

# Introduction to Literature



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# PART I

# RESOURCES



# I. Reading Journals

Reading journals are designed to help you connect the ideas we are studying to the analysis of literary works.

For each reading journal, choose whichever text in the “Library” that interests you and read it thoroughly.

Next, come up with an analysis question about the text you read. The analysis question must relate to the the topic you are learning about each week. For example, if you read *Ethan Frome* during the week we discuss literary periods, your question about the text should relate to literary periods. You might write something like,

“Are the characters in *Ethan Frome* typical of literature written during the periods of Realism and Naturalism?”

Finally, write a 350+ word response that uses information from the week’s focus to answer the question you posed. Each response must contain at least two quotations from the text. Try to be creative, have fun, and make sure you connect the weekly topics to the texts you read. There will be prompts for each week that help guide you to connect the week’s topic to the reading.



PART II

UNIT I: COURSE  
INTRODUCTION -  
MODULES I-4





## 2. Unit 1 Discussions

### Module 1: Literary Periods

#### Discussion – Literary Periods Timeline

You will construct a timeline to try and teach your fellow students about British or American literary periods. You decide the format of the timeline. Be creative.

What is a literary period? Literary periods are defined by A) when a writer produced their work and B) common traits that show how different literary works relate to one another.

For example, an important literary period in American literature would be Realism. Realism was most prevalent in the United States from the 1860's until around 1910. Realism was defined by A) an attention to honest representations of the world around the writer, B) local language and customs, and C) characters depicting working class or everyday people. Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Edith Wharton, and Charles Chestnutt would be example authors who produced works during the period known as Realism.

To be clear, if you asked Edith Wharton if she was a belonged to “Realism,” she would not have said yes. Scholars have applied these terms to the periods through examining and evaluating texts. Writers generally just write and examine the world around them. The periods help scholars organize concepts of literature, draw connections, and reflect on how literature has developed over time.

First, choose either British or American literature. Then construct the timeline of only that tradition. The timeline should:

1. Contain all major literary periods (hint there should be at least 8-10).

2. Describe 3-5 important traits of each period.
3. Provide 2-3 example writers and/or works of each period.
4. Use resources available to you through the library on the college website. Provide a list of the sources you consulted to create your timeline.

If you choose British literature, you will begin in the Anglo-Saxon Period.

If you choose American literature, you will begin in the Colonial Period, but remember Native Americans had oral traditions predating the arrival of European cultures.

## Reading Journal 1

Reading journals are designed to help you connect the ideas we are studying to the analysis of literary works.

1. Choose whichever text in the “Library” that interests you and read it thoroughly.
2. Come up with an analysis question about the text you read. The analysis question must relate to literary periods. For example, if you read *Ethan Frome* during the week we discuss literary periods, your question about the text should relate to literary periods. You might write something like: “Are the characters in *Ethan Frome* typical of literature written during the periods of Realism and Naturalism?”
1. Write a 350+ word response that uses information from the week’s focus on literary periods to answer the question you posed. Each response must contain at least two quotations from the text. Try to be creative and have fun.

## Module 2: Literary Terms

### Discussion – Literary Terms and Narrative Handoff

For this discussion post, we are all going to tell a story together. I will start the story and the next person who posts will continue it. The person after that will continue it from there, and so on.

But there's a catch.

As we write the story we are going to have in mind one or more literary terms that we intentionally use.

As we read the story, we are going to try and identify the literary terms used by others.

Here's how it works.

Read the last post in this thread and identify one of the literary terms used in that post.

Respond to that post first with a short paragraph identifying and defining the literary term(s) you saw as most prevalent in the story.

Then, using your best creative energies, continue the story by writing one paragraph using the literary term or terms you have selected.

Be sure to follow up towards the end of the module by letting your classmates know if they identified the literary terms you had in mind.

See the [Literary Terms Definition List](#) for a list of the terms we should study in this class.

#### *Example*

In this example, the chosen terms are character and metaphor.

**Post 1 – Carolina writes:**

When Cindy bought the ice cream truck, she envisioned herself as a sort of pied piper, her merry jingle summoning children to rocket pops and fudgesicles. She would be a purveyor of joy, counterforce to the summer sun, and seed for nostalgia. At least that's what she hoped. But as she pulled up the park on her first day and saw the raucous horde converging upon her, she suddenly felt more like a frog dropped into a pool of piranhas.

**Post 2 – Ted responds:**

This paragraph uses allusion, which is a reference to another literary work within a story. The allusion references the pied piper story.

**(Ted continues the story)**

Terrified, Cindy peeled out, the silly ice cream song still playing and a herd of children stampeding after her. She careened past a playground and skidded around a corner, right by a waiting policer officer. A siren screamed louder than the ice cream truck chimes and the blue lights came on. Cindy pulled over, but before the officer could step out of the cruiser, a mob of furious children descended upon them like zombies who smell brains.

**Post 3 – Carolina follows up:**

I was thinking about character. I introduced Cindy, who would be the protagonist of the story because she is the character with a goal she is trying to achieve. Allusion was a new term for me, but I can totally see what Ted means here. Thanks Ted.

**Starter**

The phone rang at midnight. Not 11:59 or 12:01, but midnight on the dot. Julie blinked at the clock and tried to wake up as she fumbled with her phone and croaked out a confused, "Hello?"

"Julie Perkins?" a man's voice asked.

"Yes?" she groggily replied.

"You need to get out of your house right now. Don't pack, don't brush your teeth, don't grab water from the fridge. Put on shoes and get outside as fast as you can. We will take care of the rest."

## Reading Journal 2

Reading journals are designed to help you connect the ideas we are studying to the analysis of literary works.

1. Choose whichever text in the “Library” that interests you and read it thoroughly.
2. Come up with an analysis question about the text you read. This week, your analysis must relate to literary terms. For example, you might write: “How does Edith Wharton use *setting* to establish *tone* in the novel *Ethan Frome*?”
3. Write a 350+ word response that uses literary terms to answer the question you posed. Each response must contain at least two quotations from the text. Have fun!

## Module 3: Critical Annotations

### Reading Journal 3

Reading journals are designed to help you connect the ideas we are studying to the analysis of literary works.

1. Choose whichever text in the “Library” that interests you and read it thoroughly.
2. Come up a research question about the text. It might relate to a character, an image, a symbol, an object, a color, or some other element of the text that you notice. So, for example, you might write: “How and why is the color red significant in Edith Wharton’s *Ethan Frome*?”
3. On the discussion board, copy 3-5 quotations that relate to your question. In 300+ words, answer the question you posed

by referencing the quotations.

## Module 4: Close Reading

### Reading Journal 4

Reading journals are designed to help you connect the ideas we are studying to the analysis of literary works.

1. Choose a text from the “Library” and read it carefully.
2. Select a scene from the text (if responding to poetry, select a stanza or respond to a short poem). Like in a movie or play, a scene in a story or play is a section with a common setting and characters. When the setting or characters change, you have a new scene.
3. Come up with a question about how that scene relates to an overall theme of the text. For example, you might write: “How does the scene in *Ethan Frome* where Ethan watches Mattie at the church dance relate to the themes of social and geographic isolation?”
4. In 300+ words, perform a close reading of the scene that answers the question you posed. Be sure to use quotations from the text.

## 3. Unit 1 Assignments

### Module 3: Critical Annotations

#### Annotation of Home Burial

See [Annotation and You](#), [How to Annotate](#) and follow the steps to submit an annotation of [“Home Burial” by Robert Frost](#). You can annotate it by hand and submit photos of it to this dropbox for credit. Alternatively, if you are tech savvy you can annotate it using Google Drive / Microsoft word or another program and submit it as a pdf.

### Module 4: Close Reading

#### Close reading of “Home Burial”

For this assignment, you will build off your annotation of “Home Burial” you will use the Steps to Perform a close reading in [An Introduction to Close Reading](#) to put all of your ideas together in a series of short paragraphs. Your guiding questions will be, What is the theme? How does the speaker relate to the theme? How does the figurative language used in this support the theme? How about the tone? Diction?





PART III

# MODULE I: LITERARY PERIODS



## 4. Literary Periods Timeline

You will construct a timeline to try and teach your fellow students about British or American literary periods. You decide the format of the timeline. Be creative.

For more information, please see [Unit 1 Discussions](#).

## 5. Reading Journal I

Reading journals are designed to help you connect the ideas we are studying to the analysis of literary works.

For more information, please see [Unit 1 Discussion](#).

PART IV

# MODULE 2: LITERARY TERMS



# 6. Literary Terms Definition List

To discuss and analyze literature it is important to know some of the basic terms and expressions used within the subject area. The following glossary covers the most widely used terms.

## Literary Terms

Term	Definition
Allegory	Simply put, an allegory is a narrative that has a symbolic meaning. That is, the whole story, its plot, characters and often setting, are all elements that signify a second correlated narrative.
Alliteration	Alliteration is when a text (most often poetry, but also prose) has three or more succeeding words that start with the same sound. It is usually applied to consonants, either at the beginning of the word or on a stressed syllable within the word.
Allusion	In a literary work there will often be a brief reference to a person, place, event or to another literary work. This is called an allusion, and was very common in classic and romantic poetry which had many references to ancient mythology.
Analogy	An analogy is a comparison between two things meant to highlight one aspect between one or both. For example, meow is to kitty as woof is to puppy.
Antagonists	Character or force opposing the protagonist.
Assonance	Assonance is repetition of vowel sounds in a line.
Atmosphere	The word covers the mood or ambience that the writer creates in his narrative. The intention is to give the reader a feeling (often dark and foreboding) of what is going to happen.
Blank verse	Blank verse is when a poem (of a certain metric pattern) has no end rhymes. Many of Shakespeare's texts, both his plays and poems are in blank verse. It will then have a certain melodic rhythm that comes alive when it is recited.
Character and Characterization	Character refers to the person(s) in a narrative or a play. They can be described directly (through the narrator) or indirectly (through the eyes of other characters). We also use the terms flat or round characters to indicate their complexity.
Clichè	A verbal clichè is a fixed and often used expression. A structural clichè is a common and predictable element of a narrative. It can be either a character or a turn of the plot. In film and literature clichès are negative elements, since they indicate lack of creativity, both in terms of language and plot arrangements.
Conflict	Conflict is the challenge main characters need to solve to achieve their goals.



Term	Definition
Connotation	Connotation means that a word has a different meaning than it has in everyday use. E.g. “cold” will in colloquial settings mean low temperature, but as a connotation it may also mean e.g. heartless or unfeeling.
Consonance	Repetition of consonant sounds in a line.
Contrast	When certain opposites are juxtaposed, or put up against each other, e.g., two scenes in a film, this will highlight the contrast between them. The effect is that the two elements will mutually amplify each other.
Dialogue	Dialogue (sometimes spelled dialog in American English[1]) is a written or spoken conversational exchange between two or more people, and a literary and theatrical form that depicts such an exchange.
Diction / Voice	Voice describes the conscious word choices an author uses to communicate to their reader.
Denotation	Common or dictionary definition of a word.
Epiphany	Epiphany in Greek means “manifestation of God.” In literature it means a sudden and often spiritual awakening, like when a character suddenly sees with clarity the way out of a predicament or a dilemma.
Foreshadow	To foreshadow is to place hints or bits of information that will lead the reader to an anticipation of the outcome of the narrative. The opening parts of a novel or a short-story will often hold elements of foreshadowing.
Genre	Genre is French and means type or form; it is used to categorize literature in groups according to certain criteria.
Gothic	In architecture, Gothic means the pointed style that broke with the traditional Roman rounded form of arches and ceilings in cathedrals. In literature the word is used about the type of novels of the late 18th century, containing eerie ingredients like ghosts in derelict castles with dark hallways and hidden doors. Other elements would include violent action, occultism and sorcery.

Term	Definition
Humanism	This is an alternative denotation of the Renaissance (1550-1650), and it signifies the human as a master of his universe; man is able to seek within himself for answers, but must also appreciate his own shortcomings and inner contradictions.
Hyperbole and Understatement	Hyperbole comes from Greek and means to exaggerate, as opposed to an understatement, which is a blunt way of making a statement by giving it less significance than it really has; e.g., to say "bad luck" when a disaster has struck.
Iamb	An iamb is a metrical foot used in various types of poetry comprised of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (as in a-bove).
Imagery	Imagery is a common term in modern literary theory; it describes poetry that is rich with suggestive images and associations.
Irony	In colloquial speech irony means to say the opposite of what one really means (verbal irony). In literature one also has this verbal irony, but also what is called structural irony, where the writer gives his plot a turn that can be read with a double meaning. In a short-story there may be an ironic twist at the ending to sum up the theme.
Line	A line is a unit of language into which a poem or play is divided.
Melodrama	Originally a melodrama was a drama with song. In literature the term will denote a plot which is a bit over the top when it comes to effects. The plot will often be sentimental and not strictly credible, and the characters are more exaggerated "types" than believable persons.
Metaphor / Figurative Language	A metaphor is a figure of speech where two or more elements of a different nature are compared with each other, but without "like" or "as". If the comparison includes "like" or "as" it is called a simile.
Meter	Meter is a collective term for the rhythmic pattern of a poem. There are a number of metric systems. A text written in meter is called a verse.
Motif	Note the spelling. A motif is a recurring element in a literary text. It may be an incident or a phrase that occurs in different situations and settings through the text.

Term	Definition
Narrator and Narrative	The narrator is the one that relates the story, and whose information unfolds the plot. The narrative is the story itself.
Omniscient	To be omniscient means “to know it all,” and is used about a narrator who is everywhere in the story and can reveal the thoughts of all the characters.
Paradox	A paradox is a phrase or statement which seems self-contradictory, but turns out to have a valid meaning after all. “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (Shakespeare, Macbeth) is an example of a literary paradox.
Plot	The plot is the structure and order of actions in a narrative text or a play.
Point of View	The point of view is also called “angle” and signifies the way a narrative is told, and from where. The point of view will be the eyes through which we see the narrative.
Protagonist	The protagonist is the main character of a narrative. There will also be sub-characters that the protagonist relates to.
Rhyme	A rhyme is a repetition of similar sounds (or the same sound) in two or more words.
Satire	A satire is a narrative which will expose a questionable practice or element in a subtle and “concealed” way. A satire can be funny, but has a serious intent.
Setting	The setting of a narrative or a play will define where and when the plot takes place. The setting will always be strongly related to the plot, and will include description of weather and light / dark.
Soliloquy	This term is used in dramatic literature and means that the actor is speaking to himself, or “aside” as it also is called. It is widely used in many of Shakespeare’s plays.
Speaker	The persona we hear delivering the words of a poem.
Stanza	A stanza is a grouped set of lines within a poem, usually set off from other stanzas by a blank line or indentation.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Stream of Consciousness	“Stream of consciousness” was a term which was introduced during modernism, and means that the narrative is based on what goes on in the mind of a protagonist. It is also called interior monologue.
Style	The style is the way the writer arranges his narrative and his choice of words. The style will be closely connected to the mood and atmosphere.
Symbol	A symbol is an object, expression or event that represents an idea beyond itself. The weather and light/darkness will often have a symbolic meaning.
Theme	The theme of a narrative or a play is the general idea or underlying message that the writer wants to expose.
Tone	The narrator’s or speaker’s disposition (attitude) towards the subject.
Tragedy	In a tragedy an innocent protagonist will be involved in escalating circumstances with a fatal result. The tragic development is either caused by a flaw in the character’s personality or by events that evolve beyond his control.

Remixed and Adapted from <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/introliterature/chapter/literary-terms-2/> and Wikipedia.

## 7. Literary Terms and Narrative Handoff

For this discussion post, we are all going to tell a story together. I will start the story and the next person who posts will continue it. The person after that will continue it from there, and so on.

For more information, please see [Unit 1 Discussion](#).

## 8. Reading Journal 2

Reading journals are designed to help you connect the ideas we are studying to the analysis of literary works.

For more information, please see [Unit 1 Discussions](#).

PART V

# MODULE 3: CRITICAL ANNOTATIONS





## 9. How to Annotate Texts

One of the greatest challenges students face is adjusting to college reading expectations. Unlike high school, students in college are expected to read more “academic” type of materials in less time and usually recall the information as soon as the next class.

The problem is many students spend hours reading and have no idea what they just read. Their eyes are moving across the page, but their mind is somewhere else. The end result is wasted time, energy, and frustration...and having to read the text again.

Although students are taught how to read at an early age, many are not taught how to actively engage with written text or other media. Annotation is a tool to help you learn how to actively engage with a text or other media.

View the following video about how to annotate a text.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online*

here: <https://library.achievingthedream.org/pimaliterature/?p=29>

Annotating a text or other media (e.g., a video, image, etc.) is as much about you as it is the text you are annotating. What are YOUR responses to the author’s writing, claims and ideas? What are YOU thinking as you consider the work? Ask questions, challenge, think!

When we annotate an author’s work, our minds should encounter the mind of the author, openly and freely. If you met the author at a party, what would you like to tell to them; what would you like to ask them? What do you think they would say in response to your comments? You can be critical of the text, but you do not have to

be. If you are annotating properly, you often begin to get ideas that have little or even nothing to do with the topic you are annotating. That's fine: it's all about generating insights and ideas of your own. Any good insight is worth keeping because it may make for a good essay or research paper later on.

## The Secret is in the Pen

One of the ways proficient readers read is with a pen in hand. They know their purpose is to keep their attention on the material by:

- Predicting what the material will be about
- Questioning the material to further understanding
- Determining what's important
- Identifying key vocabulary
- Summarizing the material in their own words, and
- Monitoring their comprehension (understanding) during and after engaging with the material


The same applies for mindfully viewing a film, video, image or other media.

## Annotating a Text

Review the video, “How to Annotate a Text.” Pay attention to both how to make annotations and what types of thoughts and ideas may be part of your annotations as you actively read a written text.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded*

 from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://library.achievingthedream.org/pinaliterature/?p=29>

## Example Assignment Format: Annotating a Written Text

For the annotation of reading assignments in this class, you will cite and comment on a minimum of FIVE (5) phrases, sentences or passages from notes you take on the selected readings.

Here is an example format for an assignment to annotate a written text:

Passage # Quotation and Location My Comments / Ideas

1. Direct quote (paragraph #) Add your comments here
2. Direct quote (paragraph #) Add your comments here
3. Direct quote (paragraph #) Add your comments here
4. Direct quote (paragraph #) Add your comments here
5. Direct quote (paragraph #) Add your comments here

## Example Assignment Format: Annotating Media

In addition to annotating written text, at times you will have assignments to annotate media (e.g., videos, images or other media). For the annotation of media assignments in this class, you will cite and comment on a minimum of THREE (3) statements, facts, examples, research or any combination of those from the notes you take about selected media.

## Here is an example format for an assignment to annotate media:

Passage # Describe Passage My Comments / Ideas

1. Passage Description Add your comments here
2. Passage Description Add your comments here
3. Passage Description Add your comments here

## 10. Home Burial by Robert Frost

*Published: 1914*

HE saw her from the bottom of the stairs  
Before she saw him. She was starting down,  
Looking back over her shoulder at some fear.  
She took a doubtful step and then undid it  
To raise herself and look again. He spoke  
Advancing toward her: "What is it you see  
From up there always—for I want to know."  
She turned and sank upon her skirts at that,  
And her face changed from terrified to dull.  
He said to gain time: "What is it you see,"  
Mounting until she cowered under him.  
"I will find out now—you must tell me, dear."  
She, in her place, refused him any help  
With the least stiffening of her neck and silence.  
She let him look, sure that he wouldn't see,  
Blind creature; and a while he didn't see.  
But at last he murmured, "Oh," and again, "Oh."  
"What is it—what?" she said.  
"Just that I see."  
"You don't," she challenged. "Tell me what it is."  
"The wonder is I didn't see at once.  
I never noticed it from here before.  
I must be wonted to it—that's the reason.  
The little graveyard where my people are!  
So small the window frames the whole of it.  
Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it?  
There are three stones of slate and one of marble,  
Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight

On the sidehill. We haven't to mind those.  
But I understand: it is not the stones,  
But the child's mound—"

"Don't, don't, don't, don't," she cried.  
She withdrew shrinking from beneath his arm  
That rested on the banister, and slid downstairs;  
And turned on him with such a daunting look,  
He said twice over before he knew himself:  
"Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?"  
"Not you! Oh, where's my hat? Oh, I don't need it!  
I must get out of here. I must get air.  
I don't know rightly whether any man can."  
"Amy! Don't go to someone else this time.  
Listen to me. I won't come down the stairs."  
He sat and fixed his chin between his fists.  
"There's something I should like to ask you, dear."  
"You don't know how to ask it."  
"Help me, then."  
Her fingers moved the latch for all reply.  
"My words are nearly always an offence.  
I don't know how to speak of anything  
So as to please you. But I might be taught  
I should suppose. I can't say I see how.  
A man must partly give up being a man  
With women-folk. We could have some arrangement  
By which I'd bind myself to keep hands off  
Anything special you're a-mind to name.  
Though I don't like such things 'twixt those that love.  
Two that don't love can't live together without them.  
But two that do can't live together with them."  
She moved the latch a little. "Don't—don't go.  
Don't carry it to someone else this time.  
Tell me about it if it's something human.  
Let me into your grief. I'm not so much  
Unlike other folks as your standing there

Apart would make me out. Give me my chance.  
I do think, though, you overdo it a little.  
What was it brought you up to think it the thing  
To take your mother—loss of a first child  
So inconsolably—in the face of love.  
You'd think his memory might be satisfied——”  
“There you go sneering now!”  
“I'm not, I'm not!  
You make me angry. I'll come down to you.  
God, what a woman! And it's come to this,  
A man can't speak of his own child that's dead.”  
“You can't because you don't know how.  
If you had any feelings, you that dug  
With your own hand—how could you?—his little grave;  
I saw you from that very window there,  
Making the gravel leap and leap in air,  
Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly  
And roll back down the mound beside the hole.  
I thought, Who is that man? I didn't know you.  
And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs  
To look again, and still your spade kept lifting.  
Then you came in. I heard your rumbling voice  
Out in the kitchen, and I don't know why,  
But I went near to see with my own eyes.  
You could sit there with the stains on your shoes  
Of the fresh earth from your own baby's grave  
And talk about your everyday concerns.  
You had stood the spade up against the wall  
Outside there in the entry, for I saw it.”  
“I shall laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed.  
I'm cursed. God, if I don't believe I'm cursed.”  
“I can repeat the very words you were saying.  
‘Three foggy mornings and one rainy day  
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build.’  
Think of it, talk like that at such a time!

What had how long it takes a birch to rot  
To do with what was in the darkened parlour.  
You couldn't care! The nearest friends can go  
With anyone to death, comes so far short  
They might as well not try to go at all.  
No, from the time when one is sick to death,  
One is alone, and he dies more alone.  
Friends make pretence of following to the grave,  
But before one is in it, their minds are turned  
And making the best of their way back to life  
And living people, and things they understand.  
But the world's evil. I won't have grief so  
If I can change it. Oh, I won't, I won't!"  
"There, you have said it all and you feel better.  
You won't go now. You're crying. Close the door.  
The heart's gone out of it: why keep it up.  
Amy! There's someone coming down the road!"  
"You—oh, you think the talk is all. I must go—  
Somewhere out of this house. How can I make you—" "  
"If—you—do!" She was opening the door wider.  
"Where do you mean to go? First tell me that.  
I'll follow and bring you back by force. I will!—"



## II. Annotation and You

### Reading to Write Effectively: Why You Need a Reading Strategy Before Writing Anything

Given all of the reading and writing that we are expected to accomplish as college/university students, it's important to be as efficient as possible when committing our time to these responsibilities. Three of the most important suggestions for approaching reading and, therefore, writing, efficiently are as follows:

#1 Read with a pen in hand; don't expect yourself to remember key concepts/ideas

- *Most of us can't remember everything that we've read and then call it to memory when we're writing. Therefore, reading with a pen in hand prepares you to circle/underline key concepts/ideas in the text you're reading. This creates a way of "tracing" key concepts/ideas throughout the text so that when it's time to recall what you've read and use it to guide your writing, it will be much easier to condense the entire text into a unique, organized, written response. If you don't want to write in the text that you're reading, open a blank Word document for keeping track of key concepts/ideas (and page numbers).*

#2 Write while reading because it's an informal way of "conversing with" the author of the text

(i.e. learning about how your writing can contribute something useful to “the conversation” of your resources)

- *In addition to circling/underlining key concepts/ideas throughout your reading process, it may also be helpful to keep a list of questions, connections with other texts/assignments/disciplines, etc. because this list can easily translate into “official” writing. For instance, even if your teacher isn’t requiring a written assignment in response to the reading assignment, if you keep a working document with questions, connections, etc. regarding the reading assignment, you will likely be much better prepared to discuss the reading, not to mention that your notations can easily serve in the short-term as a Twitter/Facebook post (which is helpful for providing others’ responses to your ideas) or in the long-term as an idea for a final paper. For most of us, it’s much easier to have somewhere to start when, eventually, we need to complete a writing assignment based on the reading assignments of the course.*

#3 Develop research questions/research key words while reading; most of the time, it’s fairly easy to identify research key words/ create unique research questions while reading actively

- *The notations you keep in the texts you’re reading can help to prevent the frustration of figuring out “what to write about” when it comes time to interpret the reading assignments into unique written work. They give you something to start with – either in the sense that you can extend the ideas you have already written down, or challenge them by researching what’s*

*missing ... either way, you have something to work with, which helps to alleviate some of the anxiety of staring at a blank page.*

## How to Analyze Poetry

Poetry is a form of expression. The poet uses his/her own personal and private language which leaves poetry open to different interpretations. Although the poet may have had one specific idea or purpose in mind, the reader's response may be completely different. Nevertheless, this does not mean that you may interpret poetry any way you wish. All interpretations must be supported by direct reference to the text. As with any type of literary analysis, you need a basic knowledge of the elements of poetry. The following guide and questions will help you.

1. Read the poem in its entirety to get a general impression.
2. What is the poem about?
3. What is the title of the poem?
4. Who is speaker or narrative voice of the poem
5. To whom is the speaker speaking?
6. What is the purpose of the poem: to describe, amuse, entertain, narrate, inform, express grief, celebrate or commemorate?
7. What is the tone of the poem? Sad, happy, melancholy, bitter?

## 12. Annotation of Home Burial

See Annotation and You, How to Annotate and follow the steps to submit an annotation of “Home Burial” by Robert Frost. You can annotate it by hand and submit photos of it to this dropbox for credit. Alternatively, if you are tech savvy you can annotate it using Google Drive / Microsoft word or another program and submit it as a pdf.

For more information, please see [Unit 1 Assignments](#).

# 13. Reading Journal 3

Reading journals are designed to help you connect the ideas we are studying to the analysis of literary works.

For more information, please see [Unit 1 Discussions](#).



PART VI

# MODULE 4: CLOSE READING





# 14. An Introduction to Close Reading

## What is Close Reading?

Close reading refers to a careful and deliberate style of reading that seeks to draw a deeper understanding of the text. When we perform a close reading we analyze or explicate a text. Reading closely is a process of working through the layers of meaning. A process of moving beyond the literal meaning of a text to the – sometimes various and at times conflicting – figurative meanings.

Literature contains layers of meaning. When you are reading to remember or simply to enjoy a story, you read on the most basic level. You remember characters' names, major events, the setting, and other basic facts.

When we perform a close reading we analyze or break apart the text. This is a process through which we ask what else we can learn or understand beyond what a basic reading provides. This involves analysis and interpretation.

Close reading is not just asking what the author had in mind or trying to figure out a code or mystery placed there intentionally by the author. It is a process in which the reader/writer makes meaning from carefully studying the text.

# A Quick Guide To Textual Analysis

## Critical Lenses

When you do a close reading, you are taking part in literary criticism. Over the years, scholars have tended to focus on a few types of literary criticism to make meaning of texts. Each examines some aspect of our society and asks what a particular story or poem tells us about that aspect. Let's start by looking at a few of these, as they can be helpful guides for the close reading process.

### *#1. History*

There are several schools of literary criticism that focus on history. New Historicism, for example, asks how a story represents or is an artifact of the time period when the author wrote it.

### *#2. Race/ethnicity*

Various schools study what texts can teach us about race, ethnicity, or other aspects of heritage. These schools include African American Studies, Asian Studies, Latino/a or Chicano/a Studies, Native American Studies and so on. Asking what a story tells us about race or ethnicity does not necessarily mean we interpret the author's message, but perhaps simply how she reflects attitudes or ideas about race prevalent when she wrote the text.

### *#3. Gender/sex/sexuality*

Like schools that look at race and ethnicity, some schools look at gender, sex, and sexuality. These schools include Feminism, Queer Studies, Gender Studies and more. For example, Feminism examines power structures in stories and how they affect men and women. When people, particularly women, are controlled by forces beyond their influence, and those forces affect them because of their sex or gender, those forces are called “patriarchy.” A Feminist critic asks how patriarchy affects the characters in a text.

### *#4. Class or Social Position*

Critics who study class in texts look at power structures. They examine who makes the decisions, who makes the rules, who enforces them, how, and why. An example of this would be Marxist Criticism which examines how money, production, and economics establish and support power structures.

## **Steps to Perform a Close Reading**

Step 1 – Read the text thoroughly. Annotate, or take notes, as you go along. You can highlight or write directly on the page. Ask questions, underline connections, highlight points of interests and ALWAYS note patterns of repetition.

Step 2 – Identify the theme – What is the text about? This isn't a summary of the plot or events, it's the bigger or broader idea the text addresses. There can be more than one theme or interpretation of a theme. Remember your literary lenses. If you are having trouble finding a theme, ask questions guided by the critical lenses – race, sex/gender, class, history.

Step 3 – Identify the protagonist/speaker. This is the character who changes as a consequence of the conflict. There can be more than one protagonist or non-protagonist characters who change; the “main” character is generally the protagonist.

Step 4 – If you are analyzing a story, connect the theme and the protagonist. Whatever lesson the protagonist learns or whatever change he/she undergoes is most likely the story’s comment on the theme. If you are analyzing a poem, what is the lesson or concept the reader should draw from the speaker’s observations?

Step 5 – Create a thesis that teaches us about the theme. In your response, you will give examples from throughout the text that support what you think about the theme.

Step 6 – Support your thesis with examples, quotes, comparisons, and whatever evidence from the text you uncover. These can be scenes, symbols, other characters, dialogue, setting, figurative language and so on.

# 15. Sample Close Reading

[Sample Close Reading](#)

# 16. Close Reading of Home Burial

For this assignment, you will build off your annotation of “Home Burial” you will use the Steps to Perform a close reading in An Introduction to Close Reading to put all of your ideas together in a series of short paragraphs.

For more information, please see [Unit 1 Assignments](#).

# 17. Reading Journal 4

Reading journals are designed to help you connect the ideas we are studying to the analysis of literary works.

For more information, please see [Unit 1 Discussions](#).





PART VII

# UNIT 2: LITERARY THEORY - MODULES 5-6



# 18. Unit 2 - Discussions

## Module 5: Introduction to Literary Theory

### Reading Journal 5

1. Choose one of the texts from the “Library” and read it carefully.
2. Choose one literary theory that interests you and read about it carefully.
3. Come up with an analysis question that relates the literary theory to the text. For example, if you are interested in Marxism, you might write: “How is the town of Starkfield in *Ethan Frome* organized by social class?” or “How is the character Zenobia Frome defined by social class?”
4. Respond to your question in 350+ words. Be sure to use quotations and to clearly indicate how your responses relates to literary theory.

## Module 6: Literary Theory & Close Reading

### Discussion – Literary Theory: Database Dive

#### *Literary Theory Close Reading Project*

Contact a librarian and have them help you locate an academic

article on one of the readings in this course. Be sure to identify an article that employs some of the aspects of at least one of the literary theories we study in this unit. Then, post the following:

1. Provide a [Citation](#) for the article you found.
2. Identify which of our readings the author focuses on.
3. Identify the Literary Theory the author uses to analyze the reading.
4. Directly quote a section of the article that you believe best illustrates the elements of the Literary Theory you identified in #3
5. Take your best attempt at explaining why the section you quoted in #4 reflects the attributes of the literary theory you identified in #3

*Example:*

- López-Rodríguez, Miriam. "The Short Story As Feminist Forum: Louisa May Alcott's Pauline's Passion and Punishment." *Short Story Criticism*, edited by Jelena Krstovic, vol. 164, Gale, 2012. *Short Story Criticism*  
Online [http://0-link.galegroup.com.library2.pima.edu/apps/doc/XKONYM428794012/LCO?u=pima\\_main&sid=LCO&xid=3061e51f](http://0-link.galegroup.com.library2.pima.edu/apps/doc/XKONYM428794012/LCO?u=pima_main&sid=LCO&xid=3061e51f). Accessed 18 Jan. 2018. Originally published in *Scribbling Women & the Short Story Form: Approaches by American & British Women Writers*, edited by Ellen Burton Harrington, Peter Lang, 2008, pp. 37-46.
- Lousia May Alcott "Behind a Mask"
- Gender Studies
- "Generally in this subgenre, just as in melodrama, the hero and the villain act while the heroine waits passively to have her fate decided by the men in her life. Alcott changes this, turning the traditional ingenue into a femme fatale; her heroines know

what they want and how to get it, regardless of social conventions.” (López-Rodríguez, 218)

- López-Rodríguez’s analysis of Pauline, a character who refuses to adopt the typical passive trope assigned to young women in novels, reinforces the concept of gender as a performance, a central tenant of Gender Studies.

## Reading Journal 6

1. Choose one of the texts from the “Library” and read it carefully.
2. Come up with a question about that text. It can be any question this time.
3. Conduct some research on the database and attempt to answer your question.
4. In 300+ words, report on your experience. If you found information in your research, cite the source(s) and explain how it answers your question. Be sure to use quotations.

If you were unsuccessful in your search, please explain your process. What databases did you use? What search terms did you try? What journals did you check out? Did you contact a librarian? Why do you think you were unable to find what you were looking for?



PART VIII

MODULE 5:  
INTRODUCTION TO  
LITERARY THEORY





# 19. Literary Theory (selection from Wikipedia)

[Literary Theory – Wikipedia](#)

# 20. Literary Theory (selection from the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

[Literary Theory – Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

# 2I. Quick Guide to Textual Analysis

## Critical Lenses

When you do a close reading, you are taking part in literary criticism. Over the years, scholars have tended to focus on a few types of literary criticism to make meaning of texts. Each examines some aspect of our society and asks what a particular story or poem tells us about that aspect. Let's start by looking at a few of these, as they can be helpful guides for the close reading process.

### #1. History

There are several schools of literary criticism that focus on history. New Historicism, for example, asks how a story represents or is an artifact of the time period when the author wrote it.

### #2. Race / Ethnicity

Various schools study what texts can teach us about race, ethnicity, or other aspects of heritage. These schools include African American Studies, Asian Studies, Latino/a or Chicano/a Studies, Native American Studies and so on. Asking what a story tells us about race or ethnicity does not necessarily mean we interpret the author's message, but perhaps simply how she reflects attitudes or ideas about race prevalent when she wrote the text.

### #3. Gender / Sex / Sexuality

Like schools that look at race and ethnicity, some schools look at gender, sex, and sexuality. These schools include Feminism, Queer Studies, Gender Studies and more. For example, Feminism examines power structures in stories and how they affect men and women. When people, particularly women, are controlled by forces beyond their influence, and those forces affect them because of their sex or gender, those forces are called “patriarchy.” A Feminist critic asks how patriarchy affects the characters in a text.

### #4. Class or Social Position

Critics who study class in texts look at power structures. They examine who makes the decisions, who makes the rules, who enforces them, how, and why. An example of this would be Marxist Criticism which examines how money, production, and economics establish and support power structures.

## 22. Reading Journal 5

Reading journals are designed to help you connect the ideas we are studying to the analysis of literary works.

For more information, please see [Unit 2 Discussions](#).

## 23. Overview of Literary Theory

[10 assorted written and multiple-choice questions assessing an overview of Literary Theory.](#)

PART IX

MODULE 6: LITERARY  
THEORY & CLOSE  
READING





# 24. Library and Internet Research

[Library and Internet Research – Writing Commons](#)

## 25. Literary Theory: Database Dive

Contact a librarian and have them help you locate an academic article on one of the readings in this course. Be sure to identify an article that employs some of the aspects of at least one of the literary theories we study in this unit.

For more information, please see [Unit 2 Discussions](#).

## 26. Reading Journal 6

Reading journals are designed to help you connect the ideas we are studying to the analysis of literary works.

For more information, please see [Unit 2 Discussions](#).



PART X

UNIT 3: SHORT FICTION  
AND THE NOVEL -  
MODULES 7-10



## 27. Unit 3 - Discussions

### Discussion – Short Fiction: Database Dive

#### *Distinguish Between Primary and Secondary Sources*

##### **1. Introduction**

Whether conducting research in the social sciences, humanities (especially history), arts, or natural sciences, the ability to distinguish between **primary** and **secondary source material** is essential. Basically, this distinction illustrates the degree to which the author of a piece is removed from the actual event being described, informing the reader as to whether the author is reporting impressions *first hand* (or is first to record these immediately following an event), or conveying the experiences and opinions of others—that is, *second hand*.

##### **2. Primary Sources**

These are **contemporary accounts** of an event, written by someone who experienced or witnessed the event in question. These **original documents** (i.e., they are not about another document or account) are often diaries, letters, memoirs, journals, speeches, manuscripts, interviews and other such unpublished works. They may also include published pieces such as newspaper or magazine articles (as long as they are written soon after the fact and not as historical accounts), photographs, audio or video recordings, research reports in the natural or social sciences, or original literary or theatrical works.

##### **3. Secondary Sources**

The function of these is to **interpret primary sources**, and so can be described as at least one step removed from the event or phenomenon under review. Secondary source materials, then,

interpret, assign value to, conjecture upon, and draw conclusions about the events reported in primary sources. These are usually in the form of published works such as journal articles or books, but may include radio or television documentaries, or conference proceedings.

#### 4. Defining Questions

When evaluating primary or secondary sources, the following questions might be asked to help ascertain the nature and value of material being considered:

- Where does this information come from – personal experience, eyewitness accounts, or reports written by others?
- Are the author's conclusions based on a single piece of evidence, or have many sources been taken into account (e.g., diary entries, along with third-party eyewitness accounts, impressions of contemporaries, newspaper accounts)?

#### 5. Assignment

This week you have been provided with two **primary sources** – “**The Yellow Wallpaper**” and “**Women of the 19th Century**.” To complete this week's Database Dive, please do the following:

1. Read “The Yellow Wallpaper” and “Women of the 19th Century.”
2. Using the library databases, find a **secondary source** on either text and read it.
3. In one paragraph, explain the main idea of the **secondary source**.
4. In 2-3 paragraphs, using the primary texts, explain two examples that either support or refute the main claim of the secondary text.



## Module 8: Short Fiction II

### Discussion – Short Fiction: Close Reading

James Joyce's short story "The Dead" closes his collection of short fiction, *Dubliners*. The entire story takes place within the space of a party. The main character, Gabriel, connects many family members and friends, but it's an encounter with someone he never met, and will never meet, that ends up defining his evening.

For your first response, please do the following:

1. Historicism – Give at least two examples of Irish history, culture, or politics a reader must know to understand this story. Cite your sources.
2. Feminism – Throughout "The Dead," Gabriel is sometimes threatened by powerful women characters. Choose one of the women characters and discuss what concepts of feminist criticism can be explained through Gabriel's encounter with her.
3. Marxism – How is class important to understanding the conclusion of "The Dead?"

## Module 9: Novel Part I

### Discussion – The Novel: Close Reading

For this assignment, you will create a lesson to teach your classmates about some aspect of the novel you are reading. This week, you will plan your lesson. You may not be completely finished

reading the novel, but you can still be planning as you go. Here are the steps:

1. Read the novel carefully.
2. Identify some aspect of the theme that you think is important to understanding the novel. Write an analysis question you will answer in your lesson. It can relate to history, class, gender, psychology, or some other observation you want to make about the novel.
3. Choose one scene you will analyze in your lesson and explain how it relates to your question.
4. Post the question and the explanation of the scene.
5. Explain your plans for your lesson. Will you use a PowerPoint? Prezi? Create a video lecture? Create an interactive assignment? What other resources will you use to teach your classmates about this novel?

## Module 10: Novel Part II

### Discussion – The Novel: Teach a Lesson

This week you will post your lesson! To complete the assignment, follow these steps:

1. Finish reading the novel (if you haven't already).
2. Answer the question about the novel you posed last week.
3. Choose one additional scene to analyze.
4. Create your lesson and post it online. If you create a narrated Power Point you can upload and attach it. If you create an activity and description, you can post it as text. If you create a video, a link or an upload is fine.

The lesson should take at least 5 minutes to complete. That means, a video or narrated PowerPoint would run five minutes. An activity and description should be 350+ words.

For examples of lesson activities, you can use any of the assignments you've encountered in this course so far, but don't copy them exactly. If you choose to design an activity, include three paragraphs of writing that explains how the activity works and how it would get your students to understand the novel.



PART XI

# MODULE 7: SHORT FICTION



## 28. Analyzing a Short Story

### What Is a Short Story?

A short story is a work of short, narrative prose that is usually centered around one single event. It is limited in scope and has an introduction, body and conclusion. Although a short story has much in common with a novel it is written with much greater precision. You will often be asked to write a literary analysis. An analysis of a short story requires basic knowledge of literary elements. The following guide and questions may help you:

### Setting

Setting is a description of where and when the story takes place. In a short story there are fewer settings compared to a novel. The time is more limited. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How is the setting created? Consider geography, weather, time of day, social conditions, etc.
- What role does setting play in the story? Is it an important part of the plot or theme? Or is it just a backdrop against which the action takes place?

Study the time period, which is also part of the setting, and ask yourself the following:

- When was the story written?
- Does it take place in the present, the past, or the future?
- How does the time period affect the language, atmosphere or

social circumstances of the short story?

## Characterization

Characterization deals with how the characters in the story are described. In short stories there are usually fewer characters compared to a novel. They usually focus on one central character or protagonist. Ask yourself the following:

- Who is the main character?
- Are the main character and other characters described through dialogue – by the way they speak (dialect or slang for instance)?
- Has the author described the characters by physical appearance, thoughts and feelings, and interaction (the way they act towards others)?
- Are they static/flat characters who do not change?
- Are they dynamic/round characters who DO change?
- What type of characters are they? What qualities stand out? Are they stereotypes?
- Are the characters believable?

## Plot and structure

The plot is the main sequence of events that make up the story. In short stories the plot is usually centered around one experience or significant moment. Consider the following questions:

- What is the most important event?
- How is the plot structured? Is it linear, chronological or does it move around?



- Is the plot believable?

## Narrator and Point of view

The narrator is the person telling the story. Consider this question:  
Are the narrator and the main character the same?

By point of view we mean from whose eyes the story is being told. Short stories tend to be told through one character's point of view. The following are important questions to consider:

- Who is the narrator or speaker in the story?
- Does the author speak through the main character?
- Is the story written in the first person "I" point of view?
- Is the story written in a detached third person "he/she" point of view?
- Is there an "all-knowing" third person who can reveal what all the characters are thinking and doing at all times and in all places?

## Conflict

Conflict or tension is usually the heart of the short story and is related to the main character. In a short story there is usually one main struggle.

- How would you describe the main conflict?
- Is it an internal conflict within the character?
- Is it an external conflict caused by the surroundings or environment the main character finds himself/herself in?

## Climax

The climax is the point of greatest tension or intensity in the short story. It can also be the point where events take a major turn as the story races towards its conclusion. Ask yourself:

- Is there a turning point in the story?
- When does the climax take place?

## Theme

The theme is the main idea, lesson, or message in the short story. It may be an abstract idea about the human condition, society, or life. Ask yourself:

- How is the theme expressed?
- Are any elements repeated and therefore suggest a theme?
- Is there more than one theme?

## Style

The author's style has to do with the his or her vocabulary, use of imagery, tone, or the feeling of the story. It has to do with the author's attitude toward the subject. In some short stories the tone can be ironic, humorous, cold, or dramatic.

- Is the author's language full of figurative language?
- What images are used?
- Does the author use a lot of symbolism? Metaphors (comparisons that do not use "as" or "like") or similes (comparisons that use "as" or "like")?

Your literary analysis of a short story will often be in the form of an essay where you may be asked to give your opinions of the short story at the end. Choose the elements that made the greatest impression on you. Point out which character/characters you liked best or least and always support your arguments.

## 29. The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

*Published: 1892*

It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity—but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and PERHAPS—I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)—PERHAPS that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again.

Personally, I disagree with their ideas.

Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

I did write for a while in spite of them; but it DOES exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition.

I sometimes fancy that my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad.

So I will let it alone and talk about the house.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people.

There is a DELICIOUS garden! I never saw such a garden—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them.

There were greenhouses, too, but they are all broken now.

There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and coheirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years.

That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid, but I don't care—there is something strange about the house—I can feel it.

I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a DRAUGHT, and shut the window.

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.

But John says if I feel so, I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself—before him, at least, and that makes me very tired.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! but John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said we came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. "Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear," said he, "and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time." So we took the nursery at the top of the house.

It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life.

One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions.

The color is repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight.

It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.

There comes John, and I must put this away,—he hates to have me write a word.

We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day.

I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please, save lack of strength.

John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious.

I am glad my case is not serious!

But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing.

John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no REASON to suffer, and that satisfies him.

Of course it is only nervousness. It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way!

I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!

Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able,—to dress and entertain, and other things.

It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby!

And yet I CANNOT be with him, it makes me so nervous.

I suppose John never was nervous in his life. He laughs at me so about this wall-paper!

At first he meant to repaper the room, but afterwards he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.

He said that after the wall-paper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on.

"You know the place is doing you good," he said, "and really, dear, I don't care to renovate the house just for a three months' rental."

"Then do let us go downstairs," I said, "there are such pretty rooms there."

Then he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose, and said he would go down to the cellar, if I wished, and have it whitewashed into the bargain.

But he is right enough about the beds and windows and things.

It is an airy and comfortable room as any one need wish, and, of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim.

I'm really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper.

Out of one window I can see the garden, those mysterious deepshaded arbors, the riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees.

Out of another I get a lovely view of the bay and a little private wharf belonging to the estate. There is a beautiful shaded lane that runs down there from the house. I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths and arbors, but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try.

I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.

But I find I get pretty tired when I try.

It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well, John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now.

I wish I could get well faster.

But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it KNEW what a vicious influence it had!

There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down.

I get positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere. There is one place where two breadths didn't match, and the eyes go all up and down the line, one a little higher than the other.

I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before, and



we all know how much expression they have! I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toy store.

I remember what a kindly wink the knobs of our big, old bureau used to have, and there was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend.

I used to feel that if any of the other things looked too fierce I could always hop into that chair and be safe.

The furniture in this room is no worse than inharmonious, however, for we had to bring it all from downstairs. I suppose when this was used as a playroom they had to take the nursery things out, and no wonder! I never saw such ravages as the children have made here.

The wall-paper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred.

Then the floor is scratched and gouged and splintered, the plaster itself is dug out here and there, and this great heavy bed which is all we found in the room, looks as if it had been through the wars.

But I don't mind it a bit—only the paper.

There comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing.

She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!

But I can write when she is out, and see her a long way off from these windows.

There is one that commands the road, a lovely shaded winding road, and one that just looks off over the country. A lovely country, too, full of great elms and velvet meadows.

This wall-paper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then.

But in the places where it isn't faded and where the sun is just

so—I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design.

There's sister on the stairs!

Well, the Fourth of July is over! The people are gone and I am tired out. John thought it might do me good to see a little company, so we just had mother and Nellie and the children down for a week.

