but certainly more appropriate.

Charles: I really don't see what I've done that's so awful.

Ruth: You behaved abominably last night. You wounded me and insulted me.

Charles: I was the victim of an aberration.

Ruth: Nonsense—you were drunk.

Charles: Drunk?

Ruth: You had four strong dry Martinis before dinner—a great deal too much burgundy at dinner—heaven knows how much port and kümmel with Dr. Bradman while I was doing my best to entertain that madwoman—and then two double brandies later—I gave them to you myself—of course you were drunk.

Charles: So that's your story, is it?

Ruth: You refused to come to bed and finally when I came down at three in the morning to see what had happened to you I found you in an alcoholic coma on the sofa with the fire out and your hair all over your face.

Charles: I was not in the least drunk, Ruth. Something happened to me—you really must believe that—something very peculiar happened to me.

Ruth: Nonsense.

Charles: It isn't nonsense—I know it looks like nonsense now in the clear, remorseless light of day, but last night it was far from being nonsense—I honestly had some sort of hallucination—

Ruth: I would really rather not discuss it any further.

Charles: But you must discuss it—it's very disturbing.

Ruth: There I agree with you. It showed you up in a most unpleasant light—I find that extremely disturbing.

Charles: I swear to you that during the séance I was convinced that I heard Elvira's voice—

Ruth: Nobody else did.

Charles: I can't help that—I did.

Ruth: You couldn't have.

Charles: And later on I was equally convinced that she was in

this room—I saw her distinctly and talked to her. After you'd gone up to bed we had quite a cozy little chat.

Ruth: And you seriously expect me to believe that you weren't drunk?

Charles: I *know* I wasn't drunk. If I'd been all that drunk I should have a dreadful hangover now, shouldn't I?

Ruth: I'm not at all sure that you haven't.

Charles: I haven't got a trace of a headache—my tongue's not coated—look at it. [*He puts out his tongue.*]

Ruth: I've not the least desire to look at your tongue; kindly put it in again.

Charles: I know what it is—you're frightened.

Ruth: Frightened? Rubbish! What is there to be frightened of?

Charles: Elvira. You wouldn't have minded all that much even if I had been drunk—it's only because it was all mixed up with Elvira.

Ruth: I seem to remember last night before dinner telling you that your views of female psychology were rather didactic. I was right: I should have added that they were puerile.

Charles: That was when it all began.

Ruth: When what all began?

Charles: We were talking too much about Elvira—it's dangerous to have somebody very strongly in your mind when you start dabbling with the occult.

Ruth: She certainly wasn't strongly in my mind.

Charles: She was in mine.

Ruth: Oh, she was, was she?

Charles: You tried to make me say that she was more physically attractive than you, so that you could hold it over me.

Ruth: I did not. I don't give a hoot how physically attractive she was.

Charles: Oh, yes, you do—your whole being is devoured with jealousy.

Ruth [*rises and starts to clear table*]: This is *too* much!

Charles: Women! My God, what I think of women!

Ruth: Your view of women is academic to say the least of it—just because you've always been dominated by them it doesn't necessarily follow that you know anything about them.

Charles: I've never been dominated by anyone.

Ruth: You were hag-ridden by your mother until you were

twenty-three—then you got into the clutches of that awful Mrs. Whatever-her-name-was—

Charles: Mrs. Winthrop-Lewellyn.

Ruth: I'm not interested. Then there was Elvira—she ruled you with a rod of iron.

Charles: Elvira never ruled anyone, she was much too elusive—that was one of her greatest charms. [*Sits*]

Ruth: Then there was Maud Charteris—

Charles: My affair with Maud Charteris lasted exactly seven and a half weeks and she cried all the time.

Ruth: The tyranny of tears! Then there was—

Charles: If you wish to make an inventory of my sex life, dear, I think it only fair to tell you that you've missed out several episodes—I'll consult my diary and give you the complete list after lunch.

Ruth: It's no use trying to impress me with your routine amorous exploits—

Charles: The only woman in my whole life who's ever attempted to dominate me is you—you've been at it for years.

Ruth: That is completely untrue.

Charles: Oh, no, it isn't. You boss me and bully me and order me about—you won't even allow me to have an hallucination if I want to.

Ruth: Alcohol will ruin your whole life if you allow it to get a hold on you, you know.

Charles: Once and for all, Ruth, I would like you to understand that what happened last night was nothing whatever to do with alcohol. You've very adroitly rationalized the whole affair to your own satisfaction, but your deductions are based on complete fallacy. I am willing to grant you that it was an aberration, some sort of odd psychic delusion brought on by suggestion or hypnosis. I was stone cold sober from first to last and extremely upset into the bargain.

Ruth: You were upset indeed! What about me?

Charles: You behaved with a stolid, obtuse lack of comprehension that frankly shocked me!

Ruth: I consider that I was remarkably patient. I shall know better next time.

Charles: Instead of putting out a gentle, comradely hand to guide me you shouted staccato orders at me like a sergeant-major.

Ruth: You seem to forget that you gratuitously insulted me.

Charles: I did not.

Ruth: You called me a guttersnipe—you told me to shut up—and when I quietly suggested that we should go up to bed you said, with the most disgusting leer, that it was an immoral suggestion.

Charles [*exasperated*]: I was talking to Elvira!

Ruth: If you were I can only say that it conjures up a fragrant picture of your first marriage.

Charles: My first marriage was perfectly charming and I think it's in the worst possible taste for you to sneer at it.

Ruth: I am not nearly so interested in your first marriage as you think I am. It's your second marriage that is absorbing me at the moment—it seems to me to be on the rocks.

Charles: Only because you persist in taking up this ridiculous attitude.

Ruth: My attitude is that of any normal woman whose husband gets drunk and hurls abuse at her.

Charles [*shouting*]: I was not drunk!

Ruth: Be quiet, they'll hear you in the kitchen.

Charles: I don't care if they hear me in the Folkestone Town Hall—I was not drunk!

Ruth: Control yourself, Charles.

Charles: How can I control myself in the face of your idiotic damned stubbornness? It's giving me claustrophobia.

Ruth [*quietly*]: You'd better ring up Dr. Bradman. [EDITH *comes in with a tray to clear away the breakfast things.*]

Edith: Can I clear, please'm?

Ruth: Yes, Edith.

Edith: Cook wants to know about lunch, mum.

Ruth [*coldly*]: Will you be in to lunch, Charles?

Charles: Please don't worry about me—I shall be perfectly happy with a bottle of gin in my bedroom.

Ruth: Don't be silly, dear. [*To* EDITH] Tell cook we shall both be in.

Edith: Yes'm.

Ruth [*conversationally—after a long pause*]: I'm going into Hythe this morning—is there anything you want?

Charles: Yes—a great deal—but I doubt if you could get it in Hythe.

Ruth: Tell cook to put Alka-Seltzer down on my list, will you, Edith?

Edith: Yes'm.

Ruth [*at the window—after another long pause*]: It's clouding over.

Charles: You have a genius for understatement. [*In silence, but breathing heavily,* EDITH *staggers out with the tray.*]

Ruth [*as she goes*]: Don't worry about the table, Edith—I'll put it away.

Edith: Yes'm. [*When* EDITH *has gone* CHARLES *goes over to* RUTH.]

Charles: Please, Ruth—be reasonable.

Ruth: I'm perfectly reasonable.

Charles: I wasn't pretending—I really did believe that I saw Elvira and when I heard her voice I was appalled.

Ruth: You put up with it for five years. [*Puts chair by gramophone.*]

Charles [*puts table in hall*]: Naturally when I saw her I had the shock of my life—that's why I dropped the glass.

Ruth: But you *couldn't* have seen her.

Charles: I know I couldn't have but I *did!*

Ruth: I'm willing to concede then that you imagined you did.

Charles: That's what I've been trying to explain to you for hours.

Ruth: Well, then, there's obviously something wrong with you.

Charles: Exactly—there is something wrong with me—something fundamentally wrong with me—that's why I've been imploring your sympathy and all I got was a sterile temperance lecture.

Ruth: You had been drinking, Charles—there's no denying that.

Charles: No more than usual.

Ruth: Well, how do you account for it then?

Charles [*frantically*]: I can't account for it—that's what's so awful.

Ruth [*practically*]: Did you feel quite well yesterday—during the day, I mean?

Charles: Of course I did.

Ruth: What did you have for lunch?

Charles: You ought to know, you had it with me.

Ruth [*thinking*]: Let me see now, there was lemon sole and that cheese thing—

Charles: Why should having a cheese thing for lunch make me see my deceased wife after dinner?

Ruth: You never know—it was rather rich.

Charles: Why didn't you see your dead husband then? You had just as much of it as I did.

Ruth: This is not getting us anywhere at all.

Charles: Of course it isn't, and it won't as long as you insist on ascribing supernatural phenomena to colonic irritation.

Ruth: Supernatural grandmother!

Charles: I admit she'd have been much less agitating.

Ruth [*sits*]: Perhaps you ought to see a nerve specialist.

Charles: I am not in the least neurotic and never have been.

Ruth: A psychoanalyst then.

Charles: I refuse to endure months of expensive humiliation only to be told at the end of it that at the age of four I was in love with my rocking horse.

Ruth: What do you suggest then?

Charles: I don't suggest anything—I'm profoundly uneasy.

Ruth: Perhaps there's something pressing on your brain.

Charles: If there were something pressing on my brain I should have violent headaches, shouldn't I?

Ruth: Not necessarily. An uncle of mine had a lump the size of a cricket ball pressing on his brain for years and he never felt a thing.

Charles [*rises*]: I know I should know if I had anything like that.

Ruth: He didn't.

Charles: What happened to him?

Ruth: He had it taken out and he's been as bright as a button ever since.

Charles: Did he have any sort of delusions—did he think he saw things that weren't there?

Ruth: No, I don't think so.

Charles: Well, what the hell are we talking about him for then? It's sheer waste of valuable time.

Ruth: I only brought him up as an example.

Charles: I think I'm going mad.

Ruth: How do you feel now?

Charles: Physically, do you mean?

Ruth: Altogether.

Charles [*after due reflection*]: Apart from being worried I feel quite normal.

Ruth: Good. You're not hearing or seeing anything in the least unusual?

Charles: Not a thing. [*At this moment* ELVIRA *comes in from the garden, carrying an armful of roses. The roses are as gray as the rest of her.*]

Elvira: You've absolutely ruined that border by the sundial—it looks like a mixed salad.

Charles: O my God!

Ruth: What's the matter now?

Charles: She's here again!

Ruth: What do you mean? Who's here again?

Charles: Elvira.

Ruth: Pull yourself together and don't be absurd.

Elvira: It's all those nasturtiums—they're so vulgar.

Charles: I like nasturtiums.

Ruth: You like what?

Elvira [*putting her gray roses into a vase*]: They're all right in moderation but in a mass like that they look beastly.

Charles: Help me, Ruth—you've got to help me—

Ruth [*rises*]: What did you mean about nasturtiums?

Charles: Never mind about that now—I tell you she's here again.

Elvira: You have been having a nice scene, haven't you? I could hear you right down the garden.

Charles: Please mind your own business.

Ruth: If your behaving like a lunatic isn't my business nothing is.

Elvira: I expect it was about me, wasn't it? I know I ought to feel sorry but I'm not—I'm delighted.

Charles: How can you be so inconsiderate?

Ruth [*shrilly*]: Inconsiderate!—I like that, I must say—

Charles: Ruth—darling—please . . .

Ruth: I've done everything I can to help—I've controlled myself admirably—and I should like to say here and now that I don't believe a word about your damned hallucinations—you're up to something, Charles—there's been a certain furtiveness in your manner for weeks— Why don't you be honest and tell me what it is?

Charles: You're wrong—you're dead wrong—I haven't been in the least furtive—I—

Ruth: You're trying to upset me—for some obscure reason you're trying to goad me into doing something that I might regret—I won't stand for it any more— You're making me utterly miserable— [*She bursts into tears and collapses on sofa.*]

Charles: Ruth—please— [*Sits on sofa beside* RUTH.]

Ruth: Don't come near me—

Elvira: Let her have a nice cry—it'll do her good.

Charles: You're utterly heartless!

Ruth: Heartless!

Charles [*wildly*]: I was not talking to you—I was talking to Elvira.

Ruth: Go on talking to her then, talk to her until you're blue in the face but don't talk to me—

Charles: Help me, Elvira—

Elvira: How?

Charles: Make her see you or something.

Elvira: I'm afraid I couldn't manage that—it's technically the most difficult business—frightfully complicated, you know—it takes years of study—

Charles: You are here, aren't you? You're not an illusion?

Elvira: I may be an illusion but I'm most definitely here.

Charles: How did you get here?