Of course I didn't do a thing. Jennie sees to everything now.

But it tired me all the same.

John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall.

But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!

Besides, it is such an undertaking to go so far.

I don't feel as if it was worth while to turn my hand over for anything, and I'm getting dreadfully fretful and querulous.

I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time.

Of course I don't when John is here, or anybody else, but when I am alone.

And I am alone a good deal just now. John is kept in town very often by serious cases, and Jennie is good and lets me alone when I want her to.

So I walk a little in the garden or down that lovely lane, sit on the porch under the roses, and lie down up here a good deal.

I'm getting really fond of the room in spite of the wall-paper. Perhaps BECAUSE of the wall-paper.

It dwells in my mind so!

I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about by the hour. It is as good as gymnastics, I assure you. I start, we'll say, at the bottom, down in the corner over there where it has not been touched, and I determine for the thousandth time that I WILL follow that pointless pattern to some sort of a conclusion.

I know a little of the principle of design, and I know this thing was

not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of.

It is repeated, of course, by the breadths, but not otherwise.

Looked at in one way each breadth stands alone, the bloated curves and flourishes—a kind of “debased Romanesque” with delirium tremens—go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity.

But, on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing seaweeds in full chase.

The whole thing goes horizontally, too, at least it seems so, and I exhaust myself in trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.

They have used a horizontal breadth for a frieze, and that adds wonderfully to the confusion.

There is one end of the room where it is almost intact, and there, when the crosslights fade and the low sun shines directly upon it, I can almost fancy radiation after all,—the interminable grotesques seem to form around a common centre and rush off in headlong plunges of equal distraction.

It makes me tired to follow it. I will take a nap I guess.

I don't know why I should write this.

I don't want to.

I don't feel able.

And I know John would think it absurd. But I MUST say what I feel and think in some way—it is such a relief!

But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief.

Half the time now I am awfully lazy, and lie down ever so much.

John says I musn't lose my strength, and has me take cod liver oil and lots of tonics and things, to say nothing of ale and wine and rare meat.

Dear John! He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick. I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wish he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.

But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished.

It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness I suppose.

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head.

He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any silly fancies run away with me.

There's one comfort, the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wall-paper.

If we had not used it, that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here after all, I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see.

Of course I never mention it to them any more—I am too wise,—but I keep watch of it all the same.

There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will.

Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day.

It is always the same shape, only very numerous.

And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit. I wonder—I begin to think—I wish John would take me away from here!

It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so.

But I tried it last night.

It was moonlight. The moon shines in all around just as the sun does.

I hate to see it sometimes, it creeps so slowly, and always comes in by one window or another.

John was asleep and I hated to waken him, so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wall-paper till I felt creepy.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.

I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper DID move, and when I came back John was awake.

"What is it, little girl?" he said. "Don't go walking about like that—you'll get cold."

I thought it was a good time to talk, so I told him that I really was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away.

"Why darling!" said he, "our lease will be up in three weeks, and I can't see how to leave before.

"The repairs are not done at home, and I cannot possibly leave town just now. Of course if you were in any danger, I could and would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better, I feel really much easier about you."

"I don't weigh a bit more," said I, "nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening when you are here, but it is worse in the morning when you are away!"

"Bless her little heart!" said he with a big hug, "she shall be as sick as she pleases! But now let's improve the shining hours by going to sleep, and talk about it in the morning!"

"And you won't go away?" I asked gloomily.

"Why, how can I, dear? It is only three weeks more and then we will take a nice little trip of a few days while Jennie is getting the house ready. Really dear you are better!"

"Better in body perhaps—" I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word.

"My darling," said he, "I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant

let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?"

So of course I said no more on that score, and we went to sleep before long. He thought I was asleep first, but I wasn't, and lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately.

On a pattern like this, by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind.

The color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is torturing.

You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well underway in following, it turns a back-somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream.

The outside pattern is a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus. If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions— why, that is something like it.

That is, sometimes!

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes.

When the sun shoots in through the east window—I always watch for that first long, straight ray—it changes so quickly that I never can quite believe it.

That is why I watch it always.

By moonlight—the moon shines in all night when there is a moon—I wouldn't know it was the same paper.

At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candle light, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be.

I didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind, that dim sub-pattern, but now I am quite sure it is a woman.

By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hour.

I lie down ever so much now. John says it is good for me, and to sleep all I can.

Indeed he started the habit by making me lie down for an hour after each meal.

It is a very bad habit I am convinced, for you see I don't sleep.

And that cultivates deceit, for I don't tell them I'm awake—O no!

The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John.

He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look.

It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis,— that perhaps it is the paper!

I have watched John when he did not know I was looking, and come into the room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I've caught him several times LOOKING AT THE PAPER! And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.

She didn't know I was in the room, and when I asked her in a quiet, a very quiet voice, with the most restrained manner possible, what she was doing with the paper—she turned around as if she had been caught stealing, and looked quite angry—asked me why I should frighten her so!

Then she said that the paper stained everything it touched, that she had found yellow smooches on all my clothes and John's, and she wished we would be more careful!

Did not that sound innocent? But I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!

Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was.

John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wall-paper.

I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was

BECAUSE of the wall-paper—he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away.

I don't want to leave now until I have found it out. There is a week more, and I think that will be enough.

I'm feeling ever so much better! I don't sleep much at night, for it is so interesting to watch developments; but I sleep a good deal in the daytime.

In the daytime it is tiresome and perplexing.

There are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it. I cannot keep count of them, though I have tried conscientiously.

It is the strangest yellow, that wall-paper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw—not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things.

But there is something else about that paper—the smell! I noticed it the moment we came into the room, but with so much air and sun it was not bad. Now we have had a week of fog and rain, and whether the windows are open or not, the smell is here.

It creeps all over the house.

I find it hovering in the dining-room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs.

It gets into my hair.

Even when I go to ride, if I turn my head suddenly and surprise it—there is that smell!

Such a peculiar odor, too! I have spent hours in trying to analyze it, to find what it smelled like.

It is not bad—at first, and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met.

In this damp weather it is awful, I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me.

It used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house—to reach the smell.

But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like is the COLOR of the paper! A yellow smell.

There is a very funny mark on this wall, low down, near the



mopboard. A streak that runs round the room. It goes behind every piece of furniture, except the bed, a long, straight, even SMOOCH, as if it had been rubbed over and over.

I wonder how it was done and who did it, and what they did it for. Round and round and round—round and round and round—it makes me dizzy!

I really have discovered something at last.

Through watching so much at night, when it changes so, I have finally found out.

The front pattern DOES move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.

Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.

And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.

They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white!

If those heads were covered or taken off it would not be half so bad.

I think that woman gets out in the daytime!

And I'll tell you why—privately—I've seen her!

I can see her out of every one of my windows!

It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight.

I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines.

I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!

I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once.

And John is so queer now, that I don't want to irritate him. I wish

he would take another room! Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself.

I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once.

But, turn as fast as I can, I can only see out of one at a time.

And though I always see her, she MAY be able to creep faster than I can turn!

I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind.

If only that top pattern could be gotten off from the under one! I mean to try it, little by little.

I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much.

There are only two more days to get this paper off, and I believe John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes.

And I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me. She had a very good report to give.

She said I slept a good deal in the daytime.

John knows I don't sleep very well at night, for all I'm so quiet!

He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind.

As if I couldn't see through him!

Still, I don't wonder he acts so, sleeping under this paper for three months.

It only interests me, but I feel sure John and Jennie are secretly affected by it.

Hurrah! This is the last day, but it is enough. John is to stay in town over night, and won't be out until this evening.

Jennie wanted to sleep with me—the sly thing! but I told her I should undoubtedly rest better for a night all alone.

That was clever, for really I wasn't alone a bit! As soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.

I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.

A strip about as high as my head and half around the room.

And then when the sun came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me, I declared I would finish it to-day!

We go away to-morrow, and they are moving all my furniture down again to leave things as they were before.

Jennie looked at the wall in amazement, but I told her merrily that I did it out of pure spite at the vicious thing.

She laughed and said she wouldn't mind doing it herself, but I must not get tired.

How she betrayed herself that time!

But I am here, and no person touches this paper but me—not ALIVE!

She tried to get me out of the room—it was too patent! But I said it was so quiet and empty and clean now that I believed I would lie down again and sleep all I could; and not to wake me even for dinner—I would call when I woke.

So now she is gone, and the servants are gone, and the things are gone, and there is nothing left but that great bedstead nailed down, with the canvas mattress we found on it.

We shall sleep downstairs to-night, and take the boat home to-morrow.

I quite enjoy the room, now it is bare again.

How those children did tear about here!

This bedstead is fairly gnawed!

But I must get to work.

I have locked the door and thrown the key down into the front path.

I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes. I want to astonish him.

I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!

But I forgot I could not reach far without anything to stand on!

This bed will NOT move!

I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner—but it hurt my teeth.

Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor.

It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!

I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.

Besides I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.

I don't like to LOOK out of the windows even—there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast.

I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did?

But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope—you don't get ME out in the road there!

I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!

It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!

I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to.

For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.

But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way.

Why there's John at the door!

It is no use, young man, you can't open it!

How he does call and pound!

Now he's crying for an axe.

It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!

"John dear!" said I in the gentlest voice, "the key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!"

That silenced him for a few moments.

Then he said—very quietly indeed, "Open the door, my darling!"

"I can't," said I. "The key is down by the front door under a plantain leaf!"

And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and

said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it of course, and came in. He stopped short by the door.

“What is the matter?” he cried. “For God’s sake, what are you doing!”

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

“I’ve got out at last,” said I, “in spite of you and Jane. And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!”

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!

**Charlotte Perkins Gilman** (July 3, 1860 – August 17, 1935) was a prominent American sociologist, novelist, writer of short stories, poetry, and non fiction, and a lecturer for social reform. She was a utopian feminist during a time when her accomplishments were exceptional for women, and she served as a role model for future generations of feminists because of her unorthodox concepts and lifestyle. Her best remembered work today is her semi-autobiographical short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper”, which she wrote after a severe bout of post-partum depression.

# 30. Woman in the 19th Century by Margaret Fuller

*Published: 1843*

“Frailty, thy name is WOMAN.”

“The Earth waits for her Queen.”

The connection between these quotations may not be obvious, but it is strict. Yet would any contradict us, if we made them applicable to the other side, and began also,

Frailty, thy name is MAN.

The Earth waits for its King?

Yet Man, if not yet fully installed in his powers, has given much earnest of his claims. Frail he is indeed,—how frail! how impure! Yet often has the vein of gold displayed itself amid the baser ores, and Man has appeared before us in princely promise worthy of his future.

If, oftentimes, we see the prodigal son feeding on the husks in the fair field no more his own, anon we raise the eyelids, heavy from bitter tears, to behold in him the radiant apparition of genius and love, demanding not less than the all of goodness, power and beauty. We see that in him the largest claim finds a due foundation. That claim is for no partial sway, no exclusive possession. He cannot be satisfied with any one gift of life, any one department of knowledge or telescopic peep at the heavens. He feels himself called to understand and aid Nature, that she may, through his intelligence, be raised and interpreted; to be a student of, and servant to, the universe-spirit; and king of his planet, that, as an angelic minister he may bring it into conscious harmony with the law of that spirit.

In clear, triumphant moments, many times, has rung through the spheres the prophecy of his jubilee; and those moments, though past in time, have been translated into eternity by thought; the bright signs they left hang in the heavens, as single stars or

constellations, and, already, a thickly sown radiance consoles the wanderer in the darkest night. Other heroes since Hercules have fulfilled the zodiac of beneficent labors, and then given up their mortal part to the fire without a murmur; while no God dared deny that they should have their reward,

Siquis tamen, Hercule, siquis  
Forte Deo doliturus erit, daia praemia nollet,  
Sed meruisse dari sciet, invitus que probabit,  
Assensere Dei

Sages and lawgivers have bent their whole nature to the search for truth, and thought themselves happy if they could buy, with the sacrifice of all temporal ease and pleasure, one seed for the future Eden. Poets and priests have strung the lyre with the heart-strings, poured out their best blood upon the altar, which, reared anew from age to age, shall at last sustain the flame pure enough to rise to highest heaven. Shall we not name with as deep a benediction those who, if not so immediately, or so consciously, in connection with the eternal truth, yet, led and fashioned by a divine instinct, serve no less to develop and interpret the open secret of love passing into life, energy creating for the purpose of happiness; the artist whose hand, drawn by a preexistent harmony to a certain medium, moulds it to forms of life more highly and completely organized than are seen elsewhere, and, by carrying out the intention of nature, reveals her meaning to those who are not yet wise enough to divine it; the philosopher who listens steadily for laws and causes, and from those obvious infers those yet unknown; the historian who, in faith that all events must have their reason and their aim, records them, and thus fills archives from which the youth of prophets may be fed; the man of science dissecting the statements, testing the facts and demonstrating order, even where he cannot its purpose?

Lives, too, which bear none of these names, have yielded tones of no less significance. The candlestick set in a low place has given light as faithfully, where it was needed, as that upon the hill, In close alleys, in dismal nooks, the Word has been read as distinctly,

as when shown by angels to holy men in the dark prison. Those who till a spot of earth scarcely larger than is wanted for a grave, have deserved that the sun should shine upon its sod till violets answer.

So great has been, from time to time, the promise, that, in all ages, men have said the gods themselves came down to dwell with them; that the All-Creating wandered on the earth to taste, in a limited nature, the sweetness of virtue; that the All-Sustaining incarnated himself to guard, in space and time, the destinies of this world; that heavenly genius dwelt among the shepherds, to sing to them and teach them how to sing. Indeed,

“Der stets den Hirten gnadig sich bewies.”

“He has constantly shown himself favorable to shepherds.”

And the dwellers in green pastures and natural students of the stars were selected to hail, first among men, the holy child, whose life and death were to present the type of excellence, which has sustained the heart of so large a portion of mankind in these later generations.

Such marks have been made by the footsteps of *man* (still, alas! to be spoken of as the *ideal* man), wherever he has passed through the wilderness of *men*, and whenever the pigmies stepped in one of those, they felt dilate within the breast somewhat that promised nobler stature and purer blood. They were impelled to forsake their evil ways of decrepit scepticism and covetousness of corruptible possessions. Convictions flowed in upon them. They, too, raised the cry: God is living, now, to-day; and all beings are brothers, for they are his children. Simple words enough, yet which only angelic natures can use or hear in their full, free sense.

These were the triumphant moments; but soon the lower nature took its turn, and the era of a truly human life was postponed.

Thus is man still a stranger to his inheritance, still a pleader, still a pilgrim. Yet his happiness is secure in the end. And now, no more a glimmering consciousness, but assurance begins to be felt and spoken, that the highest ideal Man can form of his own powers is that which he is destined to attain. Whatever the soul knows how to seek, it cannot fail to obtain. This is the Law and



the Prophets. Knock and it shall be opened; seek and ye shall find. It is demonstrated; it is a maxim. Man no longer paints his proper nature in some form, and says, "Prometheus had it; it is God-like;" but "Man must have it; it is human." However disputed by many, however ignorantly used, or falsified by those who do receive it, the fact of an universal, unceasing revelation has been too clearly stated in words to be lost sight of in thought; and sermons preached from the text, "Be ye perfect," are the only sermons of a pervasive and deep-searching influence.

But, among those who meditate upon this text, there is a great difference of view as to the way in which perfection shall be sought.

"Through the intellect," say some. "Gather from every growth of life its seed of thought; look behind every symbol for its law; if thou canst see clearly, the rest will follow."

"Through the life," say others. "Do the best thou knowest today. Shrink not from frequent error in this gradual, fragmentary state. Follow thy light for as much as it will show thee; be faithful as far as thou canst, in hope that faith presently will lead to sight. Help others, without blaming their need of thy help. Love much, and be forgiven."

"It needs not intellect, needs not experience," says a third. "If you took the true way, your destiny would be accomplished, in a purer and more natural order. You would not learn through facts of thought or action, but express through them the certainties of wisdom. In quietness yield thy soul to the causal soul. Do not disturb thy apprenticeship by premature effort; neither check the tide of instruction by methods of thy own. Be still; seek not, but wait in obedience. Thy commission will be given."

Could we indeed say what we want, could we give a description of the child that is lost, he would be found. As soon as the soul can affirm clearly that a certain demonstration is wanted, it is at hand. When the Jewish prophet described the Lamb, as the expression of what was required by the coming era, the time drew nigh. But we say not, see not as yet, clearly, what we would. Those who call

for a more triumphant expression of love, a love that cannot be crucified, show not a perfect sense of what has already been given. Love has already been expressed, that made all things new, that gave the worm its place and ministry as well as the eagle; a love to which it was alike to descend into the depths of hell, or to sit at the right hand of the Father.

Yet, no doubt, a new manifestation is at hand, a new hour in the day of Man. We cannot expect to see any one sample of completed being, when the mass of men still lie engaged in the sod, or use the freedom of their limbs only with wolfish energy. The tree cannot come to flower till its root be free from the cankering worm, and its whole growth open to air and light. While any one is base, none can be entirely free and noble. Yet something new shall presently be shown of the life of man, for hearts crave, if minds do not know how to ask it.

Among the strains of prophecy, the following, by an earnest mind of a foreign land, written some thirty years ago, is not yet outgrown; and it has the merit of being a positive appeal from the heart, instead of a critical declaration what Man should not do.

“The ministry of Man implies that he must be filled from the divine fountains which are being engendered through all eternity, so that, at the mere name of his master, he may be able to cast all his enemies into the abyss; that he may deliver all parts of nature from the barriers that imprison them; that he may purge the terrestrial atmosphere from the poisons that infect it; that he may preserve the bodies of men from the corrupt influences that surround, and the maladies that afflict them; still more, that he may keep their souls pure from the malignant insinuations which pollute, and the gloomy images that obscure them; that he may restore its serenity to the Word, which false words of men fill with mourning and sadness; that he may satisfy the desires of the angels, who await from him the development

of the marvels of nature; that, in fine, his world may be filled with God, as eternity is." [Footnote: St. Martin]

Another attempt we will give, by an obscure observer of our own day and country, to draw some lines of the desired image. It was suggested by seeing the design of Crawford's Orpheus, and connecting with the circumstance of the American, in his garret at Rome, making choice of this subject, that of Americans here at home showing such ambition to represent the character, by calling their prose and verse "Orphic sayings"—"Orphics." We wish we could add that they have shown that musical apprehension of the progress of Nature through her ascending gradations which entitled them so to do, but their attempts are frigid, though sometimes grand; in their strain we are not warmed by the fire which fertilized the soil of Greece.

Orpheus was a lawgiver by theocratic commission. He understood nature, and made her forms move to his music. He told her secrets in the form of hymns, Nature as seen in the mind of God. His soul went forth toward all beings, yet could remain sternly faithful to a chosen type of excellence. Seeking what he loved, he feared not death nor hell; neither could any shape of dread daunt his faith in the power of the celestial harmony that filled his soul.

It seemed significant of the state of things in this country, that the sculptor should have represented the seer at the moment when he was obliged with his hand to shade his eyes.

Each Orpheus must to the depths descend;  
For only thus the Poet can be wise;  
Must make the sad Persephone his friend,  
And buried love to second life arise;  
Again his love must lose through too much love,  
Must lose his life by living life too true,  
For what he sought below is passed above,  
Already done is all that he would do  
Must tune all being with his single lyre,  
Must melt all rooks free from their primal pain,

Must search all nature with his one soul's fire,  
Must bind anew all forms in heavenly chain.  
If he already sees what he must do,  
Well may he shade his eyes from the far-shining view.

A better comment could not be made on what is required to perfect Man, and place him in that superior position for which he was designed, than by the interpretation of Bacon upon the legends of the Syren coast "When the wise Ulysses passed," says he, "he caused his mariners to stop their ears, with wax, knowing there was in them no power to resist the lure of that voluptuous song. But he, the much experienced man, who wished to be experienced in all, and use all to the service of wisdom, desired to hear the song that he might understand its meaning. Yet, distrusting his own power to be firm in his better purpose, he caused himself to be bound to the mast, that he might be kept secure against his own weakness. But Orpheus passed unfettered, so absorbed in singing hymns to the gods that he could not even hear those sounds of degrading enchantment."

Meanwhile, not a few believe, and men themselves have expressed the opinion, that the time is come when Eurydice is to call for an Orpheus, rather than Orpheus for Eurydice; that the idea of Man, however imperfectly brought out, has been far more so than that of Woman; that she, the other half of the same thought, the other chamber of the heart of life, needs now take her turn in the full pulsation, and that improvement in the daughters will best aid in the reformation of the sons of this age.

It should be remarked that, as the principle of liberty is better understood, and more nobly interpreted, a broader protest is made in behalf of Woman. As men become aware that few men have had a fair chance, they are inclined to say that no women have had a fair chance. The French Revolution, that strangely disguised angel, bore witness in favor of Woman, but interpreted her claims no less ignorantly than those of Man. Its idea of happiness did not rise beyond outward enjoyment, unobstructed by the tyranny of others.

The title it gave was “citoyen,” “citoyenne;” and it is not unimportant to Woman that even this species of equality was awarded her. Before, she could be condemned to perish on the scaffold for treason, not as a citizen, but as a subject. The right with which this title then invested a human being was that of bloodshed and license. The Goddess of Liberty was impure. As we read the poem addressed to her, not long since, by Beranger, we can scarcely refrain from tears as painful as the tears of blood that flowed when “such crimes were committed in her name.” Yes! Man, born to purify and animate the unintelligent and the cold, can, in his madness, degrade and pollute no less the fair and the chaste. Yet truth was prophesied in the ravings of that hideous fever, caused by long ignorance and abuse. Europe is conning a valued lesson from the blood-stained page. The same tendencies, further unfolded, will bear good fruit in this country.

Yet, by men in this country, as by the Jews, when Moses was leading them to the promised land, everything has been done that inherited depravity could do, to hinder the promise of Heaven from its fulfilment. The cross, here as elsewhere, has been planted only to be blasphemed by cruelty and fraud. The name of the Prince of Peace has been profaned by all kinds of injustice toward the Gentile whom he said he came to save. But I need not speak of what has been done towards the Red Man, the Black Man. Those deeds are the scoff of the world; and they have been accompanied by such pious words that the gentlest would not dare to intercede with “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Here, as elsewhere, the gain of creation consists always in the growth of individual minds, which live and aspire, as flowers bloom and birds sing, in the midst of morasses; and in the continual development of that thought, the thought of human destiny, which is given to eternity adequately to express, and which ages of failure only seemingly impede. Only seemingly; and whatever seems to the contrary, this country is as surely destined to elucidate a great moral law, as Europe was to promote the mental culture of Man.

Though the national independence be blurred by the servility of

individuals; though freedom and equality have been proclaimed only to leave room for a monstrous display of slave-dealing and slave-keeping; though the free American so often feels himself free, like the Roman, only to pamper his appetites and his indolence through the misery of his fellow-beings; still it is not in vain that the verbal statement has been made, "All men are born free and equal." There it stands, a golden certainty wherewith to encourage the good, to shame the bad. The New World may be called clearly to perceive that it incurs the utmost penalty if it reject or oppress the sorrowful brother. And, if men are deaf, the angels hear. But men cannot be deaf. It is inevitable that an external freedom, an independence of the encroachments of other men, such as has been achieved for the nation, should be so also for every member of it. That which has once been clearly conceived in the intelligence cannot fail, sooner or later, to be acted out. It has become a law as irrevocable as that of the Medes in their ancient dominion; men will privately sin against it, but the law, as expressed by a leading mind of the age,

"Tutti fatti a sembianza d'un Solo,  
Figli tutti d'un solo riscatto,  
In qual'ora, in qual parte del suolo  
Trascorriamo quest' aura vital,  
Siam fratelli, siamo stretti ad un patto:  
Maladetto colui che lo infrange,  
Che s'innalza sul finoco che piange  
Che contrista uno spirto immortal." [Footnote: Manzoni]  
"All made in the likeness of the One.  
All children of one ransom,  
In whatever hour, in whatever part of the soil,  
We draw this vital air,  
We are brothers; we must be bound by one compact;  
Accursed he who infringes it,  
Who raises himself upon the weak who weep,  
Who saddens an immortal spirit."

This law cannot fail of universal recognition. Accursed be he who

willingly saddens an immortal spirit—doomed to infamy in later, wiser ages, doomed in future stages of his own being to deadly penance, only short of death. Accursed be he who sins in ignorance, if that ignorance be caused by sloth.

We sicken no less at the pomp than the strife of words. We feel that never were lungs so puffed with the wind of declamation, on moral and religious subjects, as now. We are tempted to implore these “word-heroes,” these word-Catos, word-Christis, to beware of cant [Footnote: Dr. Johnson’s one piece of advice should be written on every door: “Clear your mind of cant.” But Byron, to whom it was so acceptable, in clearing away the noxious vine, shook down the building. Sterling’s emendation is worthy of honor:

“Realize your can’t, not cast it off.”

above all things; to remember that hypocrisy is the most hopeless as well as the meanest of crimes, and that those must surely be polluted by it, who do not reserve a part of their morality and religion for private use. Landor says that he cannot have a great deal of mind who cannot afford to let the larger part of it lie fallow; and what is true of genius is not less so of virtue. The tongue is a valuable member, but should appropriate but a small part of the vital juices that are needful all over the body. We feel that the mind may “grow black and rancid in the smoke” even “of altars.” We start up from the harangue to go into our closet and shut the door. There inquires the spirit, “Is this rhetoric the bloom of healthy blood, or a false pigment artfully laid on?” And yet again we know where is so much smoke, must be some fire; with so much talk about virtue and freedom, must be mingled some desire for them; that it cannot be in vain that such have become the common topics of conversation among men, rather than schemes for tyranny and plunder, that the very newspapers see it best to proclaim themselves “Pilgrims,” “Puritans,” “Heralds of Holiness.” The king that maintains so costly a retinue cannot be a mere boast, or Carabbas fiction. We have waited here long in the dust; we are tired and hungry; but the triumphal procession must appear at last.

Of all its banners, none has been more steadily upheld, and under none have more valor and willingness for real sacrifices been shown, than that of the champions of the enslaved African. And this band it is, which, partly from a natural following out of principles, partly because many women have been prominent in that cause, makes, just now, the warmest appeal in behalf of Woman.

Though there has been a growing liberality on this subject, yet society at large is not so prepared for the demands of this party, but that its members are, and will be for some time, coldly regarded as the Jacobins of their day.

"Is it not enough," cries the irritated trader, "that you have done all you could to break up the national union, and thus destroy the prosperity of our country, but now you must be trying to break up family union, to take my wife away from the cradle and the kitchen-hearth to vote at polls, and preach from a pulpit? Of course, if she does such things, she cannot attend to those of her own sphere. She is happy enough as she is. She has more leisure than I have,—every means of improvement, every indulgence."

"Have you asked her whether she was satisfied with these *indulgences*?"

"No, but I know she is. She is too amiable to desire what would make me unhappy, and too judicious to wish to step beyond the sphere of her sex. I will never consent to have our peace disturbed by any such discussions."

"Consent—you?" it is not consent from you that is in question—it is assent from your wife."

"Am not I the head of my house?"

"You are not the head of your wife. God has given her a mind of her own.

"I am the head, and she the heart."

"God grant you play true to one another, then! I suppose I am to be grateful that you did not say she was only the hand. If the head represses no natural pulse of the heart, there can be no question as to your giving your consent. Both will be of one accord, and there needs but to present any question to get a full and true answer.



There is no need of precaution, of indulgence, nor consent. But our doubt is whether the heart *does* consent with the head, or only obeys its decrees with a passiveness that precludes the exercise of its natural powers, or a repugnance that turns sweet qualities to bitter, or a doubt that lays waste the fair occasions of life. It is to ascertain the truth that we propose some liberating measures.”

Thus vaguely are these questions proposed and discussed at present. But their being proposed at all implies much thought, and suggests more. Many women are considering within themselves what they need that they have not, and what they can have if they find they need it. Many men are considering whether women are capable of being and having more than they are and have, *and* whether, if so, it will be best to consent to improvement in their condition.

This morning, I open the Boston “Daily Mail,” and find in its “poet’s corner” a translation of Schiller’s “Dignity of Woman.” In the advertisement of a book on America, I see in the table of contents this sequence, “Republican Institutions. American Slavery. American Ladies.”

I open the “*Deutsche Schnellpost*” published in New York, and find at the head of a column, *Juden und Frauenemancipation in Ungarn*—“Emancipation of Jews and Women in Hungary.”

The past year has seen action in the Rhode Island legislature, to secure married women rights over their own property, where men showed that a very little examination of the subject could teach them much; an article in the Democratic Review on the same subject more largely considered, written by a woman, impelled, it is said, by glaring wrong to a distinguished friend, having shown the defects in the existing laws, and the state of opinion from which they spring; and on answer from the revered old man, J. Q. Adams, in some respects the Phocion of his time, to an address made him by some ladies. To this last I shall again advert in another place.

These symptoms of the times have come under my view quite accidentally: one who seeks, may, each month or week, collect more.

The numerous party, whose opinions are already labeled and

adjusted too much to their mind to admit of any new light, strive, by lectures on some model-woman of bride-like beauty and gentleness, by writing and lending little treatises, intended to mark out with precision the limits of Woman's sphere, and Woman's mission, to prevent other than the rightful shepherd from climbing the wall, or the flock from using any chance to go astray.

Without enrolling ourselves at once on either side, let us look upon the subject from the best point of view which to-day offers; no better, it is to be feared, than a high house-top. A high hill-top, or at least a cathedral-spire, would be desirable.

It may well be an Anti-Slavery party that pleads for Woman, if we consider merely that she does not hold property on equal terms with men; so that, if a husband dies without making a will, the wife, instead of taking at once his place as head of the family, inherits only a part of his fortune, often brought him by herself, as if she were a child, or ward only, not an equal partner.

We will not speak of the innumerable instances in which profligate and idle men live upon the earnings of industrious wives; or if the wives leave them, and take with them the children, to perform the double duty of mother and father, follow from place to place, and threaten to rob them of the children, if deprived of the rights of a husband, as they call them, planting themselves in their poor lodgings, frightening them into paying tribute by taking from them the children, running into debt at the expense of these otherwise so overtasked helots. Such instances count up by scores within my own memory. I have seen the husband who had stained himself by a long course of low vice, till his wife was wearied from her heroic forgiveness, by finding that his treachery made it useless, and that if she would provide bread for herself and her children, she must be separate from his ill fame—I have known this man come to install himself in the chamber of a woman who loathed him, and say she should never take food without his company. I have known these men steal their children, whom they knew they had no means to maintain, take them into dissolute company, expose them to bodily danger, to frighten the poor woman, to whom, it seems, the

fact that she alone had borne the pangs of their birth, and nourished their infancy, does not give an equal right to them. I do believe that this mode of kidnapping—and it is frequent enough in all classes of society—will be by the next age viewed as it is by Heaven now, and that the man who avails himself of the shelter of men's laws to steal from a mother her own children, or arrogate any superior right in them, save that of superior virtue, will bear the stigma he deserves, in common with him who steals grown men from their mother-land, their hopes, and their homes.

I said, we will not speak of this now; yet I *have* spoken, for the subject makes me feel too much. I could give instances that would startle the most vulgar and callous; but I will not, for the public opinion of their own sex is already against such men, and where cases of extreme tyranny are made known, there is private action in the wife's favor. But she ought not to need this, nor, I think, can she long. Men must soon see that as, on their own ground, Woman is the weaker party, she ought to have legal protection, which would make such oppression impossible. But I would not deal with "atrocious instances," except in the way of illustration, neither demand from men a partial redress in some one matter, but go to the root of the whole. If principles could be established, particulars would adjust themselves aright. Ascertain the true destiny of Woman; give her legitimate hopes, and a standard within herself; marriage and all other relations would by degrees be harmonized with these.

But to return to the historical progress of this matter. Knowing that there exists in the minds of men a tone of feeling toward women as toward slaves, such as is expressed in the common phrase, "Tell that to women and children;" that the infinite soul can only work through them in already ascertained limits; that the gift of reason, Man's highest prerogative, is allotted to them in much lower degree; that they must be kept from mischief and melancholy by being constantly engaged in active labor, which is to be furnished and directed by those better able to think, &etc., etc.,—we need not multiply instances, for who can review the experience of last week without recalling words which imply, whether in jest or earnest,

these views, or views like these,—knowing this, can we wonder that many reformers think that measures are not likely to be taken in behalf of women, unless their wishes could be publicly represented by women?

“That can never be necessary,” cry the other side. “All men are privately influenced by women; each has his wife, sister, or female friends, and is too much biased by these relations to fail of representing their interests; and, if this is not enough, let them propose and enforce their wishes with the pen. The beauty of home would be destroyed, the delicacy of the sex be violated, the dignity of halls of legislation degraded, by an attempt to introduce them there. Such duties are inconsistent with those of a mother;” and then we have ludicrous pictures of ladies in hysterics at the polls, and senate-chambers filled with cradles.

But if, in reply, we admit as truth that Woman seems destined by nature rather for the inner circle, we must add that the arrangements of civilized life have not been, as yet, such as to secure it to her. Her circle, if the duller, is not the quieter. If kept from “excitement,” she is not from drudgery. Not only the Indian squaw carries the burdens of the camp, but the favorites of Louis XIV. accompany him in his journeys, and the washerwoman stands at her tub, and carries home her work at all seasons, and in all states of health. Those who think the physical circumstances of Woman would make a part in the affairs of national government unsuitable, are by no means those who think it impossible for negresses to endure field-work, even during pregnancy, or for sempstresses to go through their killing labors.

As to the use of the pen, there was quite as much opposition to Woman’s possessing herself of that help to free agency as there is now to her seizing on the rostrum or the desk; and she is likely to draw, from a permission to plead her cause that way, opposite inferences to what might be wished by those who now grant it.

As to the possibility of her filling with grace and dignity any such position, we should think those who had seen the great actresses, and heard the Quaker preachers of modern times, would not doubt

that Woman can express publicly the fulness of thought and creation, without losing any of the peculiar beauty of her sex. What can pollute and tarnish is to act thus from any motive except that something needs to be said or done. Woman could take part in the processions, the songs, the dances of old religion; no one fancied her delicacy was impaired by appearing in public for such a cause.

As to her home, she is not likely to leave it more than she now does for balls, theatres, meetings for promoting missions, revival meetings, and others to which she flies, in hope of an animation for her existence commensurate with what she sees enjoyed by men. Governors of ladies'-fairs are no less engrossed by such a charge, than the governor of a state by his; presidents of Washingtonian societies no less away from home than presidents of conventions. If men look straitly to it, they will find that, unless their lives are domestic, those of the women will not be. A house is no home unless it contain food and fire for the mind as well as for the body. The female Greek, of our day, is as much in the street as the male to cry, "What news?" We doubt not it was the same in Athens of old. The women, shut out from the market-place, made up for it at the religious festivals. For human beings are not so constituted that they can live without expansion. If they do not get it in one way, they must in another, or perish.

As to men's representing women fairly at present, while we hear from men who owe to their wives not only all that is comfortable or graceful, but all that is wise, in the arrangement of their lives, the frequent remark, "You cannot reason with a woman,"—when from those of delicacy, nobleness, and poetic culture, falls the contemptuous phrase "women and children," and that in no light sally of the hour, but in works intended to give a permanent statement of the best experiences,—when not one man, in the million, shall I say? no, not in the hundred million, can rise above the belief that Woman was made *for Man*,—when such traits as these are daily forced upon the attention, can we feel that Man will always do justice to the interests of Woman? Can we think that he takes a sufficiently discerning and religious view of her

office and destiny *ever* to do her justice, except when prompted by sentiment,—accidentally or transiently, that is, for the sentiment will vary according to the relations in which he is placed? The lover, the poet, the artist, are likely to view her nobly. The father and the philosopher have some chance of liberality; the man of the world, the legislator for expediency, none.

Under these circumstances, without attaching importance, in themselves, to the changes demanded by the champions of Woman, we hail them as signs of the times. We would have every arbitrary barrier thrown down. We would have every path laid open to Woman as freely as to Man. Were this done, and a slight temporary fermentation allowed to subside, we should see crystallizations more pure and of more various beauty. We believe the divine energy would pervade nature to a degree unknown in the history of former ages, and that no discordant collision, but a ravishing harmony of the spheres, would ensue.

Yet, then and only then will mankind be ripe for this, when inward and outward freedom for Woman as much as for Man shall be acknowledged as a *right*, not yielded as a concession. As the friend of the negro assumes that one man cannot by right hold another in bondage, so should the friend of Woman assume that Man cannot by right lay even well-meant restrictions on Woman. If the negro be a soul, if the woman be a soul, apparelled in flesh, to one Master only are they accountable. There is but one law for souls, and, if there is to be an interpreter of it, he must come not as man, or son of man, but as son of God.

Were thought and feeling once so far elevated that Man should esteem himself the brother and friend, but nowise the lord and tutor, of Woman,—were he really bound with her in equal worship,—arrangements as to function and employment would be of no consequence. What Woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given her when we left our common home. If fewer talents were given her, yet if allowed the free and full employment of these, so that she may

render back to the giver his own with usury, she will not complain; nay, I dare to say she will bless and rejoice in her earthly birth-place, her earthly lot. Let us consider what obstructions impede this good era, and what signs give reason to hope that it draws near.

I was talking on this subject with Miranda, a woman, who, if any in the world could, might speak without heat and bitterness of the position of her sex. Her father was a man who cherished no sentimental reverence for Woman, but a firm belief in the equality of the sexes. She was his eldest child, and came to him at an age when he needed a companion. From the time she could speak and go alone, he addressed her not as a plaything, but as a living mind. Among the few verses he ever wrote was a copy addressed to this child, when the first locks were cut from her head; and the reverence expressed on this occasion for that cherished head, he never belied. It was to him the temple of immortal intellect. He respected his child, however, too much to be an indulgent parent. He called on her for clear judgment, for courage, for honor and fidelity; in short, for such virtues as he knew. In so far as he possessed the keys to the wonders of this universe, he allowed free use of them to her, and, by the incentive of a high expectation, he forbade, so far as possible, that she should let the privilege lie idle.

Thus this child was early led to feel herself a child of the spirit. She took her place easily, not only in the world of organized being, but in the world of mind. A dignified sense of self-dependence was given as all her portion, and she found it a sure anchor. Herself securely anchored, her relations with others were established with equal security. She was fortunate in a total absence of those charms which might have drawn to her bewildering flatteries, and in a strong electric nature, which repelled those who did not belong to her, and attracted those who did. With men and women her relations were noble,—affectionate without passion, intellectual without coldness. The world was free to her, and she lived freely in it. Outward adversity came, and inward conflict; but that faith and self-respect had early been awakened which must always lead, at last, to an outward serenity and an inward peace.

Of Miranda I had always thought as an example, that the restraints upon the sex were insuperable only to those who think them so, or who noisily strive to break them. She had taken a course of her own, and no man stood in her way. Many of her acts had been unusual, but excited no uproar. Few helped, but none checked her; and the many men who knew her mind and her life, showed to her confidence as to a brother, gentleness as to a sister. And not only refined, but very coarse men approved and aided one in whom they saw resolution and clearness of design. Her mind was often the leading one, always effective.

When I talked with her upon these matters, and had said very much what I have written, she smilingly replied; "And yet we must admit that I have been fortunate, and this should not be. My good father's early trust gave the first bias, and the rest followed, of course. It is true that I have had less outward aid, in after years, than most women; but that is of little consequence. Religion was early awakened in my soul,—a sense that what the soul is capable to ask it must attain, and that, though I might be aided and instructed by others, I must depend on myself as the only constant friend. This self-dependence, which was honored in me, is deprecated as a fault in most women. They are taught to learn their rule from without, not to unfold it from within.

"This is the fault of Man, who is still vain, and wishes to be more important to Woman than, by right, he should be."

"Men have not shown this disposition toward you," I said.

"No; because the position I early was enabled to take was one of self-reliance. And were all women as sure of their wants as I was, the result would be the same. But they are so overloaded with precepts by guardians, who think that nothing is so much to be dreaded for a woman as originality of thought or character, that their minds are impeded by doubts till they lose their chance of fair, free proportions. The difficulty is to get them to the point from which they shall naturally develop self-respect, and learn self-help.

"Once I thought that men would help to forward this state of things more than I do now. I saw so many of them wretched in the



connections they had formed in weakness and vanity. They seemed so glad to esteem women whenever they could.

“‘The soft arms of affection,’ said one of the most discerning spirits, ‘will not suffice for me, unless on them I see the steel bracelets of strength.’

“But early I perceived that men never, in any extreme of despair, wished to be women. On the contrary, they were ever ready to taunt one another, at any sign of weakness, with,

“‘Art thou not like the women, who,’—

The passage ends various ways, according to the occasion and rhetoric of the speaker. When they admired any woman, they were inclined to speak of her as ‘above her sex.’ Silently I observed this, and feared it argued a rooted scepticism, which for ages had been fastening on the heart, and which only an age of miracles could eradicate. Ever I have been treated with great sincerity; and I look upon it as a signal instance of this, that an intimate friend of the other sex said, in a fervent moment, that I ‘deserved in some star to be a man.’ He was much surprised when I disclosed my view of my position and hopes, when I declared my faith that the feminine side, the side of love, of beauty, of holiness, was now to have its full chance, and that, if either were better, it was better now to be a woman; for even the slightest achievement of good was furthering an especial work of our time. He smiled incredulously. ‘She makes the best she can of it,’ thought he. ‘Let Jews believe the pride of Jewry, but I am of the better sort, and know better.’

“Another used as highest praise, in speaking of a character in literature, the words ‘a manly woman.’

“So in the noble passage of Ben Jonson:

‘I meant the day-star should not brighter ride,  
Nor shed like influence, from its lucent seat;  
I meant she should be courteous, facile, sweet,  
Free from that solemn vice of greatness, pride;  
I meant each softest virtue there should meet,  
Fit in that softer bosom to abide,

Only a learned and *amanly* soul  
I purposed her, that should with even powers  
The rock, the spindle, and the shears control  
Of destiny, and spin her own free hours.”

“Me thinks,” said I, “you are too fastidious in objecting to this. Jonson, in using the word ‘manly,’ only meant to heighten the picture of this, the true, the intelligent fate, with one of the deeper colors.”

“And yet,” said she, “so invariable is the use of this word where a heroic quality is to be described, and I feel so sure that persistence and courage are the most womanly no less than the most manly qualities, that I would exchange these words for others of a larger sense, at the risk of marring the fine tissue of the verse. Read, ‘A heavenward and instructed soul,’ and I should be satisfied. Let it not be said, wherever there is energy or creative genius, ‘She has a masculine mind.’”

This by no means argues a willing want of generosity toward Woman. Man is as generous towards her as he knows how to be.

Wherever she has herself arisen in national or private history, and nobly shone forth in any form of excellence, men have received her, not only willingly, but with triumph. Their encomiums, indeed, are always, in some sense, mortifying; they show too much surprise. “Can this be you?” he cries to the transfigured Cinderella; “well, I should never have thought it, but I am very glad. We will tell every one that you have ‘*surpassed your sex.*’”

In every-day life, the feelings of the many are stained with vanity. Each wishes to be lord in a little world, to be superior at least over one; and he does not feel strong enough to retain a life-long ascendancy over a strong nature. Only a Theseus could conquer before he wed the Amazonian queen. Hercules wished rather to rest with Dejanira, and received the poisoned robe as a fit guerdon. The tale should be interpreted to all those who seek repose with the weak.

But not only is Man vain and fond of power, but the same want

of development, which thus affects him morally, prevents his intellectually discerning the destiny of Woman: The boy wants no woman, but only a girl to play ball with him, and mark his pocket handkerchief.

Thus, in Schiller's *Dignity of Woman*, beautiful as the poem is, there is no "grave and perfect man," but only a great boy to be softened and restrained by the influence of girls. Poets—the elder brothers of their race—have usually seen further; but what can you expect of every-day men, if Schiller was not more prophetic as to what women must be? Even with Richter, one foremost thought about a wife was that she would "cook him something good." But as this is a delicate subject, and we are in constant danger of being accused of slighting what are called "the functions," let me say, in behalf of Miranda and myself, that we have high respect for those who "cook something good," who create and preserve fair order in houses, and prepare therein the shining raiment for worthy inmates, worthy guests. Only these "functions" must not be a drudgery, or enforced necessity, but a part of life. Let Ulysses drive the bees home, while Penelope there piles up the fragrant loaves; they are both well employed if these be done in thought and love, willingly. But Penelope is no more meant for a baker or weaver solely, than Ulysses for a cattle-herd.

The sexes should not only correspond to and appreciate, but prophesy to one another. In individual instances this happens. Two persons love in one another the future good which they aid one another to unfold. This is imperfectly or rarely done in the general life. Man has gone but little way; now he is waiting to see whether Woman can keep step with him; but, instead of calling but, like a good brother, "You can do it, if you only think so," or impersonally, "Any one can do what he tries to do," he often discourages with school-boy brag: "Girls can't do that; girls can't play ball." But let any one defy their taunts, break through and be brave and secure, they rend the air with shouts.

# 3I. Short Fiction: Database Dive

Distinguish Between Primary and Secondary Sources with defining questions.

For more information, please see [Unit 3 Discussions](#).

PART XII

# MODULE 8: SHORT FICTION II



## 32. The Dead by James Joyce

*Published: 1914*

“The Dead” is the final story in James Joyces’ collection *Dubliners*.

Lily, the caretaker’s daughter, was literally run off her feet. Hardly had she brought one gentleman into the little pantry behind the office on the ground floor and helped him off with his overcoat than the wheezy hall-door bell clanged again and she had to scamper along the bare hallway to let in another guest. It was well for her she had not to attend to the ladies also. But Miss Kate and Miss Julia had thought of that and had converted the bathroom upstairs into a ladies’ dressing-room. Miss Kate and Miss Julia were there, gossiping and laughing and fussing, walking after each other to the head of the stairs, peering down over the banisters and calling down to Lily to ask her who had come.

It was always a great affair, the Misses Morkan’s annual dance. Everybody who knew them came to it, members of the family, old friends of the family, the members of Julia’s choir, any of Kate’s pupils that were grown up enough, and even some of Mary Jane’s pupils too. Never once had it fallen flat. For years and years it had gone off in splendid style as long as anyone could remember; ever since Kate and Julia, after the death of their brother Pat, had left the house in Stoney Batter and taken Mary Jane, their only niece, to live with them in the dark gaunt house on Usher’s Island, the upper part of which they had rented from Mr Fulham, the corn-factor on the ground floor. That was a good thirty years ago if it was a day. Mary Jane, who was then a little girl in short clothes, was now the main prop of the household, for she had the organ in Haddington Road. She had been through the Academy and gave a pupils’ concert every year in the upper room of the Antient Concert Rooms. Many of her pupils belonged to the better-class families on the Kingstown and Dalkey line. Old as they were, her aunts also did their share. Julia, though she was quite grey, was still the leading soprano in

Adam and Eve's, and Kate, being too feeble to go about much, gave music lessons to beginners on the old square piano in the back room. Lily, the caretaker's daughter, did housemaid's work for them. Though their life was modest they believed in eating well; the best of everything: diamond-bone sirloins, three-shilling tea and the best bottled stout. But Lily seldom made a mistake in the orders so that she got on well with her three mistresses. They were fussy, that was all. But the only thing they would not stand was back answers.

Of course they had good reason to be fussy on such a night. And then it was long after ten o'clock and yet there was no sign of Gabriel and his wife. Besides they were dreadfully afraid that Freddy Malins might turn up screwed. They would not wish for worlds that any of Mary Jane's pupils should see him under the influence; and when he was like that it was sometimes very hard to manage him. Freddy Malins always came late but they wondered what could be keeping Gabriel: and that was what brought them every two minutes to the banisters to ask Lily had Gabriel or Freddy come.

"O, Mr Conroy," said Lily to Gabriel when she opened the door for him, "Miss Kate and Miss Julia thought you were never coming. Good-night, Mrs Conroy."

"I'll engage they did," said Gabriel, "but they forget that my wife here takes three mortal hours to dress herself."

He stood on the mat, scraping the snow from his goloshes, while Lily led his wife to the foot of the stairs and called out:

"Miss Kate, here's Mrs Conroy."

Kate and Julia came toddling down the dark stairs at once. Both of them kissed Gabriel's wife, said she must be perished alive and asked was Gabriel with her.

"Here I am as right as the mail, Aunt Kate! Go on up. I'll follow," called out Gabriel from the dark.

He continued scraping his feet vigorously while the three women went upstairs, laughing, to the ladies' dressing-room. A light fringe of snow lay like a cape on the shoulders of his overcoat and like toecaps on the toes of his goloshes; and, as the buttons of his overcoat slipped with a squeaking noise through the snow-stiffened



frieze, a cold, fragrant air from out-of-doors escaped from crevices and folds.

"Is it snowing again, Mr Conroy?" asked Lily.

She had preceded him into the pantry to help him off with his overcoat. Gabriel smiled at the three syllables she had given his surname and glanced at her. She was a slim, growing girl, pale in complexion and with hay-coloured hair. The gas in the pantry made her look still paler. Gabriel had known her when she was a child and used to sit on the lowest step nursing a rag doll.

"Yes, Lily," he answered, "and I think we're in for a night of it."

He looked up at the pantry ceiling, which was shaking with the stamping and shuffling of feet on the floor above, listened for a moment to the piano and then glanced at the girl, who was folding his overcoat carefully at the end of a shelf.

"Tell me, Lily," he said in a friendly tone, "do you still go to school?"

"O no, sir," she answered. "I'm done schooling this year and more."

"O, then," said Gabriel gaily, "I suppose we'll be going to your wedding one of these fine days with your young man, eh?"

The girl glanced back at him over her shoulder and said with great bitterness:

"The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you."

Gabriel coloured as if he felt he had made a mistake and, without looking at her, kicked off his goloshes and flicked actively with his muffler at his patent-leather shoes.

He was a stout tallish young man. The high colour of his cheeks pushed upwards even to his forehead where it scattered itself in a few formless patches of pale red; and on his hairless face there scintillated restlessly the polished lenses and the bright gilt rims of the glasses which screened his delicate and restless eyes. His glossy black hair was parted in the middle and brushed in a long curve behind his ears where it curled slightly beneath the groove left by his hat.

When he had flicked lustre into his shoes he stood up and pulled

his waistcoat down more tightly on his plump body. Then he took a coin rapidly from his pocket.

“O Lily,” he said, thrusting it into her hands, “it’s Christmas-time, isn’t it? Just ... here’s a little...”

He walked rapidly towards the door.

“O no, sir!” cried the girl, following him. “Really, sir, I wouldn’t take it.”

“Christmas-time! Christmas-time!” said Gabriel, almost trotting to the stairs and waving his hand to her in deprecation.

The girl, seeing that he had gained the stairs, called out after him:

“Well, thank you, sir.”

He waited outside the drawing-room door until the waltz should finish, listening to the skirts that swept against it and to the shuffling of feet. He was still discomposed by the girl’s bitter and sudden retort. It had cast a gloom over him which he tried to dispel by arranging his cuffs and the bows of his tie. He then took from his waistcoat pocket a little paper and glanced at the headings he had made for his speech. He was undecided about the lines from Robert Browning for he feared they would be above the heads of his hearers. Some quotation that they would recognise from Shakespeare or from the Melodies would be better. The indelicate clacking of the men’s heels and the shuffling of their soles reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his. He would only make himself ridiculous by quoting poetry to them which they could not understand. They would think that he was airing his superior education. He would fail with them just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry. He had taken up a wrong tone. His whole speech was a mistake from first to last, an utter failure.

Just then his aunts and his wife came out of the ladies’ dressing-room. His aunts were two small plainly dressed old women. Aunt Julia was an inch or so the taller. Her hair, drawn low over the tops of her ears, was grey; and grey also, with darker shadows, was her large flaccid face. Though she was stout in build and stood erect her slow eyes and parted lips gave her the appearance of a woman who did not know where she was or where she was going. Aunt Kate was

more vivacious. Her face, healthier than her sister's, was all puckers and creases, like a shrivelled red apple, and her hair, braided in the same old-fashioned way, had not lost its ripe nut colour.

They both kissed Gabriel frankly. He was their favourite nephew, the son of their dead elder sister, Ellen, who had married T. J. Conroy of the Port and Docks.

"Gretta tells me you're not going to take a cab back to Monkstown tonight, Gabriel," said Aunt Kate.

"No," said Gabriel, turning to his wife, "we had quite enough of that last year, hadn't we? Don't you remember, Aunt Kate, what a cold Gretta got out of it? Cab windows rattling all the way, and the east wind blowing in after we passed Merrion. Very jolly it was. Gretta caught a dreadful cold."

Aunt Kate frowned severely and nodded her head at every word.

"Quite right, Gabriel, quite right," she said. "You can't be too careful."

"But as for Gretta there," said Gabriel, "she'd walk home in the snow if she were let."

Mrs Conroy laughed.

"Don't mind him, Aunt Kate," she said. "He's really an awful bother, what with green shades for Tom's eyes at night and making him do the dumb-bells, and forcing Eva to eat the stirabout. The poor child! And she simply hates the sight of it!... O, but you'll never guess what he makes me wear now!"

She broke out into a peal of laughter and glanced at her husband, whose admiring and happy eyes had been wandering from her dress to her face and hair. The two aunts laughed heartily too, for Gabriel's solicitude was a standing joke with them.

"Goloshes!" said Mrs Conroy. "That's the latest. Whenever it's wet underfoot I must put on my goloshes. Tonight even he wanted me to put them on, but I wouldn't. The next thing he'll buy me will be a diving suit."

Gabriel laughed nervously and patted his tie reassuringly while Aunt Kate nearly doubled herself, so heartily did she enjoy the joke.

The smile soon faded from Aunt Julia's face and her mirthless eyes were directed towards her nephew's face. After a pause she asked:

"And what are goloshes, Gabriel?"

"Goloshes, Julia!" exclaimed her sister "Goodness me, don't you know what goloshes are? You wear them over your ... over your boots, Gretta, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Mrs Conroy. "Guttapercha things. We both have a pair now. Gabriel says everyone wears them on the continent."

"O, on the continent," murmured Aunt Julia, nodding her head slowly.

Gabriel knitted his brows and said, as if he were slightly angered:

"It's nothing very wonderful but Gretta thinks it very funny because she says the word reminds her of Christy Minstrels."

"But tell me, Gabriel," said Aunt Kate, with brisk tact. "Of course, you've seen about the room. Gretta was saying..."

"O, the room is all right," replied Gabriel. "I've taken one in the Gresham."

"To be sure," said Aunt Kate, "by far the best thing to do. And the children, Gretta, you're not anxious about them?"

"O, for one night," said Mrs Conroy. "Besides, Bessie will look after them."

"To be sure," said Aunt Kate again. "What a comfort it is to have a girl like that, one you can depend on! There's that Lily, I'm sure I don't know what has come over her lately. She's not the girl she was at all."

Gabriel was about to ask his aunt some questions on this point but she broke off suddenly to gaze after her sister who had wandered down the stairs and was craning her neck over the banisters.

"Now, I ask you," she said almost testily, "where is Julia going? Julia! Julia! Where are you going?"

Julia, who had gone half way down one flight, came back and announced blandly:

"Here's Freddy."

At the same moment a clapping of hands and a final flourish of the pianist told that the waltz had ended. The drawing-room door was

opened from within and some couples came out. Aunt Kate drew Gabriel aside hurriedly and whispered into his ear:

“Slip down, Gabriel, like a good fellow and see if he’s all right, and don’t let him up if he’s screwed. I’m sure he’s screwed. I’m sure he is.”

Gabriel went to the stairs and listened over the banisters. He could hear two persons talking in the pantry. Then he recognised Freddy Malins’ laugh. He went down the stairs noisily.

“It’s such a relief,” said Aunt Kate to Mrs Conroy, “that Gabriel is here. I always feel easier in my mind when he’s here.... Julia, there’s Miss Daly and Miss Power will take some refreshment. Thanks for your beautiful waltz, Miss Daly. It made lovely time.”

A tall wizen-faced man, with a stiff grizzled moustache and swarthy skin, who was passing out with his partner said:

“And may we have some refreshment, too, Miss Morkan?”

“Julia,” said Aunt Kate summarily, “and here’s Mr Browne and Miss Furlong. Take them in, Julia, with Miss Daly and Miss Power.”

“I’m the man for the ladies,” said Mr Browne, pursing his lips until his moustache bristled and smiling in all his wrinkles. “You know, Miss Morkan, the reason they are so fond of me is—”

He did not finish his sentence, but, seeing that Aunt Kate was out of earshot, at once led the three young ladies into the back room. The middle of the room was occupied by two square tables placed end to end, and on these Aunt Julia and the caretaker were straightening and smoothing a large cloth. On the sideboard were arrayed dishes and plates, and glasses and bundles of knives and forks and spoons. The top of the closed square piano served also as a sideboard for viands and sweets. At a smaller sideboard in one corner two young men were standing, drinking hop-bitters.

Mr Browne led his charges thither and invited them all, in jest, to some ladies’ punch, hot, strong and sweet. As they said they never took anything strong he opened three bottles of lemonade for them. Then he asked one of the young men to move aside, and, taking hold of the decanter, filled out for himself a goodly measure of whisky. The young men eyed him respectfully while he took a trial sip.

“God help me,” he said, smiling, “it’s the doctor’s orders.”

His wizened face broke into a broader smile, and the three young ladies laughed in musical echo to his pleasantry, swaying their bodies to and fro, with nervous jerks of their shoulders. The boldest said:

“O, now, Mr Browne, I’m sure the doctor never ordered anything of the kind.”

Mr Browne took another sip of his whisky and said, with sidling mimicry:

“Well, you see, I’m like the famous Mrs Cassidy, who is reported to have said: ‘Now, Mary Grimes, if I don’t take it, make me take it, for I feel I want it.’”

His hot face had leaned forward a little too confidentially and he had assumed a very low Dublin accent so that the young ladies, with one instinct, received his speech in silence. Miss Furlong, who was one of Mary Jane’s pupils, asked Miss Daly what was the name of the pretty waltz she had played; and Mr Browne, seeing that he was ignored, turned promptly to the two young men who were more appreciative.

A red-faced young woman, dressed in pansy, came into the room, excitedly clapping her hands and crying:

“Quadrilles! Quadrilles!”

Close on her heels came Aunt Kate, crying:

“Two gentlemen and three ladies, Mary Jane!”

“O, here’s Mr Bergin and Mr Kerrigan,” said Mary Jane. “Mr Kerrigan, will you take Miss Power? Miss Furlong, may I get you a partner, Mr Bergin. O, that’ll just do now.”

“Three ladies, Mary Jane,” said Aunt Kate.

The two young gentlemen asked the ladies if they might have the pleasure, and Mary Jane turned to Miss Daly.

“O, Miss Daly, you’re really awfully good, after playing for the last two dances, but really we’re so short of ladies tonight.”

“I don’t mind in the least, Miss Morkan.”

“But I’ve a nice partner for you, Mr Bartell D’Arcy, the tenor. I’ll get him to sing later on. All Dublin is raving about him.”

“Lovely voice, lovely voice!” said Aunt Kate.

As the piano had twice begun the prelude to the first figure Mary Jane led her recruits quickly from the room. They had hardly gone when Aunt Julia wandered slowly into the room, looking behind her at something.

"What is the matter, Julia?" asked Aunt Kate anxiously. "Who is it?"

Julia, who was carrying in a column of table-napkins, turned to her sister and said, simply, as if the question had surprised her:

"It's only Freddy, Kate, and Gabriel with him."

In fact right behind her Gabriel could be seen piloting Freddy Malins across the landing. The latter, a young man of about forty, was of Gabriel's size and build, with very round shoulders. His face was fleshy and pallid, touched with colour only at the thick hanging lobes of his ears and at the wide wings of his nose. He had coarse features, a blunt nose, a convex and receding brow, tumid and protruded lips. His heavy-lidded eyes and the disorder of his scanty hair made him look sleepy. He was laughing heartily in a high key at a story which he had been telling Gabriel on the stairs and at the same time rubbing the knuckles of his left fist backwards and forwards into his left eye.

"Good-evening, Freddy," said Aunt Julia.

Freddy Malins bade the Misses Morkan good-evening in what seemed an offhand fashion by reason of the habitual catch in his voice and then, seeing that Mr Browne was grinning at him from the sideboard, crossed the room on rather shaky legs and began to repeat in an undertone the story he had just told to Gabriel.

"He's not so bad, is he?" said Aunt Kate to Gabriel.

Gabriel's brows were dark but he raised them quickly and answered:

"O, no, hardly noticeable."

"Now, isn't he a terrible fellow!" she said. "And his poor mother made him take the pledge on New Year's Eve. But come on, Gabriel, into the drawing-room."

Before leaving the room with Gabriel she signalled to Mr Browne by frowning and shaking her forefinger in warning to and fro. Mr

Browne nodded in answer and, when she had gone, said to Freddy Malins:

“Now, then, Teddy, I’m going to fill you out a good glass of lemonade just to buck you up.”

Freddy Malins, who was nearing the climax of his story, waved the offer aside impatiently but Mr Browne, having first called Freddy Malins’ attention to a disarray in his dress, filled out and handed him a full glass of lemonade. Freddy Malins’ left hand accepted the glass mechanically, his right hand being engaged in the mechanical readjustment of his dress. Mr Browne, whose face was once more wrinkling with mirth, poured out for himself a glass of whisky while Freddy Malins exploded, before he had well reached the climax of his story, in a kink of high-pitched bronchitic laughter and, setting down his untasted and overflowing glass, began to rub the knuckles of his left fist backwards and forwards into his left eye, repeating words of his last phrase as well as his fit of laughter would allow him.

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Gabriel could not listen while Mary Jane was playing her Academy piece, full of runs and difficult passages, to the hushed drawing-room. He liked music but the piece she was playing had no melody for him and he doubted whether it had any melody for the other listeners, though they had begged Mary Jane to play something. Four young men, who had come from the refreshment-room to stand in the doorway at the sound of the piano, had gone away quietly in couples after a few minutes. The only persons who seemed to follow the music were Mary Jane herself, her hands racing along the keyboard or lifted from it at the pauses like those of a priestess in momentary imprecation, and Aunt Kate standing at her elbow to turn the page.

Gabriel’s eyes, irritated by the floor, which glittered with beeswax under the heavy chandelier, wandered to the wall above the piano. A picture of the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* hung there and beside it was a picture of the two murdered princes in the Tower



which Aunt Julia had worked in red, blue and brown wools when she was a girl. Probably in the school they had gone to as girls that kind of work had been taught for one year. His mother had worked for him as a birthday present a waistcoat of purple tabinet, with little foxes' heads upon it, lined with brown satin and having round mulberry buttons. It was strange that his mother had had no musical talent though Aunt Kate used to call her the brains carrier of the Morkan family. Both she and Julia had always seemed a little proud of their serious and matronly sister. Her photograph stood before the pierglass. She held an open book on her knees and was pointing out something in it to Constantine who, dressed in a man-o'-war suit, lay at her feet. It was she who had chosen the name of her sons for she was very sensible of the dignity of family life. Thanks to her, Constantine was now senior curate in Balbrigan and, thanks to her, Gabriel himself had taken his degree in the Royal University. A shadow passed over his face as he remembered her sullen opposition to his marriage. Some slighting phrases she had used still rankled in his memory; she had once spoken of Gretta as being country cute and that was not true of Gretta at all. It was Gretta who had nursed her during all her last long illness in their house at Monkstown.

He knew that Mary Jane must be near the end of her piece for she was playing again the opening melody with runs of scales after every bar and while he waited for the end the resentment died down in his heart. The piece ended with a trill of octaves in the treble and a final deep octave in the bass. Great applause greeted Mary Jane as, blushing and rolling up her music nervously, she escaped from the room. The most vigorous clapping came from the four young men in the doorway who had gone away to the refreshment-room at the beginning of the piece but had come back when the piano had stopped.

Lancers were arranged. Gabriel found himself partnered with Miss Ivors. She was a frank-mannered talkative young lady, with a freckled face and prominent brown eyes. She did not wear a low-

cut bodice and the large brooch which was fixed in the front of her collar bore on it an Irish device and motto.

When they had taken their places she said abruptly:

"I have a crow to pluck with you."

"With me?" said Gabriel.

She nodded her head gravely.

"What is it?" asked Gabriel, smiling at her solemn manner.

"Who is G. C.?" answered Miss Ivors, turning her eyes upon him.

Gabriel coloured and was about to knit his brows, as if he did not understand, when she said bluntly:

"O, innocent Amy! I have found out that you write for *The Daily Express*. Now, aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Why should I be ashamed of myself?" asked Gabriel, blinking his eyes and trying to smile.

"Well, I'm ashamed of you," said Miss Ivors frankly. "To say you'd write for a paper like that. I didn't think you were a West Briton."

A look of perplexity appeared on Gabriel's face. It was true that he wrote a literary column every Wednesday in *The Daily Express*, for which he was paid fifteen shillings. But that did not make him a West Briton surely. The books he received for review were almost more welcome than the paltry cheque. He loved to feel the covers and turn over the pages of newly printed books. Nearly every day when his teaching in the college was ended he used to wander down the quays to the second-hand booksellers, to Hickey's on Bachelor's Walk, to Webb's or Massey's on Aston's Quay, or to O'Clohissey's in the by-street. He did not know how to meet her charge. He wanted to say that literature was above politics. But they were friends of many years' standing and their careers had been parallel, first at the university and then as teachers: he could not risk a grandiose phrase with her. He continued blinking his eyes and trying to smile and murmured lamely that he saw nothing political in writing reviews of books.

When their turn to cross had come he was still perplexed and inattentive. Miss Ivors promptly took his hand in a warm grasp and said in a soft friendly tone:

"Of course, I was only joking. Come, we cross now."

When they were together again she spoke of the University question and Gabriel felt more at ease. A friend of hers had shown her his review of Browning's poems. That was how she had found out the secret: but she liked the review immensely. Then she said suddenly:

"O, Mr Conroy, will you come for an excursion to the Aran Isles this summer? We're going to stay there a whole month. It will be splendid out in the Atlantic. You ought to come. Mr Clancy is coming, and Mr Kilkelly and Kathleen Kearney. It would be splendid for Gretta too if she'd come. She's from Connacht, isn't she?"

"Her people are," said Gabriel shortly.

"But you will come, won't you?" said Miss Ivors, laying her warm hand eagerly on his arm.

"The fact is," said Gabriel, "I have just arranged to go——"

"Go where?" asked Miss Ivors.

"Well, you know, every year I go for a cycling tour with some fellows and so——"

"But where?" asked Miss Ivors.

"Well, we usually go to France or Belgium or perhaps Germany," said Gabriel awkwardly.

"And why do you go to France and Belgium," said Miss Ivors, "instead of visiting your own land?"

"Well," said Gabriel, "it's partly to keep in touch with the languages and partly for a change."

"And haven't you your own language to keep in touch with—Irish?" asked Miss Ivors.

"Well," said Gabriel, "if it comes to that, you know, Irish is not my language."

Their neighbours had turned to listen to the cross-examination. Gabriel glanced right and left nervously and tried to keep his good humour under the ordeal which was making a blush invade his forehead.

"And haven't you your own land to visit," continued Miss Ivors,

“that you know nothing of, your own people, and your own country?”

“O, to tell you the truth,” retorted Gabriel suddenly, “I’m sick of my own country, sick of it!”

“Why?” asked Miss Ivors.

Gabriel did not answer for his retort had heated him.

“Why?” repeated Miss Ivors.

They had to go visiting together and, as he had not answered her, Miss Ivors said warmly:

“Of course, you’ve no answer.”

Gabriel tried to cover his agitation by taking part in the dance with great energy. He avoided her eyes for he had seen a sour expression on her face. But when they met in the long chain he was surprised to feel his hand firmly pressed. She looked at him from under her brows for a moment quizzically until he smiled. Then, just as the chain was about to start again, she stood on tiptoe and whispered into his ear:

“West Briton!”

When the lancers were over Gabriel went away to a remote corner of the room where Freddy Malins’ mother was sitting. She was a stout feeble old woman with white hair. Her voice had a catch in it like her son’s and she stuttered slightly. She had been told that Freddy had come and that he was nearly all right. Gabriel asked her whether she had had a good crossing. She lived with her married daughter in Glasgow and came to Dublin on a visit once a year. She answered placidly that she had had a beautiful crossing and that the captain had been most attentive to her. She spoke also of the beautiful house her daughter kept in Glasgow, and of all the friends they had there. While her tongue rambled on Gabriel tried to banish from his mind all memory of the unpleasant incident with Miss Ivors. Of course the girl or woman, or whatever she was, was an enthusiast but there was a time for all things. Perhaps he ought not to have answered her like that. But she had no right to call him a West Briton before people, even in joke. She had tried to make him

ridiculous before people, heckling him and staring at him with her rabbit's eyes.

He saw his wife making her way towards him through the waltzing couples. When she reached him she said into his ear:

"Gabriel, Aunt Kate wants to know won't you carve the goose as usual. Miss Daly will carve the ham and I'll do the pudding."

"All right," said Gabriel.

"She's sending in the younger ones first as soon as this waltz is over so that we'll have the table to ourselves."

"Were you dancing?" asked Gabriel.

"Of course I was. Didn't you see me? What row had you with Molly Ivors?"

"No row. Why? Did she say so?"

"Something like that. I'm trying to get that Mr D'Arcy to sing. He's full of conceit, I think."

"There was no row," said Gabriel moodily, "only she wanted me to go for a trip to the west of Ireland and I said I wouldn't."

His wife clasped her hands excitedly and gave a little jump.

"O, do go, Gabriel," she cried. "I'd love to see Galway again."

"You can go if you like," said Gabriel coldly.

She looked at him for a moment, then turned to Mrs Malins and said:

"There's a nice husband for you, Mrs Malins."

While she was threading her way back across the room Mrs Malins, without adverting to the interruption, went on to tell Gabriel what beautiful places there were in Scotland and beautiful scenery. Her son-in-law brought them every year to the lakes and they used to go fishing. Her son-in-law was a splendid fisher. One day he caught a beautiful big fish and the man in the hotel cooked it for their dinner.

Gabriel hardly heard what she said. Now that supper was coming near he began to think again about his speech and about the quotation. When he saw Freddy Malins coming across the room to visit his mother Gabriel left the chair free for him and retired into the embrasure of the window. The room had already cleared

and from the back room came the clatter of plates and knives. Those who still remained in the drawing-room seemed tired of dancing and were conversing quietly in little groups. Gabriel's warm trembling fingers tapped the cold pane of the window. How cool it must be outside! How pleasant it would be to walk out alone, first along by the river and then through the park! The snow would be lying on the branches of the trees and forming a bright cap on the top of the Wellington Monument. How much more pleasant it would be there than at the supper-table!

He ran over the headings of his speech: Irish hospitality, sad memories, the Three Graces, Paris, the quotation from Browning. He repeated to himself a phrase he had written in his review: "One feels that one is listening to a thought-tormented music." Miss Ivors had praised the review. Was she sincere? Had she really any life of her own behind all her propagandism? There had never been any ill-feeling between them until that night. It unnerved him to think that she would be at the supper-table, looking up at him while he spoke with her critical quizzing eyes. Perhaps she would not be sorry to see him fail in his speech. An idea came into his mind and gave him courage. He would say, alluding to Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the generation which is now on the wane among us may have had its faults but for my part I think it had certain qualities of hospitality, of humour, of humanity, which the new and very serious and hypereducated generation that is growing up around us seems to me to lack." Very good: that was one for Miss Ivors. What did he care that his aunts were only two ignorant old women?

A murmur in the room attracted his attention. Mr Browne was advancing from the door, gallantly escorting Aunt Julia, who leaned upon his arm, smiling and hanging her head. An irregular musketry of applause escorted her also as far as the piano and then, as Mary Jane seated herself on the stool, and Aunt Julia, no longer smiling, half turned so as to pitch her voice fairly into the room, gradually ceased. Gabriel recognised the prelude. It was that of an old song of Aunt Julia's—*Arrayed for the Bridal*. Her voice, strong and clear in

tone, attacked with great spirit the runs which embellish the air and though she sang very rapidly she did not miss even the smallest of the grace notes. To follow the voice, without looking at the singer's face, was to feel and share the excitement of swift and secure flight. Gabriel applauded loudly with all the others at the close of the song and loud applause was borne in from the invisible supper-table. It sounded so genuine that a little colour struggled into Aunt Julia's face as she bent to replace in the music-stand the old leather-bound songbook that had her initials on the cover. Freddy Malins, who had listened with his head perched sideways to hear her better, was still applauding when everyone else had ceased and talking animatedly to his mother who nodded her head gravely and slowly in acquiescence. At last, when he could clap no more, he stood up suddenly and hurried across the room to Aunt Julia whose hand he seized and held in both his hands, shaking it when words failed him or the catch in his voice proved too much for him.

"I was just telling my mother," he said, "I never heard you sing so well, never. No, I never heard your voice so good as it is tonight. Now! Would you believe that now? That's the truth. Upon my word and honour that's the truth. I never heard your voice sound so fresh and so ... so clear and fresh, never."

Aunt Julia smiled broadly and murmured something about compliments as she released her hand from his grasp. Mr Browne extended his open hand towards her and said to those who were near him in the manner of a showman introducing a prodigy to an audience:

"Miss Julia Morkan, my latest discovery!"

He was laughing very heartily at this himself when Freddy Malins turned to him and said:

"Well, Browne, if you're serious you might make a worse discovery. All I can say is I never heard her sing half so well as long as I am coming here. And that's the honest truth."

"Neither did I," said Mr Browne. "I think her voice has greatly improved."

Aunt Julia shrugged her shoulders and said with meek pride:

“Thirty years ago I hadn’t a bad voice as voices go.”

“I often told Julia,” said Aunt Kate emphatically, “that she was simply thrown away in that choir. But she never would be said by me.”

She turned as if to appeal to the good sense of the others against a refractory child while Aunt Julia gazed in front of her, a vague smile of reminiscence playing on her face.

“No,” continued Aunt Kate, “she wouldn’t be said or led by anyone, slaving there in that choir night and day, night and day. Six o’clock on Christmas morning! And all for what?”

“Well, isn’t it for the honour of God, Aunt Kate?” asked Mary Jane, twisting round on the piano-stool and smiling.

Aunt Kate turned fiercely on her niece and said:

“I know all about the honour of God, Mary Jane, but I think it’s not at all honourable for the pope to turn out the women out of the choirs that have slaved there all their lives and put little whipper-snappers of boys over their heads. I suppose it is for the good of the Church if the pope does it. But it’s not just, Mary Jane, and it’s not right.”

She had worked herself into a passion and would have continued in defence of her sister for it was a sore subject with her but Mary Jane, seeing that all the dancers had come back, intervened pacifically:

“Now, Aunt Kate, you’re giving scandal to Mr Browne who is of the other persuasion.”

Aunt Kate turned to Mr Browne, who was grinning at this allusion to his religion, and said hastily:

“O, I don’t question the pope’s being right. I’m only a stupid old woman and I wouldn’t presume to do such a thing. But there’s such a thing as common everyday politeness and gratitude. And if I were in Julia’s place I’d tell that Father Healey straight up to his face....”

“And besides, Aunt Kate,” said Mary Jane, “we really are all hungry and when we are hungry we are all very quarrelsome.”

“And when we are thirsty we are also quarrelsome,” added Mr Browne.



"So that we had better go to supper," said Mary Jane, "and finish the discussion afterwards."

On the landing outside the drawing-room Gabriel found his wife and Mary Jane trying to persuade Miss Ivors to stay for supper. But Miss Ivors, who had put on her hat and was buttoning her cloak, would not stay. She did not feel in the least hungry and she had already overstayed her time.

"But only for ten minutes, Molly," said Mrs Conroy. "That won't delay you."

"To take a pick itself," said Mary Jane, "after all your dancing."

"I really couldn't," said Miss Ivors.

"I am afraid you didn't enjoy yourself at all," said Mary Jane hopelessly.

"Ever so much, I assure you," said Miss Ivors, "but you really must let me run off now."

"But how can you get home?" asked Mrs Conroy.

"O, it's only two steps up the quay."

Gabriel hesitated a moment and said:

"If you will allow me, Miss Ivors, I'll see you home if you are really obliged to go."

But Miss Ivors broke away from them.

"I won't hear of it," she cried. "For goodness' sake go in to your suppers and don't mind me. I'm quite well able to take care of myself."

"Well, you're the comical girl, Molly," said Mrs Conroy frankly.

"*Beannacht libh*," cried Miss Ivors, with a laugh, as she ran down the staircase.

Mary Jane gazed after her, a moody puzzled expression on her face, while Mrs Conroy leaned over the banisters to listen for the hall-door. Gabriel asked himself was he the cause of her abrupt departure. But she did not seem to be in ill humour: she had gone away laughing. He stared blankly down the staircase.

At the moment Aunt Kate came toddling out of the supper-room, almost wringing her hands in despair.

"Where is Gabriel?" she cried. "Where on earth is Gabriel? There's

everyone waiting in there, stage to let, and nobody to carve the goose!”

“Here I am, Aunt Kate!” cried Gabriel, with sudden animation, “ready to carve a flock of geese, if necessary.”

A fat brown goose lay at one end of the table and at the other end, on a bed of creased paper strewn with sprigs of parsley, lay a great ham, stripped of its outer skin and peppered over with crust crumbs, a neat paper frill round its shin and beside this was a round of spiced beef. Between these rival ends ran parallel lines of side-dishes: two little minsters of jelly, red and yellow; a shallow dish full of blocks of blancmange and red jam, a large green leaf-shaped dish with a stalk-shaped handle, on which lay bunches of purple raisins and peeled almonds, a companion dish on which lay a solid rectangle of Smyrna figs, a dish of custard topped with grated nutmeg, a small bowl full of chocolates and sweets wrapped in gold and silver papers and a glass vase in which stood some tall celery stalks. In the centre of the table there stood, as sentries to a fruit-stand which upheld a pyramid of oranges and American apples, two squat old-fashioned decanters of cut glass, one containing port and the other dark sherry. On the closed square piano a pudding in a huge yellow dish lay in waiting and behind it were three squads of bottles of stout and ale and minerals, drawn up according to the colours of their uniforms, the first two black, with brown and red labels, the third and smallest squad white, with transverse green sashes.

Gabriel took his seat boldly at the head of the table and, having looked to the edge of the carver, plunged his fork firmly into the goose. He felt quite at ease now for he was an expert carver and liked nothing better than to find himself at the head of a well-laden table.

“Miss Furlong, what shall I send you?” he asked. “A wing or a slice of the breast?”

“Just a small slice of the breast.”

“Miss Higgins, what for you?”

“O, anything at all, Mr Conroy.”

While Gabriel and Miss Daly exchanged plates of goose and plates of ham and spiced beef Lily went from guest to guest with a dish of hot floury potatoes wrapped in a white napkin. This was Mary Jane's idea and she had also suggested apple sauce for the goose but Aunt Kate had said that plain roast goose without any apple sauce had always been good enough for her and she hoped she might never eat worse. Mary Jane waited on her pupils and saw that they got the best slices and Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia opened and carried across from the piano bottles of stout and ale for the gentlemen and bottles of minerals for the ladies. There was a great deal of confusion and laughter and noise, the noise of orders and counter-orders, of knives and forks, of corks and glass-stoppers. Gabriel began to carve second helpings as soon as he had finished the first round without serving himself. Everyone protested loudly so that he compromised by taking a long draught of stout for he had found the carving hot work. Mary Jane settled down quietly to her supper but Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia were still toddling round the table, walking on each other's heels, getting in each other's way and giving each other unheeded orders. Mr Browne begged of them to sit down and eat their suppers and so did Gabriel but they said they were time enough so that, at last, Freddy Malins stood up and, capturing Aunt Kate, plumped her down on her chair amid general laughter.

When everyone had been well served Gabriel said, smiling:

"Now, if anyone wants a little more of what vulgar people call stuffing let him or her speak."

A chorus of voices invited him to begin his own supper and Lily came forward with three potatoes which she had reserved for him.

"Very well," said Gabriel amiably, as he took another preparatory draught, "kindly forget my existence, ladies and gentlemen, for a few minutes."

He set to his supper and took no part in the conversation with which the table covered Lily's removal of the plates. The subject of talk was the opera company which was then at the Theatre Royal. Mr Bartell D'Arcy, the tenor, a dark-complexioned young man with a smart moustache, praised very highly the leading contralto of the

company but Miss Furlong thought she had a rather vulgar style of production. Freddy Malins said there was a negro chieftain singing in the second part of the Gaiety pantomime who had one of the finest tenor voices he had ever heard.

"Have you heard him?" he asked Mr Bartell D'Arcy across the table.

"No," answered Mr Bartell D'Arcy carelessly.

"Because," Freddy Malins explained, "now I'd be curious to hear your opinion of him. I think he has a grand voice."

"It takes Teddy to find out the really good things," said Mr Browne familiarly to the table.

"And why couldn't he have a voice too?" asked Freddy Malins sharply. "Is it because he's only a black?"

Nobody answered this question and Mary Jane led the table back to the legitimate opera. One of her pupils had given her a pass for *Mignon*. Of course it was very fine, she said, but it made her think of poor Georgina Burns. Mr Browne could go back farther still, to the old Italian companies that used to come to Dublin—Tietjens, Ilma de Murzka, Campanini, the great Trebelli, Giuglini, Ravelli, Aramburo. Those were the days, he said, when there was something like singing to be heard in Dublin. He told too of how the top gallery of the old Royal used to be packed night after night, of how one night an Italian tenor had sung five encores to *Let me like a Soldier fall*, introducing a high C every time, and of how the gallery boys would sometimes in their enthusiasm unyoke the horses from the carriage of some great *prima donna* and pull her themselves through the streets to her hotel. Why did they never play the grand old operas now, he asked, *Dinorah*, *Lucrezia Borgia*? Because they could not get the voices to sing them: that was why.

"Oh, well," said Mr Bartell D'Arcy, "I presume there are as good singers today as there were then."

"Where are they?" asked Mr Browne defiantly.

"In London, Paris, Milan," said Mr Bartell D'Arcy warmly. "I suppose Caruso, for example, is quite as good, if not better than any of the men you have mentioned."

"Maybe so," said Mr Browne. "But I may tell you I doubt it strongly."

"O, I'd give anything to hear Caruso sing," said Mary Jane.

"For me," said Aunt Kate, who had been picking a bone, "there was only one tenor. To please me, I mean. But I suppose none of you ever heard of him."

"Who was he, Miss Morkan?" asked Mr Bartell D'Arcy politely.

"His name," said Aunt Kate, "was Parkinson. I heard him when he was in his prime and I think he had then the purest tenor voice that was ever put into a man's throat."

"Strange," said Mr Bartell D'Arcy. "I never even heard of him."

"Yes, yes, Miss Morkan is right," said Mr Browne. "I remember hearing of old Parkinson but he's too far back for me."

"A beautiful pure sweet mellow English tenor," said Aunt Kate with enthusiasm.

Gabriel having finished, the huge pudding was transferred to the table. The clatter of forks and spoons began again. Gabriel's wife served out spoonfuls of the pudding and passed the plates down the table. Midway down they were held up by Mary Jane, who replenished them with raspberry or orange jelly or with blancmange and jam. The pudding was of Aunt Julia's making and she received praises for it from all quarters. She herself said that it was not quite brown enough.

"Well, I hope, Miss Morkan," said Mr Browne, "that I'm brown enough for you because, you know, I'm all brown."

All the gentlemen, except Gabriel, ate some of the pudding out of compliment to Aunt Julia. As Gabriel never ate sweets the celery had been left for him. Freddy Malins also took a stalk of celery and ate it with his pudding. He had been told that celery was a capital thing for the blood and he was just then under doctor's care. Mrs Malins, who had been silent all through the supper, said that her son was going down to Mount Melleray in a week or so. The table then spoke of Mount Melleray, how bracing the air was down there, how hospitable the monks were and how they never asked for a penny-piece from their guests.

"And do you mean to say," asked Mr Browne incredulously, "that a chap can go down there and put up there as if it were a hotel

and live on the fat of the land and then come away without paying anything?"

"O, most people give some donation to the monastery when they leave," said Mary Jane.

"I wish we had an institution like that in our Church," said Mr Browne candidly.

He was astonished to hear that the monks never spoke, got up at two in the morning and slept in their coffins. He asked what they did it for.

"That's the rule of the order," said Aunt Kate firmly.

"Yes, but why?" asked Mr Browne.

Aunt Kate repeated that it was the rule, that was all. Mr Browne still seemed not to understand. Freddy Malins explained to him, as best he could, that the monks were trying to make up for the sins committed by all the sinners in the outside world. The explanation was not very clear for Mr Browne grinned and said:

"I like that idea very much but wouldn't a comfortable spring bed do them as well as a coffin?"

"The coffin," said Mary Jane, "is to remind them of their last end."

As the subject had grown lugubrious it was buried in a silence of the table during which Mrs Malins could be heard saying to her neighbour in an indistinct undertone:

"They are very good men, the monks, very pious men."

The raisins and almonds and figs and apples and oranges and chocolates and sweets were now passed about the table and Aunt Julia invited all the guests to have either port or sherry. At first Mr Bartell D'Arcy refused to take either but one of his neighbours nudged him and whispered something to him upon which he allowed his glass to be filled. Gradually as the last glasses were being filled the conversation ceased. A pause followed, broken only by the noise of the wine and by unsettlings of chairs. The Misses Morkan, all three, looked down at the tablecloth. Someone coughed once or twice and then a few gentlemen patted the table gently as a signal for silence. The silence came and Gabriel pushed back his chair.

The patting at once grew louder in encouragement and then

ceased altogether. Gabriel leaned his ten trembling fingers on the tablecloth and smiled nervously at the company. Meeting a row of upturned faces he raised his eyes to the chandelier. The piano was playing a waltz tune and he could hear the skirts sweeping against the drawing-room door. People, perhaps, were standing in the snow on the quay outside, gazing up at the lighted windows and listening to the waltz music. The air was pure there. In the distance lay the park where the trees were weighted with snow. The Wellington Monument wore a gleaming cap of snow that flashed westward over the white field of Fifteen Acres.

He began:

“Ladies and Gentlemen,

“It has fallen to my lot this evening, as in years past, to perform a very pleasing task but a task for which I am afraid my poor powers as a speaker are all too inadequate.”

“No, no!” said Mr Browne.

“But, however that may be, I can only ask you tonight to take the will for the deed and to lend me your attention for a few moments while I endeavour to express to you in words what my feelings are on this occasion.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, it is not the first time that we have gathered together under this hospitable roof, around this hospitable board. It is not the first time that we have been the recipients—or perhaps, I had better say, the victims—of the hospitality of certain good ladies.”

He made a circle in the air with his arm and paused. Everyone laughed or smiled at Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia and Mary Jane who all turned crimson with pleasure. Gabriel went on more boldly:

“I feel more strongly with every recurring year that our country has no tradition which does it so much honour and which it should guard so jealously as that of its hospitality. It is a tradition that is unique as far as my experience goes (and I have visited not a few places abroad) among the modern nations. Some would say, perhaps, that with us it is rather a failing than anything to be boasted of. But granted even that, it is, to my mind, a princely

failing, and one that I trust will long be cultivated among us. Of one thing, at least, I am sure. As long as this one roof shelters the good ladies aforesaid—and I wish from my heart it may do so for many and many a long year to come—the tradition of genuine warm-hearted courteous Irish hospitality, which our forefathers have handed down to us and which we in turn must hand down to our descendants, is still alive among us.”

A hearty murmur of assent ran round the table. It shot through Gabriel’s mind that Miss Ivors was not there and that she had gone away discourteously: and he said with confidence in himself:

“Ladies and Gentlemen,

“A new generation is growing up in our midst, a generation actuated by new ideas and new principles. It is serious and enthusiastic for these new ideas and its enthusiasm, even when it is misdirected, is, I believe, in the main sincere. But we are living in a sceptical and, if I may use the phrase, a thought-tormented age: and sometimes I fear that this new generation, educated or hypereducated as it is, will lack those qualities of humanity, of hospitality, of kindly humour which belonged to an older day. Listening tonight to the names of all those great singers of the past it seemed to me, I must confess, that we were living in a less spacious age. Those days might, without exaggeration, be called spacious days: and if they are gone beyond recall let us hope, at least, that in gatherings such as this we shall still speak of them with pride and affection, still cherish in our hearts the memory of those dead and gone great ones whose fame the world will not willingly let die.”

“Hear, hear!” said Mr Browne loudly.

“But yet,” continued Gabriel, his voice falling into a softer inflection, “there are always in gatherings such as this sadder thoughts that will recur to our minds: thoughts of the past, of youth, of changes, of absent faces that we miss here tonight. Our path through life is strewn with many such sad memories: and were we to brood upon them always we could not find the heart to go on bravely with our work among the living. We have all of us



living duties and living affections which claim, and rightly claim, our strenuous endeavours.

"Therefore, I will not linger on the past. I will not let any gloomy moralising intrude upon us here tonight. Here we are gathered together for a brief moment from the bustle and rush of our everyday routine. We are met here as friends, in the spirit of good-fellowship, as colleagues, also to a certain extent, in the true spirit of *camaraderie*, and as the guests of—what shall I call them?—the Three Graces of the Dublin musical world."

The table burst into applause and laughter at this allusion. Aunt Julia vainly asked each of her neighbours in turn to tell her what Gabriel had said.

"He says we are the Three Graces, Aunt Julia," said Mary Jane.

Aunt Julia did not understand but she looked up, smiling, at Gabriel, who continued in the same vein:

"Ladies and Gentlemen,

"I will not attempt to play tonight the part that Paris played on another occasion. I will not attempt to choose between them. The task would be an invidious one and one beyond my poor powers. For when I view them in turn, whether it be our chief hostess herself, whose good heart, whose too good heart, has become a byword with all who know her, or her sister, who seems to be gifted with perennial youth and whose singing must have been a surprise and a revelation to us all tonight, or, last but not least, when I consider our youngest hostess, talented, cheerful, hard-working and the best of nieces, I confess, Ladies and Gentlemen, that I do not know to which of them I should award the prize."

Gabriel glanced down at his aunts and, seeing the large smile on Aunt Julia's face and the tears which had risen to Aunt Kate's eyes, hastened to his close. He raised his glass of port gallantly, while every member of the company fingered a glass expectantly, and said loudly:

"Let us toast them all three together. Let us drink to their health, wealth, long life, happiness and prosperity and may they long continue to hold the proud and self-won position which they hold

in their profession and the position of honour and affection which they hold in our hearts.”

All the guests stood up, glass in hand, and turning towards the three seated ladies, sang in unison, with Mr Browne as leader:

For they are jolly gay fellows,  
For they are jolly gay fellows,  
For they are jolly gay fellows,  
Which nobody can deny.

Aunt Kate was making frank use of her handkerchief and even Aunt Julia seemed moved. Freddy Malins beat time with his pudding-fork and the singers turned towards one another, as if in melodious conference, while they sang with emphasis:

Unless he tells a lie,  
Unless he tells a lie.

Then, turning once more towards their hostesses, they sang:

For they are jolly gay fellows,  
For they are jolly gay fellows,  
For they are jolly gay fellows,  
Which nobody can deny.

The acclamation which followed was taken up beyond the door of the supper-room by many of the other guests and renewed time after time, Freddy Malins acting as officer with his fork on high.

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The piercing morning air came into the hall where they were standing so that Aunt Kate said:

“Close the door, somebody. Mrs Malins will get her death of cold.”

“Browne is out there, Aunt Kate,” said Mary Jane.

“Browne is everywhere,” said Aunt Kate, lowering her voice.

Mary Jane laughed at her tone.

"Really," she said archly, "he is very attentive."

"He has been laid on here like the gas," said Aunt Kate in the same tone, "all during the Christmas."

She laughed herself this time good-humouredly and then added quickly:

"But tell him to come in, Mary Jane, and close the door. I hope to goodness he didn't hear me."

At that moment the hall-door was opened and Mr Browne came in from the doorstep, laughing as if his heart would break. He was dressed in a long green overcoat with mock astrakhan cuffs and collar and wore on his head an oval fur cap. He pointed down the snow-covered quay from where the sound of shrill prolonged whistling was borne in.

"Teddy will have all the cabs in Dublin out," he said.

Gabriel advanced from the little pantry behind the office, struggling into his overcoat and, looking round the hall, said:

"Gretta not down yet?"

"She's getting on her things, Gabriel," said Aunt Kate.

"Who's playing up there?" asked Gabriel.

"Nobody. They're all gone."

"O no, Aunt Kate," said Mary Jane. "Bartell D'Arcy and Miss O'Callaghan aren't gone yet."

"Someone is fooling at the piano anyhow," said Gabriel.

Mary Jane glanced at Gabriel and Mr Browne and said with a shiver:

"It makes me feel cold to look at you two gentlemen muffled up like that. I wouldn't like to face your journey home at this hour."

"I'd like nothing better this minute," said Mr Browne stoutly, "than a rattling fine walk in the country or a fast drive with a good spanking goer between the shafts."

"We used to have a very good horse and trap at home," said Aunt Julia sadly.

"The never-to-be-forgotten Johnny," said Mary Jane, laughing.

Aunt Kate and Gabriel laughed too.

"Why, what was wonderful about Johnny?" asked Mr Browne.

"The late lamented Patrick Morkan, our grandfather, that is," explained Gabriel, "commonly known in his later years as the old gentleman, was a glue-boiler."

"O now, Gabriel," said Aunt Kate, laughing, "he had a starch mill."

"Well, glue or starch," said Gabriel, "the old gentleman had a horse by the name of Johnny. And Johnny used to work in the old gentleman's mill, walking round and round in order to drive the mill. That was all very well; but now comes the tragic part about Johnny. One fine day the old gentleman thought he'd like to drive out with the quality to a military review in the park."

"The Lord have mercy on his soul," said Aunt Kate compassionately.

"Amen," said Gabriel. "So the old gentleman, as I said, harnessed Johnny and put on his very best tall hat and his very best stock collar and drove out in grand style from his ancestral mansion somewhere near Back Lane, I think."

Everyone laughed, even Mrs Malins, at Gabriel's manner and Aunt Kate said:

"O now, Gabriel, he didn't live in Back Lane, really. Only the mill was there."

"Out from the mansion of his forefathers," continued Gabriel, "he drove with Johnny. And everything went on beautifully until Johnny came in sight of King Billy's statue: and whether he fell in love with the horse King Billy sits on or whether he thought he was back again in the mill, anyhow he began to walk round the statue."

Gabriel paced in a circle round the hall in his goloshes amid the laughter of the others.

"Round and round he went," said Gabriel, "and the old gentleman, who was a very pompous old gentleman, was highly indignant. 'Go on, sir! What do you mean, sir? Johnny! Johnny! Most extraordinary conduct! Can't understand the horse!'"

The peal of laughter which followed Gabriel's imitation of the incident was interrupted by a resounding knock at the hall door. Mary Jane ran to open it and let in Freddy Malins. Freddy Malins,

with his hat well back on his head and his shoulders humped with cold, was puffing and steaming after his exertions.

"I could only get one cab," he said.