Elvira: I told you last night—I don't exactly know—

Charles: Well, you must make me a promise that in future you only come and talk to me when I'm alone—

Elvira [*pouting*]: How unkind you are—making me feel so unwanted—I've never been treated so rudely—

Charles: I don't mean to be rude, but you must see—

Elvira: It's all your own fault for having married a woman who is incapable of seeing beyond the nose on her face—if she had a grain of real sympathy or affection for you she'd believe what you tell her.

Charles: How could you expect anybody to believe this?

Elvira: You'd be surprised how gullible people are—we often laugh about it on the other side. [RUTH, *who has stopped crying and been staring at* CHARLES *in horror, suddenly gets up.*]

Ruth [*gently*]: Charles—

Charles [*surprised at her tone*]: Yes, dear—

Ruth: I'm awfully sorry I was cross—

Charles: But, my dear—

Ruth: I understand everything now, I do really—

Charles: You do?

Ruth [*patting his arm reassuringly*]: Of course I do.

Elvira: Look out—she's up to something—

Charles: Will you please be quiet?

Ruth: Of course, darling—we'll all be quiet, won't we? We'll be as quiet as little mice.

Charles: Ruth dear, listen—

Ruth: I want you to come upstairs with me and go to bed—

Elvira: The way that woman harps on bed is nothing short of erotic.

Charles: I'll deal with you later—

Ruth: Whenever you like, darling. Come along.

Charles: Ruth dear—I'd really rather not go to bed in the middle of the morning—

Elvira: How you've changed, darling!

Charles: Don't be disgusting.

Ruth [*sweetly*]: I'm sorry, dear—I didn't mean to be.

Charles: What are you up to?

Ruth: I'm not up to anything—I just want you to go quietly to bed and wait there until Dr. Bradman comes—

Charles: No, Ruth—you're wrong—

Ruth [*firmly*]: Come, dear—

Elvira: She'll have you in a strait jacket before you know where you are.

Charles [*frantically*]: Help me—you must help me—

Elvira [*enjoying herself*]: My dear, I would with pleasure, but I can't think how—

Charles: I can—listen, Ruth—

Ruth: Yes, dear?

Charles: If I promise to go to bed will you let me stay here for five minutes longer?

Ruth: I really think it would be better—

Charles: Bear with me—however mad it may seem—bear with me for just five minutes longer—

Ruth [*letting go of him*]: Very well—what is it?

Charles: Sit down then.

Ruth [*sitting down*]: All right—there.

Charles: Now listen—listen carefully—

Elvira: Have a cigarette, it will soothe your nerves.

Charles: I don't want a cigarette.

Ruth [*indulgently*]: Then you shan't have one, darling.

Charles: Ruth, I want to explain to you clearly and without emotion that beyond any shadow of doubt the ghost or shade or whatever you like to call it of my first wife Elvira is in this room now.

Ruth: Yes, dear.

Charles: I know you don't believe it and are trying valiantly to humor me but I intend to prove it to you.

Ruth: Why not lie down and have a nice rest and you can prove anything you want to later on?

Charles: She may not be here later on.

Elvira: Don't worry—she will!

Charles: O God!

Ruth: Hush, dear.

Charles [*to* ELVIRA]: Promise you'll do what I ask?

Elvira: That all depends what it is.

Charles: Ruth—you see that bowl of flowers on the piano?

Ruth: Yes, dear—I did it myself this morning.

Elvira: Very untidily if I may say so.

Charles: You may not.

Ruth: Very well—I never will again—I promise.

Charles: Elvira will now carry that bowl of flowers to the mantelpiece and back again. You will, Elvira, won't you—just to please me?

Elvira: I don't really see why I should—you've been quite insufferable to me ever since I materialized.

Charles: Please.

Elvira: All right, I will just this once—not that I approve of all these Herman The Great carryings on. [*She goes over to the piano.*]

Charles: Now, Ruth—watch carefully.

Ruth [*patiently*]: Very well, dear.

Charles: Go on, Elvira—bring it to the mantelpiece and back again. [ELVIRA *does so, taking obvious pleasure in doing it in a very roundabout way. At one moment she brings it up to within an inch of* RUTH'S *face.* RUTH *shrinks back with a scream and then jumps to her feet.*]

Ruth [*furiously*]: How dare you, Charles! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

Charles: What on earth for?

Ruth [*hysterically*]: It's a trick—I know perfectly well it's a trick—you've been working up to this—it's all part of some horrible plan—

Charles: It isn't—I swear it isn't—Elvira—do something else, for God's sake—

Elvira: Certainly—anything to oblige.

Ruth [*becoming really frightened*]: You want to get rid of me—you're trying to drive me out of my mind—

Charles: Don't be so silly.

Ruth: You're cruel and sadistic and I'll never forgive you—[ELVIRA *lifts up a light chair and waltzes solemnly round the room*

with it, then she puts it down with a bang. Making a dive for the door.] I'm not going to put up with this any more.

Charles [*holding her*]: You must believe it—you must—

Ruth: Let me go immediately—

Charles: That was Elvira—I swear it was—

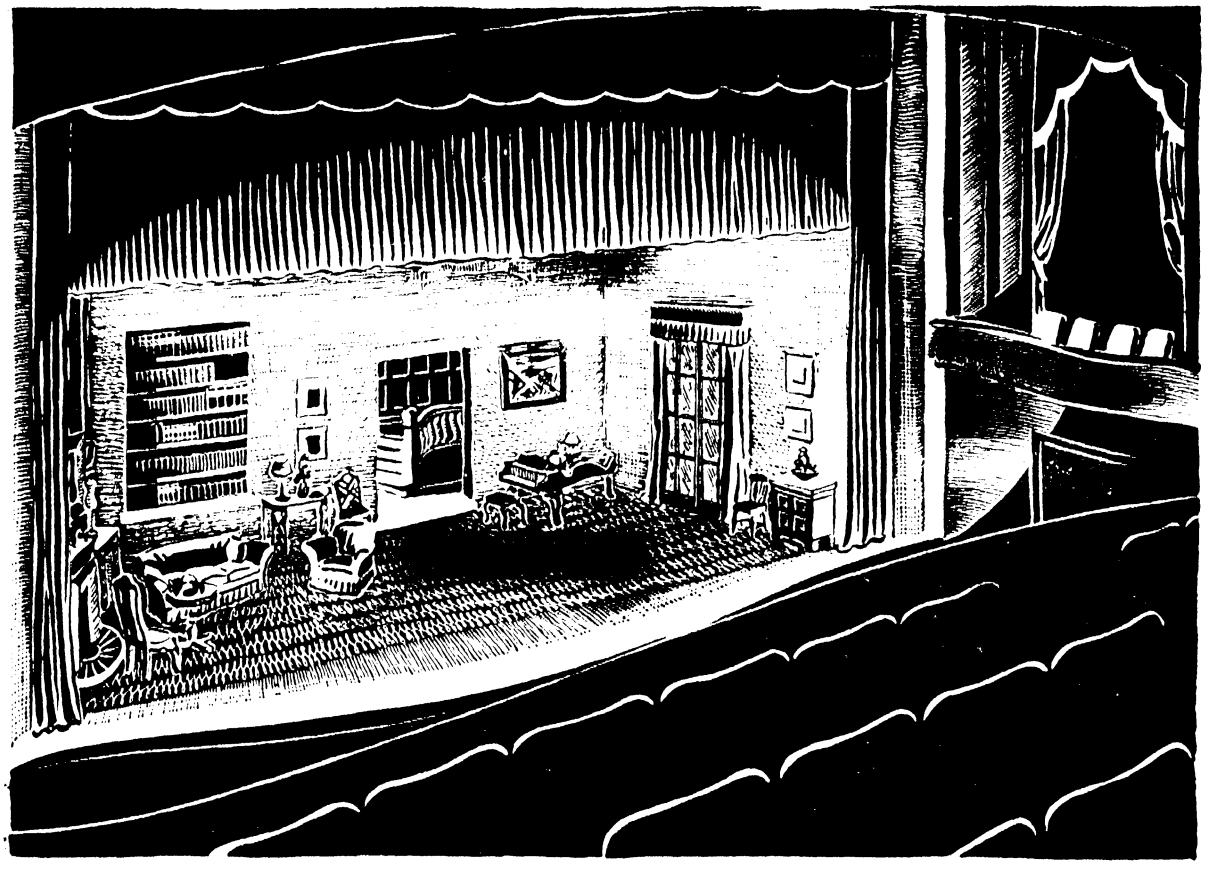
Ruth [*struggling*]: Let me go—

Charles: Ruth—please— [RUTH *breaks away from him and runs towards the windows.* ELVIRA *gets there just before her and shuts them in her face.* RUTH *starts back, appalled.*]

Ruth [*looking at* CHARLES *with eyes of horror*]: Charles—this is madness—sheer madness! It's some sort of auto-suggestion, isn't it? —some form of hypnotism, swear to me it's only that. Swear to me it's only that.

Elvira [*taking an expensive vase from the mantelpiece and crashing it into the grate*]: Hypnotism my foot! [RUTH *gives a scream and goes into violent hysterics as the curtain falls.*]

SCENE II



The time is late on the following afternoon.

When the curtain rises RUTH *is sitting alone at the tea table, which is set in front of the fire. After a moment or two she gets up and, frowning thoughtfully, goes over to the piano and takes a cigarette out of a box. As she returns to the table the front door bell rings. She hears it and straightens herself as though preparing for a difficult interview.* EDITH *enters.*

Edith: Madame Arcati. [EDITH *steps aside and* MADAME ARCATI *comes in.* EDITH *goes out.* MADAME ARCATI *is wearing a tweed coat and skirt and a great many amber beads and, possibly, a beret.*]

Madame Arcati: My dear Mrs. Condomine, I came directly I got your message.

Ruth: That was very kind of you.

Madame Arcati [*briskly*]: Kind? Nonsense! Nothing kind about it—I look upon it as an outing.

Ruth: I'm so glad—will you have some tea?

Madame Arcati: China or Indian?

Ruth: China.

Madame Arcati: Good. I never touch Indian; it upsets my vibrations.

Ruth: Do sit down.

Madame Arcati [*turning her head and sniffing*]: I find this room very interesting—very interesting indeed. I noticed it the other night.

Ruth: I'm not entirely surprised. [*She proceeds to pour out tea.*]

Madame Arcati [*sitting down and pulling off her gloves*]: Have you ever been to Cowden Manor?

Ruth: No, I'm afraid I haven't.

Madame Arcati: That's very interesting too—strikes you like a blow between the eyes the moment you walk into the drawing-room. Two lumps of sugar, please, and no milk at all.

Ruth: I am profoundly disturbed, Madame Arcati, and I want your help.

Madame Arcati: Aha! I thought as much. What's in these sandwiches?

Ruth: Cucumber.

Madame Arcati: Couldn't be better. [*She takes one.*] Fire away.

Ruth: It's most awfully difficult to explain.

Madame Arcati: Facts first—explanations afterwards.

Ruth: It's the facts that are difficult to explain—they're so fantastic.

Madame Arcati: Facts very often are. Take creative talent, for instance, how do you account for that? Look at Shakespeare and Michael Angelo! Try to explain Mozart snatching sounds out of the air and putting them down on paper when he was practically a baby —facts—plain facts. I know it's the fashion nowadays to ascribe it all to glands but my reply to that is fiddledeedee.

Ruth: Yes, I'm sure you're quite right.

Madame Arcati: There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Mrs. Condomine.

Ruth: There certainly are.

Madame Arcati: Come now—take the plunge—out with it. You've heard strange noises in the night no doubt—boards creaking—doors slamming—subdued moaning in the passages—is that it?

Ruth: No—I'm afraid it isn't.

Madame Arcati: No sudden gusts of cold wind, I hope?

Ruth: No, it's worse than that.

Madame Arcati: I'm all attention.

Ruth [*with an effort*]: I know it sounds idiotic but the other night—during the séance—something happened—

Madame Arcati: I knew it! Probably a poltergeist, they're enormously cunning, you know, they sometimes lie doggo for days—

Ruth: You know that my husband was married before?

Madame Arcati: Yes—I have heard it mentioned.

Ruth: His first wife, Elvira, died comparatively young—

Madame Arcati [*sharply*]: Where?

Ruth: Here—in this house—in this very room.

Madame Arcati [*whistling*]: Whew! I'm beginning to see daylight!

Ruth: She was convalescing after pneumonia and one evening she started to laugh helplessly at one of the B.B.C. musical programs and died of a heart attack.

Madame Arcati: And she materialized the other evening—after I had gone?

Ruth: Not to me, but to my husband.

Madame Arcati [*rising impulsively*]: Capital—capital! Oh, but that's splendid!

Ruth [*coldly*]: From your own professional standpoint I can see that it might be regarded as a major achievement!

Madame Arcati [*delighted*]: A triumph, my dear! Nothing more nor less than a triumph!

Ruth: But from my own personal point of view you must see that, to say the least of it, it's embarrassing.

Madame Arcati [*walking about the room*]: At last—at last—a genuine materialization!

Ruth: Please sit down again, Madame Arcati.

Madame Arcati: How could anyone sit down at a moment like this? It's tremendous! I haven't had such a success since the Sudbury case.

Ruth [*sharply*]: Nevertheless I must insist upon you sitting down and controlling your natural exuberance. I appreciate fully your pride in your achievement but I would like to point out that it has made my position in this house untenable and that I hold you entirely responsible.

Madame Arcati [*contrite*]: Forgive me, Mrs. Condomine—I am being abominably selfish— [*She sits down.*] How can I help you?

Ruth: How? By sending her back immediately to where she came from, of course.

Madame Arcati: I'm afraid that that is easier said than done.

Ruth: Do you mean to tell me that she is liable to stay here indefinitely?

Madame Arcati: It's difficult to say—I fear it depends largely on her.

Ruth: But my dear Madame Arcati—

Madame Arcati: Where is she now?

Ruth: My husband has driven her into Folkestone—apparently she was anxious to see an old friend of hers who is staying at the Grand.

Madame Arcati [*producing a notebook*]: Forgive this formality, but I shall have to make a report to the Psychical Research people—

Ruth: I would be very much obliged if there were no names mentioned.

Madame Arcati: The report will be confidential.

Ruth: This is a small village you know and gossip would be most undesirable.

Madame Arcati: I quite understand. You say she is visible only to your husband?

Ruth: Yes.

Madame Arcati: "Visible only to husband." Audible too I presume?

Ruth: Extremely audible.

Madame Arcati: "Extremely audible." Your husband was devoted to her?

Ruth [*with slight irritation*]: I believe so—

Madame Arcati: "Husband devoted."

Ruth: It was apparently a reasonably happy marriage—

Madame Arcati: Tut, tut, Mrs. Condomine.

Ruth: I beg your pardon?

Madame Arcati: When did she pass over?

Ruth: Seven years ago.

Madame Arcati: Aha! That means she must have been on the waiting list.

Ruth: Waiting list?

Madame Arcati: Yes, otherwise she would have got beyond the materialization stage by now. She must have marked herself down for a return visit and she'd never have been able to manage it unless there were a strong influence at work.

Ruth: Do you mean that Charles—my husband—wanted her back all that much?

Madame Arcati: Possibly, or it might have been her own determination—

Ruth: That sounds much more likely.

Madame Arcati: Would you say that she was a woman of strong character?

Ruth [*with rising annoyance*]: I really don't know, Madame Arcati. I never met her. Nor am I particularly interested in how and why she got here. I am solely concerned with the question of how to get her away again as soon as possible.

Madame Arcati: I fully sympathize with you, Mrs. Condomine, and I assure you I will do anything in my power to help—but at the moment I fear I cannot offer any great hopes.

Ruth: But I always understood that there was a way of exorcising ghosts—some sort of ritual?

Madame Arcati: You mean the old Bell and Book method?

Ruth: Yes—I suppose I do.

Madame Arcati: Poppycock, Mrs. Condomine. It was quite effective in the days of genuine religious belief but that's all changed now. I believe the decline of faith in the Spirit World has been causing grave concern.

Ruth [*impatiently*]: Has it indeed?

Madame Arcati: There was a time of course when a drop of holy

water could send even a poltergeist scampering for cover, but not any more—*"Où sont les neiges d'Antan?"*

Ruth: Be that as it may, Madame Arcati, I must beg of you to do your utmost to dematerialize my husband's first wife as soon as possible.

Madame Arcati: The time has come for me to admit to you frankly, Mrs. Condomine, that I haven't the faintest idea how to set about it.

Ruth [*rises*]: Do you mean to sit there and tell me that having mischievously conjured up this ghost or spirit or whatever she is and placed me in a hideous position you are unable to do anything about it at all?

Madame Arcati: Honesty is the best policy.

Ruth: But it's outrageous! I ought to hand you over to the police.

Madame Arcati [*rising*]: You go too far, Mrs. Condomine.

Ruth [*furiously*]: I go too far indeed? Do you realize what your insane amateur muddling has done?

Madame Arcati: I have been a professional since I was a child, Mrs. Condomine—"Amateur" is a word I cannot tolerate.

Ruth: It seems to me to be the height of amateurishness to evoke malignant spirits and not be able to get rid of them again.

Madame Arcati [*with dignity*]: I was in a trance. Anything might happen when I am in a trance.

Ruth: Well, all I can suggest is that you go into another one immediately and get this damned woman out of my house.

Madame Arcati: I can't go into trances at a moment's notice—it takes hours of preparation—in addition to which I have to be extremely careful of my diet for days beforehand. Today, for instance, I happened to lunch with friends and had pigeon pie which, plus these cucumber sandwiches, would make a trance out of the question.

Ruth: Well, you'll have to do something.

Madame Arcati: I will report the whole matter to the Society for Psychical Research at the earliest possible moment.

Ruth: Will they be able to do anything?

Madame Arcati: I doubt it. They'd send an investigating committee, I expect, and do a lot of questioning and wall tapping and mumbo jumbo and then they'd have a conference and you would probably have to go up to London to testify—

Ruth [*near tears*]: It's too humiliating—it really is.

Madame Arcati: Please try not to upset yourself—nothing can be achieved by upsetting yourself.

Ruth: It's all very fine for you to talk like that, Madame Arcati—you don't seem to have the faintest realization of my position.

Madame Arcati: Try to look on the bright side.

Ruth: Bright side indeed! If your husband's first wife suddenly appeared from the grave and came to live in the house with you, do you suppose you'd be able to look on the bright side?

Madame Arcati: I resent your tone, Mrs. Condomine, I really do.

Ruth: You most decidedly have no right to—you are entirely to blame for the whole horrible situation.

Madame Arcati: Kindly remember that I came here the other night on your own invitation.

Ruth: On my husband's invitation.

Madame Arcati: I did what I was requested to do, which was to give a séance and establish contact with the other side—I had no idea that there was any ulterior motive mixed up with it.

Ruth: Ulterior motive?

Madame Arcati: Your husband was obviously eager to get in touch with his former wife. If I had been aware of that at the time I should naturally have consulted you beforehand—after all *"Noblesse oblige"!*

Ruth: He had no intention of trying to get in touch with anyone—the whole thing was planned in order for him to get material for a mystery story he is writing about a homicidal medium.

Madame Arcati [*drawing herself up*]: Am I to understand that I was only invited in a spirit of mockery?

Ruth: Not at all—he merely wanted to make notes of some of the tricks of the trade.

Madame Arcati [*incensed*]: Tricks of the trade! Insufferable! I've never been so insulted in my life. I feel we have nothing more to say to one another, Mrs. Condomine. Good-by— [*She goes towards the door.*]

Ruth: Please don't go—please—

Madame Arcati: Your attitude from the outset has been most unpleasant, Mrs. Condomine. Some of your remarks have been discourteous in the extreme and I should like to say without umbrage that if you and your husband were foolish enough to tamper with the unseen for paltry motives and in a spirit of ribaldry, whatever has happened to you is your own fault, and, to coin a phrase, as far

as I'm concerned you can stew in your own juice! [MADAME ARCATI *goes majestically from the room.*]

Ruth [*left alone, walks about the room*]: Damn—damn—damn! [*After a moment or two* CHARLES *comes in with* ELVIRA.]

Charles: What on earth was Madame Arcati doing here?

Ruth: She came to tea.

Charles: Did you ask her?

Ruth: Of course I did.

Charles: You never told me you were going to.

Ruth: You never told me you were going to ask Elvira to live with us.

Charles: I didn't.

Elvira [*sauntering over to the tea table*]: Oh, yes, you did, darling—it was your subconscious.

Charles: What was the old girl so cross about?—she practically cut me dead.

Ruth: I told her the truth about why we invited her the other night.

Charles: That was quite unnecessary and most unkind.

Ruth: She needed taking down a bit, she was blowing herself out like a pouter pigeon.

Charles: Why did you ask her to tea?

Elvira: To get me exorcised, of course. Oh, dear, I wish I could have a cucumber sandwich—I did love them so.

Charles: Is that true, Ruth?

Ruth: Is what true?

Charles: What Elvira said.

Ruth: You know perfectly well I can't hear what Elvira says.

Charles: She said that you got Madame Arcati here to try to get her exorcised. Is that true?

Ruth: We discussed the possibilities.

Elvira: There's a snake in the grass for you.

Charles: You had no right to do such a thing without consulting me.

Ruth: I have every right—this situation is absolutely impossible and you know it.

Charles: If only you'd make an effort and try to be a little more friendly to Elvira we might all have quite a jolly time.

Ruth: I have no wish to have a jolly time with Elvira.

Elvira: She's certainly very bad tempered, isn't she? I can't think why you married her.

Charles: She's naturally a bit upset—we must make allowances.

Elvira: I was never bad tempered though, was I, darling? Not even when you were beastly to me—

Charles: I was never beastly to you.

Ruth [*exasperated*]: Where is Elvira at the moment?

Charles: In the chair, by the table.

Ruth: Now look here, Elvira—I shall have to call you Elvira, shan't I? I can't very well go on saying Mrs. Condomine all the time, it would sound too silly—

Elvira: I don't see why not.

Ruth: Did she say anything?

Charles: She said she'd like nothing better.

Elvira [*giggling*]: You really are sweet, Charles darling—I worship you.

Ruth: I wish to be absolutely honest with you, Elvira—

Elvira: Hold on to your hats, boys!

Ruth: I admit I did ask Madame Arcati here with a view to getting you exorcised and I think that if you were in my position you'd have done exactly the same thing—wouldn't you?

Elvira: I shouldn't have done it so obviously.

Ruth: What did she say?

Charles: Nothing—she just nodded and smiled.

Ruth [*with a forced smile*]: Thank you, Elvira—that's generous of you. I really would so much rather that there were no misunderstandings between us—

Charles: That's very sensible, Ruth—I agree entirely.

Ruth [*to* ELVIRA]: I want, before we go any further, to ask you a frank question. Why did you really come here? I don't see that you could have hoped to have achieved anything by it beyond the immediate joke of making Charles into a sort of astral bigamist.

Elvira: I came because the power of Charles's love tugged and tugged and tugged at me. Didn't it, my sweet?

Ruth: What did she say?

Charles: She said that she came because she wanted to see me again.

Ruth: Well, she's done that now, hasn't she?

Charles: We can't be inhospitable, Ruth.

Ruth: I have no wish to be inhospitable, but I should like to have just an idea of how long you intend to stay, Elvira?

Elvira: I don't know—I really don't know! [*She giggles.*] Isn't it awful?

Charles: She says she doesn't know.

Ruth: Surely that's a little inconsiderate?

Elvira: Didn't the old spiritualist have any constructive ideas about getting rid of me?

Charles: What did Madame Arcati say?

Ruth: She said she couldn't do a thing.

Elvira [*moving gaily over to the window*]: Hurray!

Charles: Don't be upset, Ruth dear—we shall soon adjust ourselves, you know—you must admit it's a unique experience—I can see no valid reason why we shouldn't get a great deal of fun out of it.

Ruth: Fun? Charles, how can you—you must be out of your mind!

Charles: Not at all—I thought I was at first—but now I must say I'm beginning to enjoy myself.

Ruth [*bursting into tears*]: Oh, Charles—Charles—

Elvira: She's off again.

Charles: You really must not be so callous, Elvira—try to see her point a little—

Ruth: I suppose she said something insulting—

Charles: No, dear, she didn't do anything of the sort.

Ruth: Now look here, Elvira—

Charles: She's over by the window now.

Ruth: Why the hell can't she stay in the same place!

Elvira: Temper again—my poor Charles, what a terrible life you must lead.

Charles: Do shut up, darling, you'll only make everything worse.

Ruth: Who was that "darling" addressed to—her or me?

Charles: Both of you.

Ruth [*rises. Stamping her foot*]: This is intolerable!

Charles: For Heaven's sake don't get into another state—

Ruth [*furiously*]: I've been doing my level best to control myself ever since yesterday morning and I'm damned if I'm going to try any more, the strain is too much. She has the advantage of being able to say whatever she pleases without me being able to hear her, but she can hear me all right, can't she, without any modified interpreting?

Charles: Modified interpreting? I don't know what you mean.

Ruth: Oh, yes, you do—you haven't told me once what she really said—you wouldn't dare. Judging from her photograph she's the type who would use most unpleasant language—

Charles: Ruth—you're not to talk like that.

Ruth: I've been making polite conversation all through dinner last night and breakfast and lunch today—and it's been a nightmare—and I am not going to do it any more. I don't like Elvira any more than she likes me and what's more I'm certain that I never could have, dead or alive. If, since her untimely arrival here the other evening, she had shown the slightest sign of good manners, the slightest sign of breeding, I might have felt differently towards her, but all she has done is try to make mischief between us and have private jokes with you against me. I am now going up to my room and I shall have my dinner on a tray. You and she can have the house to yourselves and joke and gossip with each other to your heart's content. The first thing in the morning I am going up to London to interview the Psychical Research Society and if they fail me I shall go straight to the Archbishop of Canterbury— [*She goes out.*]

Charles [*making a movement to follow her*]: Ruth—

Elvira: Let her go—she'll calm down later on.