"O, we'll find another along the quay," said Gabriel.

"Yes," said Aunt Kate. "Better not keep Mrs Malins standing in the draught."

Mrs Malins was helped down the front steps by her son and Mr Browne and, after many manœuvres, hoisted into the cab. Freddy Malins clambered in after her and spent a long time settling her on the seat, Mr Browne helping him with advice. At last she was settled comfortably and Freddy Malins invited Mr Browne into the cab. There was a good deal of confused talk, and then Mr Browne got into the cab. The cabman settled his rug over his knees, and bent down for the address. The confusion grew greater and the cabman was directed differently by Freddy Malins and Mr Browne, each of whom had his head out through a window of the cab. The difficulty was to know where to drop Mr Browne along the route, and Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia and Mary Jane helped the discussion from the doorstep with cross-directions and contradictions and abundance of laughter. As for Freddy Malins he was speechless with laughter. He popped his head in and out of the window every moment to the great danger of his hat, and told his mother how the discussion was progressing, till at last Mr Browne shouted to the bewildered cabman above the din of everybody's laughter:

"Do you know Trinity College?"

"Yes, sir," said the cabman.

"Well, drive bang up against Trinity College gates," said Mr Browne, "and then we'll tell you where to go. You understand now?"

"Yes, sir," said the cabman.

"Make like a bird for Trinity College."

"Right, sir," said the cabman.

The horse was whipped up and the cab rattled off along the quay amid a chorus of laughter and adieus.

Gabriel had not gone to the door with the others. He was in a dark part of the hall gazing up the staircase. A woman was standing

near the top of the first flight, in the shadow also. He could not see her face but he could see the terracotta and salmon-pink panels of her skirt which the shadow made appear black and white. It was his wife. She was leaning on the banisters, listening to something. Gabriel was surprised at her stillness and strained his ear to listen also. But he could hear little save the noise of laughter and dispute on the front steps, a few chords struck on the piano and a few notes of a man's voice singing.

He stood still in the gloom of the hall, trying to catch the air that the voice was singing and gazing up at his wife. There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter.

The hall-door was closed; and Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia and Mary Jane came down the hall, still laughing.

"Well, isn't Freddy terrible?" said Mary Jane. "He's really terrible."

Gabriel said nothing but pointed up the stairs towards where his wife was standing. Now that the hall-door was closed the voice and the piano could be heard more clearly. Gabriel held up his hand for them to be silent. The song seemed to be in the old Irish tonality and the singer seemed uncertain both of his words and of his voice. The voice, made plaintive by distance and by the singer's hoarseness, faintly illuminated the cadence of the air with words expressing grief:

O, the rain falls on my heavy locks  
And the dew wets my skin,  
My babe lies cold....

"O," exclaimed Mary Jane. "It's Bartell D'Arcy singing and he wouldn't sing all the night. O, I'll get him to sing a song before he goes."

"O do, Mary Jane," said Aunt Kate.

Mary Jane brushed past the others and ran to the staircase, but before she reached it the singing stopped and the piano was closed abruptly.

"O, what a pity!" she cried. "Is he coming down, Gretta?"

Gabriel heard his wife answer yes and saw her come down towards them. A few steps behind her were Mr Bartell D'Arcy and Miss O'Callaghan.

"O, Mr D'Arcy," cried Mary Jane, "it's downright mean of you to break off like that when we were all in raptures listening to you."

"I have been at him all the evening," said Miss O'Callaghan, "and Mrs Conroy too and he told us he had a dreadful cold and couldn't sing."

"O, Mr D'Arcy," said Aunt Kate, "now that was a great fib to tell."

"Can't you see that I'm as hoarse as a crow?" said Mr D'Arcy roughly.

He went into the pantry hastily and put on his overcoat. The others, taken aback by his rude speech, could find nothing to say. Aunt Kate wrinkled her brows and made signs to the others to drop the subject. Mr D'Arcy stood swathing his neck carefully and frowning.

"It's the weather," said Aunt Julia, after a pause.

"Yes, everybody has colds," said Aunt Kate readily, "everybody."

"They say," said Mary Jane, "we haven't had snow like it for thirty years; and I read this morning in the newspapers that the snow is general all over Ireland."

"I love the look of snow," said Aunt Julia sadly.

"So do I," said Miss O'Callaghan. "I think Christmas is never really Christmas unless we have the snow on the ground."

"But poor Mr D'Arcy doesn't like the snow," said Aunt Kate, smiling.

Mr D'Arcy came from the pantry, fully swathed and buttoned, and in a repentant tone told them the history of his cold. Everyone gave him advice and said it was a great pity and urged him to be very careful of his throat in the night air. Gabriel watched his wife, who did not join in the conversation. She was standing right under the dusty fanlight and the flame of the gas lit up the rich bronze of her

hair, which he had seen her drying at the fire a few days before. She was in the same attitude and seemed unaware of the talk about her. At last she turned towards them and Gabriel saw that there was colour on her cheeks and that her eyes were shining. A sudden tide of joy went leaping out of his heart.

"Mr D'Arcy," she said, "what is the name of that song you were singing?"

"It's called *The Lass of Aughrim*," said Mr D'Arcy, "but I couldn't remember it properly. Why? Do you know it?"

"*The Lass of Aughrim*," she repeated. "I couldn't think of the name."

"It's a very nice air," said Mary Jane. "I'm sorry you were not in voice tonight."

"Now, Mary Jane," said Aunt Kate, "don't annoy Mr D'Arcy. I won't have him annoyed."

Seeing that all were ready to start she shepherded them to the door, where good-night was said:

"Well, good-night, Aunt Kate, and thanks for the pleasant evening."

"Good-night, Gabriel. Good-night, Gretta!"

"Good-night, Aunt Kate, and thanks ever so much. Good-night, Aunt Julia."

"O, good-night, Gretta, I didn't see you."

"Good-night, Mr D'Arcy. Good-night, Miss O'Callaghan."

"Good-night, Miss Morkan."

"Good-night, again."

"Good-night, all. Safe home."

"Good-night. Good-night."

The morning was still dark. A dull yellow light brooded over the houses and the river; and the sky seemed to be descending. It was slushy underfoot; and only streaks and patches of snow lay on the roofs, on the parapets of the quay and on the area railings. The lamps were still burning redly in the murky air and, across the river, the palace of the Four Courts stood out menacingly against the heavy sky.

She was walking on before him with Mr Bartell D'Arcy, her shoes



in a brown parcel tucked under one arm and her hands holding her skirt up from the slush. She had no longer any grace of attitude but Gabriel's eyes were still bright with happiness. The blood went bounding along his veins; and the thoughts went rioting through his brain, proud, joyful, tender, valorous.

She was walking on before him so lightly and so erect that he longed to run after her noiselessly, catch her by the shoulders and say something foolish and affectionate into her ear. She seemed to him so frail that he longed to defend her against something and then to be alone with her. Moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory. A heliotrope envelope was lying beside his breakfast-cup and he was caressing it with his hand. Birds were twittering in the ivy and the sunny web of the curtain was shimmering along the floor: he could not eat for happiness. They were standing on the crowded platform and he was placing a ticket inside the warm palm of her glove. He was standing with her in the cold, looking in through a grated window at a man making bottles in a roaring furnace. It was very cold. Her face, fragrant in the cold air, was quite close to his; and suddenly he called out to the man at the furnace:

“Is the fire hot, sir?”

But the man could not hear with the noise of the furnace. It was just as well. He might have answered rudely.

A wave of yet more tender joy escaped from his heart and went coursing in warm flood along his arteries. Like the tender fire of stars moments of their life together, that no one knew of or would ever know of, broke upon and illumined his memory. He longed to recall to her those moments, to make her forget the years of their dull existence together and remember only their moments of ecstasy. For the years, he felt, had not quenched his soul or hers. Their children, his writing, her household cares had not quenched all their souls' tender fire. In one letter that he had written to her then he had said: “Why is it that words like these seem to me so dull and cold? Is it because there is no word tender enough to be your name?”

Like distant music these words that he had written years before were borne towards him from the past. He longed to be alone with her. When the others had gone away, when he and she were in their room in the hotel, then they would be alone together. He would call her softly:

“Gretta!”

Perhaps she would not hear at once: she would be undressing. Then something in his voice would strike her. She would turn and look at him....

At the corner of Winetavern Street they met a cab. He was glad of its rattling noise as it saved him from conversation. She was looking out of the window and seemed tired. The others spoke only a few words, pointing out some building or street. The horse galloped along wearily under the murky morning sky, dragging his old rattling box after his heels, and Gabriel was again in a cab with her, galloping to catch the boat, galloping to their honeymoon.

As the cab drove across O’Connell Bridge Miss O’Callaghan said:

“They say you never cross O’Connell Bridge without seeing a white horse.”

“I see a white man this time,” said Gabriel.

“Where?” asked Mr Bartell D’Arcy.

Gabriel pointed to the statue, on which lay patches of snow. Then he nodded familiarly to it and waved his hand.

“Good-night, Dan,” he said gaily.

When the cab drew up before the hotel, Gabriel jumped out and, in spite of Mr Bartell D’Arcy’s protest, paid the driver. He gave the man a shilling over his fare. The man saluted and said:

“A prosperous New Year to you, sir.”

“The same to you,” said Gabriel cordially.

She leaned for a moment on his arm in getting out of the cab and while standing at the curbstone, bidding the others good-night. She leaned lightly on his arm, as lightly as when she had danced with him a few hours before. He had felt proud and happy then, happy that she was his, proud of her grace and wifely carriage. But now, after the kindling again of so many memories, the first touch of her

body, musical and strange and perfumed, sent through him a keen pang of lust. Under cover of her silence he pressed her arm closely to his side; and, as they stood at the hotel door, he felt that they had escaped from their lives and duties, escaped from home and friends and run away together with wild and radiant hearts to a new adventure.

An old man was dozing in a great hooded chair in the hall. He lit a candle in the office and went before them to the stairs. They followed him in silence, their feet falling in soft thuds on the thickly carpeted stairs. She mounted the stairs behind the porter, her head bowed in the ascent, her frail shoulders curved as with a burden, her skirt girt tightly about her. He could have flung his arms about her hips and held her still, for his arms were trembling with desire to seize her and only the stress of his nails against the palms of his hands held the wild impulse of his body in check. The porter halted on the stairs to settle his guttering candle. They halted too on the steps below him. In the silence Gabriel could hear the falling of the molten wax into the tray and the thumping of his own heart against his ribs.

The porter led them along a corridor and opened a door. Then he set his unstable candle down on a toilet-table and asked at what hour they were to be called in the morning.

“Eight,” said Gabriel.

The porter pointed to the tap of the electric-light and began a muttered apology but Gabriel cut him short.

“We don’t want any light. We have light enough from the street. And I say,” he added, pointing to the candle, “you might remove that handsome article, like a good man.”

The porter took up his candle again, but slowly for he was surprised by such a novel idea. Then he mumbled good-night and went out. Gabriel shot the lock to.

A ghostly light from the street lamp lay in a long shaft from one window to the door. Gabriel threw his overcoat and hat on a couch and crossed the room towards the window. He looked down into the street in order that his emotion might calm a little. Then he

turned and leaned against a chest of drawers with his back to the light. She had taken off her hat and cloak and was standing before a large swinging mirror, unhooking her waist. Gabriel paused for a few moments, watching her, and then said:

“Gretta!”

She turned away from the mirror slowly and walked along the shaft of light towards him. Her face looked so serious and weary that the words would not pass Gabriel’s lips. No, it was not the moment yet.

“You looked tired,” he said.

“I am a little,” she answered.

“You don’t feel ill or weak?”

“No, tired: that’s all.”

She went on to the window and stood there, looking out. Gabriel waited again and then, fearing that diffidence was about to conquer him, he said abruptly:

“By the way, Gretta!”

“What is it?”

“You know that poor fellow Malins?” he said quickly.

“Yes. What about him?”

“Well, poor fellow, he’s a decent sort of chap after all,” continued Gabriel in a false voice. “He gave me back that sovereign I lent him, and I didn’t expect it, really. It’s a pity he wouldn’t keep away from that Browne, because he’s not a bad fellow, really.”

He was trembling now with annoyance. Why did she seem so abstracted? He did not know how he could begin. Was she annoyed, too, about something? If she would only turn to him or come to him of her own accord! To take her as she was would be brutal. No, he must see some ardour in her eyes first. He longed to be master of her strange mood.

“When did you lend him the pound?” she asked, after a pause.

Gabriel strove to restrain himself from breaking out into brutal language about the sottish Malins and his pound. He longed to cry to her from his soul, to crush her body against his, to overmaster her. But he said:

"O, at Christmas, when he opened that little Christmas-card shop in Henry Street."

He was in such a fever of rage and desire that he did not hear her come from the window. She stood before him for an instant, looking at him strangely. Then, suddenly raising herself on tiptoe and resting her hands lightly on his shoulders, she kissed him.

"You are a very generous person, Gabriel," she said.

Gabriel, trembling with delight at her sudden kiss and at the quaintness of her phrase, put his hands on her hair and began smoothing it back, scarcely touching it with his fingers. The washing had made it fine and brilliant. His heart was brimming over with happiness. Just when he was wishing for it she had come to him of her own accord. Perhaps her thoughts had been running with his. Perhaps she had felt the impetuous desire that was in him, and then the yielding mood had come upon her. Now that she had fallen to him so easily, he wondered why he had been so diffident.

He stood, holding her head between his hands. Then, slipping one arm swiftly about her body and drawing her towards him, he said softly:

"Gretta, dear, what are you thinking about?"

She did not answer nor yield wholly to his arm. He said again, softly:

"Tell me what it is, Gretta. I think I know what is the matter. Do I know?"

She did not answer at once. Then she said in an outburst of tears:

"O, I am thinking about that song, *The Lass of Aughrim*."

She broke loose from him and ran to the bed and, throwing her arms across the bed-rail, hid her face. Gabriel stood stock-still for a moment in astonishment and then followed her. As he passed in the way of the cheval-glass he caught sight of himself in full length, his broad, well-filled shirt-front, the face whose expression always puzzled him when he saw it in a mirror and his glimmering gilt-rimmed eyeglasses. He halted a few paces from her and said:

"What about the song? Why does that make you cry?"

She raised her head from her arms and dried her eyes with the

back of her hand like a child. A kinder note than he had intended went into his voice.

“Why, Gretta?” he asked.

“I am thinking about a person long ago who used to sing that song.”

“And who was the person long ago?” asked Gabriel, smiling.

“It was a person I used to know in Galway when I was living with my grandmother,” she said.

The smile passed away from Gabriel’s face. A dull anger began to gather again at the back of his mind and the dull fires of his lust began to glow angrily in his veins.

“Someone you were in love with?” he asked ironically.

“It was a young boy I used to know,” she answered, “named Michael Furey. He used to sing that song, *The Lass of Aughrim*. He was very delicate.”

Gabriel was silent. He did not wish her to think that he was interested in this delicate boy.

“I can see him so plainly,” she said after a moment. “Such eyes as he had: big, dark eyes! And such an expression in them—an expression!”

“O then, you were in love with him?” said Gabriel.

“I used to go out walking with him,” she said, “when I was in Galway.”

A thought flew across Gabriel’s mind.

“Perhaps that was why you wanted to go to Galway with that Ivors girl?” he said coldly.

She looked at him and asked in surprise:

“What for?”

Her eyes made Gabriel feel awkward. He shrugged his shoulders and said:

“How do I know? To see him, perhaps.”

She looked away from him along the shaft of light towards the window in silence.

“He is dead,” she said at length. “He died when he was only seventeen. Isn’t it a terrible thing to die so young as that?”

"What was he?" asked Gabriel, still ironically.

"He was in the gasworks," she said.

Gabriel felt humiliated by the failure of his irony and by the evocation of this figure from the dead, a boy in the gasworks. While he had been full of memories of their secret life together, full of tenderness and joy and desire, she had been comparing him in her mind with another. A shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous, well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealising his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror. Instinctively he turned his back more to the light lest she might see the shame that burned upon his forehead.

He tried to keep up his tone of cold interrogation, but his voice when he spoke was humble and indifferent.

"I suppose you were in love with this Michael Furey, Gretta," he said.

"I was great with him at that time," she said.

Her voice was veiled and sad. Gabriel, feeling now how vain it would be to try to lead her whither he had purposed, caressed one of her hands and said, also sadly:

"And what did he die of so young, Gretta? Consumption, was it?"

"I think he died for me," she answered.

A vague terror seized Gabriel at this answer as if, at that hour when he had hoped to triumph, some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him, gathering forces against him in its vague world. But he shook himself free of it with an effort of reason and continued to caress her hand. He did not question her again for he felt that she would tell him of herself. Her hand was warm and moist: it did not respond to his touch but he continued to caress it just as he had caressed her first letter to him that spring morning.

"It was in the winter," she said, "about the beginning of the winter when I was going to leave my grandmother's and come up here to the convent. And he was ill at the time in his lodgings in Galway and wouldn't be let out and his people in Oughterard were written to.

He was in decline, they said, or something like that. I never knew rightly.”

She paused for a moment and sighed.

“Poor fellow,” she said. “He was very fond of me and he was such a gentle boy. We used to go out together, walking, you know, Gabriel, like the way they do in the country. He was going to study singing only for his health. He had a very good voice, poor Michael Furey.”

“Well; and then?” asked Gabriel.

“And then when it came to the time for me to leave Galway and come up to the convent he was much worse and I wouldn’t be let see him so I wrote him a letter saying I was going up to Dublin and would be back in the summer and hoping he would be better then.”

She paused for a moment to get her voice under control and then went on:

“Then the night before I left I was in my grandmother’s house in Nuns’ Island, packing up, and I heard gravel thrown up against the window. The window was so wet I couldn’t see so I ran downstairs as I was and slipped out the back into the garden and there was the poor fellow at the end of the garden, shivering.”

“And did you not tell him to go back?” asked Gabriel.

“I implored of him to go home at once and told him he would get his death in the rain. But he said he did not want to live. I can see his eyes as well as well! He was standing at the end of the wall where there was a tree.”

“And did he go home?” asked Gabriel.

“Yes, he went home. And when I was only a week in the convent he died and he was buried in Oughterard where his people came from. O, the day I heard that, that he was dead!”

She stopped, choking with sobs and, overcome by emotion, flung herself face downward on the bed, sobbing in the quilt. Gabriel held her hand for a moment longer, irresolutely, and then, shy of intruding on her grief, let it fall gently and walked quietly to the window.

She was fast asleep.

Gabriel, leaning on his elbow, looked for a few moments



unresentfully on her tangled hair and half-open mouth, listening to her deep-drawn breath. So she had had that romance in her life: a man had died for her sake. It hardly pained him now to think how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life. He watched her while she slept as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife. His curious eyes rested long upon her face and on her hair: and, as he thought of what she must have been then, in that time of her first girlish beauty, a strange, friendly pity for her entered his soul. He did not like to say even to himself that her face was no longer beautiful but he knew that it was no longer the face for which Michael Furey had braved death.

Perhaps she had not told him all the story. His eyes moved to the chair over which she had thrown some of her clothes. A petticoat string dangled to the floor. One boot stood upright, its limp upper fallen down: the fellow of it lay upon its side. He wondered at his riot of emotions of an hour before. From what had it proceeded? From his aunt's supper, from his own foolish speech, from the wine and dancing, the merry-making when saying good-night in the hall, the pleasure of the walk along the river in the snow. Poor Aunt Julia! She, too, would soon be a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse. He had caught that haggard look upon her face for a moment when she was singing *Arrayed for the Bridal*. Soon, perhaps, he would be sitting in that same drawing-room, dressed in black, his silk hat on his knees. The blinds would be drawn down and Aunt Kate would be sitting beside him, crying and blowing her nose and telling him how Julia had died. He would cast about in his mind for some words that might console her, and would find only lame and useless ones. Yes, yes: that would happen very soon.

The air of the room chilled his shoulders. He stretched himself cautiously along under the sheets and lay down beside his wife. One by one they were all becoming shades. Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age. He thought of how she who lay beside him had locked in her heart for so many years that image of her lover's eyes when he had told her that he did not wish to live.

Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes. He had never felt like that himself towards any woman but he knew that such a feeling must be love. The tears gathered more thickly in his eyes and in the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling.

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

## 33. James Joyce: A Biography

By Cleo Hanaway

James Augustine Joyce, the eldest surviving son of John Stanislaus Joyce and Mary Jane ('May') Joyce, was born in Dublin on 2 February 1882. He attended Clongowes Wood College, a Jesuit boys' school in County Kildare, until his father lost his job as a Rates Collector in 1891. Around the same time, Joyce took 'Aloysius' as his confirmation name. After a brief spell at the Christian Brothers School, all of the Joyce brothers entered Belvedere College, a Jesuit boys' day school; fortunately, the school fees were waived.

In 1894, with the Joyces' finances dwindling further, the family moved house for the fourth time since Joyce's birth. They also sold off their last remaining Cork property. Despite increasing poverty and upheaval, Joyce managed to win a prize for his excellent exam results and wrote an essay on Ulysses which, arguably, sowed the seeds for Joyce's 1922 masterpiece of the same name. In 1896 Joyce was made prefect of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a devotional society. However, he was not as pure as he seemed; Joyce claimed to have begun his "sexual life" later that year, at the age of fourteen.[1]

### *Education*

In 1898, Joyce began studying modern languages at the Royal University (now University College, Dublin). During his time at university Joyce published several papers on literature, history, and politics. He also enjoyed visits to the music hall.[2] Joyce became particularly interested in the work of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen and Irish writer W. B. Yeats. In 1902, on a visit to London, Joyce met Yeats who introduced him to the British poet and critic Arthur Symonds. In the same year, Joyce registered to study medicine at

the Royal University but decided to leave Dublin and start medical school in Paris instead. Joyce's Parisian days were largely spent reading philosophy or literature, rather than learning about medicine. Whilst back in Dublin for Christmas, Joyce met Oliver St John Gogarty, a fellow medical student and poet who was to be reimagined as Buck Mulligan in [Ulysses](#) (1922). Joyce returned to Paris in January but soon gave up his course. In 1903, Joyce came back to Dublin to be with his ailing mother who died on 13 August.

### *Early Works and Family*

1904 was a significant year for Joyce. He began work on his short story collection [Dubliners](#) (1914) and *Stephen Hero* (a semi-biographical novel), wrote his first poetry collection [Chamber Music](#) (1907), and wrote an essay entitled 'A Portrait of the Artist' which would later be transformed into a novel entitled [A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man](#) (1916). Shortly after leaving the family home, Joyce met Nora Barnacle, a charming chambermaid hailing from Galway. Joyce and Nora first went out together on 16 June 1904, the date on which *Ulysses* is set. Four months later, the couple left Dublin for continental Europe. They arrived in Zurich but soon moved to Pola as Joyce secured a job teaching English with the Berlitz School.

In 1905, Joyce transferred to the Berlitz School in Trieste. Except for six months in Rome, attempting to become a banker, Joyce stayed in Trieste for the next eleven years. On 27 July 1905, Joyce's son, Giorgio, was born. He was followed by Joyce's daughter, Lucia, who was born on 26 July 1907. Around the time of Lucia's birth, Joyce was hospitalised with rheumatic fever and began to experience the eye troubles which would plague him throughout his life. Despite his below-par health and lack of money, Joyce managed to avail himself of Trieste's cultural delights; drinking, dining, more drinking, theatre, popular opera, dances, concerts, and films. He also took singing lessons; Joyce's teacher, Francesco Ricardo Sinico,

‘praised his voice but told him he would need two years to train it properly’.[3] Unfortunately, Joyce did not have the funds to continue with his lessons for the suggested length of time. Nonetheless, Joyce’s singing teacher clearly made an impression on him as he used his name for Captain and Emily Sinico in his *Dubliners* story ‘A Painful Case’.

In 1909, Joyce befriended Ettore Schmitz (Italian author ‘Italo Svevo’) who praised Joyce’s unfinished manuscripts for *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and persuaded him to finish the novel. Whilst back in Dublin for talks with publishers, Joyce bumped into an old acquaintance, Vincent Cosgrave, who claimed that Nora had enjoyed relations with him whilst committed to Joyce. Joyce’s conflicted emotions regarding this claim can be traced in his letters to Nora.[4] Joyce eventually reconciled his differences with Nora and returned to Trieste in October 1909. In December of the same year, Joyce went back to Dublin to open one of the city’s first permanent cinemas – *The Volta*. This was a short-lived business venture; the cinema closed down in April 1910.[5]

## *Struggle and Success*

From 1910 to 1913, Joyce was mainly engaged in revising *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and battling to get *Dubliners* published. To earn money, Joyce lectured at the Università; his series of *Hamlet* lectures could well have been an inspiration for Stephen’s *Hamlet* theory in the ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ episode of *Ulysses*. In 1914, thanks to the enthusiasm of fellow Modernist Ezra Pound, *Dubliners* was serialised in the *Egoist*, a literary journal. Later that year, *Dubliners* was finally published as a novel by Grant Richards. Whilst other young men were going off to fight in the First World War, Joyce began a prolific writing period; in the final months of 1914, Joyce wrote *Giacomo Joyce* (a semi-autobiographical multilingual novelette which Joyce never attempted to publish),

drafted *Exiles* (Joyce's only play), and began writing *Ulysses* (Joyce's famous modern epic).[6]

In 1915, Joyce, Nora, Giorgio, and Lucia, left Trieste for neutral Zurich. Stanislaus, Joyce's brother who had also been living in Trieste, failed to escape; he was placed in an Austrian detention centre until the end of the war. For the next few years, aided by grants from the Royal Literary Fund and the British Civil List (secured by Yeats and Pound), Joyce continued to write steadily. Joyce finished *Exiles* in May 1915 and, despite undergoing his first eye operation in August 1917, *Ulysses* continued to progress.

### *Controversy and Final Works*

In 1918, *Exiles* was published by Grant Richards, and in 1919 it was performed in Munich. From March 1918 to September 1920, *Ulysses* (still unfinished) was serialised in the *Little Review*, another literary magazine. However, not many subscribers were able to read certain episodes ('Laestrygonians', 'Scylla and Charybdis', 'Cyclops', and 'Nausicaa') as the magazines were confiscated and burned by the US Postal Authorities. The *Egoist* successfully published and distributed edited (less obscene) versions of several *Ulysses* episodes. In 1921, the *Little Review* was convicted of publishing obscenities and ceased publication. Joyce, now living in Paris (the whole family moved in October 1920), befriended Sylvia Beach who offered to publish *Ulysses* – in its entirety – under the imprint of her Paris bookshop, Shakespeare and Company. Joyce agreed to Beach's offer; after many revisions before and during the proof stages, the first copies of *Ulysses* were published on Joyce's fortieth birthday – 2/2/1922.[7]

In 1923, Joyce began writing *Work in Progress* which would later become his experimental masterpiece, [\*Finnegans Wake\*](#) (1939). The following year, the first fragments of *Work in Progress* were published in *Transatlantic Review*, with further instalments being

published in *transition* in 1927. 1927 also saw the publication of Joyce's second poetry collection, *Pomes Penyeach*, published by Shakespeare and Company. In 1928 *Anna Livia Plurabelle* (an early, shorter version of *Finnegans Wake*) was published in New York. Joyce was also recorded reading *Anna Livia Plurabelle* aloud; he played this recording to the Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein when they met the following year.[8]

1929 and 1931 saw French translations of *Ulysses* and *Anna Livia Plurabelle* respectively. In 1930, despite undergoing a series of further eye operations, Joyce finished and published *Haveth Childers Everywhere*, a sequel to *Anna Livia Plurabelle* and another step towards *Finnegans Wake*. On 4 July 1931, Joyce and Nora were officially married, in London. In December of the same year, Joyce's father passed away. In 1932 (15 February), Joyce's grandson, Stephen James Joyce, was born to Giorgio and his wife Helen. Meanwhile, Lucia's mental health deteriorated; she was seen by a clinic in 1932, hospitalised in 1933, and treated by analytical psychiatrist Carl Jung in 1934.

In 1933, *Ulysses* faced an obscenity trial in America. After deliberation, Judge John M. Woolsey declared that the book was not obscene so could be legally published in the USA. This decision prompted the publication of several versions of *Ulysses* over the next couple of years, including the Random House edition (1934), the Limited Editions Club edition with illustrations by Henri Matisse (1935), and the Bodley Head edition (1936). In 1938, Joyce finished *Finnegans Wake*; the following year it was published simultaneously in London and New York. In September 1939, World War Two broke out and the Joyce family moved back to neutral Zurich. On 13 January 1941 Joyce died, following surgery on a perforated ulcer. He was buried in Fluntern cemetery, Zurich, foregoing Catholic last rites. Nora died ten years later and was buried separately in Fluntern. Both bodies were reburied together in 1966.

To see the work of Ezra Pound, contemporary champion of Joyce's fiction, visit the [Pound](#) section of the website.

## References

- [1] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 48.
- [2] Jeri Johnson, 'A Chronology of James Joyce', in *James Joyce, Ulysses*, (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. lxiii-lxix (p. lxiv).
- [3] John McCourt, *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste, 1904-1920*, (Dublin, The Lilliput Press, 2001), pp. 74-5.
- [4] Richard Ellmann (ed.), *Selected Letters of James Joyce* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 156-196.
- [5] For more information on Joyce's cinema, see John McCourt (ed.), *Roll Away the Reel World: James Joyce and Cinema* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2010) – especially chapters one and two. Also see my [3-minute lecture on Joyce and cinema](#).
- [6] For an in-depth look at this prolific writing period, see John McCourt, *The Years of Bloom*, pp. 191-253.
- [7] For a detailed account of the composition of *Ulysses*, see Luca Crispi, 'Manuscript Timeline 1905-1922', *Genetic Joyce Studies*, 4 (2004), freely available online at: <http://www.geneticjoycestudies.org/GJS4/GJS4%20Crispi.htm>.
- [8] For more information of Joyce's meeting with Eisenstein, see Gösta Werner, 'James Joyce and Sergei Eisenstein', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 27:3 (1990), 491-507. You can listen Joyce's recording of *Anna Livia Plurabelle* on [YouTube](#).



## 34. Short Fiction: Close Reading

For your first response, please do the following:

Historicism – Give at least two examples of Irish history, culture, or politics a reader must know to understand this story. Cite your sources.

Feminism – Throughout “The Dead,” Gabriel is sometimes threatened by powerful women characters. Choose one of the women characters and discuss what concepts of feminist criticism can be explained through Gabriel’s encounter with her.

Marxism – How is class important to understanding the conclusion of “The Dead?”

For more information, please see [Unit 3 Discussions](#).



PART XIII

# MODULE 9: NOVEL PART I



## 35. The Novel: Choose Wisely

**Pick One of the Following to Read for This Unit**

[Behind a Mask; or a Woman's Power](#) by Louisa May Alcott (1866)

[The Death of Ivan Ilych](#) by Leo Tolstoy (1886)

# 36. The Death of Ivan Ilych by Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy

[The Death of Ivan Ilych by Leo Tolstoy](#)

# 37. Behind a Mask or A Woman's Power - A.M. Barnard

[Behind a Mask or A Woman's Power, by A.M. Barnard](#)

## 38. The Novel: Close Reading

For this assignment, you will create a lesson to teach your classmates about some aspect of the novel you are reading. This week, you will plan your lesson. You may not be completely finished reading the novel, but you can still be planning as you go.

For more information, please see [Unit 3 Discussions](#).



PART XIV

# MODULE 10: NOVEL PART II



## 39. The Novel: Teach a Lesson

To complete the assignment, follow these steps:

Finish reading the novel (if you haven't already).

Answer the question about the novel you posed last week.

Choose one additional scene to analyze.

Create your lesson and post it online. If you create a narrated Power Point you an upload and attachment. If you create an activity and description, you can post it as text. If you create a video, a link or an upload is fine.

For more information, please see [Unit 3 Discussions](#).



PART XV

# UNIT 4: POETRY AND DRAMA - MODULES 11-14



# 40. Unit 4 - Discussions

## Module 11: Poetry

### Discussion – Poetry: Annotations

See [Annotation and You](#) and [How to Annotate](#) and follow the steps to submit an annotation of one of the poems in Module 11. You can annotate it by hand and submit photos of it in this discussion for credit. Alternatively, if you are tech savvy you can annotate it using Google Drive / Microsoft word or another program and submit it as a pdf.

Reflect on your annotation and include in your post here 250 words or more where you make claims about the themes and meanings of the poem (Step 8 from [How to Annotate](#))

Respond to the annotations of at least two classmates by doing either of the following:

1. Suggesting a new annotation (new figurative language, historical or classical allusion they may have missed— or —
2. Helping them nuance their claims based on their annotations or your own observations.

## Module 12: Poetry II

### Discussion – Poetry: Comparative Close Reading

Using the annotations you and your classmates developed in Module 11 Poetry: Annotations, identify two different poems where you see at least some commonality or difference (use of tone; images; rhyme; subject matter; theme; speaker's attitude etc.).

Do a close reading where you quote from each poem and explore that commonality or difference. See [An Introduction to Close Reading](#) for a refresher.

Post your close reading here and respond to the posts of at least two classmates.

## Module 13: Drama

### Discussion – Drama: Database Dive

For this database dive, you will explore the voluminous resources for Hamlet and Shakespeare in general on the Web and share two of them that you found most interesting and useful with your peers here.

Afterward, be sure to follow the links that two other peers have posted and discuss how they provide context for the play and or assist in your understanding.

Following is a list of some websites and collections to get you started but you are not limited to searching through these sources.

- New York Public Library Best of the Web <https://www.nypl.org/weblinks/2633>



- Shakespeare Unlimited (Podcasts) <https://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-unlimited>
- “Approaching Shakespeare.” Oxford University . 48 lectures. <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/approaching-shakespeare>
- Online Resources for Shakespeare <https://www.folger.edu/online-resources>
- 96 Incredibly Useful Links for Teaching and Studying Shakespeare <http://www.onlinecollege.org/2009/12/16/100-incredibly-useful-links-for-teaching-and-studying-shakespeare/>

## Module 14: Drama II

### Discussion – Drama: Close Reading

Choose a scene from “Hamlet” that focuses on one important theme in the play.

Perform a close reading of that section of the play and post it here for your peers. See [An Introduction to Close Reading](#) for a refresher.

Respond to the posts of two of your peers.



PART XVI

# MODULE II: POETRY



## 41. Poetry



A calligram by Guillaume Apollinaire. These are a type of poem in which the written words are arranged in such a way to produce a visual image.

Poetry is a form of literary art that uses aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language to evoke meanings in addition to, or in place of, prosaic ostensible meaning (ordinary intended meaning). Poetry has traditionally been distinguished from prose by its being set in verse;<sup>[1]</sup> prose is cast in sentences, poetry in lines; the syntax of prose is dictated by meaning, whereas that of poetry is held across metre or the visual aspects of the poem.<sup>[2]</sup>

Prior to the nineteenth century, poetry was commonly understood to be something set in metrical lines; accordingly, in 1658 a definition of poetry is “any kind of subject consisting of Rhythm or Verses”<sup>[3]</sup> Possibly as a result of Aristotle’s influence (his *Poetics*), “poetry” before the nineteenth century was usually less

a technical designation for verse than a normative category of fictive or rhetorical art.[4] As a form it may pre-date literacy, with the earliest works being composed within and sustained by an oral tradition;[5] hence it constitutes the earliest example of literature.

1. “poetry, n.”. *Oxford English Dictionary*. OUP. Retrieved 13 February 2014. (subscription required) [↵](#)
2. Preminger, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 938–9 [↵](#)
3. “poetry, n.”. *Oxford English Dictionary*. OUP. Retrieved 13 February 2014. (subscription required) [↵](#)
4. Ross, “The Emergence of “Literature”: Making and Reading the English Canon in the Eighteenth Century”, 398 [↵](#)
5. Finnegan, Ruth H. (1977). Oral poetry: its nature, significance, and social context. Indiana University Press. p. 66. & Magoun, Jr., Francis P. (1953). “Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry”. *Speculum* **28** (3): 446–67. doi:10.2307/2847021 [↵](#)

### [Advanced Poetry Literary Terms](#)

## 42. Ode On a Grecian Urn by John Keats

*Published:* 1819

1.

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,  
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:  
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both,  
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?  
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?<sup>10</sup>  
[114]

2.

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:  
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;  
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!<sup>20</sup>

3.

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
For ever piping songs for ever new;[115]

More happy love! more happy, happy love!  
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,  
For ever panting, and for ever young;  
All breathing human passion far above,  
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,  
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.<sup>30</sup>  
4.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?  
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,  
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,  
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?  
What little town by river or sea shore,  
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?  
And, little town, thy streets for evermore  
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell  
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.<sup>40</sup>  
[116]

5.  
O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede  
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,  
With forest branches and the trodden weed;  
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!  
When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.<sup>50</sup>

## Notes on the Ode On a Grecian Urn

This poem is not, apparently, inspired by any one actual vase, but



by many Greek sculptures, some seen in the British Museum, some known only from engravings. Keats, in his imagination, combines them all into one work of supreme beauty.

Perhaps Keats had some recollection of Wordsworth's sonnet 'Upon the sight of a beautiful picture,' beginning 'Praised be the art.'

Page 113. l. 2. foster-child. The child of its maker, but preserved and cared for by these foster-parents.

l. 7. Tempe was a famous glen in Thessaly.

Arcady. Arcadia, a very mountainous country, the centre of the Peloponnese, was the last stronghold of the aboriginal Greeks. The people were largely shepherds and goatherds, and Pan was a local Arcadian god till the Persian wars (c. 400 b.c.). In late Greek and in Roman pastoral poetry, as in modern literature, Arcadia is a sort of ideal land of poetic shepherds.

Page 114. ll. 17-18. Bold . . . goal. The one thing denied to the figures—actual life. But Keats quickly turns to their rich compensations.

Page 115. ll. 28-30. All . . . tongue. Cf. Shelley's *To a Skylark*:

Thou lovest—but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.

ll. 31 seq. Keats is now looking at the other side of the urn. This verse strongly recalls certain parts of the frieze of the Parthenon (British Museum).

Page 116. l. 41. Attic, Greek.

[236]brede, embroidery. Cf. *Lamia*, i. 159. Here used of carving.

l. 44. tease us out of thought. Make us think till thought is lost in mystery.

## 43. Ode to a Nightingale by John Keats

*Published: 1819*

1.

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thine happiness,—  
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,  
In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.<sup>10</sup>  
[108]

2.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been  
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,  
Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!  
O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
And purple-stained mouth;  
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:<sup>20</sup>

3.

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;

Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,[109]  
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;  
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs,  
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.30  
4.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:  
Already with thee! tender is the night,  
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;  
But here there is no light,  
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.40  
[110]

5.  
I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;  
And mid-May's eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.50  
6.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,[111]

To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!  
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
To thy high requiem become a sod.<sup>60</sup>

7.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down;  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
The same that oft-times hath  
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.<sup>70</sup>

[112]

8.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!  
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.  
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
In the next valley-glades:  
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?<sup>80</sup>

## Notes on the Ode to a Nightingale

In the early months of 1819 Keats was living with his friend Brown at Hampstead (Wentworth Place). In April a nightingale built her

nest in the garden, and Brown writes: 'Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast table to the grass-plot under a plum, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of our nightingale. The [233]writing was not well legible, and it was difficult to arrange the stanza on so many scraps. With his assistance I succeeded, and this was his Ode to a Nightingale.'

Page 107. l. 4. Lethe. Cf. *Lamia*, i. 81, note.

l. 7. Dryad. Cf. *Lamia*, i. 5, note.

Page 108. l. 13. Flora, the goddess of flowers.

l. 14. sunburnt mirth. An instance of Keats's power of concentration. The people are not mentioned at all, yet this phrase conjures up a picture of merry, laughing, sunburnt peasants, as surely as could a long and elaborate description.

l. 15. the warm South. As if the wine brought all this with it.

l. 16. Hippocrene, the spring of the Muses on Mount Helicon.

l. 23. The weariness . . . fret. Cf. 'The fretful stir unprofitable and the fever of the world' in Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, which Keats well knew.

Page 109. l. 26. Where youth . . . dies. See Introduction to the Odes, p. 230.

l. 29. Beauty . . . eyes. Cf. Ode on Melancholy, 'Beauty that must die.'

l. 32. Not . . . pards. Not wine, but poetry, shall give him release from the cares of this world. Keats is again obviously thinking of Titian's picture (Cf. *Lamia*, i. 58, note).

l. 40. Notice the balmy softness which is given to this line by the use of long vowels and liquid consonants.

Page 110. ll. 41 seq. The dark, warm, sweet atmosphere seems to enfold us. It would be hard to find a more fragrant passage.

[234]l. 50. The murmurous . . . eves. We seem to hear them.

Tennyson, inspired by Keats, with more self-conscious art, uses somewhat similar effects, e.g.:

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,

And murmuring of innumerable bees.

The Princess, vii.

l. 51. Darkling. Cf. The Eve of St. Agnes, l. 355, note.

l. 61. Thou . . . Bird. Because, so far as we are concerned, the nightingale we heard years ago is the same as the one we hear to-night. The next lines make it clear that this is what Keats means.

l. 64. clown, peasant.

l. 67. alien corn. Transference of the adjective from person to surroundings. Cf. Eve of St. Agnes, l. 16; Hyperion, iii. 9.

ll. 69-70. magic . . . forlorn. Perhaps inspired by a picture of Claude's, 'The Enchanted Castle,' of which Keats had written before in a poetical epistle to his friend Reynolds—"The windows [look] as if latch'd by Fays and Elves.'

Page 112. l. 72. Toll. To him it has a deeply melancholy sound, and it strikes the death-blow to his illusion.

l. 75. plaintive. It did not sound sad to Keats at first, but as it dies away it takes colour from his own melancholy and sounds pathetic to him. Cf. Ode on Melancholy: he finds both bliss and pain in the contemplation of beauty.

ll. 76-8. Past . . . glades. The whole country speeds past our eyes in these three lines.

# 44. The World Is Too Much With Us by William Wordsworth

*Published: 1807*

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!  
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be  
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

# 45. To a Mouse, On Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough by Robert Burns

*Published: November 1785*

Wee, sleekit, cow'rin, tim'rous beastie,  
O' what a panic's in thy breastie!  
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,  
Wi' bickering brattle!  
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,  
Wi' murdering pattle.  
I'm truly sorry man's dominion  
Has broken Nature's social union,  
An' justifies that ill opinion,  
Which maks thee startle  
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion  
An' fellow mortal!  
I doubt na' whyles, but thou may thieve;  
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!  
A daimen icker in a thrave  
'S a sma' request:  
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,  
And never miss't!  
Thy wee bit housie, too, in ruin!  
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!  
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,  
O' foggage green!  
An' bleak December's win's ensuin,  
Baith snell and keen!  
Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,  
An' weary winter comin fast,



An' cozie here, beneath the blast,  
Thou thought to dwell,  
Till crash! the cruel coulter past  
Out thro' thy cell.  
That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble,  
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!  
Now thou's turned out, for a' thy trouble,  
But house or hald,  
To thole the winter's sleety dribble,  
An' cranreuch cauld.  
But Mousie, thou art no thy lane,  
In proving foresight may be vain:  
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men,  
Gang aft a-gley,  
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,  
For promis'd joy.  
Still thou are blest, compared wi' me!  
The present only toucheth thee:  
But Och! I backward cast my e'e,  
On prospects drear!  
An' forward, tho' I canna see,  
I guess an' fear!

# 46. We Wear the Mask

## by Paul Laurence Dunbar

*Published: 1913*

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—  
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile  
And mouth with myriad subtleties,  
Why should the world be over-wise,  
In counting all our tears and sighs?  
Nay, let them only see us, while  
We wear the mask.  
We smile, but oh great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise.  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile,  
But let the world dream otherwise,  
We wear the mask!

## 47. The Wound-Dresser by Walt Whitman

*Published: 1865*

1

An old man bending I come among new faces,  
Years looking backward resuming in answer to children,  
Come tell us old man, as from young men and maidens that love  
me,

(Arous'd and angry, I'd thought to beat the alarum, and urge  
relentless war,

But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd and I resign'd  
myself,

To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the  
dead;)

Years hence of these scenes, of these furious passions, these  
chances,

Of unsurpass'd heroes, (was one side so brave? the other was  
equally brave;)

Now be witness again, paint the mightiest armies of earth,  
Of those armies so rapid so wondrous what saw you to tell us?  
What stays with you latest and deepest? of curious panics,  
Of hard-fought engagements or sieges tremendous what deepest  
remains?

2

O maidens and young men I love and that love me,  
What you ask of my days those the strangest and sudden your  
talking recalls,

Soldier alert I arrive after a long march cover'd with sweat and  
dust,

In the nick of time I come, plunge in the fight, loudly shout in the  
rush of successful charge,

Enter the captur'd works—yet lo, like a swift-running river they  
fade,

Pass and are gone they fade—I dwell not on soldiers' perils or  
soldiers' joys,

(Both I remember well—many the hardships, few the joys, yet I  
was content.)

But in silence, in dreams' projections,

While the world of gain and appearance and mirth goes on,

So soon what is over forgotten, and waves wash the imprints off  
the sand,

With hinged knees returning I enter the doors, (while for you up  
there,

Whoever you are, follow without noise and be of strong heart.)

Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,

Straight and swift to my wounded I go,

Where they lie on the ground after the battle brought in,

Where their priceless blood reddens the grass the ground,

Or to the rows of the hospital tent, or under the roof'd hospital,

To the long rows of cots up and down each side I return,

To each and all one after another I draw near, not one do I miss,

An attendant follows holding a tray, he carries a refuse pail,

Soon to be fill'd with clotted rags and blood, emptied, and fill'd  
again.

I onward go, I stop,

With hinged knees and steady hand to dress wounds,

I am firm with each, the pangs are sharp yet unavoidable,

One turns to me his appealing eyes—poor boy! I never knew you,

Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for you, if that  
would save you.

3

On, on I go, (open doors of time! open hospital doors!)

The crush'd head I dress, (poor crazed hand tear not the bandage  
away.)

The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet through and through  
examine,

Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye, yet life  
struggles hard,  
(Come sweet death! be persuaded O beautiful death!  
In mercy come quickly.)  
From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand,  
I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and  
blood,  
Back on his pillow the soldier bends with curv'd neck and side  
falling head,  
His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the  
bloody stump,  
And has not yet look'd on it.  
I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep,  
But a day or two more, for see the frame all wasted and sinking,  
And the yellow-blue countenance see.  
I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bullet-wound,  
Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so  
sickening,  
so offensive,  
While the attendant stands behind aside me holding the tray and  
pail.  
I am faithful, I do not give out,  
The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen,  
These and more I dress with impassive hand, (yet deep in my  
breast  
a fire, a burning flame.)

4

Thus in silence in dreams' projections,  
Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals,  
The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,  
I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are so young,  
Some suffer so much, I recall the experience sweet and sad,  
(Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have cross'd and  
rested,  
Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips.)

# 48. How to Annotate

## Analyze / Annotate a Poem

1. Read the poem carefully.
2. Jot down all the words or terms that are unfamiliar to you, then look them up and record what they mean.
3. Now, with the unfamiliar sections identified, re-read the poem.
4. What is the subject of the poem? Note this next to the title.
5. Who is the speaker? What is his/her point of view in the poem? Underline the lines or images in the poem that you think give insight into the speaker and point of view. In the margin beside these sections, note how the lines or images inform you about the speaker and point of view.
6. Go through the poem and identify all figurative language. That means look for metaphors, similes, allusions, symbols, etc. Also look for imagery (language that appeals to the senses). What do they each mean in the context of the poem? Circle examples of figurative language and note in the margin how you think they relate to the subject of the poem.
7. Look for sound devices (alliteration, assonance, consonance), meter, rhyme scheme etc. How do these things make the poem sound? What feeling or tone do they give to the poem? Also look at the diction of the poem (word choice)? What tone does it create? At the bottom of the page, record sound devices and example of word choice (for example – see line 3 – alliteration – the tone feels anxious or worrisome).
8. On another page or document, make a claim about the theme or meaning of the poem. What is this poem about?
9. Reread the poem and look for anything you missed on your first read through.