Charles: It's unlike her to behave like this—she's generally so equable.

Elvira: No, she isn't, not really, her mouth gives her away—it's a hard mouth, Charles.

Charles: Her mouth's got nothing to do with it—I resent your discussing Ruth as though she were a horse.

Elvira: Do you love her?

Charles: Of course I do.

Elvira: As much as you loved me?

Charles: Don't be silly—it's all entirely different.

Elvira: I'm so glad. Nothing could ever have been quite the same, could it?

Charles: You always behaved very badly.

Elvira: Oh, Charles!

Charles: I'm grieved to see that your sojourn in the other world hasn't improved you in the least.

Elvira [*curling up in sofa*]: Go on, darling—I love it when you pretend to be cross with me—

Charles: I'm now going up to talk to Ruth.

Elvira: Cowardy custard.

Charles: Don't be so idiotic. I can't let her go like that—I must be a little nice and sympathetic to her.

Elvira: I don't see why! If she's set on being disagreeable I should just let her get on with it.

Charles: The whole business is very difficult for her—we must be fair.

Elvira: She should learn to be more adaptable.

Charles: She probably will in time—it's been a shock—

Elvira: Has it been a shock for you too, darling?

Charles: Of course—what did you expect?

Elvira: A nice shock?

Charles: What do you want, Elvira?

Elvira: Want? I don't know what you mean.

Charles: I remember that whenever you were overpoweringly demure like that it usually meant that you wanted something.

Elvira: It's horrid of you to be so suspicious. All I want is to be with you.

Charles: Well, you are.

Elvira: I mean alone, darling. If you go and pamper Ruth and smalm her over, she'll probably come flouncing down again and our lovely quiet evening together will be spoilt.

Charles: You're incorrigibly selfish.

Elvira: Well, I haven't seen you for seven years—it's only natural that I should want a little time alone with you—to talk over old times. I'll let you go up just for a little while if you really think it's your duty.

Charles: Of course it is.

Elvira [*smiling*]: Then I don't mind.

Charles [*rises*]: You're disgraceful, Elvira.

Elvira: You won't be long, will you? You'll come down again very soon?

Charles: I shall most likely dress for *dinner* while I'm upstairs—you can read the *Tatler* or something.

Elvira: Darling, you don't have to dress—for me.

Charles: I always dress for dinner.

Elvira: What are you going to have? I should like to watch you eat something really delicious—

Charles [*smiling and kissing his hand to her*]: Be a good girl now—you can play the gramophone if you like.

Elvira [*demurely*]: Thank you, Charles. [CHARLES *goes out.*] ELVIRA *gets up, looks in the gramophone cupboard, finds the record of "Always" and puts it on. She starts to waltz lightly round the room to it.* EDITH *comes in to fetch the tea tray. She sees the gramo-*

phone playing by itself so she turns it off and puts the record back in the cupboard. While she is picking up the tray ELVIRA *takes the record out and puts it on again.* EDITH *gives a shriek, drops the tray and rushes out of the room.* ELVIRA *continues to waltz gaily.*]

[*Curtain*]

SCENE III

The time is evening several days later.

When the curtain rises MRS. BRADMAN *is sitting in an armchair.* RUTH *is standing by the window drumming on the pane with her fingers.*

Mrs. Bradman [*in armchair*]: Does it show any signs of clearing?

Ruth [*at window—looking out*]: No, it's still pouring.

Mrs. Bradman: I do sympathize with you, really I do—it's really been quite a chapter of accidents, hasn't it?

Ruth: It certainly has.

Mrs. Bradman: That happens sometimes, you know—everything seems to go wrong at once—exactly as though there were some evil forces at work. I remember once when George and I went away for a fortnight's holiday not long after we were married—we were dogged by bad luck from beginning to end—the weather was vile—George sprained his ankle—I caught a terrible cold and had to stay in bed for two days—and to crown everything the lamp fell over in the sitting-room and set fire to the treatise George had written on hyperplasia of the abdominal glands.

Ruth [*absently*]: How dreadful.

Mrs. Bradman: He had to write it all over again—every single word.

Ruth: You're sure you wouldn't like a cocktail or some sherry or anything?

Mrs. Bradman: No, thank you—really not—George will be down in a minute and we've got to go like lightning—we were supposed to be at the Wilmots' at seven and it's nearly that now.

Ruth: I think I'll have a little sherry—I feel I need it. [*She goes to the side table and pours herself some sherry.*]

Mrs. Bradman: Don't worry about your husband's arm, Mrs. Condomine—I'm sure it's only a sprain.

Ruth: It's not his arm I'm worried about.

Mrs. Bradman: And I'm sure Edith will be up and about again in a few days—

Ruth: My cook gave notice this morning.

Mrs. Bradman: Well, really! Servants are awful, aren't they? Not a shred of gratitude—at the first sign of trouble they run out on you—like rats leaving a sinking ship.

Ruth: I can't feel that your simile was entirely fortunate, Mrs. Bradman.

Mrs. Bradman [*flustered*]: Oh, I didn't mean that, really I didn't! [DR. BRADMAN *comes in.*]

Dr. Bradman: Nothing to worry about, Mrs. Condomine—it's only a slight strain—

Ruth: I'm so relieved.

Dr. Bradman: He made a good deal of fuss when I examined it—men are much worse patients than women, you know—particularly highly strung men like your husband.

Ruth: Is he so highly strung, do you think?

Dr. Bradman: Yes, as a matter of fact I wanted to talk to you about that. I'm afraid he's been overworking lately.

Ruth [*frowning*]: Overworking?

Dr. Bradman: He's in rather a nervous condition—nothing serious, you understand—

Ruth: What makes you think so?

Dr. Bradman: I know the symptoms. Of course the shock of his fall might have something to do with it, but I certainly should advise a complete rest for a couple of weeks—

Ruth: You mean he ought to go away?

Dr. Bradman: I do. In cases like that a change of atmosphere can work wonders.

Ruth: What symptoms did you notice?

Dr. Bradman: Oh, nothing to be unduly alarmed about—a certain air of strain—an inability to focus his eyes on the person he is talking to—a few rather marked irrelevancies in his conversation.

Ruth: I see. Can you remember any specific example?

Dr. Bradman: Oh, he suddenly shouted, "What are you doing in the bathroom?" and then, a little later, while I was writing him a prescription, he suddenly said, "For God's sake behave yourself!"

Mrs. Bradman: How extraordinary.

Ruth [*nervously*]: He often goes on like that—particularly when he's immersed in writing a book—

Dr. Bradman: Oh, I am not in the least perturbed about it really —but I do think a rest and a change would be a good idea.

Ruth: Thank you so much, Doctor. Would you like some sherry?

Dr. Bradman: No, thank you—we really must be off.

Ruth: How is poor Edith?

Dr. Bradman: She'll be all right in a few days—she's still recovering from the concussion.

Mrs. Bradman: It's funny, isn't it, that both your housemaid and your husband should fall down on the same day, isn't it?

Ruth: Yes, if that sort of thing amuses you.

Mrs. Bradman [*giggling nervously*]: Of course I didn't mean it like that, Mrs. Condomine—

Dr. Bradman: Come along, my dear—you're talking too much as usual.

Mrs. Bradman: You are horrid, George. Good-by, Mrs. Condomine— [*Rises.*]

Ruth [*shaking hands*]: Good-by.

Dr. Bradman [*also shaking hands*]: I'll pop in and have a look at both patients sometime tomorrow morning.

Ruth: Thank you so much. [CHARLES *comes in. His left arm is in a sling.* ELVIRA *follows him and sits down by the fire.*]

Dr. Bradman: Well—how does it feel?

Charles: All right.

Dr. Bradman: It's only a slight sprain, you know.

Charles: Is this damned sling really essential?

Dr. Bradman: It's a wise precaution—it will prevent you using your left hand except when it's really necessary.

Charles: I had intended to drive into Folkestone this evening—

Dr. Bradman: It would be much better if you didn't.

Charles: It's extremely inconvenient—

Ruth: You can easily wait and go tomorrow, Charles—

Elvira: I can't stand another of those dreary evenings at home. Charles—it'll drive me dotty—and I haven't seen a movie for seven years—

Charles: Let me be the first to congratulate you.

Dr. Bradman [*kindly*]: What's that, old man?

Ruth [*with intense meaning*]: Charles dear—try to be sensible, I implore you.

Charles: Sorry— I forgot.

Dr. Bradman: You can drive the car if you promise to go very slowly and carefully. Your gear shift is on the right, isn't it?

Charles: Yes.

Dr. Bradman: Well, use your left hand as little as possible.

Charles: All right.

Ruth: You'd much better stay at home.

Dr. Bradman: Couldn't you drive him in?

Ruth [*stiffly*]: I'm afraid not—I have lots to do in the house and there's Edith to be attended to.

Dr. Bradman: Well, I'll leave you to fight it out among yourselves— [*To* CHARLES] But remember if you do insist on going—carefully does it—the roads are very slippery anyhow. Come along, Violet.

Mrs. Bradman: Good-by again— Good-by, Mr. Condomine.

Charles: Good-by. [*He goes into the hall with the* BRADMANS. RUTH, *left alone, puts her sherry glass down on the table irritably.*]

Ruth: You really are infuriating, Elvira—surely you could wait and go to the movies another night— [ELVIRA *gives a little laugh and, taking a rose out of a vase, throws it at* RUTH *and vanishes through the French windows.*]

Ruth [*picking up the rose and putting it back in the vase*]: And stop behaving like a schoolgirl—you're old enough to know better.

Charles [*coming in*]: What?

Ruth: I was talking to Elvira.

Charles: She isn't here.

Ruth: She was a moment ago—she threw a rose at me.

Charles: She's been very high-spirited all day. I know this mood of old. It usually meant that she was up to something.

Ruth: You're sure she isn't here?

Charles: Quite sure.

Ruth: I want to talk to you.

Charles: O God!

Ruth: I must—it's important.

Charles: You've behaved very well for the last few days, Ruth—you're not going to start making scenes again, are you?

Ruth: I resent that air of patronage, Charles. I have behaved well, as you call it, because there was nothing else to do, but I think it only fair to warn you that I offer no guarantee for the future. My patience is being stretched to its uttermost.

Charles: As far as I can see the position is just as difficult for Elvira as it is for you—if not more so. The poor little thing comes back trustingly after all those years in the other world and what is she faced with? Nothing but brawling and hostility?

Ruth: What did she expect?

Charles: Surely even a protoplasmic manifestation has the right to expect a little of the milk of human kindness?

Ruth: Milk of human fiddlesticks.

Charles: That just doesn't make sense, dear.

Ruth: Elvira is about as trusting as a puff adder.

Charles: You're granite, Ruth—sheer, unyielding granite.

Ruth: And a good deal more dangerous into the bargain.

Charles: Dangerous? I never heard anything so ridiculous. How could a poor lonely, wistful little spirit like Elvira be dangerous.

Ruth: Quite easily—and she is. She's beginning to show her hand.

Charles: How do you mean—in what way?

Ruth [*sits on sofa*]: This is a fight, Charles—a bloody battle—a duel to the death between Elvira and me. Don't you realize that?

Charles: Melodramatic hysteria.

Ruth: It isn't melodramatic hysteria—it's true. Can't you see?

Charles: No; I can't. You're imagining things—jealousy causes people to have the most curious delusions.

Ruth: I am making every effort not to lose my temper with you, Charles, but I must say you are making it increasingly difficult for me.

Charles: All this talk of battles and duels—

Ruth: She came here with one purpose and one purpose only—and if you can't see it you're a bigger fool than I thought you.

Charles: What purpose could she have had beyond a natural desire to see me again? After all, you must remember that she was extremely attached to me, poor child.

Ruth: Her purpose is perfectly obvious. It is to get you to herself forever.

Charles: That's absurd—how could she?

Ruth: By killing you off of course.

Charles: Killing me off? You're mad!

Ruth: Why do you suppose Edith fell down the stairs and nearly cracked her skull?

Charles: What's Edith got to do with it?

Ruth: Because the whole of the top stair was covered with axle grease. Cook discovered it afterwards.

Charles: You're making this up, Ruth—

Ruth: I'm not. I swear I'm not. Why do you suppose when you were lopping that dead branch off the pear tree that the ladder broke? Because it had been practically sawn through on both sides.

Charles: But why should she want to kill me? I could understand her wanting to kill you, but why me?

Ruth: If you were dead it would be her final triumph over me. She'd have you with her forever on her damned astral plane and I'd be left high and dry. She's probably planning a sort of spiritual remarriage. I wouldn't put anything past her.

Charles [*rises. Really shocked*]: Ruth!

Ruth: Don't you see now?

Charles [*walking about the room*]: She couldn't be so sly, so wicked—she couldn't.

Ruth: Couldn't she just!

Charles: I grant you that as a character she was always rather light and irresponsible but I would never have believed her capable of low cunning—

Ruth: Perhaps the spirit world has deteriorated her.

Charles: Oh, Ruth!

Ruth: For Heaven's sake stop looking like a wounded spaniel and concentrate—this is serious.

Charles: What are we to do?

Ruth: You're not to let her know that we suspect a thing—behave perfectly ordinarily—as though nothing had happened. I'm going to Madame Arcati immediately—I don't care how cross she is, she's got to help us—even if she can't get rid of Elvira she must know some technical method of rendering her harmless. If a trance is necessary she shall go into a trance if I have to beat her into it. I'll be back in a half an hour—tell Elvira I've gone to see the Vicar—

Charles: This is appalling—

Ruth: Never mind about that—remember now, don't give yourself away by so much as a flick of an eyelid— [ELVIRA *comes in from the garden.*]

Charles: Look out—

Ruth: What?

Charles: I merely said it's a nice lookout.

Elvira: What's a nice lookout?

Charles: The weather, Elvira—the glass is going down and down and down—it's positively macabre.

Elvira: I find it difficult to believe that you and Ruth, at this particular moment, can't think of anything more interesting to talk about than the weather.

Ruth [*rises*]: I can't stand this any more. I really can't.

Charles: Ruth dear—please—

Elvira: Has she broken out again?

Ruth: What did she say?

Charles: She asked if you had broken out again.

Ruth: How dare you talk like that, Elvira!

Charles: Now then, Ruth—

Ruth [*with dignity*]: Charles and I were not talking about the weather, Elvira, as you so very shrewdly suspected. I should loathe you to think *that we had any secrets from you* and so I will explain exactly what we were talking about. I was trying to persuade him *not* to drive you into Folkestone this evening. It will be bad for his arm and you can perfectly easily wait until tomorrow. However, as he seems to be determined to place your wishes before mine in everything, I have nothing further to say. I'm sure I hope you both enjoy yourselves. [*She goes out and slams the door.*]

Charles: There now.

Elvira: Oh, Charles—have you been beastly to her?

Charles: No—Ruth doesn't like being thwarted any more than you do.

Elvira: She's a woman of sterling character. It's a pity she's so unforgiving.

Charles: As I told you before—I would rather not discuss Ruth with you—it makes me uncomfortable.

Elvira: I won't mention her again. Are you ready?

Charles: What for?

Elvira: To go to Folkestone of course.

Charles [*rises from pouf*]: I want a glass of sherry first.

Elvira: I don't believe you want to take me at all.

Charles: Of course I want to take you, but I still think it would be more sensible to wait until tomorrow—it's a filthy night.

Elvira [*crossly*]: How familiar this is.

Charles: In what way familiar?

Elvira: All through our married life I only had to suggest something for you immediately to start hedging me off—

Charles: I'm not hedging you off, I merely said—

Elvira: All right—all right—we'll spend another cozy, intimate evening at home with Ruth sewing away at that hideous table center and snapping at us like a terrier.

Charles: Ruth is perfectly aware that the table center is hideous. It happens to be a birthday present for her mother—

Elvira: It's no use trying to defend Ruth's taste to me—it's thoroughly artsy craftsy and you know it.

Charles: It is not artsy craftsy.

Elvira: She's ruined this room—look at those curtains and that awful shawl on the piano—

Charles: Lady Mackinley sent it to us from Burma.

Elvira: Obviously because it had been sent to her from Birmingham.

Charles: If you don't behave yourself I shan't take you into Folkestone ever.

Elvira [*coaxingly*]: Please, Charles—don't be elderly and grand with me! Please let's go now.

Charles: Not until I've had my sherry.

Elvira: You are tiresome, darling—I've been waiting about for hours—

Charles: A few more minutes won't make any difference then. [*He pours himself out some sherry.*]

Elvira [*petulantly, flinging herself into a chair*]: Oh, very well.

Charles: Besides, the car won't be back for a half an hour at least.

Elvira [*sharply*]: What do you mean?

Charles [*sipping his sherry nonchalantly*]: Ruth's taken it—she had to go and see the Vicar—

Elvira [*jumping up—in extreme agitation*]: What!!

Charles: What on earth's the matter?

Elvira: You say *Ruth's* taken the car?

Charles: Yes—to go and see the Vicar—but she won't be long.

Elvira [*wildly*]: O, my God! O, my God!

Charles: Elvira!—

Elvira: Stop her! You must stop her at once—

Charles: Why—what for?—

Elvira [*jumping up and down*]: Stop her—go out and stop her immediately!

Charles: It's too late now—she's gone already.

Elvira [*backs away towards window*]: Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!!!

Charles: What are you going on like this for? What have you done?

Elvira [*frightened*]: Done?—I haven't done anything—

Charles: Elvira—you're lying—

Elvira [*backing away from him*]: I'm not lying. What is there to lie about?

Charles: What are you in such a state for?

Elvira [*almost hysterical*]: I'm not in a state—I don't know what you mean—

Charles: You've done something dreadful—

Elvira [*backs away*]: Don't look at me like that, Charles—I haven't—I swear I haven't—

Charles [*striking his forehead*]: My God, the car!

Elvira: No, Charles—no—

Charles: Ruth was right—you did want to kill me—you've done something to the car—

Elvira [*howling like a banshee*]: Oh—oh—oh—oh!—

Charles: What did you do—answer me? [*At this moment the telephone rings.* CHARLES *stops dead; then with slow steps goes to it.*]

Charles [*at telephone*]: Hallo—hallo—yes, speaking—I see—the bridge at the bottom of the hill—thank you. No, I'll come at once—[*He slowly puts back the receiver. As he does so the door bursts open.*]

Elvira [*obviously retreating from someone*]: Well, of all the filthy, low-down tricks— [*She shields her head with her hands and screams.*] Ow—stop it—Ruth—let go— [*She runs out of the room and slams the door. It opens again immediately and slams again.* CHARLES *stares, aghast.*]

[*Curtain*]

ACT THREE

SCENE I

The time is evening a few days later.

CHARLES *is standing before the fire drinking his after-dinner coffee. He is in deep mourning. He finishes his coffee, puts the cup down on the mantelpiece, lights a cigarette and settles himself comfortably in an armchair. He adjusts a reading lamp and with a sigh of well-being opens a novel and begins to read it.*

There is a ring at the front doorbell. With an exclamation of annoyance he puts down the book, gets up and goes out into the hall. After a moment or so MADAME ARCATI *comes in.* CHARLES *follows her and shuts the door.* MADAME ARCATI *is wearing the strange, rather barbaric evening clothes that she wore in Act One.*

Madame Arcati: I hope you will not consider this an intrusion, Mr. Condomine.

Charles: Not at all—please sit down, won't you?

Madame Arcati: Thank you. [*She does so.*]

Charles: Would you like some coffee—or a liqueur?

Madame Arcati: No, thank you. I had to come, Mr. Condomine.

Charles [*politely*]: Yes?

Madame Arcati: I felt a tremendous urge—like a rushing wind, and so I hopped on my bike and here I am.

Charles: It was very kind of you.

Madame Arcati: No, no, no—not kind at all—it was my duty—I know it strongly.

Charles: Duty?

Madame Arcati: I reproach myself bitterly, you know.

Charles: Please don't—there is no necessity for that. [*Sits in armchair.*]

Madame Arcati: I allowed myself to get into a huff the other day with your late wife. I rode all the way home in the grip of temper, Mr. Condomine.—I have regretted it ever since.

Charles: My dear Madame Arcati . . .

Madame Arcati [*holding up her hand*]: Please let me go on. Mine is the shame, mine is the blame—I shall never forgive myself. Had I not been so impetuous—had I listened to the cool voice of reason—much might have been averted. . . .

Charles: You told my wife distinctly that you were unable to help her—you were perfectly honest. Over and above the original unfortunate mistake I see no reason for you to reproach yourself.

Madame Arcati: I threw up the sponge—in a moment of crisis I threw up the sponge instead of throwing down the gauntlet . . .

Charles: Whatever you threw, Madame Arcati, I very much fear nothing could have been done—it seems that circumstances have been a little too strong for all of us.

Madame Arcati: I cannot bring myself to admit defeat so easily—it is gall and wormwood to me—I could have at least concentrated—made an effort.

Charles: Never mind.

Madame Arcati: I do mind. I cannot help it. I mind with every fiber of my being. I have been thinking very carefully, I have also been reading up a good deal during the last few dreadful days . . . I gather that we are alone?

Charles [*looking round*]: My first wife is not in the room, she is upstairs lying down, the funeral exhausted her. I imagine that my second wife is with her but of course I have no way of knowing for certain.

Madame Arcati: You have remarked no difference in the texture of your first wife since the accident?

Charles: No, she seems much as usual, a little under the weather perhaps, a trifle low-spirited, but that's all.

Madame Arcati: Well, that washes that out.

Charles: I'm afraid I don't understand.

Madame Arcati: Just a little theory I had. In the nineteenth century there was a pretty widespread belief that a ghost who participated in the death of a human being disintegrated automatically—

Charles: How do you know that Elvira was in any way responsible for Ruth's death?

Madame Arcati: Elvira—such a pretty name—it has a definite lilt to it, hasn't it? [*She hums for a moment. Singing the Elvi-i-ira*] Elvira—Elvi-ira . . .

Charles [*rather agitated*]: You haven't answered my question. How did you know?

Madame Arcati: It came to me last night, Mr. Condomine—it came to me in a blinding flash—I had just finished my Ovaltine and turned the light out when I suddenly started up in bed with a loud cry—"Great Scott. I've got it!" I said—after that I began to put two and two together. At three in the morning—with my brain fairly seething—I went to work on my crystal for a little but it wasn't very satisfactory—cloudy, you know—

Charles [*moving about uneasily*]: I would be very much obliged if you would keep any theories you have regarding my wife's death to yourself, Madame Arcati . . .

Madame Arcati: My one desire is to help you. I feel I have been dreadfully remiss over the whole affair—not only remiss but untidy.

Charles: I am afraid there is nothing whatever to be done.

Madame Arcati [*triumphantly*]: But there is—there is! [*She produces a piece of paper from her bag and brandishes it.*] I have found a formula—here it is! I copied it out of Edmondson's *Witchcraft and Its Byways.*

Charles [*irritably*]: What the hell are you talking about?

Madame Arcati [*rises*]: Pluck up your heart, Mr. Condomine . . . all is not lost!

Charles [*rises*]: Now look here, Madame Arcati—

Madame Arcati: You are still anxious to dematerialize your first wife, I suppose?

Charles [*in a lower voice, with a cautious look towards the door*]: Of course I am—I'm perfectly furious with her, but—

Madame Arcati: But what?

Charles: Well—she's been very upset for the last few days—you see apart from me being angry with her which she always hated even when she was alive, Ruth, my second wife, has hardly left her side for a moment—you must see that she's been having a pretty bad time what with one thing and another . . .

Madame Arcati: Your delicacy of feeling does you credit but I must say, if you will forgive my bluntness, that you are a damned fool, Mr. Condomine.

Charles [*stiffly*]: You are at liberty to think whatever you please.

Madame Arcati: Now, now, now—don't get on your high horse—there's no sense in that, is there? I have a formula here that I think will be able to get rid of her without hurting her feelings in the least. It's extremely simple and requires nothing more than complete concentration from you and minor trance from me—I may even be able to manage it without lying down.

Charles: Honestly I would rather— [*At this moment the door opens and* ELVIRA *enters, coming quickly into the room. She is obviously very upset.*]

Elvira: Charles—

Charles: What on earth's the matter?

Elvira [*seeing* MADAME ARCATI]: Oh! What's she doing here?

Charles: She came to offer me her condolences.

Elvira: They should have been congratulations.

Charles: Please don't say things like that, Elvira—it is in the worst possible taste. Madame Arcati—allow me to introduce my first wife Elvira—

Madame Arcati: How do you do?

Elvira: What does she want, Charles? Send her away— [*She walks about the room.*]

Madame Arcati: In what part of the room is she at the moment?

Charles: She's moving about rather rapidly. I'll tell you when and where she settles.

Elvira: She's the one who got me here in the first place, isn't she?

Charles: Yes.

Elvira: Well, please tell her to get me away again as soon as possible—I can't stand this house another minute.

Charles: Really, Elvira—I'm surprised at you.

Elvira [*nearly in tears*]: I don't care how surprised you are—I want to go home—I'm sick of the whole thing.

Charles: Don't be childish, Elvira.

Elvira: I'm not being childish—I mean it.

Madame Arcati [*sniffing*]: Very interesting—very interesting—I smell protoplasm strongly!