## 49. Poetry: Annotations

See Annotation and You and How to Annotate and follow the steps to submit an annotation of one of the poems in Module 11. You can annotate it by hand and submit photos of it in this discussion for credit. Alternatively, if you are tech savvy you can annotate it using Google Drive / Microsoft word or another program and submit it as a pdf.

Reflect on your annotation and include in your post here 250 words or more where you make claims about the themes and meanings of the poem (Step 8 from How to Annotate)

For more information, please see [Unit 4 Discussions](#).





PART XVII

# MODULE 12: POETRY II



# 50. The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock by T. S. Eliot

*Published: 1915*

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse  
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,  
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.  
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo  
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,  
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherized upon a table;  
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,  
The muttering retreats  
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:  
Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent  
To lead you to an overwhelming question...  
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"  
Let us go and make our visit.  
In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo.  
The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,  
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes  
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,  
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,  
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,  
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,  
And seeing that it was a soft October night,

Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.  
And indeed there will be time  
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,  
Rubbing its back upon the window panes;  
There will be time, there will be time  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet  
There will be time to murder and create,  
And time for all the works and days of hands  
That lift and drop a question on your plate;  
Time for you and time for me,  
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
Before the taking of a toast and tea.  
In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo.  
And indeed there will be time  
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"  
Time to turn back and descend the stair,  
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—  
(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")  
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,  
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—  
(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")  
Do I dare  
Disturb the universe?  
In a minute there is time  
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.  
For I have known them all already, known them all:  
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;  
I know the voices dying with a dying fall  
Beneath the music from a farther room.  
So how should I presume?  
And I have known the eyes already, known them all—  
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,

And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,  
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,  
Then how should I begin  
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?  
And how should I presume?  
And I have known the arms already, known them all—  
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare  
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)  
Is it perfume from a dress  
That makes me so digress?  
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.  
And should I then presume?  
And how should I begin?

.....

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets  
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes  
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?  
I should have been a pair of ragged claws  
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

.....

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!  
Smoothed by long fingers,  
Asleep... tired... or it malingers.  
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.  
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,  
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?  
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,  
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon  
a platter,  
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;  
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,  
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,  
And in short, I was afraid.  
And would it have been worth it, after all,  
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,

Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,  
 Would it have been worth while,  
 To have bitten off the matter with a smile,  
 To have squeezed the universe into a ball  
 To roll it toward some overwhelming question,  
 To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,  
 Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—  
 If one, settling a pillow by her head,  
 Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;  
 That is not it, at all."  
 And would it have been worth it, after all,  
 Would it have been worth while,  
 After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,  
 After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along  
 the  
 floor—  
 And this, and so much more?—  
 It is impossible to say just what I mean!  
 But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:  
 Would it have been worth while  
 If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,  
 And turning toward the window, should say:  
 "That is not it at all,  
 That is not what I meant, at all."  
 . . . . .  
 No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;  
 Am an attendant lord, one that will do  
 To swell a progress, start a scene or two,  
 Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,  
 Deferential, glad to be of use,  
 Politic, cautious, and meticulous;  
 Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;  
 At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—  
 Almost, at times, the Fool.  
 I grow old... I grow old...

I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.  
Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?  
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.  
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.  
I do not think that they will sing to me.  
I have seen them riding seaward on the waves  
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
When the wind blows the water white and black.  
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

# 51. The Death of the Hired Man by Robert Frost

*Published:* 1915

MARY sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table  
Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,  
She ran on tip-toe down the darkened passage  
To meet him in the doorway with the news  
And put him on his guard. "Silas is back."  
She pushed him outward with her through the door  
And shut it after her. "Be kind," she said.  
She took the market things from Warren's arms  
And set them on the porch, then drew him down  
To sit beside her on the wooden steps.  
"When was I ever anything but kind to him?  
But I'll not have the fellow back," he said.  
'I told him so last haying, didn't I?  
'If he left then,' I said, 'that ended it.'  
What good is he? Who else will harbour him  
At his age for the little he can do?  
What help he is there's no depending on.  
Off he goes always when I need him most.  
'He thinks he ought to earn a little pay,  
Enough at least to buy tobacco with,  
So he won't have to beg and be beholden.'  
'All right,' I say, 'I can't afford to pay  
Any fixed wages, though I wish I could.'  
'Someone else can.' 'Then someone else will have to.'  
I shouldn't mind his bettering himself  
If that was what it was. You can be certain,  
When he begins like that, there's someone at him  
Trying to coax him off with pocket-money,—



In haying time, when any help is scarce.  
In winter he comes back to us. I'm done."  
"Sh! not so loud: he'll hear you," Mary said.  
"I want him to: he'll have to soon or late."  
"He's worn out. He's asleep beside the stove.  
When I came up from Rowe's I found him here,  
Huddled against the barn-door fast asleep,  
A miserable sight, and frightening, too—  
You needn't smile—I didn't recognise him—  
I wasn't looking for him—and he's changed.  
Wait till you see."  
"Where did you say he'd been?"  
"He didn't say. I dragged him to the house,  
And gave him tea and tried to make him smoke.  
I tried to make him talk about his travels.  
Nothing would do: he just kept nodding off."  
"What did he say? Did he say anything?"  
"But little."  
"Anything? Mary, confess  
He said he'd come to ditch the meadow for me."  
"Warren!"  
"But did he? I just want to know."  
"Of course he did. What would you have him say?  
Surely you wouldn't grudge the poor old man  
Some humble way to save his self-respect.  
He added, if you really care to know,  
He meant to clear the upper pasture, too.  
That sounds like something you have heard before?  
Warren, I wish you could have heard the way  
He jumbled everything. I stopped to look  
Two or three times—he made me feel so queer—  
To see if he was talking in his sleep.  
He ran on Harold Wilson—you remember—  
The boy you had in haying four years since.  
He's finished school, and teaching in his college.

Silas declares you'll have to get him back.  
He says they two will make a team for work:  
Between them they will lay this farm as smooth!  
The way he mixed that in with other things.  
He thinks young Wilson a likely lad, though daft  
On education—you know how they fought  
ALL through July under the blazing sun,  
Silas up on the cart to build the load,  
Harold along beside to pitch it on.”  
“Yes, I took care to keep well out of earshot.”  
“Well, those days trouble Silas like a dream.  
You wouldn't think they would. How some things linger!  
Harold's young college boy's assurance piqued him.  
After so many years he still keeps finding  
Good arguments he sees he might have used.  
I sympathise. I know just how it feels  
To think of the right thing to say too late.  
Harold's associated in his mind with Latin.  
He asked me what I thought of Harold's saying  
He studied Latin like the violin  
Because he liked it—that an argument!  
He said he couldn't make the boy believe  
He could find water with a hazel prong—  
Which showed how much good school had ever done him.  
He wanted to go over that. But most of all  
He thinks if he could have another chance  
To teach him how to build a load of hay——”  
“I know, that's Silas' one accomplishment.  
He bundles every forkful in its place,  
And tags and numbers it for future reference,  
So he can find and easily dislodge it  
In the unloading. Silas does that well.  
He takes it out in bunches like big birds' nests.  
You never see him standing on the hay  
He's trying to lift, straining to lift himself.”

“He thinks if he could teach him that, he’d be  
Some good perhaps to someone in the world.  
He hates to see a boy the fool of books.  
Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,  
And nothing to look backward to with pride,  
And nothing to look forward to with hope,  
So now and never any different.”  
Part of a moon was falling down the west,  
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.  
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw  
And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand  
Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,  
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,  
As if she played unheard the tenderness  
That wrought on him beside her in the night.  
“Warren,” she said, “he has come home to die:  
You needn’t be afraid he’ll leave you this time.”  
“Home,” he mocked gently.  
“Yes, what else but home?  
It all depends on what you mean by home.  
Of course he’s nothing to us, any more  
Than was the hound that came a stranger to us  
Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail.”  
“Home is the place where, when you have to go there,  
They have to take you in.”  
“I should have called it  
Something you somehow haven’t to deserve.”  
Warren leaned out and took a step or two,  
Picked up a little stick, and brought it back  
And broke it in his hand and tossed it by.  
“Silas has better claim on us you think  
Than on his brother? Thirteen little miles  
As the road winds would bring him to his door.  
Silas has walked that far no doubt to-day.  
Why didn’t he go there? His brother’s rich,

A somebody—director in the bank.”

“He never told us that.”

“We know it though.”

“I think his brother ought to help, of course.

I’ll see to that if there is need. He ought of right

To take him in, and might be willing to—

He may be better than appearances.

But have some pity on Silas. Do you think

If he’d had any pride in claiming kin

Or anything he looked for from his brother,

He’d keep so still about him all this time?”

“I wonder what’s between them.”

“I can tell you.

Silas is what he is—we wouldn’t mind him—

But just the kind that kinsfolk can’t abide.

He never did a thing so very bad.

He don’t know why he isn’t quite as good

As anyone. He won’t be made ashamed

To please his brother, worthless though he is.”

“I can’t think Si ever hurt anyone.”

“No, but he hurt my heart the way he lay

And rolled his old head on that sharp-edged chair-back.

He wouldn’t let me put him on the lounge.

You must go in and see what you can do.

I made the bed up for him there to-night.

You’ll be surprised at him—how much he’s broken.

His working days are done; I’m sure of it.”

“I’d not be in a hurry to say that.”

“I haven’t been. Go, look, see for yourself.

But, Warren, please remember how it is:

He’s come to help you ditch the meadow.

He has a plan. You mustn’t laugh at him.

He may not speak of it, and then he may.

I’ll sit and see if that small sailing cloud

Will hit or miss the moon.”

It hit the moon.  
Then there were three there, making a dim row,  
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she.  
Warren returned—too soon, it seemed to her,  
Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.  
“Warren,” she questioned.  
“Dead,” was all he answered.

## 52. Mowing by Robert Frost

*Published:* 1913

THERE was never a sound beside the wood but one,  
And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground.  
What was it it whispered? I knew not well myself;  
Perhaps it was something about the heat of the sun,  
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound—  
And that was why it whispered and did not speak.  
It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,  
Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:  
Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak  
To the earnest love that laid the swale in rows,  
Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers  
(Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake.  
The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.  
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

## 53. A Servant to Servants by Robert Frost

*Published: 1914*

I DIDN'T make you know how glad I was  
To have you come and camp here on our land.  
I promised myself to get down some day  
And see the way you lived, but I don't know!  
With a houseful of hungry men to feed  
I guess you'd find.... It seems to me  
I can't express my feelings any more  
Than I can raise my voice or want to lift  
My hand (oh, I can lift it when I have to).  
Did ever you feel so? I hope you never.  
It's got so I don't even know for sure  
Whether I am glad, sorry, or anything.  
There's nothing but a voice-like left inside  
That seems to tell me how I ought to feel,  
And would feel if I wasn't all gone wrong.  
You take the lake. I look and look at it.  
I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water.  
I stand and make myself repeat out loud  
The advantages it has, so long and narrow,  
Like a deep piece of some old running river  
Cut short off at both ends. It lies five miles  
Straight away through the mountain notch  
From the sink window where I wash the plates,  
And all our storms come up toward the house,  
Drawing the slow waves whiter and whiter and whiter.  
It took my mind off doughnuts and soda biscuit  
To step outdoors and take the water dazzle  
A sunny morning, or take the rising wind

About my face and body and through my wrapper,  
When a storm threatened from the Dragon's Den,  
And a cold chill shivered across the lake.  
I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water,  
Our Willoughby! How did you hear of it?  
I expect, though, everyone's heard of it.  
In a book about ferns? Listen to that!  
You let things more like feathers regulate  
Your going and coming. And you like it here?  
I can see how you might. But I don't know!  
It would be different if more people came,  
For then there would be business. As it is,  
The cottages Len built, sometimes we rent them,  
Sometimes we don't. We've a good piece of shore  
That ought to be worth something, and may yet.  
But I don't count on it as much as Len.  
He looks on the bright side of everything,  
Including me. He thinks I'll be all right  
With doctoring. But it's not medicine—  
Lowe is the only doctor's dared to say so—  
It's rest I want—there, I have said it out—  
From cooking meals for hungry hired men  
And washing dishes after them—from doing  
Things over and over that just won't stay done.  
By good rights I ought not to have so much  
Put on me, but there seems no other way.  
Len says one steady pull more ought to do it.  
He says the best way out is always through.  
And I agree to that, or in so far  
As that I can see no way out but through—  
Leastways for me—and then they'll be convinced.  
It's not that Len don't want the best for me.  
It was his plan our moving over in  
Beside the lake from where that day I showed you  
We used to live—ten miles from anywhere.



We didn't change without some sacrifice,  
But Len went at it to make up the loss.  
His work's a man's, of course, from sun to sun,  
But he works when he works as hard as I do—  
Though there's small profit in comparisons.  
(Women and men will make them all the same.)  
But work ain't all. Len undertakes too much.  
He's into everything in town. This year  
It's highways, and he's got too many men  
Around him to look after that make waste.  
They take advantage of him shamefully,  
And proud, too, of themselves for doing so.  
We have four here to board, great good-for-nothings,  
Sprawling about the kitchen with their talk  
While I fry their bacon. Much they care!  
No more put out in what they do or say  
Than if I wasn't in the room at all.  
Coming and going all the time, they are:  
I don't learn what their names are, let alone  
Their characters, or whether they are safe  
To have inside the house with doors unlocked.  
I'm not afraid of them, though, if they're not  
Afraid of me. There's two can play at that.  
I have my fancies: it runs in the family.  
My father's brother wasn't right. They kept him  
Locked up for years back there at the old farm.  
I've been away once—yes, I've been away.  
The State Asylum. I was prejudiced;  
I wouldn't have sent anyone of mine there;  
You know the old idea—the only asylum  
Was the poorhouse, and those who could afford,  
Rather than send their folks to such a place,  
Kept them at home; and it does seem more human.  
But it's not so: the place is the asylum.  
There they have every means proper to do with,

And you aren't darkening other people's lives—  
Worse than no good to them, and they no good  
To you in your condition; you can't know  
Affection or the want of it in that state.  
I've heard too much of the old-fashioned way.  
My father's brother, he went mad quite young.  
Some thought he had been bitten by a dog,  
Because his violence took on the form  
Of carrying his pillow in his teeth;  
But it's more likely he was crossed in love,  
Or so the story goes. It was some girl.  
Anyway all he talked about was love.  
They soon saw he would do someone a mischief  
If he wa'n't kept strict watch of, and it ended  
In father's building him a sort of cage,  
Or room within a room, of hickory poles,  
Like stanchions in the barn, from floor to ceiling,—  
A narrow passage all the way around.  
Anything they put in for furniture  
He'd tear to pieces, even a bed to lie on.  
So they made the place comfortable with straw,  
Like a beast's stall, to ease their consciences.  
Of course they had to feed him without dishes.  
They tried to keep him clothed, but he paraded  
With his clothes on his arm—all of his clothes.  
Cruel—it sounds. I 'spose they did the best  
They knew. And just when he was at the height,  
Father and mother married, and mother came,  
A bride, to help take care of such a creature,  
And accommodate her young life to his.  
That was what marrying father meant to her.  
She had to lie and hear love things made dreadful  
By his shouts in the night. He'd shout and shout  
Until the strength was shouted out of him,  
And his voice died down slowly from exhaustion.

He'd pull his bars apart like bow and bow-string,  
And let them go and make them twang until  
His hands had worn them smooth as any ox-bow.  
And then he'd crow as if he thought that child's play—  
The only fun he had. I've heard them say, though,  
They found a way to put a stop to it.  
He was before my time—I never saw him;  
But the pen stayed exactly as it was  
There in the upper chamber in the ell,  
A sort of catch-all full of attic clutter.  
I often think of the smooth hickory bars.  
It got so I would say—you know, half fooling—  
“It's time I took my turn upstairs in jail”—  
Just as you will till it becomes a habit.  
No wonder I was glad to get away.  
Mind you, I waited till Len said the word.  
I didn't want the blame if things went wrong.  
I was glad though, no end, when we moved out,  
And I looked to be happy, and I was,  
As I said, for a while—but I don't know!  
Somehow the change wore out like a prescription.  
And there's more to it than just window-views  
And living by a lake. I'm past such help—  
Unless Len took the notion, which he won't,  
And I won't ask him—it's not sure enough.  
I 'spose I've got to go the road I'm going:  
Other folks have to, and why shouldn't I?  
I almost think if I could do like you,  
Drop everything and live out on the ground—  
But it might be, come night, I shouldn't like it,  
Or a long rain. I should soon get enough,  
And be glad of a good roof overhead.  
I've lain awake thinking of you, I'll warrant,  
More than you have yourself, some of these nights.  
The wonder was the tents weren't snatched away

From over you as you lay in your beds.  
I haven't courage for a risk like that.  
Bless you, of course, you're keeping me from work,  
But the thing of it is, I need to be kept.  
There's work enough to do—there's always that;  
But behind's behind. The worst that you can do  
Is set me back a little more behind.  
I sha'n't catch up in this world, anyway.  
I'd rather you'd not go unless you must.

## 54. Hope by Emily Dickinson

*Published:* 1862

Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the words,  
And never stops at all,  
And sweetest in the gale is heard;  
And sore must be the storm  
That could abash the little bird  
That kept so many warm.  
I 've heard it in the chilliest land,  
And on the strangest sea;  
Yet, never, in extremity,  
It asked a crumb of me.

## 55. Lament by Edna St. Vincent Millay

*Published:* 1921

Listen, children:  
Your father is dead.  
From his old coats  
I'll make you little jackets;  
I'll make you little trousers  
From his old pants.  
There'll be in his pockets  
Things he used to put there,  
Keys and pennies  
Covered with tobacco;  
Dan shall have the pennies  
To save in his bank;  
Anne shall have the keys  
To make a pretty noise with.  
Life must go on,  
And the dead be forgotten;  
Life must go on,  
Though good men die;  
Anne, eat your breakfast;  
Dan, take your medicine;  
Life must go on;  
I forget just why.

## 56. Poetry: Comparative Close Reading

Using the annotations you and your classmates developed in Module 11 Poetry: Annotations, identify two different poems where you see at least some commonality or difference (use of tone; images; rhyme; subject matter; theme; speaker's attitude etc.).

Do a close reading where you quote from each poem and explore that commonality or difference. See An Introduction to Close Reading for a refresher.

For more information, please see [Unit 4 Discussions](#).





PART XVIII

# MODULE 13: DRAMA



# 57. The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark by William Shakespeare

*Published: Between 1599 and 1602*

Select a [format and read the eBook](#).

## 58. Drama: Database Dive

For this database dive, you will explore the voluminous resources for Hamlet and Shakespeare in general on the Web and share two of them that you found most interesting and useful with your peers here.

Afterward, be sure to follow the links that two other peers have posted and discuss how they provide context for the play and or assist in your understanding.

For more information, please see [Unit 4 Discussions](#).

PART XIX

## MODULE 14: DRAMA II



## 59. Drama: Close Reading

Choose a scene from “Hamlet” that focuses on one important theme in the play.

Perform a close reading of that section of the play and post it here for your peers. See [An Introduction to Close Reading](#) for a refresher.

For more information, please see [Unit 4 Discussions](#).





PART XX

# UNIT 5: FINAL ESSAY - MODULES 15-16



# 60. Unit 5 - Discussions

## Module 15: Final Essay

### Discussion – Discuss the Final Essay

After you've read the [Final Essay Assignment](#) and you've picked your topic present it here for your peers and your instructor to review.

Tell us not only what work of literature you chose to write about but why you enjoyed reading it!

Then, tell us what theme you have identified in the work and what your [working thesis](#) will be.

Finally, post a link and an annotated bibliography to at least one scholarly article that relates in some way to your text. The article can be about the text directly or about the theme of the texts or a literary theory that you intend to use as a lens for the text.

See [Annotated Bibliographies](#) for more help on how to create one.



PART XXI

# MODULE 15: FINAL ESSAY



# 6I. Final Close Reading Essay Assignment

Requirements: 3-5 pages, double-spaced, MLA format

Description: This close reading essay asks you to choose a work of literature, identify a theme, come up with a thesis that makes a claim about the theme you've chosen, and write an essay to support your claim. A claim must be a statement that you can argue; you must try to persuade your readers to understand and accept your interpretation of the theme and the story. In order to do so, you will need to describe how the author uses literary devices and you will need to support your ideas with evidence and quotations from the text, as well as published research on the text.

Write a text you enjoyed! You may choose any text we have read in class. Please do not choose a text other than those we read in class. Considering the essay is short, choose only one novel, short story, or play to analyze; you may be able to write about more than one poem, though it is suggested you try to analyze just one first.

**Here are some suggestions to help you plan your essay:**

1. Build on an online discussion post. If you already wrote an analysis of the text, and your instructor will respond to it, that's significant work toward your essay.
2. It's good to analyze various literary elements – setting, of view, symbols, metaphors – but you will get the most mileage out of analyzing characters and conflict.
3. Don't summarize or, if you must, limit summary of the text to one paragraph. This is not a book report.

4. Do research by reading scholarly articles before you finalize your thesis. Responding to what's been written is a great way to get ideas.
5. Break the text into scenes and organize your essay around analysis of specific scenes. Think of the text like a movie or TV show and divide it into scenes based on setting – where and when things occur – as well as who is there.
6. Discuss symbolic meaning. That will help you get beyond summary. Remember critical approaches we discussed, such as New Historicism, ideological analysis, and other schools of criticism. Use the Bedford Guide, too.
7. Start early. This is not something you can throw together at the last minute.
8. Consult me! Your instructor loves talking about literature and will always be happy to discuss your ideas.
9. Use quotes in every paragraph, both from your primary text and from sources.
10. Adhere to all assignment criteria. 3-5 pages doesn't mean 2.75 pages. Use Times New Roman, 12 point font, standard margins, and no extra spaces between paragraphs.

## **Assessment – Your essay will be assessed based on the following criteria:**

1. Clear thesis that presents an arguable claim.
2. Accuracy of your close reading/ innovation or creativity.
3. Evidence from the text – quotations, paraphrasing etc.
4. Evidence from research – must include at least two scholarly sources (not web sources)
5. Conventions of writing – grammar, organization, word choice etc.



## 62. Annotated Bibliographies

Writers often create annotated bibliographies as a part of a research project, as a means of recording their thoughts and deciding which sources to actually use to support the purpose of their research. Some writers include annotated bibliographies at the end of a research paper as a way of offering their insights about the source's usability to their readers.

Instructors in college often assign annotated bibliographies as a means of helping students think through their source's quality and appropriateness to their research question or topic.

Although it may take a while to complete the annotated bibliography, the annotations themselves are relatively brief.

Annotations may include three things:

1. A brief summary of the information in that source.
2. A brief evaluation of the quality of the source's information.
3. A brief evaluation of whether the source is useful for the purpose of the research.

[Sample Annotated Bibliography](#)

## 63. Discuss the Final Essay

After you've read the Final Essay Assignment and you've picked your topic present it here for your peers and your instructor to review.

Tell us not only what work of literature you chose to write about but why you enjoyed reading it!

Then, tell us what theme you have identified in the work and what your working thesis will be.

Finally, post a link and an annotated bibliography to at least one scholarly article that relates in some way to your text. The article can be about the text directly or about the theme of the texts or a literary theory that you intend to use as a lens for the text.

See Annotated Bibliographies for more help on how to create one.

For more information, please see [Unit 5 Discussions](#).

PART XXII  
LIBRARY



## 64. The Hunger Artist by Franz Kafka

*Published: 1922*

In the last decades interest in hunger artists has declined considerably. Whereas in earlier days there was good money to be earned putting on major productions of this sort under one's own management, nowadays that is totally impossible. Those were different times. Back then the hunger artist captured the attention of the entire city. From day to day while the fasting lasted, participation increased. Everyone wanted to see the hunger artist at least daily. During the final days there were people with subscription tickets who sat all day in front of the small barred cage. And there were even viewing hours at night, their impact heightened by torchlight. On fine days the cage was dragged out into the open air, and then the hunger artist was put on display particularly for the children. While for grown-ups the hunger artist was often merely a joke, something they participated in because it was fashionable, the children looked on amazed, their mouths open, holding each other's hands for safety, as he sat there on scattered straw – spurning a chair – in a black tights, looking pale, with his ribs sticking out prominently, sometimes nodding politely, answering questions with a forced smile, even sticking his arm out through the bars to let people feel how emaciated he was, but then completely sinking back into himself, so that he paid no attention to anything, not even to what was so important to him, the striking of the clock, which was the single furnishing in the cage, merely looking out in front of him with his eyes almost shut and now and then sipping from a tiny glass of water to moisten his lips.

Apart from the changing groups of spectators there were also constant observers chosen by the public – strangely enough they were usually butchers – who, always three at a time, were given

the task of observing the hunger artist day and night, so that he didn't get something to eat in some secret manner. It was, however, merely a formality, introduced to reassure the masses, for those who understood knew well enough that during the period of fasting the hunger artist would never, under any circumstances, have eaten the slightest thing, not even if compelled by force. The honour of his art forbade it. Naturally, none of the watchers understood that. Sometimes there were nightly groups of watchers who carried out their vigil very laxly, deliberately sitting together in a distant corner and putting all their attention into playing cards there, clearly intending to allow the hunger artist a small refreshment, which, according to their way of thinking, he could get from some secret supplies. Nothing was more excruciating to the hunger artist than such watchers. They depressed him. They made his fasting terribly difficult. Sometimes he overcame his weakness and sang during the time they were observing, for as long as he could keep it up, to show people how unjust their suspicions about him were. But that was little help. For then they just wondered among themselves about his skill at being able to eat even while singing. He much preferred the observers who sat down right against the bars and, not satisfied with the dim backlighting of the room, illuminated him with electric flashlights. The glaring light didn't bother him in the slightest. Generally he couldn't sleep at all, and he could always doze under any lighting and at any hour, even in an overcrowded, noisy auditorium. With such observers, he was very happily prepared to spend the entire night without sleeping. He was very pleased to joke with them, to recount stories from his nomadic life and then, in turn, to listen their stories – doing everything just to keep them awake, so that he could keep showing them once again that he had nothing to eat in his cage and that he was fasting as none of them could.

He was happiest, however, when morning came and a lavish breakfast was brought for them at his own expense, on which they hurled themselves with the appetite of healthy men after a hard night's work without sleep. True, there were still people who wanted

to see in this breakfast an unfair means of influencing the observers, but that was going too far, and if they were asked whether they wanted to undertake the observers' night shift for its own sake, without the breakfast, they excused themselves. But nonetheless they stood by their suspicions.

However, it was, in general, part of fasting that these doubts were inextricably associated with it. For, in fact, no one was in a position to spend time watching the hunger artist every day and night, so no one could know, on the basis of his own observation, whether this was a case of truly uninterrupted, flawless fasting. The hunger artist himself was the only one who could know that and, at the same time, the only spectator capable of being completely satisfied with his own fasting. But the reason he was never satisfied was something different. Perhaps it was not fasting at all which made him so very emaciated that many people, to their own regret, had to stay away from his performance, because they couldn't bear to look at him. For he was also so skeletal out of dissatisfaction with himself, because he alone knew something that even initiates didn't know – how easy it was to fast. It was the easiest thing in the world. About this he did not remain silent, but people did not believe him. At best they thought he was being modest. Most of them, however, believed he was a publicity seeker or a total swindler, for whom, at all events, fasting was easy, because he understood how to make it easy, and then had the nerve to half admit it. He had to accept all that. Over the years he had become accustomed to it. But this dissatisfaction kept gnawing at his insides all the time and never yet – and this one had to say to his credit – had he left the cage of his own free will after any period of fasting.

The impresario had set the maximum length of time for the fast at forty days – he would never allow the fasting go on beyond that point, not even in the cosmopolitan cities. And, in fact, he had a good reason. Experience had shown that for about forty days one could increasingly whip up a city's interest by gradually increasing advertising, but that then the people turned away – one could demonstrate a significant decline in popularity. In this respect,

there were, of course, small differences among different towns and among different countries, but as a rule it was true that forty days was the maximum length of time.

So then on the fortieth day the door of the cage – which was covered with flowers – was opened, an enthusiastic audience filled the amphitheatre, a military band played, two doctors entered the cage, in order to take the necessary measurements of the hunger artist, the results were announced to the auditorium through a megaphone, and finally two young ladies arrived, happy about the fact that they were the ones who had just been selected by lot, seeking to lead the hunger artist down a couple of steps out of the cage, where on a small table a carefully chosen hospital meal was laid out. And at this moment the hunger artist always fought back. Of course, he still freely laid his bony arms in the helpful outstretched hands of the ladies bending over him, but he did not want to stand up. Why stop right now after forty days? He could have kept going for even longer, for an unlimited length of time. Why stop right now, when he was in his best form, indeed, not yet even in his best fasting form? Why did people want to rob him of the fame of fasting longer, not just so that he could become the greatest hunger artist of all time, which he probably was already, but also so that he could surpass himself in some unimaginable way, for he felt there were no limits to his capacity for fasting. Why did this crowd, which pretended to admire him so much, have so little patience with him? If he kept going and kept fasting longer, why would they not tolerate it? Then, too, he was tired and felt good sitting in the straw. Now he was supposed to stand up straight and tall and go to eat, something which, when he just imagined it, made him feel nauseous right away. With great difficulty he repressed mentioning this only out of consideration for the women. And he looked up into the eyes of these women, apparently so friendly but in reality so cruel, and shook his excessively heavy head on his feeble neck.

But then happened what always happened. The impresario came and in silence – the music made talking impossible – raised his



arms over the hunger artist, as if inviting heaven to look upon its work here on the straw, this unfortunate martyr, something the hunger artist certainly was, only in a completely different sense, then grabbed the hunger artist around his thin waist, in the process wanting with his exaggerated caution to make people believe that here he had to deal with something fragile, and handed him over – not without secretly shaking him a little, so that the hunger artist's legs and upper body swung back and forth uncontrollably – to the women, who had in the meantime turned as pale as death. At this point, the hunger artist endured everything. His head lay on his chest – it was as if it had inexplicably rolled around and just stopped there – his body was arched back, his legs, in an impulse of self-preservation, pressed themselves together at the knees, but scraped the ground, as if they were not really on the floor but were looking for the real ground, and the entire weight of his body, admittedly very small, lay against one of the women, who appealed for help with flustered breath, for she had not imagined her post of honor would be like this, and then stretched her neck as far as possible, to keep her face from the least contact with the hunger artist, but then, when she couldn't manage this and her more fortunate companion didn't come to her assistance but trembled and remained content to hold in front of her the hunger artist's hand, that small bundle of knuckles, she broke into tears, to the delighted laughter of the auditorium, and had to be relieved by an attendant who had been standing ready for some time. Then came the meal. The impresario put a little food into mouth of the hunger artist, now half unconscious, as if fainting, and kept up a cheerful patter designed to divert attention away from the hunger artist's condition. Then a toast was proposed to the public, which was supposedly whispered to the impresario by the hunger artist, the orchestra confirmed everything with a great fanfare, people dispersed, and no one had the right to be dissatisfied with the event, no one except the hunger artist – he was always the only one.

He lived this way, taking small regular breaks, for many years, apparently in the spotlight, honoured by the world, but for all that

his mood was usually gloomy, and it kept growing gloomier all the time, because no one understood how to take him seriously. But how was he to find consolation? What was there left for him to wish for? And if a good-natured man who felt sorry for him ever wanted to explain to him that his sadness probably came from his fasting, then it could happen that the hunger artist responded with an outburst of rage and began to shake the bars like an animal, frightening everyone. But the impresario had a way of punishing moments like this, something he was happy to use. He would make an apology for the hunger artist to the assembled public, conceding that the irritability had been provoked only by his fasting, something quite intelligible to well-fed people and capable of excusing the behaviour of the hunger artist without further explanation. From there he would move on to speak about the equally hard to understand claim of the hunger artist that he could go on fasting for much longer than he was doing. He would praise the lofty striving, the good will, and the great self-denial no doubt contained in this claim, but then would try to contradict it simply by producing photographs, which were also on sale, for in the pictures one could see the hunger artist on the fortieth day of his fast, in bed, almost dead from exhaustion. Although the hunger artist was very familiar with this perversion of the truth, it always strained his nerves again and was too much for him. What was a result of the premature ending of the fast people were now proposing as its cause! It was impossible to fight against this lack of understanding, against this world of misunderstanding. In good faith he always listened eagerly to the impresario at the bars of his cage, but each time, once the photographs came out, he would let go of the bars and, with a sigh, sink back into the straw, and a reassured public could come up again and view him.

When those who had witnessed such scenes thought back on them a few years later, often they were unable to understand themselves. For in the meantime that change mentioned above had set it. It happened almost immediately. There may have been more profound reasons for it, but who bothered to disco

ver what they were? At any rate, one day the pampered hunger artist saw himself abandoned by the crowd of pleasure seekers, who preferred to stream to other attractions. The impresario chased around half of Europe one more time with him, to see whether he could still re-discover the old interest here and there. It was all futile. It was as if a secret agreement against the fasting performances had developed everywhere. Naturally, it couldn't really have happened all at once, and people later remembered some things which in the days of intoxicating success they hadn't paid sufficient attention to, some inadequately suppressed indications, but now it was too late to do anything to counter them. Of course, it was certain that the popularity of fasting would return once more someday, but for those now alive that was no consolation. What was the hunger artist to do now? A man whom thousands of people had cheered on could not display himself in show booths at small fun fairs. The hunger artist was not only too old to take up a different profession, but was fanatically devoted to fasting more than anything else. So he said farewell to the impresario, an incomparable companion on his life's road, and let himself be hired by a large circus. In order to spare his own feelings, he didn't even look at the terms of his contract at all.

A large circus with its huge number of men, animals, and gimmicks, which are constantly being let go and replenished, can use anyone at any time, even a hunger artist, provided, of course, his demands are modest. Moreover, in this particular case it was not only the hunger artist himself who was engaged, but also his old and famous name. In fact, given the characteristic nature of his art, which was not diminished by his advancing age, one could never claim that a worn out artist, who no longer stood at the pinnacle of his ability, wanted to escape to a quiet position in the circus. On the contrary, the hunger artist declared that he could fast just as well as in earlier times – something that was entirely credible. Indeed, he even affirmed that if people would let him do what he wanted – and he was promised this without further ado – he would really now legitimately amaze the world for the first time, an assertion which,

however, given the mood of the time, which the hunger artist in his enthusiasm easily overlooked, only brought smiles from the experts.

However, basically the hunger artist had not forgotten his sense of the way things really were, and he took it as self-evident that people would not set him and his cage up as the star attraction somewhere in the middle of the arena, but would move him outside in some other readily accessible spot near the animal stalls. Huge brightly painted signs surrounded the cage and announced what there was to look at there. During the intervals in the main performance, when the general public pushed out towards the menagerie in order to see the animals, they could hardly avoid moving past the hunger artist and stopping there a moment. They would perhaps have remained with him longer, if those pushing up behind them in the narrow passage way, who did not understand this pause on the way to the animal stalls they wanted to see, had not made a longer peaceful observation impossible. This was also the reason why the hunger artist began to tremble at these visiting hours, which he naturally used to long for as the main purpose of his life. In the early days he could hardly wait for the pauses in the performances. He had looked forward with delight to the crowd pouring around him, until he became convinced only too quickly – and even the most stubborn, almost deliberate self-deception could not hold out against the experience – that, judging by their intentions, most of these people were, again and again without exception, only visiting the menagerie. And this view from a distance still remained his most beautiful moment. For when they had come right up to him, he immediately got an earful from the shouting of the two steadily increasing groups, the ones who wanted to take their time looking at the hunger artist, not with any understanding but on a whim or from mere defiance – for him these ones were soon the more painful – and a second group of people whose only demand was to go straight to the animal stalls.

Once the large crowds had passed, the late comers would arrive,

and although there was nothing preventing these people any more from sticking around for as long as they wanted, they rushed past with long strides, almost without a sideways glance, to get to the animals in time. And it was an all-too-rare stroke of luck when the father of a family came by with his children, pointed his finger at the hunger artist, gave a detailed explanation about what was going on here, and talked of earlier years, when he had been present at similar but incomparably more magnificent performances, and then the children, because they had been inadequately prepared at school and in life, always stood around still uncomprehendingly. What was fasting to them? But nonetheless the brightness of the look in their searching eyes revealed something of new and more gracious times coming. Perhaps, the hunger artist said to himself sometimes, everything would be a little better if his location were not quite so near the animal stalls. That way it would be easy for people to make their choice, to say nothing of the fact that he was very upset and constantly depressed by the stink from the stalls, the animals' commotion at night, the pieces of raw meat dragged past him for the carnivorous beasts, and the roars at feeding time. But he did not dare to approach the administration about it. In any case, he had the animals to thank for the crowds of visitors among whom, here and there, there could be one destined for him. And who knew where they would hide him if he wished to remind them of his existence and, along with that, of the fact that, strictly speaking, he was only an obstacle on the way to the menagerie.

A small obstacle, at any rate, a constantly diminishing obstacle. People got used to the strange notion that in these times they would want to pay attention to a hunger artist, and with this habitual awareness the judgment on him was pronounced. He might fast as well as he could – and he did – but nothing could save him any more. People went straight past him. Try to explain the art of fasting to anyone! If someone doesn't feel it, then he cannot be made to understand it. The beautiful signs became dirty and illegible. People tore them down, and no one thought of replacing them. The small table with the number of days the fasting had lasted, which early

on had been carefully renewed every day, remained unchanged for a long time, for after the first weeks the staff grew tired of even this small task. And so the hunger artist kept fasting on and on, as he once had dreamed about in earlier times, and he had no difficulty succeeding in achieving what he had predicted back then, but no one was counting the days – no one, not even the hunger artist himself, knew how great his achievement was by this point, and his heart grew heavy. And when once in a while a person strolling past stood there making fun of the old number and talking of a swindle, that was in a sense the stupidest lie which indifference and innate maliciousness could invent, for the hunger artist was not being deceptive – he was working honestly – but the world was cheating him of his reward.

Many days went by once more, and this, too, came to an end. Finally the cage caught the attention of a supervisor, and he asked the attendant why they had left this perfectly useful cage standing here unused with rotting straw inside. Nobody knew, until one man, with the help of the table with the number on it, remembered the hunger artist. They pushed the straw around with a pole and found the hunger artist in there. “Are you still fasting?” the supervisor asked. “When are you finally going to stop?” “Forgive me everything,” whispered the hunger artist. Only the supervisor, who was pressing his ear up against the cage, understood him. “Certainly,” said the supervisor, tapping his forehead with his finger in order to indicate to the spectators the state the hunger artist was in, “we forgive you.” “I always wanted you to admire my fasting,” said the hunger artist. “But we do admire it,” said the supervisor obligingly. “But you shouldn’t admire it,” said the hunger artist. “Well then, we don’t admire it,” said the supervisor, “but why shouldn’t we admire it?” “Because I had to fast. I can’t do anything else,” said the hunger artist. “Just look at you,” said the supervisor, “why can’t you do anything else?” “Because,” said the hunger artist, lifting his head a little and, with his lips pursed as if for a kiss, speaking right into the supervisor’s ear so that he wouldn’t miss anything, “because I couldn’t find a food which I enjoyed. If I had found that, believe

me, I would not have made a spectacle of myself and would have eaten to my heart's content, like you and everyone else." Those were his last words, but in his failing eyes there was the firm, if no longer proud, conviction that he was continuing to fast.

"All right, tidy this up now," said the supervisor. And they buried the hunger artist along with the straw. But in his cage they put a young panther. Even for a person with the dullest mind it was clearly refreshing to see this wild animal throwing itself around in this cage, which had been dreary for such a long time. It lacked nothing. Without thinking about it for any length of time, the guards brought the animal food. It enjoyed the taste and never seemed to miss its freedom. This noble body, equipped with everything necessary, almost to the point of bursting, also appeared to carry freedom around with it. That seem to be located somewhere or other in its teeth, and its joy in living came with such strong passion from its throat that it was not easy for spectators to keep watching. But they controlled themselves, kept pressing around the cage, and had no desire to move on.

## 65. Rashōmon by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa

*Published: 1917*

It happened one evening. A lowly servant was under Rashōmon Gate, waiting for the rain to stop. Under the broad gate, there was no one but him. On one of the large round pillars whose red paint was peeling off in places, there was only a solitary katydid. Because the gate was located on Suzaku Boulevard, you would normally expect to find two or three other people there, waiting for the rain to let up. But there was nobody there but him.

You see, over the last two or three years there had been a series of disasters in Kyoto: earthquakes, whirlwinds, fires, and famines. The capital was falling apart in many different ways. According to old records, Buddhist statues and altars had been smashed, and their vermilion-lacquered and gold- or silver-foiled wood piled up on the side of the road and sold as kindling. Needless to say, with the capital in this condition, there was no one to repair the gate, and indeed, nobody even gave it a second thought. Taking advantage of this state of neglect, foxes and badgers began to live there. Robbers lived there. Eventually, it had even become customary to take unclaimed corpses to the gate and dump them there. So after sunset, people got scared, and nobody dared set foot near the gate after dark.

In their place, a large murder of crows had flocked there. During the day, countless birds could be seen flying around in circles while cawing at the high ornamental ridge-end tiles. They looked just like scattered sesame seeds, particularly when the sky above the gate turned red at sunset. The crows, of course, had come to peck at the flesh of the dead bodies on top of the gate. Today, however, perhaps because it was late, not a single bird could be seen. But what you could see were their white droppings, stuck in patches to the stone



steps, which were crumbling in places, with long weeds growing from the cracks. The servant, wearing a navy-blue kimono that had faded from over-washing, sat down on the seventh-and-top step of the stone staircase. He watched the rain fall while playing with a large pimple on his right cheek, lost in his own thoughts.

A little while ago, I wrote, “A lowly servant was waiting for the rain to stop”. However, even if the rain did stop, the servant still wouldn’t have anything to do. Normally, of course, he would have been expected to return to his master’s house, but he had been released from the service of his master four or five days before. As I wrote earlier, at this time, the city of Kyoto was deteriorating in many different ways. That this servant had been dismissed by his master, who had employed him for so many years, was merely another small side effect of this decline. So, rather than saying, “A lowly servant was waiting for the rain to stop”, it would have been more appropriate to say, “A lowly servant, trapped by the rain, had nowhere to go, and didn’t know what to do”. The weather that day further served to darken the mood of this [Heian-period](#) servant. The rain had started falling at a little after 4 PM, and it still showed no signs of letting up. For now, foremost on the servant’s mind was how he would make his living tomorrow – how he would get through this “hopeless situation”. As he tried to piece together his wandering thoughts, he listened pensively to the sound of the rain falling on Suzaku Boulevard.

The rain engulfed Rashōmon, and gales of rain from far away pounded down upon the gate with a tremendous noise. The darkness of night gradually set in from above, and if you were to look up, it might seem as if the large, gloomy clouds were suspended from the ends of the tiles that jutted out from the roof of the gate.

In order to somehow get through his “hopeless situation”, the servant might have to set his morals aside. If he refused to do things that he thought were morally questionable, then he would only end up starving to death under a roofed mud wall or on the side of the road. And then he would be taken to this gate, to be discarded, like a dog. “If I am willing to do whatever it takes to survive...” His

thoughts had circled through his head a number of times, and they had finally arrived here. But this “if” would always remain a mere hypothetical. For although the servant acknowledged that he had to do whatever he could to get by, he didn’t have the courage to bring the sentence to its foregone conclusion: “I am bound to become a thief.”

The servant sneezed, and he stood up wearily. Kyoto – so chilly in the evening – was already cold enough that he wished he had a brazier. The wind and the darkness blew mercilessly between the pillars of the gate. The katydid that had been sitting on the red pillar was long gone.

The servant tucked his head into his chest, hunched up his shoulders – clad in the blue kimono he wore over his thin yellow underclothes – and looked around the gate. “If there is a place where I won’t be bothered by the wind or the rain... a place where I won’t be seen... a place where it looks like I can sleep comfortably all night... then I will spend the night there”, he thought. Luckily, just then, he spotted the wide, red staircase that led to the tower atop the gate. The only people he might find up there would already be dead! So, the servant, being careful that his simple wooden-hilted sword did not slip out of its sheath, stepped on the bottom stair with his straw sandal.

It was a few minutes later. Halfway up the wide staircase leading to the top of the gate’s tower, the man held his breath, and, crouching like a cat, he looked up cautiously. The light of a fire shone down softly upon the man’s right cheek from the top of the tower. It was that same cheek, with the red pus-filled pimple among the stubble. The servant had taken for granted that everyone up there would already be dead. But when he climbed up two or three more steps, he saw that not only had someone had lit a fire up there, they seemed to be moving it back and forth... He could tell this from the way that the muddy, yellow light wavered in the spider webs hanging from every nook and cranny of the ceiling. A lighted fire... on this rainy night... and on top of this gate... Surely this could be no ordinary human.

The servant crept up to the top step of the steep staircase, his feet as silent as a gecko's. He straightened out his body as much as he could, stuck his neck out as far as possible, and cautiously peered into the tower. As the rumours had said, a number of corpses had been discarded in the tower, but the firelight wasn't as bright as he had expected, so he couldn't tell how many. Although the light was dim, what he did know was that some of the bodies were wearing kimonos and others were naked. Predictably, the corpses' numbers counted both men and woman, mixed together amongst the dead. The bodies looked so much like clay dolls, that you might doubt that any of them had ever even been alive. Their mouths open and their arms outstretched, they were strewn haphazardly across the floor. And while the higher parts of their bodies – like their chests and shoulders – caught some of the dim firelight, they cast shadows on the lower parts, and the corpses were as eternally silent as a mute.

The servant instinctively covered his nose from the putrid stench of the rotting bodies. But the next instant, his hand fell away from his face. A strong emotion had almost completely robbed him of his sense of smell.

It was at that moment that the servant first caught glimpse of the person squatting among the corpses. It was an emaciated little old white-haired woman in a dusky-red kimono. The old woman was carrying a lighted pine torch and staring at one of the corpses' faces. Judging from the length of its hair in places, it was probably the body of a woman.

For a while, moved by six parts fear and four parts curiosity, the servant forgot even to breathe. To borrow a phrase from the writers of the chronicles of old, he felt as if “the hairs on his head and body had grown thick”. The old woman thrust the handle of the pine torch into the space between the floorboards. She placed both hands on the corpse's head, and like a monkey picking the lice off its child, she began to pull out strands of the corpse's long hair, one-by-one. The hairs seemed to be coming out with very little effort.

Each time she plucked one of those hairs, the servant grew a little bit less frightened. And each time she plucked one of those hairs,

the intense hatred that he now felt for this woman grew a little bit stronger. No – it is probably misleading to say that he hated her, *per se*. Rather, it was a revulsion against all forms of evil, which was growing stronger by the minute. At that moment, if someone again raised the question that the servant had been thinking about under the gate – whether he would starve to death or become a criminal – the servant would almost certainly have chosen starvation, without an ounce of regret. Like the torch the old woman had jammed between the floorboards, this was how ardently the man's heart burned against all that was evil.

The servant, of course, didn't know why the old woman was pulling out the corpse's hair, so, rationally, he had no way of knowing if it was immoral or not. But for this servant, on this rainy night, on top of this gate, pulling out a dead woman's hair was an unforgivable sin. Of course, the servant had already forgotten that until very recently, he was considering becoming a robber himself.