Elvira: What a disgusting thing to say.

Madame Arcati [*very excited*]: Where is she now?

Charles: Here—close to me.

Madame Arcati [*mystically—stretching out her hands*]: Are you happy, my dear—?

Elvira [*stamping her foot*]: Tell the silly old bitch to mind her own business.

Madame Arcati [*in a song-song voice*]: Was the journey difficult? Are you weary?

Elvira: She's dotty.

Charles: Just a moment, Madame Arcati . . .

Madame Arcati [*with her eyes shut*]: This is wonderful—wonderful—

Elvira: For God's sake tell her to go into the other room, Charles. I've got to talk to you.

Charles: Madame Arcati . . .

Madame Arcati: Just a moment. I almost have contact—I can sense the vibrations—this is magnificent . . .

Charles: Go on, Elvira—don't be a spoilsport—give her a bit of encouragement.

Elvira: If you'll promise to get her into the other room.

Charles: All right. [ELVIRA *goes up to* MADAME ARCATI *and blows gently into her ear.*]

Madame Arcati [*jumping*]: Yes, yes—again—again—

Elvira [*blowing in the other ear behind* MADAME ARCATI]: How's that?

Madame Arcati [*clasping and unclasping her hands in a frenzy of excitement*]: This is first rate—it really is first rate. Absolutely stunning!

Charles: I'm so glad you're pleased.

Elvira: Please get rid of her. Ruth will be in in a minute.

Charles: Madame Arcati, would you think it most frightfully rude if I asked you to go into the dining-room for a moment? My first wife wishes to speak to me alone.

Madame Arcati: Oh, must I? It's so lovely being actually in the room with her.

Charles: Only for a few minutes—I promise she'll be here when you come back.

Madame Arcati: Very well. Hand me my bag, will you?—it's on the sofa.

Elvira [*picking it up and handing it to her*]: Here you are.

Madame Arcati [*taking it and blowing her a kiss*]: Oh, you darling—you little darling. [MADAME ARCATI, *humming ecstatically, goes into the dining-room and shuts the door.*]

Elvira: How good is she really?

Charles: I don't know.

Elvira: Do you think she really could get me back again?

Charles: But, my dear child . . .

Elvira: And don't call me your dear child—it's smug and supercilious.

Charles: There's no need to be rude.

Elvira [*turning away*]: The whole thing's been a failure—a miserable, dreary failure—and oh! what *high hopes* I started out with.

Charles: You can't expect much sympathy from me, you know. I am perfectly aware that your highest hope was to murder me.

Elvira: Don't put it like that, it sounds so beastly.

Charles: It is beastly. It's one of the beastliest ideas I've ever heard.

Elvira: There was a time when you'd have welcomed the chance of being with me forever.

Charles: Your behavior has shocked me immeasurably, Elvira, I had no idea you were so unscrupulous.

Elvira [*bursting into tears*]: Oh, Charles.

Charles: Stop crying.

Elvira: They're only ghost tears—they don't mean anything really—but they're very painful.

Charles: You've brought all this on yourself, you know. [*Sits on sofa.*]

Elvira: That's right—rub it in. Anyhow, it was only because I

loved you—the silliest thing I ever did in my whole life was to love you—you were always unworthy of me.

Charles: That remark comes perilously near impertinence, Elvira.

Elvira: I sat there, on the other side, just longing for you day after day. I did really—all through your affair with that brassy-looking woman in the South of France I went on loving you and thinking truly of you—then you married Ruth and even then I forgave you and tried to understand because all the time I believed deep inside that you really loved me best . . . that's why I put myself down for a return visit and had to fill in all those forms and wait about in draughty passages for hours—if only you'd died before you met Ruth everything might have been all right—she's absolutely ruined you—I hadn't been in the house a day before I realized that. Your books aren't a quarter as good as they used be either.

Charles [*incensed. Rises*]: That is entirely untrue . . . Ruth helped me and encouraged me with my work which is a damned sight more than you ever did.

Elvira: That's probably what's wrong with it.

Charles: All you ever thought of was going to parties and enjoying yourself.

Elvira: Why shouldn't I have fun? I died young, didn't I?

Charles: You needn't have died at all if you hadn't been idiotic enough to go out on the river with Guy Henderson and get soaked to the skin—

Elvira: So we're back at Guy Henderson again, are we?

Charles: You behaved abominably over Guy Henderson and it's no use pretending that you didn't.

Elvira [*sits on arm of chair*]: Guy adored me—and anyhow he was very attractive.

Charles: You told me distinctly that he didn't attract you in the least.

Elvira: You'd have gone through the roof if I'd told you that he did.

Charles: Did you have an affair with Guy Henderson?

Elvira: I would rather not discuss it if you don't mind.

Charles: Answer me—did you or didn't you?

Elvira: Of course I didn't.

Charles: You let him kiss you though, didn't you?

Elvira: How could I stop him? He was bigger than I was.

Charles [*furiously*]: And you swore to me—

Elvira: Of course I did. You were always making scenes over nothing at all.

Charles: Nothing at all.

Elvira: You never loved me a bit really—it was only your beastly vanity.

Charles: You seriously believe that it was only vanity that upset me when you went out in the punt with Guy Henderson?

Elvira: It was not a punt—it was a little launch.

Charles: I don't care if it was a three-masted schooner, you had no right to go!

Elvira: You seem to forget *why* I went! You seem to forget that you had spent the entire evening making sheep's eyes at that overblown-looking harridan with the false pearls.

Charles: A woman in Cynthia Cheviot's position would hardly wear false pearls.

Elvira: They were practically all she was wearing.

Charles: I am pained to observe that seven years in the echoing vaults of eternity have in no way impaired your native vulgarity.

Elvira: That was the remark of a pompous ass.

Charles: There is nothing to be gained by continuing this discussion.

Elvira: You always used to say that when you were thoroughly worsted.

Charles: On looking back on our married years, Elvira, I see now, with horrid clarity, that they were nothing but a mockery.

Elvira: You invite mockery, Charles—it's something to do with your personality I think, a certain seedy grandeur.

Charles: Once and for all, Elvira—

Elvira: You never suspected it but I laughed at you steadily from the altar to the grave—all your ridiculous petty jealousies and your fussings and fumings—

Charles: You were feckless and irresponsible and morally unstable —I realized that before we left Budleigh Salterton.

Elvira: Nobody but a monumental bore would have thought of having a honeymoon at Budleigh Salterton.

Charles: What's the matter with Budleigh Salterton?

Elvira: I was an eager young bride, Charles—I wanted glamour and music and romance—all I got was potted palms, seven hours of every day on a damp golf course and a three-piece orchestra playing "Merrie England."

Charles: It's a pity you didn't tell me so at the time.

Elvira: I did—but you wouldn't listen—that's why I went out on the moors that day with Captain Bracegirdle. I was desperate.

Charles: You swore to me that you'd gone over to see your aunt in Exmouth!

Elvira: It was the moors.

Charles: With Captain Bracegirdle?

Elvira: With Captain Bracegirdle.

Charles [*furiously*]: I might have known it—what a fool I was—what a blind fool! Did he make love to you?

Elvira [*sucking her finger and regarding it thoughtfully*]: Of course.

Charles: Oh, Elvira!

Elvira: Only very discreetly—he was in the cavalry, you know—

Charles: Well, all I can say is that I'm well rid of you.

Elvira: Unfortunately you're not.

Charles: Oh, yes, I am—you're dead and Ruth's dead—I shall sell this house lock, stock and barrel and go away.

Elvira: I shall follow you.

Charles: I shall go a long way away—I shall go to South America—you'll hate that, you were always a bad traveler.

Elvira [*at piano*]: That can't be helped—I shall have to follow you—you called me back.

Charles: I did *not* call you back!

Elvira: Well, somebody did—and it's hardly likely to have been Ruth.

Charles: Nothing in the world was further from my thoughts.

Elvira: You were talking about me before dinner that evening.

Charles: I might just as easily have been talking about Joan of Arc but that wouldn't necessarily mean that I wanted her to come and live with me.

Elvira: As a matter of fact she's rather fun.

Charles: Stick to the point.

Elvira: When I think of what might have happened if I'd succeeded in getting you to the other world after all—it makes me shudder, it does honestly . . . it would be nothing but bickering and squabbling forever and ever and ever . . . I swear I'll be better off with Ruth—at least she'll find her own set and not get in my way.

Charles: So I get in your way, do I?

Elvira: Only because I was idiotic enough to imagine that you loved me, and I sort of felt sorry for you.

Charles: I'm sick of these insults—please go away.

Elvira: There's nothing I should like better—I've always believed in cutting my losses. That's why I died.

Charles [*rises*]: Of all the brazen sophistry—

Elvira: Call that old girl in again—set her to work—I won't tolerate this any longer—I want to go home. [*She starts to cry.*]

Charles: For Heaven's sake don't snivel.

Elvira [*stamping her foot*]: Call her in—she's got to get me out this.

Charles [*going to the dining-room door*]: I quite agree—and the sooner the better. [*He opens the door.*] Madame Arcati—would you please come in now? [MADAME ARCATI *comes in eagerly.*]

Madame Arcati: Is the darling still here?

Charles [*grimly*]: Yes, she is.

Madame Arcati: Where—tell me where?

Charles: Over by the piano—blowing her nose.

Madame Arcati [*approaching the piano*]: My dear—oh, my dear—

Elvira: Stop her fawning on me, Charles, or I shall break something.

Charles: Elvira and I have discussed the whole situation, Madame Arcati, and she wishes to go home immediately.

Madame Arcati: Home?

Charles: Wherever she came from.

Madame Arcati: You don't think she would like to stay a few days longer—while I try to get things a little more organized?

Elvira: No—no—I want to go now.

Madame Arcati: I could come and be here with her—I could bring my crystal—

Elvira: God forbid!

Charles: We are both agreed that she must go as soon as possible. Please strain every nerve, Madame Arcati—make every effort—you said something about a formula—what is it?

Madame Arcati [*reluctantly*]: Well—if you insist.

Charles: I most emphatically do insist.

Elvira [*wailing*]: Oh, Charles. . . .

Charles: Shut up.

Madame Arcati: I can't guarantee anything, you know—I'll do my best but it may not work.

Charles: What is the formula?

Madame Arcati: Nothing more than a little verse really—it fell

into disuse after the seventeenth century—I shall need some pepper and salt—

Charles: There's some pepper and salt in the dining-room—I'll get it. [*He goes.*]

Madame Arcati: We ought of course to have some Shepherd's Wort and a frog or two but I think I can manage without. You won't be frightened, dear, will you? It's absolutely painless.

Charles [*coming back with the cruet*]: Will this be enough?

Madame Arcati: Oh, yes—I only need a little—put it on the table please. Now then, let me see— [*She fumbles in her bag for the paper and her glasses.*] Ah, yes— [*To* CHARLES] Sprinkle it, will you—just a soupçon—there, right in the middle— [CHARLES *does so.*]

Elvira: This is going to be a flop—I can tell you that here and now.

Madame Arcati: Now a few snapdragons out of that vase, there's a good chap.

Elvira [*contemptuously*]: Merlin does all this sort of thing at parties and bores us all stiff with it, only he always uses blackthorn and a great deal of whimsy!

Charles: Here you are.

Madame Arcati: Now then—the gramophone—in the old days of course they used a zither or reed pipes— [*She goes to the gramophone.*] We'd better have the same record we had before, I think.

Elvira: I'll get it. [*She takes out the record and puts it on the gramophone.*]

Madame Arcati [*watching, fascinated*]: Oh, if only that Mr. Emsworth of the Psychical Research Society could see this—he'd have a fit, he would really! Don't start it yet, dear. Now then— [CHARLES *gets piano chair and brings it down to table.*] Sit down, please, Mr. Condomine, rest your hands on the table but don't put your fingers in the pepper—I shall turn out the lights myself. Oh, shucks, I'd nearly forgotten— [*She goes to the table and makes designs in the sprinkled pepper and salt with her forefinger.*] One triangle— [*She consults the paper.*] One half circle and one little dot—there!

Elvira: This is waste of time—she's a complete fake.

Charles: Anything's worth trying.

Elvira: I'm as eager for it to succeed as you are—don't make any mistake about that. But I'll lay you ten to one it's a dead failure.

Madame Arcati: Now, if your wife would be kind enough to lie down on the sofa—

Charles: Go on, Elvira.

Elvira [*lies down on sofa*]: This is sheer nonsense—don't blame me if I get the giggles.

Charles: Concentrate—think of nothing.

Madame Arcati: That's right—quite right—hands at the sides—legs extended—breathe steadily—one two—one two—one two—is she comfortable?

Charles: Are you comfortable, Elvira?

Elvira: No.

Charles: She's quite comfortable.

Madame Arcati: I shall join you in a moment, Mr. Condomine—I may have to go into a slight trance but if I do pay no attention—Now first the music and away we go! [MADAME ARCATI *turns on the gramophone and stands quite still by the side of it with her hands behind her head for a little—then suddenly, with great swiftness, she runs to the door and switches out the lights. Her form can dimly be discerned moving about in the darkness.* CHARLES *gives a loud sneeze.*]

Elvira [*giggling*]: Oh, dear—it's the pepper.

Charles: Damn!

Madame Arcati: Hold on to yourself—concentrate— [MADAME ARCATI *recites in a sing-song voice*]

"Ghostly specter—ghoul or fiend,
Never more be thou convened;
Shepherd's Wort and Holy Rite
Banish thee into the night."

Elvira: What a disagreeable little verse.

Charles: Be quiet, Elvira.

Madame Arcati: Shhh! [*There is silence.*] Is there anyone there? . . . Is there anyone there?—one rap for yes—two raps for no. Is there anyone there? . . . [*The table gives a loud bump.*] Aha! Good stuff! Is it Daphne? . . . [*The table gives another bump.*] I'm sorry to bother you, dear, but Mrs. Condomine wants to return. [*The table bumps several times very quickly.*] Now then, Daphne . . . Did you hear what I said? [*After a pause the table gives one bump.*] Can you help us? . . . [*There is another pause, then the table begins to bump violently without stopping.*] Hold tight, Mr.

Condomine—it's trying to break away. Oh! Oh! Oh— [*The table falls over with a crash.*]

Charles: What's the matter, Madame Arcati? Are you hurt?

Madame Arcati [*wailing*]: Oh! Oh! Oh—

Charles [*turns on lights*]: What on earth's happening? [MADAME ARCATI *is lying on the floor with the table upside down on her back.* CHARLES *hurriedly lifts it off. Shaking her*] Are you hurt, Madame Arcati?

Elvira: She's in one of her damned trances again and I'm here as much as ever I was.

Charles [*shaking* MADAME ARCATI]: For God's sake, wake up.

Madame Arcati [*moaning*]: Oh! Oh! Oh—

Elvira: Leave her alone—she's having a whale of a time. If I ever do get back I'll strangle that bloody little Daphne. . . .

Charles: Wake up!

Madame Arcati [*sitting up suddenly*]: What happened?

Charles: Nothing—nothing at all.

Madame Arcati [*rising and dusting herself*]: Oh, yes, it did—I know something happened.

Charles: You fell over—that's all that happened.

Madame Arcati: Is she still here?

Charles: Of course she is.

Madame Arcati: Something must have gone wrong.

Elvira: Make her do it properly. I'm sick of being messed about like this.

Charles: She's doing her best. Be quiet, Elvira.

Madame Arcati: Something happened—I sensed it in my trance—I felt it—it shivered through me. [*Suddenly the window curtains blow out almost straight and* RUTH *walks into the room. She is still wearing the brightly colored clothes in which we last saw her but now they are entirely gray. So is her hair and her skin.*]

Ruth: Once and for all, Charles, what the hell does this mean? [*The lights fade.*]

SCENE II

When the lights go up again several hours have elapsed. The whole room is in slight disarray. There are birch branches and evergreens laid on the floor in front of the doors and crossed birch branches pinned rather untidily onto the curtains. The furniture has been moved about a bit. On the bridge table there is a pile of playing cards, MADAME ARCATI'S *crystal and a Ouija board. Also a plate of sandwiches and two empty beer mugs.*

MADAME ARCATI *is stretched out on the sofa with her eyes shut.* ELVIRA *is seated at the bridge table looking despondently at the debris.* RUTH *is by the fireplace.* CHARLES *is walking irritably about the room.*

Ruth: Well—we've done all we can—I must say I couldn't be more exhausted.

Elvira: It will be daylight soon. [*The clock strikes five, very slowly.*]

Ruth: That clock's always irritated me—it strikes far too slowly.

Charles: It was a wedding present from Uncle Walter.

Ruth: Whose Uncle Walter?

Charles: Elvira's.

Ruth: Well, all I can say is he might have chosen something a little more decorative.

Elvira: If that really were all you could say, Ruth, I'm sure it would be a great comfort to us all.

Ruth [*grandly*]: You can be as rude as you like, Elvira, I don't

mind a bit—as a matter of fact I should be extremely surprised if you weren't.

Elvira [*truculently*]: Why?

Ruth: The reply to that is really too obvious.

Charles: I wish you two would stop bickering for one minute.

Ruth: This is quite definitely one of the most frustrating nights I have ever spent.

Elvira: The reply to that is pretty obvious too.

Ruth: I'm sure I don't know what you mean.

Elvira: Skip it.

Ruth: Now listen to me, Elvira. If you and I have got to stay together indefinitely in this house—and it looks unpleasantly—[*Turns to* MADAME ARCATI]—likely—we had better come to some sort of an arrangement.

Elvira: What sort of an arrangement?

Charles: You're *not* going to stay indefinitely in this house.

Ruth: With you then—we shall have to be with you.

Charles: I don't see why—why don't you take a cottage somewhere?

Ruth: You called us back.

Charles: I've already explained until I'm black in the face that I did nothing of the sort.

Ruth: Madame Arcati said you did.

Charles: Madame Arcati's a muddling old fool.

Elvira: I could have told you that in the first place.

Ruth: I think you're behaving very shabbily, Charles.

Charles: I don't see what I've done.

Ruth: We have all agreed that as Elvira and I are dead that it would be both right and proper for us to dematerialize again as soon as possible. That, I admit. We have allowed ourselves to be subjected to the most humiliating hocus-pocus for hours and hours without complaining—

Charles: Without complaining?

Ruth: We've stood up—we've lain down—we've concentrated. We've sat interminably while that tiresome old woman recited extremely unflattering verses at us. We've endured five séances—we've watched her fling herself in and out of trances until we're dizzy and at the end of it all we find ourselves exactly where we were at the beginning. . . .

Charles: Well, it's not my fault.

Ruth: Be that as it may, the least you could do is to admit failure

gracefully and try and make the best of it—your manners are boorish to a degree.

Charles: I'm just as exhausted as you are. I've had to do all the damned table tapping, remember.

Ruth: If she can't get us back, she can't and that's that. We shall have to think of something else.

Charles: She *must* get you back—anything else is unthinkable.

Elvira: There's gratitude for you!

Charles: Gratitude?

Elvira: Yes, for all the years we've both devoted to you—you ought to be ashamed.

Charles: What about all the years I've devoted to you?

Elvira: Nonsense—we've waited on you hand and foot—haven't we, Ruth? You're exceedingly selfish and always were.

Charles: In that case I fail to see why you were both so anxious to get back to me.

Ruth: You called us back. And you've done nothing but try to get rid of us ever since we came—hasn't he, Elvira?

Elvira: He certainly has.

Ruth: And now, owing to your idiotic inefficiency, we find ourselves in the most mortifying position—we're neither fish, flesh nor fowl nor whatever it is.

Elvira: Good red herring.

Ruth: It can't be.

Charles: Well, why don't you do something about it? Why don't you go back on your own?

Ruth: We can't—you know perfectly well we can't.

Charles: Isn't there anybody on the other side who can help?

Ruth: How do I know? I've only been there a few days . . . ask Elvira.

Elvira: I've already told you, that's no good—if we got Cagliostro, Mesmer, Merlin, Gil de Retz and the Black Douglas in a row they couldn't do a thing—the impetus has got to come from here. . . . Perhaps darling Charles doesn't want us to go quite enough.

Charles: I certainly do.

Elvira: Well, you must have a very weak will then. I always suspected it.

Ruth: It's no use arguing any more—wake up Madame Arcati.

Elvira: Oh, not another séance—please, not another séance!

Charles [*loudly—bending over* MADAME ARCATI]: Please wake up. Madame Arcati . . .

Ruth: Shake her.

Charles: It might upset her.

Ruth: I don't care if it kills her.

Charles: Please wake up, Madame Arcati. . . .

Madame Arcati [*waking*]: What time is it?

Charles: Ten past five!

Madame Arcati: What time did I go off? [*She sits up.*]

Charles: Over an hour ago.

Madame Arcati [*reaching for her bag*]: Curious . . . very curious. Forgive me for a moment, I must just make a note of that for my diary. [*She takes a book out of her bag and scribbles in it.*] Are they still here?

Charles: Yes.

Madame Arcati: How disappointing.

Charles: Have you any suggestions?

Madame Arcati [*rising briskly*]: We mustn't give up hope. Chin up—never give in—that's my motto.

Ruth: This schoolgirl phraseology's driving me mad.

Madame Arcati: Now then . . .

Charles: Now then what?

Madame Arcati: What do you say we have another séance and really put our shoulders to the wheel?—Make it a real rouser!

Elvira: For God's sake, not another séance.

Madame Arcati: I might be able to materialize a trumpet if I tried hard enough—better than nothing, you know—I feel as fit as a fiddle after my rest.

Elvira: I don't care if she materializes a whole symphony orchestra—I implore you not to let her have another séance.

Charles: Don't you think, Madame Arcati, that perhaps we've had enough séances? After all, they haven't achieved much, have they?

Madame Arcati: Rome wasn't built in a day, you know.

Charles: I know it wasn't, but. . . .

Madame Arcati: Well then—cheer up—away with melancholy.

Charles: Now listen, Madame Arcati . . . before you go off into any further trances I really think we ought to discuss the situation a little.

Madame Arcati: Good—an excellent idea—and while we're doing it I shall have another of these delicious sandwiches—I'm as hungry as a hunter.

Charles: Would you like some more beer?

Madame Arcati: No, thank you—better not.

Charles: Very well—I think I'll have a small whisky and soda.

Madame Arcati: Make it a double and enjoy yourself. [CHARLES *goes to the drinks table and mixes himself a whisky and soda.*]

Ruth: One day I intend to give myself the pleasure of telling Madame Arcati exactly what I think of her.

Charles: She's been doing her best.

Madame Arcati: Are the girls getting despondent?

Charles: I'm afraid they are *rather.*

Madame Arcati: We'll win through yet—don't be downhearted.

Ruth: If we're not very careful she'll materialize a hockey team.

Madame Arcati: Now then, Mr. Condomine—the discussion—fire away.

Charles: Well, my wives and I have been talking it over and they are both absolutely convinced that I somehow or other called them back.

Madame Arcati: Very natural.

Charles: I am equally convinced that I did not.

Madame Arcati: Love is a strong psychic force, Mr. Condomine —it can work untold miracles. A true love call can encompass the universe—

Charles [*hastily*]: I'm sure it can, but I must confess to you frankly that although my affection for both Elvira and Ruth is of the warmest I cannot truthfully feel that it would come under the heading that you describe.

Elvira: I should just think not indeed.

Madame Arcati: You may not know your own strength, Mr. Condomine.

Charles [*firmly*]: I did *not* call them back—either consciously or subconsciously.

Madame Arcati: But, Mr. Condomine . . .

Charles: That is my final word on the subject.

Madame Arcati: Neither of them could have appeared unless there had been somebody—a psychic subject—in the house, who wished for them . . .

Charles: Well, it wasn't me.

Elvira: Perhaps it was Dr. Bradman—I never knew he cared.

Madame Arcati: Are you sure?—Are you really sure?

Charles: Absolutely positive.

Madame Arcati [*snapping her fingers*]: Great Scott, I believe we've been barking up the wrong tree!

Charles: How do you mean?

Madame Arcati: The Sudbury case!

Charles: I don't understand.

Madame Arcati: There's no reason why you should—it was before your day—I wonder—oh, I wonder. . . .

Charles: What was the Sudbury case? I wish you'd explain.

Madame Arcati: It was the case that made me famous, Mr. Condomine—it was what you might describe in theatrical parlance as my first smash hit! I had letters from all over the world about it—especially India.

Charles: What did you do?

Madame Arcati: I dematerialized old Lady Sudbury after she'd been firmly entrenched in the private chapel for over seventeen years.

Charles [*rises*]: How?—Can't you remember how?

Madame Arcati: Chance—a fluke—I happened on it by the merest coincidence.

Charles: What fluke—what was it?

Madame Arcati: Wait—all in good time. [*She begins to walk about the room.*] Now let me see—who was in the house during our first séance?

Charles: Only the Bradmans, Ruth and me and yourself.

Madame Arcati: Ah, yes—yes—to be sure—but the Bradmans weren't here last night, were they?

Charles: No.

Madame Arcati: Quickly . . . my crystal—

Charles [*handing it to her*]: Here. . . .

Madame Arcati [*shaking it crossly*]: Damn the thing, it's cloudy again— [*She looks again.*] Ah!—that's better—it's there again—it's there again— I'm beginning to understand.

Charles: I wish I was. What's there again?

Madame Arcati: A bandage—a white bandage—hold on to a white bandage. . . .

Charles: I haven't got a white bandage.