The servant strained his legs, and, suddenly, leapt up from the stairs without warning. He strode over to the woman, his hand on the wooden hilt of his sword. Needless to say, the woman was scared out of her wits.

As soon as the old woman saw the servant, she sprung up as if she had been fired from a crossbow.

"You! Where are you going?"

The servant shouted. He stood firmly in the old woman's way, as she tripped over corpses in a frenzied attempt to escape. The old woman tried to shove him aside. But the servant still had no intention of letting her go, and he pushed her back. For a while, the two grappled among the corpses without saying a word. But the outcome of this battle was clear from the beginning. In the end, the servant grabbed the old woman's arm and wrenched her down to the floor. Her arm, like a chicken leg, was merely skin and bones.

"What were you doing? Well, what were you doing? SPEAK! If you don't tell me, you'll get THIS!"

The servant pushed the old woman away from him, and, suddenly, he drew his sword and thrust the pale white steel before her eyes.

But the old woman said nothing. Her hands shook uncontrollably, her shoulders heaved as she panted. Her eyes were open so wide that they looked like they were going to pop right out their sockets, but still, like a mute, she remained obstinately silent. Seeing this, the servant then realized that he held this woman's life in the palm of his hand. When he realized this, his heart, which had been burning so fiercely with hatred, cooled down, until all that remained were the feelings of pride and satisfaction that come with a job well done. The servant looked down at the woman, lowered his voice and said:

"I'm not an official from the police department or anything. I'm just a traveller who happened to be passing under the gate a moment ago. So I'm not going to tie you up or anything like that. But it would be best if you told me what you were doing on top of this gate just now."

The bug-eyed old woman opened her eyes even wider, and stared at the servant's face. She looked at him with the piercing red eyes of a bird of prey. And then, her lips – so wrinkled that they were almost a part of her nose – moved, as if she were chewing something. You could see her pointed Adam's apple moving in her gaunt throat. Then, from that throat, came a pant-broken voice that sounded like the cawing of a crow.

"I'm taking this hair... I'm taking this woman's hair to... Well, I thought I'd make a wig."

The servant was disappointed that the old woman's answer was so unexpectedly dull. Along with the disappointment, those old feelings of hatred and contempt came flooding back to him. And somehow, he must have conveyed these feelings to the old woman. With the hairs she had stolen from the corpse still clutched in one hand, she mumbled in a raspy, toadish voice:

"I see. Well, perhaps it is immoral to pull out the hairs of the dead. But these corpses up here – all of them – they were just the sort of people who wouldn't have minded. In fact, this woman whose hair I was just pulling out a moment ago – she used to cut snakes into 5-inch pieces, dry them, and go sell them at the camp of the crown prince's palace guard, saying it was dried fish. If she hadn't

died in the plague, she would probably still be going there now. And yet, the guards said this woman's dried fish tasted good, and they always bought it to go with their rice. I don't think what she did was immoral. If she hadn't done it, she would have starved to death, so, she just did what she had to. And this woman, who understood so well these things we have to do, would probably forgive me for what I'm doing to her too."

The old woman said something along those lines.

The servant put his sword back in its scabbard and rested his hand on its hilt while he listened to her story unsympathetically. Sure enough, while he listened, his right hand nursed the red pus-filled pimple on his cheek. As he was listening to her story, he felt the courage that he had lacked under the gate a few moments earlier building up inside him. It was leading him in the completely opposite direction of the courage he had when he climbed up the gate and grabbed the old woman. The servant was no longer debating whether to starve to death or become a thief. The way he felt now, the idea of starving to death was virtually unthinkable.

"That's definitely true," the servant agreed derisively when she had finished speaking. He took a step forward and suddenly tore his right hand away from the pimple. Grabbing the woman by the scruff of the neck, he said to her in a biting tone:

"Well then, you won't hold it against me if I try to steal your clothes. If I don't, you see, I too will starve."

The servant deftly stripped the woman of her kimono. She tried to cling to his leg, but he kicked her violently onto the corpses. The entrance to the stairwell was a mere five paces away. In the blink of an eye, the servant ran down the steep staircase and into the darkness, carrying the dusky-red kimono under his arm.

For a while, the old woman lay there as if she were dead, but it was only a short time before she lifted her naked body off the corpses. Whimpering, she crawled over to the stairs, by the light of her still-lit torch. She stuck her head into the stairwell door, and looked down to the bottom of the gate, her short white hair hanging upside down. But outside, there was only the pitch-black darkness of night.

Where the servant went to, nobody knows.

# 66. The Story of an Hour by Kate Chopin

*Published: 1894*

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which someone was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.



She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will—as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been. When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under the breath: “free, free, free!” The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial. She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind

intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

“Free! Body and soul free!” she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. “Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven’s sake open the door.”

“Go away. I am not making myself ill.” No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister’s importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister’s waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Someone was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine’s piercing cry; at Richards’ quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease – of the joy that kills.

## 67. Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton

I had the story, bit by bit, from various people, and, as generally happens in such cases, each time it was a different story.

If you know Starkfield, Massachusetts, you know the post-office. If you know the post-office you must have seen Ethan Frome drive up to it, drop the reins on his hollow-backed bay and drag himself across the brick pavement to the white colonnade; and you must have asked who he was.

It was there that, several years ago, I saw him for the first time; and the sight pulled me up sharp. Even then he was the most striking figure in Starkfield, though he was but the ruin of a man. It was not so much his great height that marked him, for the “natives” were easily singled out by their lank longitude from the stockier foreign breed: it was the careless powerful look he had, in spite of a lameness checking each step like the jerk of a chain. There was something bleak and unapproachable in his face, and he was so stiffened and grizzled that I took him for an old man and was surprised to hear that he was not more than fifty-two. I had this from Harmon Gow, who had driven the stage from Bettsbridge to Starkfield in pre-trolley days and knew the chronicle of all the families on his line.

“He’s looked that way ever since he had his smash-up; and that’s twenty-four years ago come next February,” Harmon threw out between reminiscent pauses.

The “smash-up” it was—I gathered from the same informant—which, besides drawing the red gash across Ethan Frome’s forehead, had so shortened and warped his right side that it cost him a visible effort to take the few steps from his buggy to the post-office window. He used to drive in from his farm every day at about noon, and as that was my own hour for fetching my

mail I often passed him in the porch or stood beside him while we waited on the motions of the distributing hand behind the grating. I noticed that, though he came so punctually, he seldom received anything but a copy of the Bettsbridge Eagle, which he put without a glance into his sagging pocket. At intervals, however, the post-master would hand him an envelope addressed to Mrs. Zenobia—or Mrs. Zeena—Frome, and usually bearing conspicuously in the upper left-hand corner the address of some manufacturer of patent medicine and the name of his specific. These documents my neighbour would also pocket without a glance, as if too much used to them to wonder at their number and variety, and would then turn away with a silent nod to the post-master.

Every one in Starkfield knew him and gave him a greeting tempered to his own grave mien; but his taciturnity was respected and it was only on rare occasions that one of the older men of the place detained him for a word. When this happened he would listen quietly, his blue eyes on the speaker's face, and answer in so low a tone that his words never reached me; then he would climb stiffly into his buggy, gather up the reins in his left hand and drive slowly away in the direction of his farm.

"It was a pretty bad smash-up?" I questioned Harmon, looking after Frome's retreating figure, and thinking how gallantly his lean brown head, with its shock of light hair, must have sat on his strong shoulders before they were bent out of shape.

"Wust kind," my informant assented. "More'n enough to kill most men. But the Fromes are tough. Ethan'll likely touch a hundred."

"Good God!" I exclaimed. At the moment Ethan Frome, after climbing to his seat, had leaned over to assure himself of the security of a wooden box—also with a druggist's label on it—which he had placed in the back of the buggy, and I saw his face as it probably looked when he thought himself alone. "That man touch a hundred? He looks as if he was dead and in hell now!"

Harmon drew a slab of tobacco from his pocket, cut off a wedge and pressed it into the leather pouch of his cheek. "Guess he's been in Starkfield too many winters. Most of the smart ones get away."

"Why didn't he?"

"Somebody had to stay and care for the folks. There warn't ever anybody but Ethan. Fust his father—then his mother—then his wife."

"And then the smash-up?"

Harmon chuckled sardonically. "That's so. He had to stay then."

"I see. And since then they've had to care for him?"

Harmon thoughtfully passed his tobacco to the other cheek. "Oh, as to that: I guess it's always Ethan done the caring."

Though Harmon Gow developed the tale as far as his mental and moral reach permitted there were perceptible gaps between his facts, and I had the sense that the deeper meaning of the story was in the gaps. But one phrase stuck in my memory and served as the nucleus about which I grouped my subsequent inferences: "Guess he's been in Starkfield too many winters."

Before my own time there was up I had learned to know what that meant. Yet I had come in the degenerate day of trolley, bicycle and rural delivery, when communication was easy between the scattered mountain villages, and the bigger towns in the valleys, such as Bettsbridge and Shadd's Falls, had libraries, theatres and Y. M. C. A. halls to which the youth of the hills could descend for recreation. But when winter shut down on Starkfield and the village lay under a sheet of snow perpetually renewed from the pale skies, I began to see what life there—or rather its negation—must have been in Ethan Frome's young manhood.

I had been sent up by my employers on a job connected with the big power-house at Corbury Junction, and a long-drawn carpenters' strike had so delayed the work that I found myself anchored at Starkfield—the nearest habitable spot—for the best part of the winter. I chafed at first, and then, under the hypnotising effect of routine, gradually began to find a grim satisfaction in the life. During the early part of my stay I had been struck by the contrast between the vitality of the climate and the deadness of the community. Day by day, after the December snows were over, a blazing blue sky poured down torrents of light and air on the white landscape, which gave them back in an intenser glitter. One would have supposed

that such an atmosphere must quicken the emotions as well as the blood; but it seemed to produce no change except that of retarding still more the sluggish pulse of Starkfield. When I had been there a little longer, and had seen this phase of crystal clearness followed by long stretches of sunless cold; when the storms of February had pitched their white tents about the devoted village and the wild cavalry of March winds had charged down to their support; I began to understand why Starkfield emerged from its six months' siege like a starved garrison capitulating without quarter. Twenty years earlier the means of resistance must have been far fewer, and the enemy in command of almost all the lines of access between the beleaguered villages; and, considering these things, I felt the sinister force of Harmon's phrase: "Most of the smart ones get away." But if that were the case, how could any combination of obstacles have hindered the flight of a man like Ethan Frome?

During my stay at Starkfield I lodged with a middle-aged widow colloquially known as Mrs. Ned Hale. Mrs. Hale's father had been the village lawyer of the previous generation, and "lawyer Varnum's house," where my landlady still lived with her mother, was the most considerable mansion in the village. It stood at one end of the main street, its classic portico and small-paned windows looking down a flagged path between Norway spruces to the slim white steeple of the Congregational church. It was clear that the Varnum fortunes were at the ebb, but the two women did what they could to preserve a decent dignity; and Mrs. Hale, in particular, had a certain wan refinement not out of keeping with her pale old-fashioned house.

In the "best parlour," with its black horse-hair and mahogany weakly illuminated by a gurgling Carcel lamp, I listened every evening to another and more delicately shaded version of the Starkfield chronicle. It was not that Mrs. Ned Hale felt, or affected, any social superiority to the people about her; it was only that the accident of a finer sensibility and a little more education had put just enough distance between herself and her neighbours to enable her to judge them with detachment. She was not unwilling to exercise this faculty, and I had great hopes of getting from her

the missing facts of Ethan Frome's story, or rather such a key to his character as should co-ordinate the facts I knew. Her mind was a store-house of innocuous anecdote and any question about her acquaintances brought forth a volume of detail; but on the subject of Ethan Frome I found her unexpectedly reticent. There was no hint of disapproval in her reserve; I merely felt in her an insurmountable reluctance to speak of him or his affairs, a low "Yes, I knew them both... it was awful..." seeming to be the utmost concession that her distress could make to my curiosity.

So marked was the change in her manner, such depths of sad initiation did it imply, that, with some doubts as to my delicacy, I put the case anew to my village oracle, Harmon Gow; but got for my pains only an uncomprehending grunt.

"Ruth Varnum was always as nervous as a rat; and, come to think of it, she was the first one to see 'em after they was picked up. It happened right below lawyer Varnum's, down at the bend of the Corbury road, just round about the time that Ruth got engaged to Ned Hale. The young folks was all friends, and I guess she just can't bear to talk about it. She's had troubles enough of her own."

All the dwellers in Starkfield, as in more notable communities, had had troubles enough of their own to make them comparatively indifferent to those of their neighbours; and though all conceded that Ethan Frome's had been beyond the common measure, no one gave me an explanation of the look in his face which, as I persisted in thinking, neither poverty nor physical suffering could have put there. Nevertheless, I might have contented myself with the story pieced together from these hints had it not been for the provocation of Mrs. Hale's silence, and—a little later—for the accident of personal contact with the man.

On my arrival at Starkfield, Denis Eady, the rich Irish grocer, who was the proprietor of Starkfield's nearest approach to a livery stable, had entered into an agreement to send me over daily to Corbury Flats, where I had to pick up my train for the Junction. But about the middle of the winter Eady's horses fell ill of a local epidemic. The illness spread to the other Starkfield stables and for a day or

two I was put to it to find a means of transport. Then Harmon Gow suggested that Ethan Frome's bay was still on his legs and that his owner might be glad to drive me over.

I stared at the suggestion. "Ethan Frome? But I've never even spoken to him. Why on earth should he put himself out for me?"

Harmon's answer surprised me still more. "I don't know as he would; but I know he wouldn't be sorry to earn a dollar."

I had been told that Frome was poor, and that the saw-mill and the arid acres of his farm yielded scarcely enough to keep his household through the winter; but I had not supposed him to be in such want as Harmon's words implied, and I expressed my wonder.

"Well, matters ain't gone any too well with him," Harmon said. "When a man's been setting round like a hulk for twenty years or more, seeing things that want doing, it eats inter him, and he loses his grit. That Frome farm was always 'bout as bare's a milkpan when the cat's been round; and you know what one of them old water-mills is wuth nowadays. When Ethan could sweat over 'em both from sunup to dark he kinder choked a living out of 'em; but his folks ate up most everything, even then, and I don't see how he makes out now. Fust his father got a kick, out haying, and went soft in the brain, and gave away money like Bible texts afore he died. Then his mother got queer and dragged along for years as weak as a baby; and his wife Zeena, she's always been the greatest hand at doctoring in the county. Sickness and trouble: that's what Ethan's had his plate full up with, ever since the very first helping."

The next morning, when I looked out, I saw the hollow-backed bay between the Varnum spruces, and Ethan Frome, throwing back his worn bearskin, made room for me in the sleigh at his side. After that, for a week, he drove me over every morning to Corbury Flats, and on my return in the afternoon met me again and carried me back through the icy night to Starkfield. The distance each way was barely three miles, but the old bay's pace was slow, and even with firm snow under the runners we were nearly an hour on the way. Ethan Frome drove in silence, the reins loosely held in his left hand, his brown seamed profile, under the helmet-like peak of the



cap, relieved against the banks of snow like the bronze image of a hero. He never turned his face to mine, or answered, except in monosyllables, the questions I put, or such slight pleasantries as I ventured. He seemed a part of the mute melancholy landscape, an incarnation of its frozen woe, with all that was warm and sentient in him fast bound below the surface; but there was nothing unfriendly in his silence. I simply felt that he lived in a depth of moral isolation too remote for casual access, and I had the sense that his loneliness was not merely the result of his personal plight, tragic as I guessed that to be, but had in it, as Harmon Gow had hinted, the profound accumulated cold of many Starkfield winters.

Only once or twice was the distance between us bridged for a moment; and the glimpses thus gained confirmed my desire to know more. Once I happened to speak of an engineering job I had been on the previous year in Florida, and of the contrast between the winter landscape about us and that in which I had found myself the year before; and to my surprise Frome said suddenly: "Yes: I was down there once, and for a good while afterward I could call up the sight of it in winter. But now it's all snowed under."

He said no more, and I had to guess the rest from the inflection of his voice and his sharp relapse into silence.

Another day, on getting into my train at the Flats, I missed a volume of popular science—I think it was on some recent discoveries in bio-chemistry—which I had carried with me to read on the way. I thought no more about it till I got into the sleigh again that evening, and saw the book in Frome's hand.

"I found it after you were gone," he said.

I put the volume into my pocket and we dropped back into our usual silence; but as we began to crawl up the long hill from Corbury Flats to the Starkfield ridge I became aware in the dusk that he had turned his face to mine.

"There are things in that book that I didn't know the first word about," he said.

I wondered less at his words than at the queer note of resentment

in his voice. He was evidently surprised and slightly aggrieved at his own ignorance.

“Does that sort of thing interest you?” I asked.

“It used to.”

“There are one or two rather new things in the book: there have been some big strides lately in that particular line of research.” I waited a moment for an answer that did not come; then I said: “If you’d like to look the book through I’d be glad to leave it with you.”

He hesitated, and I had the impression that he felt himself about to yield to a stealing tide of inertia; then, “Thank you—I’ll take it,” he answered shortly.

I hoped that this incident might set up some more direct communication between us. Frome was so simple and straightforward that I was sure his curiosity about the book was based on a genuine interest in its subject. Such tastes and acquirements in a man of his condition made the contrast more poignant between his outer situation and his inner needs, and I hoped that the chance of giving expression to the latter might at least unseal his lips. But something in his past history, or in his present way of living, had apparently driven him too deeply into himself for any casual impulse to draw him back to his kind. At our next meeting he made no allusion to the book, and our intercourse seemed fated to remain as negative and one-sided as if there had been no break in his reserve.

Frome had been driving me over to the Flats for about a week when one morning I looked out of my window into a thick snow-fall. The height of the white waves massed against the garden-fence and along the wall of the church showed that the storm must have been going on all night, and that the drifts were likely to be heavy in the open. I thought it probable that my train would be delayed; but I had to be at the power-house for an hour or two that afternoon, and I decided, if Frome turned up, to push through to the Flats and wait there till my train came in. I don’t know why I put it in the conditional, however, for I never doubted that Frome would appear. He was not the kind of man to be turned from his business

by any commotion of the elements; and at the appointed hour his sleigh glided up through the snow like a stage-apparition behind thickening veils of gauze.

I was getting to know him too well to express either wonder or gratitude at his keeping his appointment; but I exclaimed in surprise as I saw him turn his horse in a direction opposite to that of the Corbury road.

"The railroad's blocked by a freight-train that got stuck in a drift below the Flats," he explained, as we jogged off into the stinging whiteness.

"But look here—where are you taking me, then?"

"Straight to the Junction, by the shortest way," he answered, pointing up School House Hill with his whip.

"To the Junction—in this storm? Why, it's a good ten miles!"

"The bay'll do it if you give him time. You said you had some business there this afternoon. I'll see you get there."

He said it so quietly that I could only answer: "You're doing me the biggest kind of a favour."

"That's all right," he rejoined.

Abreast of the schoolhouse the road forked, and we dipped down a lane to the left, between hemlock boughs bent inward to their trunks by the weight of the snow. I had often walked that way on Sundays, and knew that the solitary roof showing through bare branches near the bottom of the hill was that of Frome's saw-mill. It looked exanimate enough, with its idle wheel looming above the black stream dashed with yellow-white spume, and its cluster of sheds sagging under their white load. Frome did not even turn his head as we drove by, and still in silence we began to mount the next slope. About a mile farther, on a road I had never travelled, we came to an orchard of starved apple-trees writhing over a hillside among outcroppings of slate that nuzzled up through the snow like animals pushing out their noses to breathe. Beyond the orchard lay a field or two, their boundaries lost under drifts; and above the fields, huddled against the white immensities of land and sky, one

of those lonely New England farm-houses that make the landscape lonelier.

“That’s my place,” said Frome, with a sideways jerk of his lame elbow; and in the distress and oppression of the scene I did not know what to answer. The snow had ceased, and a flash of watery sunlight exposed the house on the slope above us in all its plaintive ugliness. The black wraith of a deciduous creeper flapped from the porch, and the thin wooden walls, under their worn coat of paint, seemed to shiver in the wind that had risen with the ceasing of the snow.

“The house was bigger in my father’s time: I had to take down the ‘L,’ a while back,” Frome continued, checking with a twitch of the left rein the bay’s evident intention of turning in through the broken-down gate.

I saw then that the unusually forlorn and stunted look of the house was partly due to the loss of what is known in New England as the “L”: that long deep-roofed adjunct usually built at right angles to the main house, and connecting it, by way of storerooms and tool-house, with the wood-shed and cow-barn. Whether because of its symbolic sense, the image it presents of a life linked with the soil, and enclosing in itself the chief sources of warmth and nourishment, or whether merely because of the consolatory thought that it enables the dwellers in that harsh climate to get to their morning’s work without facing the weather, it is certain that the “L” rather than the house itself seems to be the centre, the actual hearth-stone of the New England farm. Perhaps this connection of ideas, which had often occurred to me in my rambles about Starkfield, caused me to hear a wistful note in Frome’s words, and to see in the diminished dwelling the image of his own shrunken body.

“We’re kinder side-tracked here now,” he added, “but there was considerable passing before the railroad was carried through to the Flats.” He roused the lagging bay with another twitch; then, as if the mere sight of the house had let me too deeply into his confidence for any farther pretence of reserve, he went on slowly: “I’ve always set down the worst of mother’s trouble to that. When she got the

rheumatism so bad she couldn't move around she used to sit up there and watch the road by the hour; and one year, when they was six months mending the Bettsbridge pike after the floods, and Harmon Gow had to bring his stage round this way, she picked up so that she used to get down to the gate most days to see him. But after the trains begun running nobody ever come by here to speak of, and mother never could get it through her head what had happened, and it preyed on her right along till she died."

As we turned into the Corbury road the snow began to fall again, cutting off our last glimpse of the house; and Frome's silence fell with it, letting down between us the old veil of reticence. This time the wind did not cease with the return of the snow. Instead, it sprang up to a gale which now and then, from a tattered sky, flung pale sweeps of sunlight over a landscape chaotically tossed. But the bay was as good as Frome's word, and we pushed on to the Junction through the wild white scene.

In the afternoon the storm held off, and the clearness in the west seemed to my inexperienced eye the pledge of a fair evening. I finished my business as quickly as possible, and we set out for Starkfield with a good chance of getting there for supper. But at sunset the clouds gathered again, bringing an earlier night, and the snow began to fall straight and steadily from a sky without wind, in a soft universal diffusion more confusing than the gusts and eddies of the morning. It seemed to be a part of the thickening darkness, to be the winter night itself descending on us layer by layer.

The small ray of Frome's lantern was soon lost in this smothering medium, in which even his sense of direction, and the bay's homing instinct, finally ceased to serve us. Two or three times some ghostly landmark sprang up to warn us that we were astray, and then was sucked back into the mist; and when we finally regained our road the old horse began to show signs of exhaustion. I felt myself to blame for having accepted Frome's offer, and after a short discussion I persuaded him to let me get out of the sleigh and walk along through the snow at the bay's side. In this way we struggled on for another mile or two, and at last reached a point where Frome,

peering into what seemed to me formless night, said: "That's my gate down yonder."

The last stretch had been the hardest part of the way. The bitter cold and the heavy going had nearly knocked the wind out of me, and I could feel the horse's side ticking like a clock under my hand.

"Look here, Frome," I began, "there's no earthly use in your going any farther—" but he interrupted me: "Nor you neither. There's been about enough of this for anybody."

I understood that he was offering me a night's shelter at the farm, and without answering I turned into the gate at his side, and followed him to the barn, where I helped him to unharness and bed down the tired horse. When this was done he unhooked the lantern from the sleigh, stepped out again into the night, and called to me over his shoulder: "This way."

Far off above us a square of light trembled through the screen of snow. Staggering along in Frome's wake I floundered toward it, and in the darkness almost fell into one of the deep drifts against the front of the house. Frome scrambled up the slippery steps of the porch, digging a way through the snow with his heavily booted foot. Then he lifted his lantern, found the latch, and led the way into the house. I went after him into a low unlit passage, at the back of which a ladder-like staircase rose into obscurity. On our right a line of light marked the door of the room which had sent its ray across the night; and behind the door I heard a woman's voice droning querulously.

Frome stamped on the worn oil-cloth to shake the snow from his boots, and set down his lantern on a kitchen chair which was the only piece of furniture in the hall. Then he opened the door.

"Come in," he said; and as he spoke the droning voice grew still...

It was that night that I found the clue to Ethan Frome, and began to put together this vision of his story.

# I

The village lay under two feet of snow, with drifts at the windy corners. In a sky of iron the points of the Dipper hung like icicles and Orion flashed his cold fires. The moon had set, but the night was so transparent that the white house-fronts between the elms looked gray against the snow, clumps of bushes made black stains on it, and the basement windows of the church sent shafts of yellow light far across the endless undulations.

Young Ethan Frome walked at a quick pace along the deserted street, past the bank and Michael Eady's new brick store and Lawyer Varnum's house with the two black Norway spruces at the gate. Opposite the Varnum gate, where the road fell away toward the Corbury valley, the church reared its slim white steeple and narrow peristyle. As the young man walked toward it the upper windows drew a black arcade along the side wall of the building, but from the lower openings, on the side where the ground sloped steeply down to the Corbury road, the light shot its long bars, illuminating many fresh furrows in the track leading to the basement door, and showing, under an adjoining shed, a line of sleighs with heavily blanketed horses.

The night was perfectly still, and the air so dry and pure that it gave little sensation of cold. The effect produced on Frome was rather of a complete absence of atmosphere, as though nothing less tenuous than ether intervened between the white earth under his feet and the metallic dome overhead. "It's like being in an exhausted receiver," he thought. Four or five years earlier he had taken a year's course at a technological college at Worcester, and dabbled in the laboratory with a friendly professor of physics; and the images supplied by that experience still cropped up, at unexpected moments, through the totally different associations of thought in which he had since been living. His father's death, and the misfortunes following it, had put a premature end to Ethan's studies; but though they had not gone far enough to be of much practical

use they had fed his fancy and made him aware of huge cloudy meanings behind the daily face of things.

As he strode along through the snow the sense of such meanings glowed in his brain and mingled with the bodily flush produced by his sharp tramp. At the end of the village he paused before the darkened front of the church. He stood there a moment, breathing quickly, and looking up and down the street, in which not another figure moved. The pitch of the Corbury road, below lawyer Varnum's spruces, was the favourite coasting-ground of Starkfield, and on clear evenings the church corner rang till late with the shouts of the coasters; but to-night not a sled darkened the whiteness of the long declivity. The hush of midnight lay on the village, and all its waking life was gathered behind the church windows, from which strains of dance-music flowed with the broad bands of yellow light.

The young man, skirting the side of the building, went down the slope toward the basement door. To keep out of range of the revealing rays from within he made a circuit through the untrodden snow and gradually approached the farther angle of the basement wall. Thence, still hugging the shadow, he edged his way cautiously forward to the nearest window, holding back his straight spare body and craning his neck till he got a glimpse of the room.

Seen thus, from the pure and frosty darkness in which he stood, it seemed to be seething in a mist of heat. The metal reflectors of the gas-jets sent crude waves of light against the whitewashed walls, and the iron flanks of the stove at the end of the hall looked as though they were heaving with volcanic fires. The floor was thronged with girls and young men. Down the side wall facing the window stood a row of kitchen chairs from which the older women had just risen. By this time the music had stopped, and the musicians—a fiddler, and the young lady who played the harmonium on Sundays—were hastily refreshing themselves at one corner of the supper-table which aligned its devastated pie-dishes and ice-cream saucers on the platform at the end of the hall. The guests were preparing to leave, and the tide had already set toward the passage where coats and wraps were hung, when a young man with



a sprightly foot and a shock of black hair shot into the middle of the floor and clapped his hands. The signal took instant effect. The musicians hurried to their instruments, the dancers—some already half-muffled for departure—fell into line down each side of the room, the older spectators slipped back to their chairs, and the lively young man, after diving about here and there in the throng, drew forth a girl who had already wound a cherry-coloured “fascinator” about her head, and, leading her up to the end of the floor, whirled her down its length to the bounding tune of a Virginia reel.

Frome’s heart was beating fast. He had been straining for a glimpse of the dark head under the cherry-coloured scarf and it vexed him that another eye should have been quicker than his. The leader of the reel, who looked as if he had Irish blood in his veins, danced well, and his partner caught his fire. As she passed down the line, her light figure swinging from hand to hand in circles of increasing swiftness, the scarf flew off her head and stood out behind her shoulders, and Frome, at each turn, caught sight of her laughing panting lips, the cloud of dark hair about her forehead, and the dark eyes which seemed the only fixed points in a maze of flying lines.

The dancers were going faster and faster, and the musicians, to keep up with them, belaboured their instruments like jockeys lashing their mounts on the home-stretch; yet it seemed to the young man at the window that the reel would never end. Now and then he turned his eyes from the girl’s face to that of her partner, which, in the exhilaration of the dance, had taken on a look of almost impudent ownership. Denis Eady was the son of Michael Eady, the ambitious Irish grocer, whose suppleness and effrontery had given Starkfield its first notion of “smart” business methods, and whose new brick store testified to the success of the attempt. His son seemed likely to follow in his steps, and was meanwhile applying the same arts to the conquest of the Starkfield maidenhood. Hitherto Ethan Frome had been content to think him a mean fellow; but now he positively invited a horse-whipping. It was strange that the girl

did not seem aware of it: that she could lift her rapt face to her dancer's, and drop her hands into his, without appearing to feel the offence of his look and touch.

Frome was in the habit of walking into Starkfield to fetch home his wife's cousin, Mattie Silver, on the rare evenings when some chance of amusement drew her to the village. It was his wife who had suggested, when the girl came to live with them, that such opportunities should be put in her way. Mattie Silver came from Stamford, and when she entered the Fromes' household to act as her cousin Zeena's aid it was thought best, as she came without pay, not to let her feel too sharp a contrast between the life she had left and the isolation of a Starkfield farm. But for this—as Frome sardonically reflected—it would hardly have occurred to Zeena to take any thought for the girl's amusement.

When his wife first proposed that they should give Mattie an occasional evening out he had inwardly demurred at having to do the extra two miles to the village and back after his hard day on the farm; but not long afterward he had reached the point of wishing that Starkfield might give all its nights to revelry.

Mattie Silver had lived under his roof for a year, and from early morning till they met at supper he had frequent chances of seeing her; but no moments in her company were comparable to those when, her arm in his, and her light step flying to keep time with his long stride, they walked back through the night to the farm. He had taken to the girl from the first day, when he had driven over to the Flats to meet her, and she had smiled and waved to him from the train, crying out, "You must be Ethan!" as she jumped down with her bundles, while he reflected, looking over her slight person: "She don't look much on housework, but she ain't a fretter, anyhow." But it was not only that the coming to his house of a bit of hopeful young life was like the lighting of a fire on a cold hearth. The girl was more than the bright serviceable creature he had thought her. She had an eye to see and an ear to hear: he could show her things and tell her things, and taste the bliss of feeling that all he imparted left long reverberations and echoes he could wake at will.

It was during their night walks back to the farm that he felt most intensely the sweetness of this communion. He had always been more sensitive than the people about him to the appeal of natural beauty. His unfinished studies had given form to this sensibility and even in his unhappiest moments field and sky spoke to him with a deep and powerful persuasion. But hitherto the emotion had remained in him as a silent ache, veiling with sadness the beauty that evoked it. He did not even know whether any one else in the world felt as he did, or whether he was the sole victim of this mournful privilege. Then he learned that one other spirit had trembled with the same touch of wonder: that at his side, living under his roof and eating his bread, was a creature to whom he could say: "That's Orion down yonder; the big fellow to the right is Aldebaran, and the bunch of little ones—like bees swarming—they're the Pleiades..." or whom he could hold entranced before a ledge of granite thrusting up through the fern while he unrolled the huge panorama of the ice age, and the long dim stretches of succeeding time. The fact that admiration for his learning mingled with Mattie's wonder at what he taught was not the least part of his pleasure. And there were other sensations, less definable but more exquisite, which drew them together with a shock of silent joy: the cold red of sunset behind winter hills, the flight of cloud-flocks over slopes of golden stubble, or the intensely blue shadows of hemlocks on sunlit snow. When she said to him once: "It looks just as if it was painted!" it seemed to Ethan that the art of definition could go no farther, and that words had at last been found to utter his secret soul...

As he stood in the darkness outside the church these memories came back with the poignancy of vanished things. Watching Mattie whirl down the floor from hand to hand he wondered how he could ever have thought that his dull talk interested her. To him, who was never gay but in her presence, her gaiety seemed plain proof of indifference. The face she lifted to her dancers was the same which, when she saw him, always looked like a window that has caught the sunset. He even noticed two or three gestures which, in his fatuity, he had thought she kept for him: a way of throwing her head back

when she was amused, as if to taste her laugh before she let it out, and a trick of sinking her lids slowly when anything charmed or moved her.

The sight made him unhappy, and his unhappiness roused his latent fears. His wife had never shown any jealousy of Mattie, but of late she had grumbled increasingly over the house-work and found oblique ways of attracting attention to the girl's inefficiency. Zeena had always been what Starkfield called "sickly," and Frome had to admit that, if she were as ailing as she believed, she needed the help of a stronger arm than the one which lay so lightly in his during the night walks to the farm. Mattie had no natural turn for housekeeping, and her training had done nothing to remedy the defect. She was quick to learn, but forgetful and dreamy, and not disposed to take the matter seriously. Ethan had an idea that if she were to marry a man she was fond of the dormant instinct would wake, and her pies and biscuits become the pride of the county; but domesticity in the abstract did not interest her. At first she was so awkward that he could not help laughing at her; but she laughed with him and that made them better friends. He did his best to supplement her unskilled efforts, getting up earlier than usual to light the kitchen fire, carrying in the wood overnight, and neglecting the mill for the farm that he might help her about the house during the day. He even crept down on Saturday nights to scrub the kitchen floor after the women had gone to bed; and Zeena, one day, had surprised him at the churn and had turned away silently, with one of her queer looks.

Of late there had been other signs of her disfavour, as intangible but more disquieting. One cold winter morning, as he dressed in the dark, his candle flickering in the draught of the ill-fitting window, he had heard her speak from the bed behind him.

"The doctor don't want I should be left without anybody to do for me," she said in her flat whine.

He had supposed her to be asleep, and the sound of her voice had startled him, though she was given to abrupt explosions of speech after long intervals of secretive silence.

He turned and looked at her where she lay indistinctly outlined under the dark calico quilt, her high-boned face taking a grayish tinge from the whiteness of the pillow.

"Nobody to do for you?" he repeated.

"If you say you can't afford a hired girl when Mattie goes."

Frome turned away again, and taking up his razor stooped to catch the reflection of his stretched cheek in the blotched looking-glass above the wash-stand.

"Why on earth should Mattie go?"

"Well, when she gets married, I mean," his wife's drawl came from behind him.

"Oh, she'd never leave us as long as you needed her," he returned, scraping hard at his chin.

"I wouldn't ever have it said that I stood in the way of a poor girl like Mattie marrying a smart fellow like Denis Eady," Zeena answered in a tone of plaintive self-effacement.

Ethan, glaring at his face in the glass, threw his head back to draw the razor from ear to chin. His hand was steady, but the attitude was an excuse for not making an immediate reply.

"And the doctor don't want I should be left without anybody," Zeena continued. "He wanted I should speak to you about a girl he's heard about, that might come—"

Ethan laid down the razor and straightened himself with a laugh.

"Denis Eady! If that's all, I guess there's no such hurry to look round for a girl."

"Well, I'd like to talk to you about it," said Zeena obstinately.

He was getting into his clothes in fumbling haste. "All right. But I haven't got the time now; I'm late as it is," he returned, holding his old silver turnip-watch to the candle.

Zeena, apparently accepting this as final, lay watching him in silence while he pulled his suspenders over his shoulders and jerked his arms into his coat; but as he went toward the door she said, suddenly and incisively: "I guess you're always late, now you shave every morning."

That thrust had frightened him more than any vague insinuations

about Denis Eady. It was a fact that since Mattie Silver's coming he had taken to shaving every day; but his wife always seemed to be asleep when he left her side in the winter darkness, and he had stupidly assumed that she would not notice any change in his appearance. Once or twice in the past he had been faintly disquieted by Zenobia's way of letting things happen without seeming to remark them, and then, weeks afterward, in a casual phrase, revealing that she had all along taken her notes and drawn her inferences. Of late, however, there had been no room in his thoughts for such vague apprehensions. Zeena herself, from an oppressive reality, had faded into an insubstantial shade. All his life was lived in the sight and sound of Mattie Silver, and he could no longer conceive of its being otherwise. But now, as he stood outside the church, and saw Mattie spinning down the floor with Denis Eady, a throng of disregarded hints and menaces wove their cloud about his brain....

## II

As the dancers poured out of the hall Frome, drawing back behind the projecting storm-door, watched the segregation of the grotesquely muffled groups, in which a moving lantern ray now and then lit up a face flushed with food and dancing. The villagers, being afoot, were the first to climb the slope to the main street, while the country neighbours packed themselves more slowly into the sleighs under the shed.

"Ain't you riding, Mattie?" a woman's voice called back from the throng about the shed, and Ethan's heart gave a jump. From where he stood he could not see the persons coming out of the hall till they had advanced a few steps beyond the wooden sides of the storm-door; but through its cracks he heard a clear voice answer: "Mercy no! Not on such a night."

She was there, then, close to him, only a thin board between.

In another moment she would step forth into the night, and his eyes, accustomed to the obscurity, would discern her as clearly as though she stood in daylight. A wave of shyness pulled him back into the dark angle of the wall, and he stood there in silence instead of making his presence known to her. It had been one of the wonders of their intercourse that from the first, she, the quicker, finer, more expressive, instead of crushing him by the contrast, had given him something of her own ease and freedom; but now he felt as heavy and loutish as in his student days, when he had tried to “jolly” the Worcester girls at a picnic.

He hung back, and she came out alone and paused within a few yards of him. She was almost the last to leave the hall, and she stood looking uncertainly about her as if wondering why he did not show himself. Then a man’s figure approached, coming so close to her that under their formless wrappings they seemed merged in one dim outline.

“Gentleman friend gone back on you? Say, Matt, that’s tough! No, I wouldn’t be mean enough to tell the other girls. I ain’t as low-down as that.” (How Frome hated his cheap banter!) “But look at here, ain’t it lucky I got the old man’s cutter down there waiting for us?”

Frome heard the girl’s voice, gaily incredulous: “What on earth’s your father’s cutter doin’ down there?”

“Why, waiting for me to take a ride. I got the roan colt too. I kinder knew I’d want to take a ride to-night,” Eady, in his triumph, tried to put a sentimental note into his bragging voice.

The girl seemed to waver, and Frome saw her twirl the end of her scarf irresolutely about her fingers. Not for the world would he have made a sign to her, though it seemed to him that his life hung on her next gesture.

“Hold on a minute while I unhitch the colt,” Denis called to her, springing toward the shed.

She stood perfectly still, looking after him, in an attitude of tranquil expectancy torturing to the hidden watcher. Frome noticed that she no longer turned her head from side to side, as though peering through the night for another figure. She let Denis Eady

lead out the horse, climb into the cutter and fling back the bearskin to make room for her at his side; then, with a swift motion of flight, she turned about and darted up the slope toward the front of the church.

“Good-bye! Hope you’ll have a lovely ride!” she called back to him over her shoulder.

Denis laughed, and gave the horse a cut that brought him quickly abreast of her retreating figure.

“Come along! Get in quick! It’s as slippery as thunder on this turn,” he cried, leaning over to reach out a hand to her.

She laughed back at him: “Good-night! I’m not getting in.”

By this time they had passed beyond Frome’s earshot and he could only follow the shadowy pantomime of their silhouettes as they continued to move along the crest of the slope above him. He saw Eady, after a moment, jump from the cutter and go toward the girl with the reins over one arm. The other he tried to slip through hers; but she eluded him nimbly, and Frome’s heart, which had swung out over a black void, trembled back to safety. A moment later he heard the jingle of departing sleigh bells and discerned a figure advancing alone toward the empty expanse of snow before the church.

In the black shade of the Varnum spruces he caught up with her and she turned with a quick “Oh!”

“Think I’d forgotten you, Matt?” he asked with sheepish glee.

She answered seriously: “I thought maybe you couldn’t come back for me.”

“Couldn’t? What on earth could stop me?”

“I knew Zeena wasn’t feeling any too good to-day.”

“Oh, she’s in bed long ago.” He paused, a question struggling in him. “Then you meant to walk home all alone?”

“Oh, I ain’t afraid!” she laughed.

They stood together in the gloom of the spruces, an empty world glimmering about them wide and grey under the stars. He brought his question out.

“If you thought I hadn’t come, why didn’t you ride back with Denis Eady?”



“Why, where were you? How did you know? I never saw you!”

Her wonder and his laughter ran together like spring rills in a thaw. Ethan had the sense of having done something arch and ingenious. To prolong the effect he groped for a dazzling phrase, and brought out, in a growl of rapture: “Come along.”

He slipped an arm through hers, as Eady had done, and fancied it was faintly pressed against her side, but neither of them moved. It was so dark under the spruces that he could barely see the shape of her head beside his shoulder. He longed to stoop his cheek and rub it against her scarf. He would have liked to stand there with her all night in the blackness. She moved forward a step or two and then paused again above the dip of the Corbury road. Its icy slope, scored by innumerable runners, looked like a mirror scratched by travellers at an inn.

“There was a whole lot of them coasting before the moon set,” she said.

“Would you like to come in and coast with them some night?” he asked.

“Oh, would you, Ethan? It would be lovely!”

“We’ll come to-morrow if there’s a moon.”

She lingered, pressing closer to his side. “Ned Hale and Ruth Varnum came just as near running into the big elm at the bottom. We were all sure they were killed.” Her shiver ran down his arm. “Wouldn’t it have been too awful? They’re so happy!”

“Oh, Ned ain’t much at steering. I guess I can take you down all right!” he said disdainfully.

He was aware that he was “talking big,” like Denis Eady; but his reaction of joy had unsteadied him, and the inflection with which she had said of the engaged couple “They’re so happy!” made the words sound as if she had been thinking of herself and him.

“The elm is dangerous, though. It ought to be cut down,” she insisted.

“Would you be afraid of it, with me?”

“I told you I ain’t the kind to be afraid” she tossed back, almost indifferently; and suddenly she began to walk on with a rapid step.

These alterations of mood were the despair and joy of Ethan Frome. The motions of her mind were as incalculable as the flit of a bird in the branches. The fact that he had no right to show his feelings, and thus provoke the expression of hers, made him attach a fantastic importance to every change in her look and tone. Now he thought she understood him, and feared; now he was sure she did not, and despaired. To-night the pressure of accumulated misgivings sent the scale drooping toward despair, and her indifference was the more chilling after the flush of joy into which she had plunged him by dismissing Denis Eady. He mounted School House Hill at her side and walked on in silence till they reached the lane leading to the saw-mill; then the need of some definite assurance grew too strong for him.

"You'd have found me right off if you hadn't gone back to have that last reel with Denis," he brought out awkwardly. He could not pronounce the name without a stiffening of the muscles of his throat.

"Why, Ethan, how could I tell you were there?"

"I suppose what folks say is true," he jerked out at her, instead of answering.

She stopped short, and he felt, in the darkness, that her face was lifted quickly to his. "Why, what do folks say?"

"It's natural enough you should be leaving us" he floundered on, following his thought.

"Is that what they say?" she mocked back at him; then, with a sudden drop of her sweet treble: "You mean that Zeena—ain't suited with me any more?" she faltered.

Their arms had slipped apart and they stood motionless, each seeking to distinguish the other's face.

"I know I ain't anything like as smart as I ought to be," she went on, while he vainly struggled for expression. "There's lots of things a hired girl could do that come awkward to me still—and I haven't got much strength in my arms. But if she'd only tell me I'd try. You know she hardly ever says anything, and sometimes I can see she ain't suited, and yet I don't know why." She turned on him with a sudden

flash of indignation. "You'd ought to tell me, Ethan Frome—you'd ought to! Unless you want me to go too—"

Unless he wanted her to go too! The cry was balm to his raw wound. The iron heavens seemed to melt and rain down sweetness. Again he struggled for the all-expressive word, and again, his arm in hers, found only a deep "Come along."

They walked on in silence through the blackness of the hemlock-shaded lane, where Ethan's sawmill gloomed through the night, and out again into the comparative clearness of the fields. On the farther side of the hemlock belt the open country rolled away before them grey and lonely under the stars. Sometimes their way led them under the shade of an overhanging bank or through the thin obscurity of a clump of leafless trees. Here and there a farmhouse stood far back among the fields, mute and cold as a grave-stone. The night was so still that they heard the frozen snow crackle under their feet. The crash of a loaded branch falling far off in the woods reverberated like a musket-shot, and once a fox barked, and Mattie shrank closer to Ethan, and quickened her steps.

At length they sighted the group of larches at Ethan's gate, and as they drew near it the sense that the walk was over brought back his words.

"Then you don't want to leave us, Matt?"

He had to stoop his head to catch her stifled whisper: "Where'd I go, if I did?"

The answer sent a pang through him but the tone suffused him with joy. He forgot what else he had meant to say and pressed her against him so closely that he seemed to feel her warmth in his veins.

"You ain't crying are you, Matt?"

"No, of course I'm not," she quavered.

They turned in at the gate and passed under the shaded knoll where, enclosed in a low fence, the Frome grave-stones slanted at crazy angles through the snow. Ethan looked at them curiously. For years that quiet company had mocked his restlessness, his desire for change and freedom. "We never got away—how should you?"

seemed to be written on every headstone; and whenever he went in or out of his gate he thought with a shiver: "I shall just go on living here till I join them." But now all desire for change had vanished, and the sight of the little enclosure gave him a warm sense of continuance and stability.

"I guess we'll never let you go, Matt," he whispered, as though even the dead, lovers once, must conspire with him to keep her; and brushing by the graves, he thought: "We'll always go on living here together, and some day she'll lie there beside me."

He let the vision possess him as they climbed the hill to the house. He was never so happy with her as when he abandoned himself to these dreams. Half-way up the slope Mattie stumbled against some unseen obstruction and clutched his sleeve to steady herself. The wave of warmth that went through him was like the prolongation of his vision. For the first time he stole his arm about her, and she did not resist. They walked on as if they were floating on a summer stream.

Zeena always went to bed as soon as she had had her supper, and the shutterless windows of the house were dark. A dead cucumber-vine dangled from the porch like the crape streamer tied to the door for a death, and the thought flashed through Ethan's brain: "If it was there for Zeena—" Then he had a distinct sight of his wife lying in their bedroom asleep, her mouth slightly open, her false teeth in a tumbler by the bed...

They walked around to the back of the house, between the rigid gooseberry bushes. It was Zeena's habit, when they came back late from the village, to leave the key of the kitchen door under the mat. Ethan stood before the door, his head heavy with dreams, his arm still about Mattie. "Matt—" he began, not knowing what he meant to say.

She slipped out of his hold without speaking, and he stooped down and felt for the key.

"It's not there!" he said, straightening himself with a start.

They strained their eyes at each other through the icy darkness. Such a thing had never happened before.

"Maybe she's forgotten it," Mattie said in a tremulous whisper; but both of them knew that it was not like Zeena to forget.

"It might have fallen off into the snow," Mattie continued, after a pause during which they had stood intently listening.

"It must have been pushed off, then," he rejoined in the same tone. Another wild thought tore through him. What if tramps had been there—what if...

Again he listened, fancying he heard a distant sound in the house; then he felt in his pocket for a match, and kneeling down, passed its light slowly over the rough edges of snow about the doorstep.

He was still kneeling when his eyes, on a level with the lower panel of the door, caught a faint ray beneath it. Who could be stirring in that silent house? He heard a step on the stairs, and again for an instant the thought of tramps tore through him. Then the door opened and he saw his wife.

Against the dark background of the kitchen she stood up tall and angular, one hand drawing a quilted counterpane to her flat breast, while the other held a lamp. The light, on a level with her chin, drew out of the darkness her puckered throat and the projecting wrist of the hand that clutched the quilt, and deepened fantastically the hollows and prominences of her high-boned face under its ring of crimping-pins. To Ethan, still in the rosy haze of his hour with Mattie, the sight came with the intense precision of the last dream before waking. He felt as if he had never before known what his wife looked like.

She drew aside without speaking, and Mattie and Ethan passed into the kitchen, which had the deadly chill of a vault after the dry cold of the night.

"Guess you forgot about us, Zeena," Ethan joked, stamping the snow from his boots.

"No. I just felt so mean I couldn't sleep."

Mattie came forward, unwinding her wraps, the colour of the cherry scarf in her fresh lips and cheeks. "I'm so sorry, Zeena! Isn't there anything I can do?"

"No; there's nothing," Zeena turned away from her. "You might 'a' shook off that snow outside," she said to her husband.

She walked out of the kitchen ahead of them and pausing in the hall raised the lamp at arm's-length, as if to light them up the stairs.

Ethan paused also, affecting to fumble for the peg on which he hung his coat and cap. The doors of the two bedrooms faced each other across the narrow upper landing, and to-night it was peculiarly repugnant to him that Mattie should see him follow Zeena.

"I guess I won't come up yet awhile," he said, turning as if to go back to the kitchen.

Zeena stopped short and looked at him. "For the land's sake—what you going to do down here?"

"I've got the mill accounts to go over."

She continued to stare at him, the flame of the unshaded lamp bringing out with microscopic cruelty the fretful lines of her face.

"At this time o' night? You'll ketch your death. The fire's out long ago."

Without answering he moved away toward the kitchen. As he did so his glance crossed Mattie's and he fancied that a fugitive warning gleamed through her lashes. The next moment they sank to her flushed cheeks and she began to mount the stairs ahead of Zeena.

"That's so. It is powerful cold down here," Ethan assented; and with lowered head he went up in his wife's wake, and followed her across the threshold of their room.

### III

There was some hauling to be done at the lower end of the wood-lot, and Ethan was out early the next day.

The winter morning was as clear as crystal. The sunrise burned red in a pure sky, the shadows on the rim of the wood-lot were

darkly blue, and beyond the white and scintillating fields patches of far-off forest hung like smoke.

It was in the early morning stillness, when his muscles were swinging to their familiar task and his lungs expanding with long draughts of mountain air, that Ethan did his clearest thinking. He and Zeena had not exchanged a word after the door of their room had closed on them. She had measured out some drops from a medicine-bottle on a chair by the bed and, after swallowing them, and wrapping her head in a piece of yellow flannel, had lain down with her face turned away. Ethan undressed hurriedly and blew out the light so that he should not see her when he took his place at her side. As he lay there he could hear Mattie moving about in her room, and her candle, sending its small ray across the landing, drew a scarcely perceptible line of light under his door. He kept his eyes fixed on the light till it vanished. Then the room grew perfectly black, and not a sound was audible but Zeena's asthmatic breathing. Ethan felt confusedly that there were many things he ought to think about, but through his tingling veins and tired brain only one sensation throbbed: the warmth of Mattie's shoulder against his. Why had he not kissed her when he held her there? A few hours earlier he would not have asked himself the question. Even a few minutes earlier, when they had stood alone outside the house, he would not have dared to think of kissing her. But since he had seen her lips in the lamplight he felt that they were his.

Now, in the bright morning air, her face was still before him. It was part of the sun's red and of the pure glitter on the snow. How the girl had changed since she had come to Starkfield! He remembered what a colourless slip of a thing she had looked the day he had met her at the station. And all the first winter, how she had shivered with cold when the northerly gales shook the thin clapboards and the snow beat like hail against the loose-hung windows!

He had been afraid that she would hate the hard life, the cold and loneliness; but not a sign of discontent escaped her. Zeena took the view that Mattie was bound to make the best of Starkfield since she hadn't any other place to go to; but this did not strike Ethan as

conclusive. Zeena, at any rate, did not apply the principle in her own case.

He felt all the more sorry for the girl because misfortune had, in a sense, indentured her to them. Mattie Silver was the daughter of a cousin of Zenobia Frome's, who had inflamed his clan with mingled sentiments of envy and admiration by descending from the hills to Connecticut, where he had married a Stamford girl and succeeded to her father's thriving "drug" business. Unhappily Orin Silver, a man of far-reaching aims, had died too soon to prove that the end justifies the means. His accounts revealed merely what the means had been; and these were such that it was fortunate for his wife and daughter that his books were examined only after his impressive funeral. His wife died of the disclosure, and Mattie, at twenty, was left alone to make her way on the fifty dollars obtained from the sale of her piano. For this purpose her equipment, though varied, was inadequate. She could trim a hat, make molasses candy, recite "Curfew shall not ring to-night," and play "The Lost Chord" and a pot-pourri from "Carmen." When she tried to extend the field of her activities in the direction of stenography and book-keeping her health broke down, and six months on her feet behind the counter of a department store did not tend to restore it. Her nearest relations had been induced to place their savings in her father's hands, and though, after his death, they ungrudgingly acquitted themselves of the Christian duty of returning good for evil by giving his daughter all the advice at their disposal, they could hardly be expected to supplement it by material aid. But when Zenobia's doctor recommended her looking about for some one to help her with the house-work the clan instantly saw the chance of exacting a compensation from Mattie. Zenobia, though doubtful of the girl's efficiency, was tempted by the freedom to find fault without much risk of losing her; and so Mattie came to Starkfield.

Zenobia's fault-finding was of the silent kind, but not the less penetrating for that. During the first months Ethan alternately burned with the desire to see Mattie defy her and trembled with fear of the result. Then the situation grew less strained. The pure air,



and the long summer hours in the open, gave back life and elasticity to Mattie, and Zeena, with more leisure to devote to her complex ailments, grew less watchful of the girl's omissions; so that Ethan, struggling on under the burden of his barren farm and failing saw-mill, could at least imagine that peace reigned in his house.

There was really, even now, no tangible evidence to the contrary; but since the previous night a vague dread had hung on his sky-line. It was formed of Zeena's obstinate silence, of Mattie's sudden look of warning, of the memory of just such fleeting imperceptible signs as those which told him, on certain stainless mornings, that before night there would be rain.

His dread was so strong that, man-like, he sought to postpone certainty. The hauling was not over till mid-day, and as the lumber was to be delivered to Andrew Hale, the Starkfield builder, it was really easier for Ethan to send Jotham Powell, the hired man, back to the farm on foot, and drive the load down to the village himself. He had scrambled up on the logs, and was sitting astride of them, close over his shaggy grays, when, coming between him and their streaming necks, he had a vision of the warning look that Mattie had given him the night before.

"If there's going to be any trouble I want to be there," was his vague reflection, as he threw to Jotham the unexpected order to unhitch the team and lead them back to the barn.

It was a slow trudge home through the heavy fields, and when the two men entered the kitchen Mattie was lifting the coffee from the stove and Zeena was already at the table. Her husband stopped short at sight of her. Instead of her usual calico wrapper and knitted shawl she wore her best dress of brown merino, and above her thin strands of hair, which still preserved the tight undulations of the crimping-pins, rose a hard perpendicular bonnet, as to which Ethan's clearest notion was that he had to pay five dollars for it at the Bettsbridge Emporium. On the floor beside her stood his old valise and a bandbox wrapped in newspapers.

"Why, where are you going, Zeena?" he exclaimed.

"I've got my shooting pains so bad that I'm going over to

Bettsbridge to spend the night with Aunt Martha Pierce and see that new doctor," she answered in a matter-of-fact tone, as if she had said she was going into the store-room to take a look at the preserves, or up to the attic to go over the blankets.

In spite of her sedentary habits such abrupt decisions were not without precedent in Zeena's history. Twice or thrice before she had suddenly packed Ethan's valise and started off to Bettsbridge, or even Springfield, to seek the advice of some new doctor, and her husband had grown to dread these expeditions because of their cost. Zeena always came back laden with expensive remedies, and her last visit to Springfield had been commemorated by her paying twenty dollars for an electric battery of which she had never been able to learn the use. But for the moment his sense of relief was so great as to preclude all other feelings. He had now no doubt that Zeena had spoken the truth in saying, the night before, that she had sat up because she felt "too mean" to sleep: her abrupt resolve to seek medical advice showed that, as usual, she was wholly absorbed in her health.

As if expecting a protest, she continued plaintively; "If you're too busy with the hauling I presume you can let Jotham Powell drive me over with the sorrel in time to catch the train at the Flats."

Her husband hardly heard what she was saying. During the winter months there was no stage between Starkfield and Bettsbridge, and the trains which stopped at Corbury Flats were slow and infrequent. A rapid calculation showed Ethan that Zeena could not be back at the farm before the following evening....

"If I'd supposed you'd 'a' made any objection to Jotham Powell's driving me over—" she began again, as though his silence had implied refusal. On the brink of departure she was always seized with a flux of words. "All I know is," she continued, "I can't go on the way I am much longer. The pains are clear away down to my ankles now, or I'd 'a' walked in to Starkfield on my own feet, sooner'n put you out, and asked Michael Eady to let me ride over on his wagon to the Flats, when he sends to meet the train that brings his groceries.

I'd 'a' had two hours to wait in the station, but I'd sooner 'a' done it, even with this cold, than to have you say—"

"Of course Jotham'll drive you over," Ethan roused himself to answer. He became suddenly conscious that he was looking at Mattie while Zeena talked to him, and with an effort he turned his eyes to his wife. She sat opposite the window, and the pale light reflected from the banks of snow made her face look more than usually drawn and bloodless, sharpened the three parallel creases between ear and cheek, and drew querulous lines from her thin nose to the corners of her mouth. Though she was but seven years her husband's senior, and he was only twenty-eight, she was already an old woman.

Ethan tried to say something befitting the occasion, but there was only one thought in his mind: the fact that, for the first time since Mattie had come to live with them, Zeena was to be away for a night. He wondered if the girl were thinking of it too....

He knew that Zeena must be wondering why he did not offer to drive her to the Flats and let Jotham Powell take the lumber to Starkfield, and at first he could not think of a pretext for not doing so; then he said: "I'd take you over myself, only I've got to collect the cash for the lumber."

As soon as the words were spoken he regretted them, not only because they were untrue—there being no prospect of his receiving cash payment from Hale—but also because he knew from experience the imprudence of letting Zeena think he was in funds on the eve of one of her therapeutic excursions. At the moment, however, his one desire was to avoid the long drive with her behind the ancient sorrel who never went out of a walk.

Zeena made no reply: she did not seem to hear what he had said. She had already pushed her plate aside, and was measuring out a draught from a large bottle at her elbow.

"It ain't done me a speck of good, but I guess I might as well use it up," she remarked; adding, as she pushed the empty bottle toward Mattie: "If you can get the taste out it'll do for pickles."

## IV

As soon as his wife had driven off Ethan took his coat and cap from the peg. Mattie was washing up the dishes, humming one of the dance tunes of the night before. He said "So long, Matt," and she answered gaily "So long, Ethan"; and that was all.

It was warm and bright in the kitchen. The sun slanted through the south window on the girl's moving figure, on the cat dozing in a chair, and on the geraniums brought in from the door-way, where Ethan had planted them in the summer to "make a garden" for Mattie. He would have liked to linger on, watching her tidy up and then settle down to her sewing; but he wanted still more to get the hauling done and be back at the farm before night.

All the way down to the village he continued to think of his return to Mattie. The kitchen was a poor place, not "spruce" and shining as his mother had kept it in his boyhood; but it was surprising what a homelike look the mere fact of Zeena's absence gave it. And he pictured what it would be like that evening, when he and Mattie were there after supper. For the first time they would be alone together indoors, and they would sit there, one on each side of the stove, like a married couple, he in his stocking feet and smoking his pipe, she laughing and talking in that funny way she had, which was always as new to him as if he had never heard her before.

The sweetness of the picture, and the relief of knowing that his fears of "trouble" with Zeena were unfounded, sent up his spirits with a rush, and he, who was usually so silent, whistled and sang aloud as he drove through the snowy fields. There was in him a slumbering spark of sociability which the long Starkfield winters had not yet extinguished. By nature grave and inarticulate, he admired recklessness and gaiety in others and was warmed to the marrow by friendly human intercourse. At Worcester, though he had the name of keeping to himself and not being much of a hand at a good time, he had secretly gloried in being clapped on the back

and hailed as “Old Ethe” or “Old Stiff”; and the cessation of such familiarities had increased the chill of his return to Starkfield.

There the silence had deepened about him year by year. Left alone, after his father’s accident, to carry the burden of farm and mill, he had had no time for convivial loiterings in the village; and when his mother fell ill the loneliness of the house grew more oppressive than that of the fields. His mother had been a talker in her day, but after her “trouble” the sound of her voice was seldom heard, though she had not lost the power of speech. Sometimes, in the long winter evenings, when in desperation her son asked her why she didn’t “say something,” she would lift a finger and answer: “Because I’m listening”; and on stormy nights, when the loud wind was about the house, she would complain, if he spoke to her: “They’re talking so out there that I can’t hear you.”

It was only when she drew toward her last illness, and his cousin Zenobia Pierce came over from the next valley to help him nurse her, that human speech was heard again in the house. After the mortal silence of his long imprisonment Zeena’s volubility was music in his ears. He felt that he might have “gone like his mother” if the sound of a new voice had not come to steady him. Zeena seemed to understand his case at a glance. She laughed at him for not knowing the simplest sick-bed duties and told him to “go right along out” and leave her to see to things. The mere fact of obeying her orders, of feeling free to go about his business again and talk with other men, restored his shaken balance and magnified his sense of what he owed her. Her efficiency shamed and dazzled him. She seemed to possess by instinct all the household wisdom that his long apprenticeship had not instilled in him. When the end came it was she who had to tell him to hitch up and go for the undertaker, and she thought it “funny” that he had not settled beforehand who was to have his mother’s clothes and the sewing-machine. After the funeral, when he saw her preparing to go away, he was seized with an unreasoning dread of being left alone on the farm; and before he knew what he was doing he had asked her to stay there with him.

He had often thought since that it would not have happened if his mother had died in spring instead of winter...

When they married it was agreed that, as soon as he could straighten out the difficulties resulting from Mrs. Frome's long illness, they would sell the farm and saw-mill and try their luck in a large town. Ethan's love of nature did not take the form of a taste for agriculture. He had always wanted to be an engineer, and to live in towns, where there were lectures and big libraries and "fellows doing things." A slight engineering job in Florida, put in his way during his period of study at Worcester, increased his faith in his ability as well as his eagerness to see the world; and he felt sure that, with a "smart" wife like Zeena, it would not be long before he had made himself a place in it.

Zeena's native village was slightly larger and nearer to the railway than Starkfield, and she had let her husband see from the first that life on an isolated farm was not what she had expected when she married. But purchasers were slow in coming, and while he waited for them Ethan learned the impossibility of transplanting her. She chose to look down on Starkfield, but she could not have lived in a place which looked down on her. Even Bettsbridge or Shadd's Falls would not have been sufficiently aware of her, and in the greater cities which attracted Ethan she would have suffered a complete loss of identity. And within a year of their marriage she developed the "sickliness" which had since made her notable even in a community rich in pathological instances. When she came to take care of his mother she had seemed to Ethan like the very genius of health, but he soon saw that her skill as a nurse had been acquired by the absorbed observation of her own symptoms.

Then she too fell silent. Perhaps it was the inevitable effect of life on the farm, or perhaps, as she sometimes said, it was because Ethan "never listened." The charge was not wholly unfounded. When she spoke it was only to complain, and to complain of things not in his power to remedy; and to check a tendency to impatient retort he had first formed the habit of not answering her, and finally of thinking of other things while she talked. Of late, however, since

he had reasons for observing her more closely, her silence had begun to trouble him. He recalled his mother's growing taciturnity, and wondered if Zeena were also turning "queer." Women did, he knew. Zeena, who had at her fingers' ends the pathological chart of the whole region, had cited many cases of the kind while she was nursing his mother; and he himself knew of certain lonely farm-houses in the neighbourhood where stricken creatures pined, and of others where sudden tragedy had come of their presence. At times, looking at Zeena's shut face, he felt the chill of such forebodings. At other times her silence seemed deliberately assumed to conceal far-reaching intentions, mysterious conclusions drawn from suspicions and resentments impossible to guess. That supposition was even more disturbing than the other; and it was the one which had come to him the night before, when he had seen her standing in the kitchen door.

Now her departure for Bettsbridge had once more eased his mind, and all his thoughts were on the prospect of his evening with Mattie. Only one thing weighed on him, and that was his having told Zeena that he was to receive cash for the lumber. He foresaw so clearly the consequences of this imprudence that with considerable reluctance he decided to ask Andrew Hale for a small advance on his load.

When Ethan drove into Hale's yard the builder was just getting out of his sleigh.

"Hello, Ethel!" he said. "This comes handy."

Andrew Hale was a ruddy man with a big gray moustache and a stubbly double-chin unconstrained by a collar; but his scrupulously clean shirt was always fastened by a small diamond stud. This display of opulence was misleading, for though he did a fairly good business it was known that his easygoing habits and the demands of his large family frequently kept him what Starkfield called "behind." He was an old friend of Ethan's family, and his house one of the few to which Zeena occasionally went, drawn there by the fact that Mrs. Hale, in her youth, had done more "doctoring" than any other woman in Starkfield, and was still a recognised authority on symptoms and treatment.

Hale went up to the grays and patted their sweating flanks.

"Well, sir," he said, "you keep them two as if they was pets."

Ethan set about unloading the logs and when he had finished his job he pushed open the glazed door of the shed which the builder used as his office. Hale sat with his feet up on the stove, his back propped against a battered desk strewn with papers: the place, like the man, was warm, genial and untidy.

"Sit right down and thaw out," he greeted Ethan.

The latter did not know how to begin, but at length he managed to bring out his request for an advance of fifty dollars. The blood rushed to his thin skin under the sting of Hale's astonishment. It was the builder's custom to pay at the end of three months, and there was no precedent between the two men for a cash settlement.

Ethan felt that if he had pleaded an urgent need Hale might have made shift to pay him; but pride, and an instinctive prudence, kept him from resorting to this argument. After his father's death it had taken time to get his head above water, and he did not want Andrew Hale, or any one else in Starkfield, to think he was going under again. Besides, he hated lying; if he wanted the money he wanted it, and it was nobody's business to ask why. He therefore made his demand with the awkwardness of a proud man who will not admit to himself that he is stooping; and he was not much surprised at Hale's refusal.

The builder refused genially, as he did everything else: he treated the matter as something in the nature of a practical joke, and wanted to know if Ethan meditated buying a grand piano or adding a "cupolo" to his house; offering, in the latter case, to give his services free of cost.

Ethan's arts were soon exhausted, and after an embarrassed pause he wished Hale good day and opened the door of the office. As he passed out the builder suddenly called after him: "See here—you ain't in a tight place, are you?"

"Not a bit," Ethan's pride retorted before his reason had time to intervene.

"Well, that's good! Because I am, a shade. Fact is, I was going to ask you to give me a little extra time on that payment. Business is pretty



slack, to begin with, and then I'm fixing up a little house for Ned and Ruth when they're married. I'm glad to do it for 'em, but it costs." His look appealed to Ethan for sympathy. "The young people like things nice. You know how it is yourself: it's not so long ago since you fixed up your own place for Zeena."

Ethan left the grays in Hale's stable and went about some other business in the village. As he walked away the builder's last phrase lingered in his ears, and he reflected grimly that his seven years with Zeena seemed to Starkfield "not so long."

The afternoon was drawing to an end, and here and there a lighted pane spangled the cold gray dusk and made the snow look whiter. The bitter weather had driven every one indoors and Ethan had the long rural street to himself. Suddenly he heard the brisk play of sleigh-bells and a cutter passed him, drawn by a free-going horse. Ethan recognised Michael Eady's roan colt, and young Denis Eady, in a handsome new fur cap, leaned forward and waved a greeting. "Hello, Ethel!" he shouted and spun on.

The cutter was going in the direction of the Frome farm, and Ethan's heart contracted as he listened to the dwindling bells. What more likely than that Denis Eady had heard of Zeena's departure for Bettsbridge, and was profiting by the opportunity to spend an hour with Mattie? Ethan was ashamed of the storm of jealousy in his breast. It seemed unworthy of the girl that his thoughts of her should be so violent.

He walked on to the church corner and entered the shade of the Varnum spruces, where he had stood with her the night before. As he passed into their gloom he saw an indistinct outline just ahead of him. At his approach it melted for an instant into two separate shapes and then conjoined again, and he heard a kiss, and a half-laughing "Oh!" provoked by the discovery of his presence. Again the outline hastily disunited and the Varnum gate slammed on one half while the other hurried on ahead of him. Ethan smiled at the discomfiture he had caused. What did it matter to Ned Hale and Ruth Varnum if they were caught kissing each other? Everybody in Starkfield knew they were engaged. It pleased Ethan to have

surprised a pair of lovers on the spot where he and Mattie had stood with such a thirst for each other in their hearts; but he felt a pang at the thought that these two need not hide their happiness.

He fetched the grays from Hale's stable and started on his long climb back to the farm. The cold was less sharp than earlier in the day and a thick fleecy sky threatened snow for the morrow. Here and there a star pricked through, showing behind it a deep well of blue. In an hour or two the moon would push over the ridge behind the farm, burn a gold-edged rent in the clouds, and then be swallowed by them. A mournful peace hung on the fields, as though they felt the relaxing grasp of the cold and stretched themselves in their long winter sleep.

Ethan's ears were alert for the jingle of sleigh-bells, but not a sound broke the silence of the lonely road. As he drew near the farm he saw, through the thin screen of larches at the gate, a light twinkling in the house above him. "She's up in her room," he said to himself, "fixing herself up for supper"; and he remembered Zeena's sarcastic stare when Mattie, on the evening of her arrival, had come down to supper with smoothed hair and a ribbon at her neck.

He passed by the graves on the knoll and turned his head to glance at one of the older headstones, which had interested him deeply as a boy because it bore his name.

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF ETHAN FROME AND ENDURANCE  
HIS WIFE, WHO DWELLED TOGETHER IN PEACE FOR FIFTY  
YEARS.

He used to think that fifty years sounded like a long time to live together; but now it seemed to him that they might pass in a flash. Then, with a sudden dart of irony, he wondered if, when their turn came, the same epitaph would be written over him and Zeena.

He opened the barn-door and craned his head into the obscurity, half-fearing to discover Denis Eady's roan colt in the stall beside the sorrel. But the old horse was there alone, mumbling his crib with toothless jaws, and Ethan whistled cheerfully while he bedded down the grays and shook an extra measure of oats into their mangers. His was not a tuneful throat—but harsh melodies burst from it as

he locked the barn and sprang up the hill to the house. He reached the kitchen-porch and turned the door-handle; but the door did not yield to his touch.

Startled at finding it locked he rattled the handle violently; then he reflected that Mattie was alone and that it was natural she should barricade herself at nightfall. He stood in the darkness expecting to hear her step. It did not come, and after vainly straining his ears he called out in a voice that shook with joy: "Hello, Matt!"

Silence answered; but in a minute or two he caught a sound on the stairs and saw a line of light about the door-frame, as he had seen it the night before. So strange was the precision with which the incidents of the previous evening were repeating themselves that he half expected, when he heard the key turn, to see his wife before him on the threshold; but the door opened, and Mattie faced him.

She stood just as Zeena had stood, a lifted lamp in her hand, against the black background of the kitchen. She held the light at the same level, and it drew out with the same distinctness her slim young throat and the brown wrist no bigger than a child's. Then, striking upward, it threw a lustrous fleck on her lips, edged her eyes with velvet shade, and laid a milky whiteness above the black curve of her brows.

She wore her usual dress of darkish stuff, and there was no bow at her neck; but through her hair she had run a streak of crimson ribbon. This tribute to the unusual transformed and glorified her. She seemed to Ethan taller, fuller, more womanly in shape and motion. She stood aside, smiling silently, while he entered, and then moved away from him with something soft and flowing in her gait. She set the lamp on the table, and he saw that it was carefully laid for supper, with fresh dough-nuts, stewed blueberries and his favourite pickles in a dish of gay red glass. A bright fire glowed in the stove and the cat lay stretched before it, watching the table with a drowsy eye.

Ethan was suffocated with the sense of well-being. He went out into the passage to hang up his coat and pull off his wet boots. When

he came back Mattie had set the teapot on the table and the cat was rubbing itself persuasively against her ankles.

“Why, Puss! I nearly tripped over you,” she cried, the laughter sparkling through her lashes.

Again Ethan felt a sudden twinge of jealousy. Could it be his coming that gave her such a kindled face?

“Well, Matt, any visitors?” he threw off, stooping down carelessly to examine the fastening of the stove.

She nodded and laughed “Yes, one,” and he felt a blackness settling on his brows.

“Who was that?” he questioned, raising himself up to slant a glance at her beneath his scowl.

Her eyes danced with malice. “Why, Jotham Powell. He came in after he got back, and asked for a drop of coffee before he went down home.”

The blackness lifted and light flooded Ethan’s brain. “That all? Well, I hope you made out to let him have it.” And after a pause he felt it right to add: “I suppose he got Zeena over to the Flats all right?”

“Oh, yes; in plenty of time.”

The name threw a chill between them, and they stood a moment looking sideways at each other before Mattie said with a shy laugh. “I guess it’s about time for supper.”

They drew their seats up to the table, and the cat, unbidden, jumped between them into Zeena’s empty chair. “Oh, Puss!” said Mattie, and they laughed again.

Ethan, a moment earlier, had felt himself on the brink of eloquence; but the mention of Zeena had paralysed him. Mattie seemed to feel the contagion of his embarrassment, and sat with downcast lids, sipping her tea, while he feigned an insatiable appetite for dough-nuts and sweet pickles. At last, after casting about for an effective opening, he took a long gulp of tea, cleared his throat, and said: “Looks as if there’d be more snow.”

She feigned great interest. “Is that so? Do you suppose it’ll

interfere with Zeena's getting back?" She flushed red as the question escaped her, and hastily set down the cup she was lifting.

Ethan reached over for another helping of pickles. "You never can tell, this time of year, it drifts so bad on the Flats." The name had benumbed him again, and once more he felt as if Zeena were in the room between them.

"Oh, Puss, you're too greedy!" Mattie cried.

The cat, unnoticed, had crept up on muffled paws from Zeena's seat to the table, and was stealthily elongating its body in the direction of the milk-jug, which stood between Ethan and Mattie. The two leaned forward at the same moment and their hands met on the handle of the jug. Mattie's hand was underneath, and Ethan kept his clasped on it a moment longer than was necessary. The cat, profiting by this unusual demonstration, tried to effect an unnoticed retreat, and in doing so backed into the pickle-dish, which fell to the floor with a crash.

Mattie, in an instant, had sprung from her chair and was down on her knees by the fragments.

"Oh, Ethan, Ethan—it's all to pieces! What will Zeena say?"

But this time his courage was up. "Well, she'll have to say it to the cat, any way!" he rejoined with a laugh, kneeling down at Mattie's side to scrape up the swimming pickles.

She lifted stricken eyes to him. "Yes, but, you see, she never meant it should be used, not even when there was company; and I had to get up on the step-ladder to reach it down from the top shelf of the china-closet, where she keeps it with all her best things, and of course she'll want to know why I did it—"

The case was so serious that it called forth all of Ethan's latent resolution.

"She needn't know anything about it if you keep quiet. I'll get another just like it to-morrow. Where did it come from? I'll go to Shadd's Falls for it if I have to!"

"Oh, you'll never get another even there! It was a wedding present—don't you remember? It came all the way from Philadelphia, from Zeena's aunt that married the minister. That's

why she wouldn't ever use it. Oh, Ethan, Ethan, what in the world shall I do?"

She began to cry, and he felt as if every one of her tears were pouring over him like burning lead. "Don't, Matt, don't—oh, don't!" he implored her.

She struggled to her feet, and he rose and followed her helplessly while she spread out the pieces of glass on the kitchen dresser. It seemed to him as if the shattered fragments of their evening lay there.

"Here, give them to me," he said in a voice of sudden authority.

She drew aside, instinctively obeying his tone. "Oh, Ethan, what are you going to do?"

Without replying he gathered the pieces of glass into his broad palm and walked out of the kitchen to the passage. There he lit a candle-end, opened the china-closet, and, reaching his long arm up to the highest shelf, laid the pieces together with such accuracy of touch that a close inspection convinced him of the impossibility of detecting from below that the dish was broken. If he glued it together the next morning months might elapse before his wife noticed what had happened, and meanwhile he might after all be able to match the dish at Shadd's Falls or Bettsbridge. Having satisfied himself that there was no risk of immediate discovery he went back to the kitchen with a lighter step, and found Mattie disconsolately removing the last scraps of pickle from the floor.

"It's all right, Matt. Come back and finish supper," he commanded her.

Completely reassured, she shone on him through tear-hung lashes, and his soul swelled with pride as he saw how his tone subdued her. She did not even ask what he had done. Except when he was steering a big log down the mountain to his mill he had never known such a thrilling sense of mastery.

## V

They finished supper, and while Mattie cleared the table Ethan went to look at the cows and then took a last turn about the house. The earth lay dark under a muffled sky and the air was so still that now and then he heard a lump of snow come thumping down from a tree far off on the edge of the wood-lot.

When he returned to the kitchen Mattie had pushed up his chair to the stove and seated herself near the lamp with a bit of sewing. The scene was just as he had dreamed of it that morning. He sat down, drew his pipe from his pocket and stretched his feet to the glow. His hard day's work in the keen air made him feel at once lazy and light of mood, and he had a confused sense of being in another world, where all was warmth and harmony and time could bring no change. The only drawback to his complete well-being was the fact that he could not see Mattie from where he sat; but he was too indolent to move and after a moment he said: "Come over here and sit by the stove."

Zeena's empty rocking-chair stood facing him. Mattie rose obediently, and seated herself in it. As her young brown head detached itself against the patch-work cushion that habitually framed his wife's gaunt countenance, Ethan had a momentary shock. It was almost as if the other face, the face of the superseded woman, had obliterated that of the intruder. After a moment Mattie seemed to be affected by the same sense of constraint. She changed her position, leaning forward to bend her head above her work, so that he saw only the foreshortened tip of her nose and the streak of red in her hair; then she slipped to her feet, saying "I can't see to sew," and went back to her chair by the lamp.

Ethan made a pretext of getting up to replenish the stove, and when he returned to his seat he pushed it sideways that he might get a view of her profile and of the lamplight falling on her hands. The cat, who had been a puzzled observer of these unusual

movements, jumped up into Zeena's chair, rolled itself into a ball, and lay watching them with narrowed eyes.

Deep quiet sank on the room. The clock ticked above the dresser, a piece of charred wood fell now and then in the stove, and the faint sharp scent of the geraniums mingled with the odour of Ethan's smoke, which began to throw a blue haze about the lamp and to hang its greyish cobwebs in the shadowy corners of the room.

All constraint had vanished between the two, and they began to talk easily and simply. They spoke of every-day things, of the prospect of snow, of the next church sociable, of the loves and quarrels of Starkfield. The commonplace nature of what they said produced in Ethan an illusion of long-established intimacy which no outburst of emotion could have given, and he set his imagination adrift on the fiction that they had always spent their evenings thus and would always go on doing so...

"This is the night we were to have gone coasting, Matt," he said at length, with the rich sense, as he spoke, that they could go on any other night they chose, since they had all time before them.

She smiled back at him. "I guess you forgot!"

"No, I didn't forget; but it's as dark as Egypt outdoors. We might go to-morrow if there's a moon."

She laughed with pleasure, her head tilted back, the lamplight sparkling on her lips and teeth. "That would be lovely, Ethan!"

He kept his eyes fixed on her, marvelling at the way her face changed with each turn of their talk, like a wheat-field under a summer breeze. It was intoxicating to find such magic in his clumsy words, and he longed to try new ways of using it.

"Would you be scared to go down the Corbury road with me on a night like this?" he asked.

Her cheeks burned redder. "I ain't any more scared than you are!"

"Well, I'd be scared, then; I wouldn't do it. That's an ugly corner down by the big elm. If a fellow didn't keep his eyes open he'd go plumb into it." He luxuriated in the sense of protection and authority which his words conveyed. To prolong and intensify the feeling he added: "I guess we're well enough here."



She let her lids sink slowly, in the way he loved. "Yes, we're well enough here," she sighed.

Her tone was so sweet that he took the pipe from his mouth and drew his chair up to the table. Leaning forward, he touched the farther end of the strip of brown stuff that she was hemming. "Say, Matt," he began with a smile, "what do you think I saw under the Varnum spruces, coming along home just now? I saw a friend of yours getting kissed."

The words had been on his tongue all the evening, but now that he had spoken them they struck him as inexpressibly vulgar and out of place.

Mattie blushed to the roots of her hair and pulled her needle rapidly twice or thrice through her work, insensibly drawing the end of it away from him. "I suppose it was Ruth and Ned," she said in a low voice, as though he had suddenly touched on something grave.

Ethan had imagined that his allusion might open the way to the accepted pleasantries, and these perhaps in turn to a harmless caress, if only a mere touch on her hand. But now he felt as if her blush had set a flaming guard about her. He supposed it was his natural awkwardness that made him feel so. He knew that most young men made nothing at all of giving a pretty girl a kiss, and he remembered that the night before, when he had put his arm about Mattie, she had not resisted. But that had been out-of-doors, under the open irresponsible night. Now, in the warm lamplit room, with all its ancient implications of conformity and order, she seemed infinitely farther away from him and more unapproachable.

To ease his constraint he said: "I suppose they'll be setting a date before long."

"Yes. I shouldn't wonder if they got married some time along in the summer." She pronounced the word married as if her voice caressed it. It seemed a rustling covert leading to enchanted glades. A pang shot through Ethan, and he said, twisting away from her in his chair: "It'll be your turn next, I wouldn't wonder."

She laughed a little uncertainly. "Why do you keep on saying that?"

He echoed her laugh. "I guess I do it to get used to the idea."

He drew up to the table again and she sewed on in silence, with dropped lashes, while he sat in fascinated contemplation of the way in which her hands went up and down above the strip of stuff, just as he had seen a pair of birds make short perpendicular flights over a nest they were building. At length, without turning her head or lifting her lids, she said in a low tone: "It's not because you think Zeena's got anything against me, is it?"

His former dread started up full-armed at the suggestion. "Why, what do you mean?" he stammered.

She raised distressed eyes to his, her work dropping on the table between them. "I don't know. I thought last night she seemed to have."

"I'd like to know what," he growled.

"Nobody can tell with Zeena." It was the first time they had ever spoken so openly of her attitude toward Mattie, and the repetition of the name seemed to carry it to the farther corners of the room and send it back to them in long repercussions of sound. Mattie waited, as if to give the echo time to drop, and then went on: "She hasn't said anything to you?"

He shook his head. "No, not a word."

She tossed the hair back from her forehead with a laugh. "I guess I'm just nervous, then. I'm not going to think about it any more."

"Oh, no—don't let's think about it, Matt!"

The sudden heat of his tone made her colour mount again, not with a rush, but gradually, delicately, like the reflection of a thought stealing slowly across her heart. She sat silent, her hands clasped on her work, and it seemed to him that a warm current flowed toward him along the strip of stuff that still lay unrolled between them. Cautiously he slid his hand palm-downward along the table till his finger-tips touched the end of the stuff. A faint vibration of her lashes seemed to show that she was aware of his gesture, and that it had sent a counter-current back to her; and she let her hands lie motionless on the other end of the strip.

As they sat thus he heard a sound behind him and turned his head.

The cat had jumped from Zeena's chair to dart at a mouse in the wainscot, and as a result of the sudden movement the empty chair had set up a spectral rocking.

"She'll be rocking in it herself this time to-morrow," Ethan thought. "I've been in a dream, and this is the only evening we'll ever have together." The return to reality was as painful as the return to consciousness after taking an anaesthetic. His body and brain ached with indescribable weariness, and he could think of nothing to say or to do that should arrest the mad flight of the moments.

His alteration of mood seemed to have communicated itself to Mattie. She looked up at him languidly, as though her lids were weighted with sleep and it cost her an effort to raise them. Her glance fell on his hand, which now completely covered the end of her work and grasped it as if it were a part of herself. He saw a scarcely perceptible tremor cross her face, and without knowing what he did he stooped his head and kissed the bit of stuff in his hold. As his lips rested on it he felt it glide slowly from beneath them, and saw that Mattie had risen and was silently rolling up her work. She fastened it with a pin, and then, finding her thimble and scissors, put them with the roll of stuff into the box covered with fancy paper which he had once brought to her from Bettsbridge.

He stood up also, looking vaguely about the room. The clock above the dresser struck eleven.

"Is the fire all right?" she asked in a low voice.

He opened the door of the stove and poked aimlessly at the embers. When he raised himself again he saw that she was dragging toward the stove the old soap-box lined with carpet in which the cat made its bed. Then she recrossed the floor and lifted two of the geranium pots in her arms, moving them away from the cold window. He followed her and brought the other geraniums, the hyacinth bulbs in a cracked custard bowl and the German ivy trained over an old croquet hoop.

When these nightly duties were performed there was nothing left to do but to bring in the tin candlestick from the passage, light the candle and blow out the lamp. Ethan put the candlestick in Mattie's

hand and she went out of the kitchen ahead of him, the light that she carried before her making her dark hair look like a drift of mist on the moon.

“Good night, Matt,” he said as she put her foot on the first step of the stairs.

She turned and looked at him a moment. “Good night, Ethan,” she answered, and went up.

When the door of her room had closed on her he remembered that he had not even touched her hand.

## VI

The next morning at breakfast Jotham Powell was between them, and Ethan tried to hide his joy under an air of exaggerated indifference, lounging back in his chair to throw scraps to the cat, growling at the weather, and not so much as offering to help Mattie when she rose to clear away the dishes.

He did not know why he was so irrationally happy, for nothing was changed in his life or hers. He had not even touched the tip of her fingers or looked her full in the eyes. But their evening together had given him a vision of what life at her side might be, and he was glad now that he had done nothing to trouble the sweetness of the picture. He had a fancy that she knew what had restrained him...

There was a last load of lumber to be hauled to the village, and Jotham Powell—who did not work regularly for Ethan in winter—had “come round” to help with the job. But a wet snow, melting to sleet, had fallen in the night and turned the roads to glass. There was more wet in the air and it seemed likely to both men that the weather would “milden” toward afternoon and make the going safer. Ethan therefore proposed to his assistant that they should load the sledge at the wood-lot, as they had done on the previous morning, and put off the “teaming” to Starkfield till later in the day. This plan had the advantage of enabling him to send Jotham to the Flats after

dinner to meet Zenobia, while he himself took the lumber down to the village.

He told Jotham to go out and harness up the greys, and for a moment he and Mattie had the kitchen to themselves. She had plunged the breakfast dishes into a tin dish-pan and was bending above it with her slim arms bared to the elbow, the steam from the hot water beading her forehead and tightening her rough hair into little brown rings like the tendrils on the traveller's joy.

Ethan stood looking at her, his heart in his throat. He wanted to say: "We shall never be alone again like this." Instead, he reached down his tobacco-pouch from a shelf of the dresser, put it into his pocket and said: "I guess I can make out to be home for dinner."

She answered "All right, Ethan," and he heard her singing over the dishes as he went.

As soon as the sledge was loaded he meant to send Jotham back to the farm and hurry on foot into the village to buy the glue for the pickle-dish. With ordinary luck he should have had time to carry out this plan; but everything went wrong from the start. On the way over to the wood-lot one of the greys slipped on a glare of ice and cut his knee; and when they got him up again Jotham had to go back to the barn for a strip of rag to bind the cut. Then, when the loading finally began, a sleety rain was coming down once more, and the tree trunks were so slippery that it took twice as long as usual to lift them and get them in place on the sledge. It was what Jotham called a sour morning for work, and the horses, shivering and stamping under their wet blankets, seemed to like it as little as the men. It was long past the dinner-hour when the job was done, and Ethan had to give up going to the village because he wanted to lead the injured horse home and wash the cut himself.

He thought that by starting out again with the lumber as soon as he had finished his dinner he might get back to the farm with the glue before Jotham and the old sorrel had had time to fetch Zenobia from the Flats; but he knew the chance was a slight one. It turned on the state of the roads and on the possible lateness of the Bettsbridge train. He remembered afterward, with a grim flash

of self-derision, what importance he had attached to the weighing of these probabilities...

As soon as dinner was over he set out again for the wood-lot, not daring to linger till Jotham Powell left. The hired man was still drying his wet feet at the stove, and Ethan could only give Mattie a quick look as he said beneath his breath: "I'll be back early."

He fancied that she nodded her comprehension; and with that scant solace he had to trudge off through the rain.

He had driven his load half-way to the village when Jotham Powell overtook him, urging the reluctant sorrel toward the Flats. "I'll have to hurry up to do it," Ethan mused, as the sleigh dropped down ahead of him over the dip of the school-house hill. He worked like ten at the unloading, and when it was over hastened on to Michael Eady's for the glue. Eady and his assistant were both "down street," and young Denis, who seldom deigned to take their place, was lounging by the stove with a knot of the golden youth of Starkfield. They hailed Ethan with ironic compliment and offers of conviviality; but no one knew where to find the glue. Ethan, consumed with the longing for a last moment alone with Mattie, hung about impatiently while Denis made an ineffectual search in the obscurer corners of the store.

"Looks as if we were all sold out. But if you'll wait around till the old man comes along maybe he can put his hand on it."

"I'm obliged to you, but I'll try if I can get it down at Mrs. Homan's," Ethan answered, burning to be gone.

Denis's commercial instinct compelled him to aver on oath that what Eady's store could not produce would never be found at the widow Homan's; but Ethan, heedless of this boast, had already climbed to the sledge and was driving on to the rival establishment. Here, after considerable search, and sympathetic questions as to what he wanted it for, and whether ordinary flour paste wouldn't do as well if she couldn't find it, the widow Homan finally hunted down her solitary bottle of glue to its hiding-place in a medley of cough-lozenges and corset-laces.

"I hope Zeena ain't broken anything she sets store by," she called after him as he turned the greys toward home.

The fitful bursts of sleet had changed into a steady rain and the horses had heavy work even without a load behind them. Once or twice, hearing sleigh-bells, Ethan turned his head, fancying that Zeena and Jotham might overtake him; but the old sorrel was not in sight, and he set his face against the rain and urged on his ponderous pair.

The barn was empty when the horses turned into it and, after giving them the most perfunctory ministrations they had ever received from him, he strode up to the house and pushed open the kitchen door.

Mattie was there alone, as he had pictured her. She was bending over a pan on the stove; but at the sound of his step she turned with a start and sprang to him.

"See, here, Matt, I've got some stuff to mend the dish with! Let me get at it quick," he cried, waving the bottle in one hand while he put her lightly aside; but she did not seem to hear him.

"Oh, Ethan—Zeena's come," she said in a whisper, clutching his sleeve.

They stood and stared at each other, pale as culprits.

"But the sorrel's not in the barn!" Ethan stammered.

"Jotham Powell brought some goods over from the Flats for his wife, and he drove right on home with them," she explained.

He gazed blankly about the kitchen, which looked cold and squalid in the rainy winter twilight.

"How is she?" he asked, dropping his voice to Mattie's whisper.

She looked away from him uncertainly. "I don't know. She went right up to her room."

"She didn't say anything?"

"No."

Ethan let out his doubts in a low whistle and thrust the bottle back into his pocket. "Don't fret; I'll come down and mend it in the night," he said. He pulled on his wet coat again and went back to the barn to feed the greys.

While he was there Jotham Powell drove up with the sleigh, and when the horses had been attended to Ethan said to him: "You might as well come back up for a bite." He was not sorry to assure himself of Jotham's neutralising presence at the supper table, for Zeena was always "nervous" after a journey. But the hired man, though seldom loth to accept a meal not included in his wages, opened his stiff jaws to answer slowly: "I'm obliged to you, but I guess I'll go along back."

Ethan looked at him in surprise. "Better come up and dry off. Looks as if there'd be something hot for supper."

Jotham's facial muscles were unmoved by this appeal and, his vocabulary being limited, he merely repeated: "I guess I'll go along back."

To Ethan there was something vaguely ominous in this stolid rejection of free food and warmth, and he wondered what had happened on the drive to nerve Jotham to such stoicism. Perhaps Zeena had failed to see the new doctor or had not liked his counsels: Ethan knew that in such cases the first person she met was likely to be held responsible for her grievance.

When he re-entered the kitchen the lamp lit up the same scene of shining comfort as on the previous evening. The table had been as carefully laid, a clear fire glowed in the stove, the cat dozed in its warmth, and Mattie came forward carrying a plate of dough-nuts.

She and Ethan looked at each other in silence; then she said, as she had said the night before: "I guess it's about time for supper."

## VII

Ethan went out into the passage to hang up his wet garments. He listened for Zeena's step and, not hearing it, called her name up the stairs. She did not answer, and after a moment's hesitation he went up and opened her door. The room was almost dark, but in the obscurity he saw her sitting by the window, bolt upright, and knew



by the rigidity of the outline projected against the pane that she had not taken off her travelling dress.

“Well, Zeena,” he ventured from the threshold.

She did not move, and he continued: “Supper’s about ready. Ain’t you coming?”

She replied: “I don’t feel as if I could touch a morsel.”

It was the consecrated formula, and he expected it to be followed, as usual, by her rising and going down to supper. But she remained seated, and he could think of nothing more felicitous than: “I presume you’re tired after the long ride.”

Turning her head at this, she answered solemnly: “I’m a great deal sicker than you think.”

Her words fell on his ear with a strange shock of wonder. He had often heard her pronounce them before—what if at last they were true?

He advanced a step or two into the dim room. “I hope that’s not so, Zeena,” he said.

She continued to gaze at him through the twilight with a mien of wan authority, as of one consciously singled out for a great fate. “I’ve got complications,” she said.

Ethan knew the word for one of exceptional import. Almost everybody in the neighbourhood had “troubles,” frankly localized and specified; but only the chosen had “complications.” To have them was in itself a distinction, though it was also, in most cases, a death-warrant. People struggled on for years with “troubles,” but they almost always succumbed to “complications.”

Ethan’s heart was jerking to and fro between two extremities of feeling, but for the moment compassion prevailed. His wife looked so hard and lonely, sitting there in the darkness with such thoughts.

“Is that what the new doctor told you?” he asked, instinctively lowering his voice.

“Yes. He says any regular doctor would want me to have an operation.”

Ethan was aware that, in regard to the important question of surgical intervention, the female opinion of the neighbourhood was

divided, some glorying in the prestige conferred by operations while others shunned them as indelicate. Ethan, from motives of economy, had always been glad that Zeena was of the latter faction.

In the agitation caused by the gravity of her announcement he sought a consolatory short cut. "What do you know about this doctor anyway? Nobody ever told you that before."

He saw his blunder before she could take it up: she wanted sympathy, not consolation.

"I didn't need to have anybody tell me I was losing ground every day. Everybody but you could see it. And everybody in Bettsbridge knows about Dr. Buck. He has his office in Worcester, and comes over once a fortnight to Shadd's Falls and Bettsbridge for consultations. Eliza Spears was wasting away with kidney trouble before she went to him, and now she's up and around, and singing in the choir."