Madame Arcati: Shhh! [*She puts the crystal down and stands silent for a moment.*]

Elvira: She's too good, you know—she ought to be in a circus. [MADAME ARCATI *advances to the middle of the room and raises her arms slowly—she begins to intone.*]

Madame Arcati:

Be you in nook or cranny, answer me,
Be you in Still-room or closet, answer me,
Be you behind the panel, above the stairs,
Beneath the eaves—waking or sleeping,
Answer me!

That ought to do it or I'm a Dutchman.

Charles: Do what?

Madame Arcati: Hush—wait— [*She picks up one of the birch branches and waves it solemnly to and fro.*]

Ruth: For God's sake, don't let her throw any more of that garlic about. It nearly made me sick last time.

Charles: Would you like the gramophone on or the lights out or anything?

Madame Arcati: No, no—it's near—it's very near—

Elvira: If it's a ghost I shall scream.

Ruth: I hope it's nobody we know—I shall feel so silly. [*Suddenly the door opens and* EDITH *comes into the room. She is wearing a pink flannel dressing gown and bedroom slippers. Her head is bandaged.*]

Edith: Did you ring, sir?

Madame Arcati: The bandage! The white bandage!

Charles: No, Edith.

Edith: I'm sorry, sir—I could have sworn I heard the bell—or somebody calling—I was asleep—I don't rightly know which it was. . . .

Madame Arcati: Come here, child.

Edith: Oh! [*She looks anxiously at* CHARLES.]

Charles: Go on—go to Madame Arcati—it's quite all right.

Madame Arcati: Who do you see in this room, child?

Edith: Oh, dear. . . .

Madame Arcati: Answer, please.

Edith [*falteringly*]: You, madame— [*She stops.*]

Madame Arcati: Go on.

Edith: The Master.

Madame Arcati: Anyone else?

Edith: Oh, no, madame. . . .

Madame Arcati [*inflexibly*]: Look again.

Edith [*imploringly, to* CHARLES]: I don't understand, sir—I—

Madame Arcati: Come, child—don't beat about the bush—look

again. [ELVIRA *begins to move about the room almost as though she were being pulled.* EDITH *follows with her eyes.*]

Ruth: Do concentrate, Elvira, and keep still.

Elvira: I can't. . . .

Madame Arcati: Do you see anyone else now?

Edith [*slyly*]: Oh, no, madame.

Madame Arcati: She's lying.

Edith: Oh, madame!

Madame Arcati: They always do.

Charles: They?

Madame Arcati [*sharply*]: Where are they now?

Edith: By the fireplace. Oh!

Charles: She can see them—do you mean she can see them?

Madame Arcati: Probably not very clearly—but enough—

Edith [*bursting into tears*]: Let me go—I haven't done nothing nor seen nobody—let me go back to bed.

Madame Arcati: Give her a sandwich.

Edith [*drawing away*]: I don't want a sandwich. I want to go back to bed. . . .

Charles [*handing* EDITH *the plate*]: Here, Edith.

Madame Arcati: Nonsense—a big healthy girl like you saying no to a delicious sandwich—I never heard of such a thing—sit down.

Edith [*to* CHARLES]: Please, sir, I . . .

Charles: Please do as Madame Arcati says, Edith.

Edith [*sitting down and sniffing*]: I haven't done nothing wrong.

Charles: It's all right—nobody said you had.

Ruth: If she's been the cause of all this unpleasantness I'll give her a week's notice tomorrow.

Elvira: You may not be here tomorrow—

Madame Arcati: Look at me, Edith. [EDITH *obediently does so.*] Cuckoo—cuckoo—cuckoo—

Edith [*jumping*]: Oh, dear—what's the matter with her? Is she barmy?

Madame Arcati: Here, Edith—this is my finger—look— [*She waggles it.*] Have you ever seen such a long, long, long finger? Look, now it's on the right—now it's on the left—backwards and forwards it goes—see—very quietly backwards and forwards—tic-toc—tic—toc—tic-toc.

Elvira: The mouse ran up the clock.

Ruth: Be *quiet*—you'll ruin everything. [MADAME ARCATI

whistles a little tune close to EDITH'S *face—then she snaps her fingers.* EDITH *looks stolidly in front of her without flinching.* MADAME ARCATI *stands back.*]

Madame Arcati: Well—so far so good—she's off all right.

Charles: Off?

Madame Arcati: She's a Natural—just the same as the Sudbury case—it really is the most amusing coincidence. Now then—would you ask your wives to stand close together, please?

Charles: Where?

Madame Arcati: Over there by you.

Charles: Elvira—Ruth—

Ruth: I resent being ordered about like this.

Elvira: I don't like this at all—I don't like any of it—I feel peculiar.

Charles: I'm afraid I must insist.

Elvira: It would serve you right if we flatly refused to do anything at all.

Madame Arcati: Are you sorry for having been so mischievous, Edith?

Edith [*cheerfully*]: Oh, yes, madame.

Madame Arcati: You know what you have to do now, don't you, Edith?

Edith: Oh, yes, madame.

Ruth: I believe it's going to work, whatever it is. Oh, Charles.

Charles: Shhh!

Ruth: This is good-by, Charles.

Elvira: Tell her to stop for a minute—there's something I want to say before I go.

Charles: You should have thought of that before—it's too late now.

Elvira: Of all the mean, ungracious—

Ruth: Charles, listen a moment . . .

Madame Arcati [*in a shrill voice*]: Lights! [MADAME ARCATI *rushes to the door and switches off the lights. In the dark* EDITH *is singing "Always" in a very high cockney voice.*]

Elvira [*in the dark*]: I saw Captain Bracegirdle again, Charles—several times—I went to the Four Hundred with him twice when you were in Nottingham. And I must say I couldn't have enjoyed it more.

Ruth: Don't think you're getting rid of us quite so easily, my dear—you may not be able to see us but we shall be here all right

—I consider that you have behaved atrociously over the whole miserable business. And I should like to say here and now— [*Her voice fades into a whisper and then disappears altogether.*]

Madame Arcati [*exultantly*]: Splendid! Hurrah! We've done it! That's quite enough singing for the moment, Edith.

Charles [*after a pause*]: Shall I put on the lights?

Madame Arcati: No—I will. [CHARLES *pulls the curtains and daylight floods into the room.* RUTH *and* ELVIRA *have disappeared.* EDITH *is still sitting on the chair.*]

Charles: They've gone—they've really gone.

Madame Arcati: Yes—I think we've really pulled it off this time.

Charles: You'd better wake her up, hadn't you? She might bring them back again.

Madame Arcati [*clapping her hands in* EDITH'S *face*]: Wake up, child!

Edith [*nearly jumping out of the chair*]: Good 'eavens! Where am I?

Charles: It's all right, Edith—you can go back to bed now.

Edith: Why, it's morning.

Charles: Yes—I know it is.

Edith: But I *was* in bed—how did I get down 'ere?

Charles: I rang, Edith—I rang the bell and you answered it—didn't I, Madame Arcati?

Edith: Did I drop off? Do you think it's my concussion again? Oh, dear!

Charles: Off you go, Edith, and thank you very much. [*He presses a pound note into her hand.*] Thank you very much indeed.

Edith: Oh, sir, whatever for? [*She looks at him in sudden horror.*] Oh, sir!! [*She bolts from the room.*]

Charles [*surprised*]: What on earth did she mean by that?

Madame Arcati: Golly, what a night! I'm ready to drop in my tracks.

Charles: Would you like to stay here?—there's the spare room, you know.

Madame Arcati: No, thank you—each to his own nest—I'll pedal home in a jiffy—it's only seven miles.

Charles: I'm deeply grateful to you, Madame Arcati. I don't know what arrangements you generally make but I trust you will send in your account in due course.

Madame Arcati: Good heavens, Mr. Condomine—it was a pleasure—I wouldn't dream of such a thing.

Charles: But really I feel that all those trances. . . .

Madame Arcati: I enjoy them, Mr. Condomine, thoroughly. I always have since a child.

Charles: Perhaps you'd give me the pleasure of lunching with me one day soon?

Madame Arcati: When you come back—I should be delighted.

Charles: Come back?

Madame Arcati [*lowering her voice*]: Take my advice, Mr. Condomine, and go away immediately.

Charles: But, Madame Arcati! You don't mean that . . . ?

Madame Arcati [*clearing her stuff from table*]: This must be an unhappy house for you—there must be memories both grave and gay in every corner of it—also— [*She pauses.*]

Charles: Also what?

Madame Arcati [*thinking better of it*]: There are more things in heaven and earth, Mr. Condomine. [*She places her finger to her lips.*] Just go—pack your traps and go as soon as possible.

Charles [*also in lowered tones*]: Do you mean that they may still be here?

Madame Arcati [*she nods and then nonchalantly whistles a little tune*]: *Quien sabe,* as the Spanish say. [*She collects her bag and her crystal.*]

Charles [*looking furtively round the room*]: I wonder—I wonder. I'll follow your advice, Madame Arcati. Thank you again.

Madame Arcati: Well, good-by, Mr. Condomine—it's been fascinating—from first to last—fascinating. Do you mind if I take just one more sandwich to munch on my way home? [*Comes down to table for sandwich.*]

Charles: By all means. [MADAME ARCATI *goes to the door.* CHARLES *follows her to see her safely out.*]

Madame Arcati [*as they go*]: Don't trouble—I can find my way. Cheerio once more and good hunting! [CHARLES *watches her into the hall and then comes back into the room. He prowls about for a moment as though he were not sure that he was alone.*]

Charles [*softly*]: Ruth—Elvira—are you there? [*A pause.*] Ruth —Elvira—I know damn well you're there— [*Another pause.*] I just want to tell you that I'm going away so there's no point in your hanging about any longer—I'm going a long way away—somewhere where I don't believe you'll be able to follow me. In spite of what Elvira said I don't think spirits can travel over water. Is that quite clear, my darlings? You said in one of your more acid moments,

Ruth, that I had been hag-ridden all my life! How right you were —but now I'm free, Ruth dear, not only of Mother and Elvira and Mrs. Winthrop-Lewellen, but free of you too, and I should like to take this farewell opportunity of saying I'm enjoying it immensely— [*A vase crashes into the fireplace.*] Aha—I thought so—you were very silly, Elvira, to imagine that I didn't know all about you and Captain Bracegirdle—I did. But what you didn't know was that I was extremely attached to Paula Westlake at the time! [*The clock strikes sixteen viciously and very quickly.*] I was reasonably faithful to you, Ruth, but I doubt if it would have lasted much longer— you were becoming increasingly domineering, you know, and there's nothing more off-putting than that, is there? [*A large picture falls down with a crash.*] Good-by for the moment, my dears. I expect we are bound to meet again one day, but until we do I'm going to enjoy myself as I've never enjoyed myself before. You can break up the house as much as you like—I'm leaving it anyhow. Think kindly of me and send out good thoughts— [*The overmantel begins to shake and tremble as though someone were tugging at it.*] Nice work, Elvira—persevere. Good-by again—parting is such *sweet* sorrow! [*He goes out of the room just as the overmantel crashes to the floor and the curtain pole comes tumbling down.*]

[*Curtain*]

Index

of Terms Common to the Literature of the Drama and to the Theatre

(Numbers refer to pages on which the terms are defined.)

Abstract character, 206
Abstract setting, 207
Afterpiece, 84
Aside, 6

Border lights, 208
Box set, 8

Climax, 7
Comedy of character, 458
  of humor, 457
  of manners, 457
Conflict, 116
Costume play, 10
Crisis, 7
Curtain-raiser, 84
Cut-drop, 207
Cut-out, 207

Dated play, 460
Denouement, 7
Downstage, 9
Dramatic, 111
Dramatic irony, 87
Drop, 207

Exposition, 5
Expressionism, 202-209

Fantasy, 86
Farce, 458
Flash-back, 298
Fourth wall, convention of the, 297
Free theatre, 200

High comedy (See *Comedy of manners.*)

Light
  Flat, 201
  Plastic, 201
Lighting
  Arbitrary, 88, 207
  Natural, 88

Monodrama, 205
Morality play, 391
Motivation, 6

Naturalism, 296

One-act play, 83-84

Pantomime, 207
Picture-frame stage, 208
Platform stage, 208
Poetic justice, 122
Point of attack, 5

Problem play, 3
Proscenium, 208
Pulitzer Prize, 120, 298

Raisonneur, 7
Realism, 5
Recognition, 7
Relief stage, 201

Satire, 457
Social drama, 3
Soliloquy, 206
Stage business, 9
Stage direction, 9
Stage left, 9
Stage movement, 9
Stage right, 9
Stage setting, formal, 112
Strip lights, 208
Symbolism, 206

Teaser, 208
Telescopic characterization, 206
Theatric, 111
Tormentors, 208
Tragedy
  Elizabethan, 115
  Greek, 114
  Modern, 115
Trope, 456
Type character, 206

Unities, 300
Upstage, 9

Well-made play, 1