"Well, I'm glad of that. You must do just what he tells you," Ethan answered sympathetically.

She was still looking at him. "I mean to," she said. He was struck by a new note in her voice. It was neither whining nor reproachful, but drily resolute.

"What does he want you should do?" he asked, with a mounting vision of fresh expenses.

"He wants I should have a hired girl. He says I oughtn't to have to do a single thing around the house."

"A hired girl?" Ethan stood transfixed.

"Yes. And Aunt Martha found me one right off. Everybody said I was lucky to get a girl to come away out here, and I agreed to give her a dollar extry to make sure. She'll be over to-morrow afternoon."

Wrath and dismay contended in Ethan. He had foreseen an immediate demand for money, but not a permanent drain on his scant resources. He no longer believed what Zeena had told him of the supposed seriousness of her state: he saw in her expedition to Bettsbridge only a plot hatched between herself and her Pierce relations to foist on him the cost of a servant; and for the moment wrath predominated.

"If you meant to engage a girl you ought to have told me before you started," he said.

"How could I tell you before I started? How did I know what Dr. Buck would say?"

"Oh, Dr. Buck—" Ethan's incredulity escaped in a short laugh. "Did Dr. Buck tell you how I was to pay her wages?"

Her voice rose furiously with his. "No, he didn't. For I'd 'a' been ashamed to tell him that you grudged me the money to get back my health, when I lost it nursing your own mother!"

"You lost your health nursing mother?"

"Yes; and my folks all told me at the time you couldn't do no less than marry me after—"

"Zeena!"

Through the obscurity which hid their faces their thoughts seemed to dart at each other like serpents shooting venom. Ethan was seized with horror of the scene and shame at his own share in it. It was as senseless and savage as a physical fight between two enemies in the darkness.

He turned to the shelf above the chimney, groped for matches and lit the one candle in the room. At first its weak flame made no impression on the shadows; then Zeena's face stood grimly out against the uncurtained pane, which had turned from grey to black.

It was the first scene of open anger between the couple in their sad seven years together, and Ethan felt as if he had lost an irretrievable advantage in descending to the level of recrimination. But the practical problem was there and had to be dealt with.

"You know I haven't got the money to pay for a girl, Zeena. You'll have to send her back: I can't do it."

"The doctor says it'll be my death if I go on slaving the way I've had to. He doesn't understand how I've stood it as long as I have."

"Slaving!—" He checked himself again, "You sha'n't lift a hand, if he says so. I'll do everything round the house myself—"

She broke in: "You're neglecting the farm enough already," and this being true, he found no answer, and left her time to add ironically:

“Better send me over to the almshouse and done with it... I guess there’s been Fromes there afore now.”

The taunt burned into him, but he let it pass. “I haven’t got the money. That settles it.”

There was a moment’s pause in the struggle, as though the combatants were testing their weapons. Then Zeena said in a level voice: “I thought you were to get fifty dollars from Andrew Hale for that lumber.”

“Andrew Hale never pays under three months.” He had hardly spoken when he remembered the excuse he had made for not accompanying his wife to the station the day before; and the blood rose to his frowning brows.

“Why, you told me yesterday you’d fixed it up with him to pay cash down. You said that was why you couldn’t drive me over to the Flats.”

Ethan had no suppleness in deceiving. He had never before been convicted of a lie, and all the resources of evasion failed him. “I guess that was a misunderstanding,” he stammered.

“You ain’t got the money?”

“No.”

“And you ain’t going to get it?”

“No.”

“Well, I couldn’t know that when I engaged the girl, could I?”

“No.” He paused to control his voice. “But you know it now. I’m sorry, but it can’t be helped. You’re a poor man’s wife, Zeena; but I’ll do the best I can for you.”

For a while she sat motionless, as if reflecting, her arms stretched along the arms of her chair, her eyes fixed on vacancy. “Oh, I guess we’ll make out,” she said mildly.

The change in her tone reassured him. “Of course we will! There’s a whole lot more I can do for you, and Mattie—”

Zeena, while he spoke, seemed to be following out some elaborate mental calculation. She emerged from it to say: “There’ll be Mattie’s board less, any how—”

Ethan, supposing the discussion to be over, had turned to go

down to supper. He stopped short, not grasping what he heard. "Mattie's board less—?" he began.

Zeena laughed. It was an odd unfamiliar sound—he did not remember ever having heard her laugh before. "You didn't suppose I was going to keep two girls, did you? No wonder you were scared at the expense!"

He still had but a confused sense of what she was saying. From the beginning of the discussion he had instinctively avoided the mention of Mattie's name, fearing he hardly knew what: criticism, complaints, or vague allusions to the imminent probability of her marrying. But the thought of a definite rupture had never come to him, and even now could not lodge itself in his mind.

"I don't know what you mean," he said. "Mattie Silver's not a hired girl. She's your relation."

"She's a pauper that's hung onto us all after her father'd done his best to ruin us. I've kep' her here a whole year: it's somebody else's turn now."

As the shrill words shot out Ethan heard a tap on the door, which he had drawn shut when he turned back from the threshold.

"Ethan—Zeena!" Mattie's voice sounded gaily from the landing, "do you know what time it is? Supper's been ready half an hour."

Inside the room there was a moment's silence; then Zeena called out from her seat: "I'm not coming down to supper."

"Oh, I'm sorry! Aren't you well? Sha'n't I bring you up a bite of something?"

Ethan roused himself with an effort and opened the door. "Go along down, Matt. Zeena's just a little tired. I'm coming."

He heard her "All right!" and her quick step on the stairs; then he shut the door and turned back into the room. His wife's attitude was unchanged, her face inexorable, and he was seized with the despairing sense of his helplessness.

"You ain't going to do it, Zeena?"

"Do what?" she emitted between flattened lips.

"Send Mattie away—like this?"

"I never bargained to take her for life!"

He continued with rising vehemence: "You can't put her out of the house like a thief—a poor girl without friends or money. She's done her best for you and she's got no place to go to. You may forget she's your kin but everybody else'll remember it. If you do a thing like that what do you suppose folks'll say of you?"

Zeena waited a moment, as if giving him time to feel the full force of the contrast between his own excitement and her composure. Then she replied in the same smooth voice: "I know well enough what they say of my having kep' her here as long as I have."

Ethan's hand dropped from the door-knob, which he had held clenched since he had drawn the door shut on Mattie. His wife's retort was like a knife-cut across the sinews and he felt suddenly weak and powerless. He had meant to humble himself, to argue that Mattie's keep didn't cost much, after all, that he could make out to buy a stove and fix up a place in the attic for the hired girl—but Zeena's words revealed the peril of such pleadings.

"You mean to tell her she's got to go—at once?" he faltered out, in terror of letting his wife complete her sentence.

As if trying to make him see reason she replied impartially: "The girl will be over from Bettsbridge to-morrow, and I presume she's got to have somewheres to sleep."

Ethan looked at her with loathing. She was no longer the listless creature who had lived at his side in a state of sullen self-absorption, but a mysterious alien presence, an evil energy secreted from the long years of silent brooding. It was the sense of his helplessness that sharpened his antipathy. There had never been anything in her that one could appeal to; but as long as he could ignore and command he had remained indifferent. Now she had mastered him and he abhorred her. Mattie was her relation, not his: there were no means by which he could compel her to keep the girl under her roof. All the long misery of his baffled past, of his youth of failure, hardship and vain effort, rose up in his soul in bitterness and seemed to take shape before him in the woman who at every turn had barred his way. She had taken everything else from him; and now she meant to take the one thing that made up for all the others.

For a moment such a flame of hate rose in him that it ran down his arm and clenched his fist against her. He took a wild step forward and then stopped.

“You’re—you’re not coming down?” he said in a bewildered voice.

“No. I guess I’ll lay down on the bed a little while,” she answered mildly; and he turned and walked out of the room.

In the kitchen Mattie was sitting by the stove, the cat curled up on her knees. She sprang to her feet as Ethan entered and carried the covered dish of meat-pie to the table.

“I hope Zeena isn’t sick?” she asked.

“No.”

She shone at him across the table. “Well, sit right down then. You must be starving.” She uncovered the pie and pushed it over to him. So they were to have one more evening together, her happy eyes seemed to say!

He helped himself mechanically and began to eat; then disgust took him by the throat and he laid down his fork.

Mattie’s tender gaze was on him and she marked the gesture.

“Why, Ethan, what’s the matter? Don’t it taste right?”

“Yes—it’s first-rate. Only I—” He pushed his plate away, rose from his chair, and walked around the table to her side. She started up with frightened eyes.

“Ethan, there’s something wrong! I knew there was!”

She seemed to melt against him in her terror, and he caught her in his arms, held her fast there, felt her lashes beat his cheek like netted butterflies.

“What is it—what is it?” she stammered; but he had found her lips at last and was drinking unconsciousness of everything but the joy they gave him.

She lingered a moment, caught in the same strong current; then she slipped from him and drew back a step or two, pale and troubled. Her look smote him with compunction, and he cried out, as if he saw her drowning in a dream: “You can’t go, Matt! I’ll never let you!”

“Go—go?” she stammered. “Must I go?”

The words went on sounding between them as though a torch of warning flew from hand to hand through a black landscape.

Ethan was overcome with shame at his lack of self-control in flinging the news at her so brutally. His head reeled and he had to support himself against the table. All the while he felt as if he were still kissing her, and yet dying of thirst for her lips.

“Ethan, what has happened? Is Zeena mad with me?”

Her cry steadied him, though it deepened his wrath and pity. “No, no,” he assured her, “it’s not that. But this new doctor has scared her about herself. You know she believes all they say the first time she sees them. And this one’s told her she won’t get well unless she lays up and don’t do a thing about the house—not for months—”

He paused, his eyes wandering from her miserably. She stood silent a moment, drooping before him like a broken branch. She was so small and weak-looking that it wrung his heart; but suddenly she lifted her head and looked straight at him. “And she wants somebody handier in my place? Is that it?”

“That’s what she says to-night.”

“If she says it to-night she’ll say it to-morrow.”

Both bowed to the inexorable truth: they knew that Zeena never changed her mind, and that in her case a resolve once taken was equivalent to an act performed.

There was a long silence between them; then Mattie said in a low voice: “Don’t be too sorry, Ethan.”

“Oh, God—oh, God,” he groaned. The glow of passion he had felt for her had melted to an aching tenderness. He saw her quick lids beating back the tears, and longed to take her in his arms and soothe her.

“You’re letting your supper get cold,” she admonished him with a pale gleam of gaiety.

“Oh, Matt—Matt—where’ll you go to?”

Her lids sank and a tremor crossed her face. He saw that for the first time the thought of the future came to her distinctly. “I might get something to do over at Stamford,” she faltered, as if knowing that he knew she had no hope.



He dropped back into his seat and hid his face in his hands. Despair seized him at the thought of her setting out alone to renew the weary quest for work. In the only place where she was known she was surrounded by indifference or animosity; and what chance had she, inexperienced and untrained, among the million bread-seekers of the cities? There came back to him miserable tales he had heard at Worcester, and the faces of girls whose lives had begun as hopefully as Mattie's.... It was not possible to think of such things without a revolt of his whole being. He sprang up suddenly.

"You can't go, Matt! I won't let you! She's always had her way, but I mean to have mine now—"

Mattie lifted her hand with a quick gesture, and he heard his wife's step behind him.

Zeena came into the room with her dragging down-at-the-heel step, and quietly took her accustomed seat between them.

"I felt a little mite better, and Dr. Buck says I ought to eat all I can to keep my strength up, even if I ain't got any appetite," she said in her flat whine, reaching across Mattie for the teapot. Her "good" dress had been replaced by the black calico and brown knitted shawl which formed her daily wear, and with them she had put on her usual face and manner. She poured out her tea, added a great deal of milk to it, helped herself largely to pie and pickles, and made the familiar gesture of adjusting her false teeth before she began to eat. The cat rubbed itself ingratiatingly against her, and she said "Good Pussy," stooped to stroke it and gave it a scrap of meat from her plate.

Ethan sat speechless, not pretending to eat, but Mattie nibbled valiantly at her food and asked Zeena one or two questions about her visit to Bettsbridge. Zeena answered in her every-day tone and, warming to the theme, regaled them with several vivid descriptions of intestinal disturbances among her friends and relatives. She looked straight at Mattie as she spoke, a faint smile deepening the vertical lines between her nose and chin.

When supper was over she rose from her seat and pressed her hand to the flat surface over the region of her heart. "That pie of

yours always sets a mite heavy, Matt,” she said, not ill-naturedly. She seldom abbreviated the girl’s name, and when she did so it was always a sign of affability.

“I’ve a good mind to go and hunt up those stomach powders I got last year over in Springfield,” she continued. “I ain’t tried them for quite a while, and maybe they’ll help the heartburn.”

Mattie lifted her eyes. “Can’t I get them for you, Zeena?” she ventured.

“No. They’re in a place you don’t know about,” Zeena answered darkly, with one of her secret looks.

She went out of the kitchen and Mattie, rising, began to clear the dishes from the table. As she passed Ethan’s chair their eyes met and clung together desolately. The warm still kitchen looked as peaceful as the night before. The cat had sprung to Zeena’s rocking-chair, and the heat of the fire was beginning to draw out the faint sharp scent of the geraniums. Ethan dragged himself wearily to his feet.

“I’ll go out and take a look around,” he said, going toward the passage to get his lantern.

As he reached the door he met Zeena coming back into the room, her lips twitching with anger, a flush of excitement on her sallow face. The shawl had slipped from her shoulders and was dragging at her down-trodden heels, and in her hands she carried the fragments of the red glass pickle-dish.

“I’d like to know who done this,” she said, looking sternly from Ethan to Mattie.

There was no answer, and she continued in a trembling voice: “I went to get those powders I’d put away in father’s old spectacle-case, top of the china-closet, where I keep the things I set store by, so’s folks shan’t meddle with them—” Her voice broke, and two small tears hung on her lashless lids and ran slowly down her cheeks. “It takes the stepladder to get at the top shelf, and I put Aunt Philura Maple’s pickle-dish up there o’ purpose when we was married, and it’s never been down since, ‘cept for the spring cleaning, and then I always lifted it with my own hands, so’s ‘t it shouldn’t get broke.”

She laid the fragments reverently on the table. "I want to know who done this," she quavered.

At the challenge Ethan turned back into the room and faced her. "I can tell you, then. The cat done it."

"The cat?"

"That's what I said."

She looked at him hard, and then turned her eyes to Mattie, who was carrying the dish-pan to the table.

"I'd like to know how the cat got into my china-closet" she said.

"Chasin' mice, I guess," Ethan rejoined. "There was a mouse round the kitchen all last evening."

Zeena continued to look from one to the other; then she emitted her small strange laugh. "I knew the cat was a smart cat," she said in a high voice, "but I didn't know he was smart enough to pick up the pieces of my pickle-dish and lay 'em edge to edge on the very shelf he knocked 'em off of."

Mattie suddenly drew her arms out of the steaming water. "It wasn't Ethan's fault, Zeena! The cat did break the dish; but I got it down from the china-closet, and I'm the one to blame for its getting broken."

Zeena stood beside the ruin of her treasure, stiffening into a stony image of resentment, "You got down my pickle-dish-what for?"

A bright flush flew to Mattie's cheeks. "I wanted to make the supper-table pretty," she said.

"You wanted to make the supper-table pretty; and you waited till my back was turned, and took the thing I set most store by of anything I've got, and wouldn't never use it, not even when the minister come to dinner, or Aunt Martha Pierce come over from Bettsbridge—" Zeena paused with a gasp, as if terrified by her own evocation of the sacrilege. "You're a bad girl, Mattie Silver, and I always known it. It's the way your father begun, and I was warned of it when I took you, and I tried to keep my things where you couldn't get at 'em—and now you've took from me the one I cared for most of all—" She broke off in a short spasm of sobs that passed and left her more than ever like a shape of stone.

"If I'd 'a' listened to folks, you'd 'a' gone before now, and this wouldn't 'a' happened," she said; and gathering up the bits of broken glass she went out of the room as if she carried a dead body...

## VIII

When Ethan was called back to the farm by his father's illness his mother gave him, for his own use, a small room behind the untenanted "best parlour." Here he had nailed up shelves for his books, built himself a box-sofa out of boards and a mattress, laid out his papers on a kitchen-table, hung on the rough plaster wall an engraving of Abraham Lincoln and a calendar with "Thoughts from the Poets," and tried, with these meagre properties, to produce some likeness to the study of a "minister" who had been kind to him and lent him books when he was at Worcester. He still took refuge there in summer, but when Mattie came to live at the farm he had to give her his stove, and consequently the room was uninhabitable for several months of the year.

To this retreat he descended as soon as the house was quiet, and Zeena's steady breathing from the bed had assured him that there was to be no sequel to the scene in the kitchen. After Zeena's departure he and Mattie had stood speechless, neither seeking to approach the other. Then the girl had returned to her task of clearing up the kitchen for the night and he had taken his lantern and gone on his usual round outside the house. The kitchen was empty when he came back to it; but his tobacco-pouch and pipe had been laid on the table, and under them was a scrap of paper torn from the back of a seedsman's catalogue, on which three words were written: "Don't trouble, Ethan."

Going into his cold dark "study" he placed the lantern on the table and, stooping to its light, read the message again and again. It was the first time that Mattie had ever written to him, and the possession of the paper gave him a strange new sense of her

nearness; yet it deepened his anguish by reminding him that henceforth they would have no other way of communicating with each other. For the life of her smile, the warmth of her voice, only cold paper and dead words!

Confused motions of rebellion stormed in him. He was too young, too strong, too full of the sap of living, to submit so easily to the destruction of his hopes. Must he wear out all his years at the side of a bitter querulous woman? Other possibilities had been in him, possibilities sacrificed, one by one, to Zeena's narrow-mindedness and ignorance. And what good had come of it? She was a hundred times bitterer and more discontented than when he had married her: the one pleasure left her was to inflict pain on him. All the healthy instincts of self-defence rose up in him against such waste...

He bundled himself into his old coon-skin coat and lay down on the box-sofa to think. Under his cheek he felt a hard object with strange protuberances. It was a cushion which Zeena had made for him when they were engaged—the only piece of needlework he had ever seen her do. He flung it across the floor and propped his head against the wall...

He knew a case of a man over the mountain—a young fellow of about his own age—who had escaped from just such a life of misery by going West with the girl he cared for. His wife had divorced him, and he had married the girl and prospered. Ethan had seen the couple the summer before at Shadd's Falls, where they had come to visit relatives. They had a little girl with fair curls, who wore a gold locket and was dressed like a princess. The deserted wife had not done badly either. Her husband had given her the farm and she had managed to sell it, and with that and the alimony she had started a lunch-room at Bettsbridge and bloomed into activity and importance. Ethan was fired by the thought. Why should he not leave with Mattie the next day, instead of letting her go alone? He would hide his valise under the seat of the sleigh, and Zeena would suspect nothing till she went upstairs for her afternoon nap and found a letter on the bed...

His impulses were still near the surface, and he sprang up, re-lit

the lantern, and sat down at the table. He rummaged in the drawer for a sheet of paper, found one, and began to write.

“Zeena, I’ve done all I could for you, and I don’t see as it’s been any use. I don’t blame you, nor I don’t blame myself. Maybe both of us will do better separate. I’m going to try my luck West, and you can sell the farm and mill, and keep the money—”

His pen paused on the word, which brought home to him the relentless conditions of his lot. If he gave the farm and mill to Zeena what would be left him to start his own life with? Once in the West he was sure of picking up work—he would not have feared to try his chance alone. But with Mattie depending on him the case was different. And what of Zeena’s fate? Farm and mill were mortgaged to the limit of their value, and even if she found a purchaser—in itself an unlikely chance—it was doubtful if she could clear a thousand dollars on the sale. Meanwhile, how could she keep the farm going? It was only by incessant labour and personal supervision that Ethan drew a meagre living from his land, and his wife, even if she were in better health than she imagined, could never carry such a burden alone.

Well, she could go back to her people, then, and see what they would do for her. It was the fate she was forcing on Mattie—why not let her try it herself? By the time she had discovered his whereabouts, and brought suit for divorce, he would probably—wherever he was—be earning enough to pay her a sufficient alimony. And the alternative was to let Mattie go forth alone, with far less hope of ultimate provision...

He had scattered the contents of the table-drawer in his search for a sheet of paper, and as he took up his pen his eye fell on an old copy of the Bettsbridge Eagle. The advertising sheet was folded uppermost, and he read the seductive words: “Trips to the West: Reduced Rates.”

He drew the lantern nearer and eagerly scanned the fares; then the paper fell from his hand and he pushed aside his unfinished letter. A moment ago he had wondered what he and Mattie were to live on when they reached the West; now he saw that he had

not even the money to take her there. Borrowing was out of the question: six months before he had given his only security to raise funds for necessary repairs to the mill, and he knew that without security no one at Starkfield would lend him ten dollars. The inexorable facts closed in on him like prison-warders handcuffing a convict. There was no way out—none. He was a prisoner for life, and now his one ray of light was to be extinguished.

He crept back heavily to the sofa, stretching himself out with limbs so leaden that he felt as if they would never move again. Tears rose in his throat and slowly burned their way to his lids.

As he lay there, the window-pane that faced him, growing gradually lighter, inlaid upon the darkness a square of moon-suffused sky. A crooked tree-branch crossed it, a branch of the apple-tree under which, on summer evenings, he had sometimes found Mattie sitting when he came up from the mill. Slowly the rim of the rainy vapours caught fire and burnt away, and a pure moon swung into the blue. Ethan, rising on his elbow, watched the landscape whiten and shape itself under the sculpture of the moon. This was the night on which he was to have taken Mattie coasting, and there hung the lamp to light them! He looked out at the slopes bathed in lustre, the silver-edged darkness of the woods, the spectral purple of the hills against the sky, and it seemed as though all the beauty of the night had been poured out to mock his wretchedness...

He fell asleep, and when he woke the chill of the winter dawn was in the room. He felt cold and stiff and hungry, and ashamed of being hungry. He rubbed his eyes and went to the window. A red sun stood over the grey rim of the fields, behind trees that looked black and brittle. He said to himself: "This is Matt's last day," and tried to think what the place would be without her.

As he stood there he heard a step behind him and she entered.

"Oh, Ethan—were you here all night?"

She looked so small and pinched, in her poor dress, with the red scarf wound about her, and the cold light turning her paleness sallow, that Ethan stood before her without speaking.

"You must be frozen," she went on, fixing lustreless eyes on him. He drew a step nearer. "How did you know I was here?"

"Because I heard you go down stairs again after I went to bed, and I listened all night, and you didn't come up."

All his tenderness rushed to his lips. He looked at her and said: "I'll come right along and make up the kitchen fire."

They went back to the kitchen, and he fetched the coal and kindlings and cleared out the stove for her, while she brought in the milk and the cold remains of the meat-pie. When warmth began to radiate from the stove, and the first ray of sunlight lay on the kitchen floor, Ethan's dark thoughts melted in the mellower air. The sight of Mattie going about her work as he had seen her on so many mornings made it seem impossible that she should ever cease to be a part of the scene. He said to himself that he had doubtless exaggerated the significance of Zeena's threats, and that she too, with the return of daylight, would come to a saner mood.

He went up to Mattie as she bent above the stove, and laid his hand on her arm. "I don't want you should trouble either," he said, looking down into her eyes with a smile.

She flushed up warmly and whispered back: "No, Ethan, I ain't going to trouble."

"I guess things'll straighten out," he added.

There was no answer but a quick throb of her lids, and he went on: "She ain't said anything this morning?"

"No. I haven't seen her yet."

"Don't you take any notice when you do."

With this injunction he left her and went out to the cow-barn. He saw Jotham Powell walking up the hill through the morning mist, and the familiar sight added to his growing conviction of security.

As the two men were clearing out the stalls Jotham rested on his pitch-fork to say: "Dan'l Byrne's goin' over to the Flats to-day noon, an' he c'd take Mattie's trunk along, and make it easier ridin' when I take her over in the sleigh."

Ethan looked at him blankly, and he continued: "Mis' Frome said



the new girl'd be at the Flats at five, and I was to take Mattie then, so's 't she could ketch the six o'clock train for Stamford."

Ethan felt the blood drumming in his temples. He had to wait a moment before he could find voice to say: "Oh, it ain't so sure about Mattie's going—"

"That so?" said Jotham indifferently; and they went on with their work.

When they returned to the kitchen the two women were already at breakfast. Zeena had an air of unusual alertness and activity. She drank two cups of coffee and fed the cat with the scraps left in the pie-dish; then she rose from her seat and, walking over to the window, snipped two or three yellow leaves from the geraniums. "Aunt Martha's ain't got a faded leaf on 'em; but they pine away when they ain't cared for," she said reflectively. Then she turned to Jotham and asked: "What time'd you say Dan'l Byrne'd be along?"

The hired man threw a hesitating glance at Ethan. "Round about noon," he said.

Zeena turned to Mattie. "That trunk of yours is too heavy for the sleigh, and Dan'l Byrne'll be round to take it over to the Flats," she said.

"I'm much obliged to you, Zeena," said Mattie.

"I'd like to go over things with you first," Zeena continued in an unperturbed voice. "I know there's a huckabuck towel missing; and I can't make out what you done with that match-safe 't used to stand behind the stuffed owl in the parlour."

She went out, followed by Mattie, and when the men were alone Jotham said to his employer: "I guess I better let Dan'l come round, then."

Ethan finished his usual morning tasks about the house and barn; then he said to Jotham: "I'm going down to Starkfield. Tell them not to wait dinner."

The passion of rebellion had broken out in him again. That which had seemed incredible in the sober light of day had really come to pass, and he was to assist as a helpless spectator at Mattie's banishment. His manhood was humbled by the part he was

compelled to play and by the thought of what Mattie must think of him. Confused impulses struggled in him as he strode along to the village. He had made up his mind to do something, but he did not know what it would be.

The early mist had vanished and the fields lay like a silver shield under the sun. It was one of the days when the glitter of winter shines through a pale haze of spring. Every yard of the road was alive with Mattie's presence, and there was hardly a branch against the sky or a tangle of brambles on the bank in which some bright shred of memory was not caught. Once, in the stillness, the call of a bird in a mountain ash was so like her laughter that his heart tightened and then grew large; and all these things made him see that something must be done at once.

Suddenly it occurred to him that Andrew Hale, who was a kind-hearted man, might be induced to reconsider his refusal and advance a small sum on the lumber if he were told that Zeena's ill-health made it necessary to hire a servant. Hale, after all, knew enough of Ethan's situation to make it possible for the latter to renew his appeal without too much loss of pride; and, moreover, how much did pride count in the ebullition of passions in his breast?

The more he considered his plan the more hopeful it seemed. If he could get Mrs. Hale's ear he felt certain of success, and with fifty dollars in his pocket nothing could keep him from Mattie...

His first object was to reach Starkfield before Hale had started for his work; he knew the carpenter had a job down the Corbury road and was likely to leave his house early. Ethan's long strides grew more rapid with the accelerated beat of his thoughts, and as he reached the foot of School House Hill he caught sight of Hale's sleigh in the distance. He hurried forward to meet it, but as it drew nearer he saw that it was driven by the carpenter's youngest boy and that the figure at his side, looking like a large upright cocoon in spectacles, was that of Mrs. Hale. Ethan signed to them to stop, and Mrs. Hale leaned forward, her pink wrinkles twinkling with benevolence.

"Mr. Hale? Why, yes, you'll find him down home now. He ain't

going to his work this forenoon. He woke up with a touch o' lumbago, and I just made him put on one of old Dr. Kidder's plasters and set right up into the fire."

Beaming maternally on Ethan, she bent over to add: "I on'y just heard from Mr. Hale 'bout Zeena's going over to Bettsbridge to see that new doctor. I'm real sorry she's feeling so bad again! I hope he thinks he can do something for her. I don't know anybody round here's had more sickness than Zeena. I always tell Mr. Hale I don't know what she'd 'a' done if she hadn't 'a' had you to look after her; and I used to say the same thing 'bout your mother. You've had an awful mean time, Ethan Frome."

She gave him a last nod of sympathy while her son chirped to the horse; and Ethan, as she drove off, stood in the middle of the road and stared after the retreating sleigh.

It was a long time since any one had spoken to him as kindly as Mrs. Hale. Most people were either indifferent to his troubles, or disposed to think it natural that a young fellow of his age should have carried without repining the burden of three crippled lives. But Mrs. Hale had said, "You've had an awful mean time, Ethan Frome," and he felt less alone with his misery. If the Hales were sorry for him they would surely respond to his appeal...

He started down the road toward their house, but at the end of a few yards he pulled up sharply, the blood in his face. For the first time, in the light of the words he had just heard, he saw what he was about to do. He was planning to take advantage of the Hales' sympathy to obtain money from them on false pretences. That was a plain statement of the cloudy purpose which had driven him in headlong to Starkfield.

With the sudden perception of the point to which his madness had carried him, the madness fell and he saw his life before him as it was. He was a poor man, the husband of a sickly woman, whom his desertion would leave alone and destitute; and even if he had had the heart to desert her he could have done so only by deceiving two kindly people who had pitied him.

He turned and walked slowly back to the farm.

## IX

At the kitchen door Daniel Byrne sat in his sleigh behind a big-boned grey who pawed the snow and swung his long head restlessly from side to side.

Ethan went into the kitchen and found his wife by the stove. Her head was wrapped in her shawl, and she was reading a book called “Kidney Troubles and Their Cure” on which he had had to pay extra postage only a few days before.

Zeena did not move or look up when he entered, and after a moment he asked: “Where’s Mattie?”

Without lifting her eyes from the page she replied: “I presume she’s getting down her trunk.”

The blood rushed to his face. “Getting down her trunk—alone?”

“Jotham Powell’s down in the wood-lot, and Dan’l Byrne says he darsn’t leave that horse,” she returned.

Her husband, without stopping to hear the end of the phrase, had left the kitchen and sprung up the stairs. The door of Mattie’s room was shut, and he wavered a moment on the landing. “Matt,” he said in a low voice; but there was no answer, and he put his hand on the door-knob.

He had never been in her room except once, in the early summer, when he had gone there to plaster up a leak in the eaves, but he remembered exactly how everything had looked: the red-and-white quilt on her narrow bed, the pretty pin-cushion on the chest of drawers, and over it the enlarged photograph of her mother, in an oxydized frame, with a bunch of dyed grasses at the back. Now these and all other tokens of her presence had vanished, and the room looked as bare and comfortless as when Zeena had shown her into it on the day of her arrival. In the middle of the floor stood her trunk, and on the trunk she sat in her Sunday dress, her back turned to the door and her face in her hands. She had not heard Ethan’s call because she was sobbing and she did not hear his step till he stood close behind her and laid his hands on her shoulders.

"Matt—oh, don't—oh, Matt!"

She started up, lifting her wet face to his. "Ethan—I thought I wasn't ever going to see you again!"

He took her in his arms, pressing her close, and with a trembling hand smoothed away the hair from her forehead.

"Not see me again? What do you mean?"

She sobbed out: "Jotham said you told him we wasn't to wait dinner for you, and I thought—"

"You thought I meant to cut it?" he finished for her grimly.

She clung to him without answering, and he laid his lips on her hair, which was soft yet springy, like certain mosses on warm slopes, and had the faint woody fragrance of fresh sawdust in the sun.

Through the door they heard Zeena's voice calling out from below: "Dan'l Byrne says you better hurry up if you want him to take that trunk."

They drew apart with stricken faces. Words of resistance rushed to Ethan's lips and died there. Mattie found her handkerchief and dried her eyes; then, bending down, she took hold of a handle of the trunk.

Ethan put her aside. "You let go, Matt," he ordered her.

She answered: "It takes two to coax it round the corner"; and submitting to this argument he grasped the other handle, and together they manoeuvred the heavy trunk out to the landing.

"Now let go," he repeated; then he shouldered the trunk and carried it down the stairs and across the passage to the kitchen. Zeena, who had gone back to her seat by the stove, did not lift her head from her book as he passed. Mattie followed him out of the door and helped him to lift the trunk into the back of the sleigh. When it was in place they stood side by side on the door-step, watching Daniel Byrne plunge off behind his fidgety horse.

It seemed to Ethan that his heart was bound with cords which an unseen hand was tightening with every tick of the clock. Twice he opened his lips to speak to Mattie and found no breath. At length, as she turned to re-enter the house, he laid a detaining hand on her.

"I'm going to drive you over, Matt," he whispered.

She murmured back: "I think Zeena wants I should go with Jotham."

"I'm going to drive you over," he repeated; and she went into the kitchen without answering.

At dinner Ethan could not eat. If he lifted his eyes they rested on Zeena's pinched face, and the corners of her straight lips seemed to quiver away into a smile. She ate well, declaring that the mild weather made her feel better, and pressed a second helping of beans on Jotham Powell, whose wants she generally ignored.

Mattie, when the meal was over, went about her usual task of clearing the table and washing up the dishes. Zeena, after feeding the cat, had returned to her rocking-chair by the stove, and Jotham Powell, who always lingered last, reluctantly pushed back his chair and moved toward the door.

On the threshold he turned back to say to Ethan: "What time'll I come round for Mattie?"

Ethan was standing near the window, mechanically filling his pipe while he watched Mattie move to and fro. He answered: "You needn't come round; I'm going to drive her over myself."

He saw the rise of the colour in Mattie's averted cheek, and the quick lifting of Zeena's head.

"I want you should stay here this afternoon, Ethan," his wife said. "Jotham can drive Mattie over."

Mattie flung an imploring glance at him, but he repeated curtly: "I'm going to drive her over myself."

Zeena continued in the same even tone: "I wanted you should stay and fix up that stove in Mattie's room afore the girl gets here. It ain't been drawing right for nigh on a month now."

Ethan's voice rose indignantly. "If it was good enough for Mattie I guess it's good enough for a hired girl."

"That girl that's coming told me she was used to a house where they had a furnace," Zeena persisted with the same monotonous mildness.

"She'd better ha' stayed there then," he flung back at her; and

turning to Mattie he added in a hard voice: "You be ready by three, Matt; I've got business at Corbury."

Jotham Powell had started for the barn, and Ethan strode down after him aflame with anger. The pulses in his temples throbbed and a fog was in his eyes. He went about his task without knowing what force directed him, or whose hands and feet were fulfilling its orders. It was not till he led out the sorrel and backed him between the shafts of the sleigh that he once more became conscious of what he was doing. As he passed the bridle over the horse's head, and wound the traces around the shafts, he remembered the day when he had made the same preparations in order to drive over and meet his wife's cousin at the Flats. It was little more than a year ago, on just such a soft afternoon, with a "feel" of spring in the air. The sorrel, turning the same big ringed eye on him, nuzzled the palm of his hand in the same way; and one by one all the days between rose up and stood before him...

He flung the bearskin into the sleigh, climbed to the seat, and drove up to the house. When he entered the kitchen it was empty, but Mattie's bag and shawl lay ready by the door. He went to the foot of the stairs and listened. No sound reached him from above, but presently he thought he heard some one moving about in his deserted study, and pushing open the door he saw Mattie, in her hat and jacket, standing with her back to him near the table.

She started at his approach and turning quickly, said: "Is it time?"

"What are you doing here, Matt?" he asked her.

She looked at him timidly. "I was just taking a look round—that's all," she answered, with a wavering smile.

They went back into the kitchen without speaking, and Ethan picked up her bag and shawl.

"Where's Zeena?" he asked.

"She went upstairs right after dinner. She said she had those shooting pains again, and didn't want to be disturbed."

"Didn't she say good-bye to you?"

"No. That was all she said."

Ethan, looking slowly about the kitchen, said to himself with a

shudder that in a few hours he would be returning to it alone. Then the sense of unreality overcame him once more, and he could not bring himself to believe that Mattie stood there for the last time before him.

"Come on," he said almost gaily, opening the door and putting her bag into the sleigh. He sprang to his seat and bent over to tuck the rug about her as she slipped into the place at his side. "Now then, go 'long," he said, with a shake of the reins that sent the sorrel placidly jogging down the hill.

"We got lots of time for a good ride, Matt!" he cried, seeking her hand beneath the fur and pressing it in his. His face tingled and he felt dizzy, as if he had stopped in at the Starkfield saloon on a zero day for a drink.

At the gate, instead of making for Starkfield, he turned the sorrel to the right, up the Bettsbridge road. Mattie sat silent, giving no sign of surprise; but after a moment she said: "Are you going round by Shadow Pond?"

He laughed and answered: "I knew you'd know!"

She drew closer under the bearskin, so that, looking sideways around his coat-sleeve, he could just catch the tip of her nose and a blown brown wave of hair. They drove slowly up the road between fields glistening under the pale sun, and then bent to the right down a lane edged with spruce and larch. Ahead of them, a long way off, a range of hills stained by mottlings of black forest flowed away in round white curves against the sky. The lane passed into a pine-wood with boles reddening in the afternoon sun and delicate blue shadows on the snow. As they entered it the breeze fell and a warm stillness seemed to drop from the branches with the dropping needles. Here the snow was so pure that the tiny tracks of wood-animals had left on it intricate lace-like patterns, and the bluish cones caught in its surface stood out like ornaments of bronze.

Ethan drove on in silence till they reached a part of the wood where the pines were more widely spaced; then he drew up and helped Mattie to get out of the sleigh. They passed between the aromatic trunks, the snow breaking crisply under their feet, till they



came to a small sheet of water with steep wooded sides. Across its frozen surface, from the farther bank, a single hill rising against the western sun threw the long conical shadow which gave the lake its name. It was a shy secret spot, full of the same dumb melancholy that Ethan felt in his heart.

He looked up and down the little pebbly beach till his eye lit on a fallen tree-trunk half submerged in snow.

"There's where we sat at the picnic," he reminded her.

The entertainment of which he spoke was one of the few that they had taken part in together: a "church picnic" which, on a long afternoon of the preceding summer, had filled the retired place with merry-making. Mattie had begged him to go with her but he had refused. Then, toward sunset, coming down from the mountain where he had been felling timber, he had been caught by some strayed revellers and drawn into the group by the lake, where Mattie, encircled by facetious youths, and bright as a blackberry under her spreading hat, was brewing coffee over a gipsy fire. He remembered the shyness he had felt at approaching her in his uncouth clothes, and then the lighting up of her face, and the way she had broken through the group to come to him with a cup in her hand. They had sat for a few minutes on the fallen log by the pond, and she had missed her gold locket, and set the young men searching for it; and it was Ethan who had spied it in the moss.... That was all; but all their intercourse had been made up of just such inarticulate flashes, when they seemed to come suddenly upon happiness as if they had surprised a butterfly in the winter woods...

"It was right there I found your locket," he said, pushing his foot into a dense tuft of blueberry bushes.

"I never saw anybody with such sharp eyes!" she answered.

She sat down on the tree-trunk in the sun and he sat down beside her.

"You were as pretty as a picture in that pink hat," he said.

She laughed with pleasure. "Oh, I guess it was the hat!" she rejoined.

They had never before avowed their inclination so openly, and

Ethan, for a moment, had the illusion that he was a free man, wooing the girl he meant to marry. He looked at her hair and longed to touch it again, and to tell her that it smelt of the woods; but he had never learned to say such things.

Suddenly she rose to her feet and said: "We mustn't stay here any longer."

He continued to gaze at her vaguely, only half-roused from his dream. "There's plenty of time," he answered.

They stood looking at each other as if the eyes of each were straining to absorb and hold fast the other's image. There were things he had to say to her before they parted, but he could not say them in that place of summer memories, and he turned and followed her in silence to the sleigh. As they drove away the sun sank behind the hill and the pine-boles turned from red to grey.

By a devious track between the fields they wound back to the Starkfield road. Under the open sky the light was still clear, with a reflection of cold red on the eastern hills. The clumps of trees in the snow seemed to draw together in ruffled lumps, like birds with their heads under their wings; and the sky, as it paled, rose higher, leaving the earth more alone.

As they turned into the Starkfield road Ethan said: "Matt, what do you mean to do?"

She did not answer at once, but at length she said: "I'll try to get a place in a store."

"You know you can't do it. The bad air and the standing all day nearly killed you before."

"I'm a lot stronger than I was before I came to Starkfield."

"And now you're going to throw away all the good it's done you!"

There seemed to be no answer to this, and again they drove on for a while without speaking. With every yard of the way some spot where they had stood, and laughed together or been silent, clutched at Ethan and dragged him back.

"Isn't there any of your father's folks could help you?"

"There isn't any of 'em I'd ask."

He lowered his voice to say: "You know there's nothing I wouldn't do for you if I could."

"I know there isn't."

"But I can't—"

She was silent, but he felt a slight tremor in the shoulder against his.

"Oh, Matt," he broke out, "if I could ha' gone with you now I'd ha' done it—"

She turned to him, pulling a scrap of paper from her breast. "Ethan—I found this," she stammered. Even in the failing light he saw it was the letter to his wife that he had begun the night before and forgotten to destroy. Through his astonishment there ran a fierce thrill of joy. "Matt—" he cried; "if I could ha' done it, would you?"

"Oh, Ethan, Ethan—what's the use?" With a sudden movement she tore the letter in shreds and sent them fluttering off into the snow.

"Tell me, Matt! Tell me!" he adjured her.

She was silent for a moment; then she said, in such a low tone that he had to stoop his head to hear her: "I used to think of it sometimes, summer nights when the moon was so bright. I couldn't sleep."

His heart reeled with the sweetness of it. "As long ago as that?"

She answered, as if the date had long been fixed for her: "The first time was at Shadow Pond."

"Was that why you gave me my coffee before the others?"

"I don't know. Did I? I was dreadfully put out when you wouldn't go to the picnic with me; and then, when I saw you coming down the road, I thought maybe you'd gone home that way o' purpose; and that made me glad."

They were silent again. They had reached the point where the road dipped to the hollow by Ethan's mill and as they descended the darkness descended with them, dropping down like a black veil from the heavy hemlock boughs.

"I'm tied hand and foot, Matt. There isn't a thing I can do," he began again.

"You must write to me sometimes, Ethan."

"Oh, what good'll writing do? I want to put my hand out and touch you. I want to do for you and care for you. I want to be there when you're sick and when you're lonesome."

"You mustn't think but what I'll do all right."

"You won't need me, you mean? I suppose you'll marry!"

"Oh, Ethan!" she cried.

"I don't know how it is you make me feel, Matt. I'd a'most rather have you dead than that!"

"Oh, I wish I was, I wish I was!" she sobbed.

The sound of her weeping shook him out of his dark anger, and he felt ashamed.

"Don't let's talk that way," he whispered.

"Why shouldn't we, when it's true? I've been wishing it every minute of the day."

"Matt! You be quiet! Don't you say it."

"There's never anybody been good to me but you."

"Don't say that either, when I can't lift a hand for you!"

"Yes; but it's true just the same."

They had reached the top of School House Hill and Starkfield lay below them in the twilight. A cutter, mounting the road from the village, passed them by in a joyous flutter of bells, and they straightened themselves and looked ahead with rigid faces. Along the main street lights had begun to shine from the house-fronts and stray figures were turning in here and there at the gates. Ethan, with a touch of his whip, roused the sorrel to a languid trot.

As they drew near the end of the village the cries of children reached them, and they saw a knot of boys, with sleds behind them, scattering across the open space before the church.

"I guess this'll be their last coast for a day or two," Ethan said, looking up at the mild sky.

Mattie was silent, and he added: "We were to have gone down last night."

Still she did not speak and, prompted by an obscure desire to help himself and her through their miserable last hour, he went on

discursively: "Ain't it funny we haven't been down together but just that once last winter?"

She answered: "It wasn't often I got down to the village."

"That's so," he said.

They had reached the crest of the Corbury road, and between the indistinct white glimmer of the church and the black curtain of the Varnum spruces the slope stretched away below them without a sled on its length. Some erratic impulse prompted Ethan to say: "How'd you like me to take you down now?"

She forced a laugh. "Why, there isn't time!"

"There's all the time we want. Come along!" His one desire now was to postpone the moment of turning the sorrel toward the Flats.

"But the girl," she faltered. "The girl'll be waiting at the station."

"Well, let her wait. You'd have to if she didn't. Come!"

The note of authority in his voice seemed to subdue her, and when he had jumped from the sleigh she let him help her out, saying only, with a vague feint of reluctance: "But there isn't a sled round anywheres."

"Yes, there is! Right over there under the spruces." He threw the bearskin over the sorrel, who stood passively by the roadside, hanging a meditative head. Then he caught Mattie's hand and drew her after him toward the sled.

She seated herself obediently and he took his place behind her, so close that her hair brushed his face. "All right, Matt?" he called out, as if the width of the road had been between them.

She turned her head to say: "It's dreadfully dark. Are you sure you can see?"

He laughed contemptuously: "I could go down this coast with my eyes tied!" and she laughed with him, as if she liked his audacity. Nevertheless he sat still a moment, straining his eyes down the long hill, for it was the most confusing hour of the evening, the hour when the last clearness from the upper sky is merged with the rising night in a blur that disguises landmarks and falsifies distances.

"Now!" he cried.

The sled started with a bound, and they flew on through the dusk,

gathering smoothness and speed as they went, with the hollow night opening out below them and the air singing by like an organ. Mattie sat perfectly still, but as they reached the bend at the foot of the hill, where the big elm thrust out a deadly elbow, he fancied that she shrank a little closer.

“Don’t be scared, Matt!” he cried exultantly, as they spun safely past it and flew down the second slope; and when they reached the level ground beyond, and the speed of the sled began to slacken, he heard her give a little laugh of glee.

They sprang off and started to walk back up the hill. Ethan dragged the sled with one hand and passed the other through Mattie’s arm.

“Were you scared I’d run you into the elm?” he asked with a boyish laugh.

“I told you I was never scared with you,” she answered.

The strange exaltation of his mood had brought on one of his rare fits of boastfulness. “It is a tricky place, though. The least swerve, and we’d never ha’ come up again. But I can measure distances to a hair’s-breadth—always could.”

She murmured: “I always say you’ve got the surest eye...”

Deep silence had fallen with the starless dusk, and they leaned on each other without speaking; but at every step of their climb Ethan said to himself: “It’s the last time we’ll ever walk together.”

They mounted slowly to the top of the hill. When they were abreast of the church he stooped his head to her to ask: “Are you tired?” and she answered, breathing quickly: “It was splendid!”

With a pressure of his arm he guided her toward the Norway spruces. “I guess this sled must be Ned Hale’s. Anyhow I’ll leave it where I found it.” He drew the sled up to the Varnum gate and rested it against the fence. As he raised himself he suddenly felt Mattie close to him among the shadows.

“Is this where Ned and Ruth kissed each other?” she whispered breathlessly, and flung her arms about him. Her lips, groping for his, swept over his face, and he held her fast in a rapture of surprise.

“Good-bye-good-bye,” she stammered, and kissed him again.

"Oh, Matt, I can't let you go!" broke from him in the same old cry. She freed herself from his hold and he heard her sobbing. "Oh, I can't go either!" she wailed.

"Matt! What'll we do? What'll we do?"

They clung to each other's hands like children, and her body shook with desperate sobs.

Through the stillness they heard the church clock striking five.

"Oh, Ethan, it's time!" she cried.

He drew her back to him. "Time for what? You don't suppose I'm going to leave you now?"

"If I missed my train where'd I go?"

"Where are you going if you catch it?"

She stood silent, her hands lying cold and relaxed in his.

"What's the good of either of us going anywheres without the other one now?" he said.

She remained motionless, as if she had not heard him. Then she snatched her hands from his, threw her arms about his neck, and pressed a sudden drenched cheek against his face. "Ethan! Ethan! I want you to take me down again!"

"Down where?"

"The coast. Right off," she panted. "So 't we'll never come up any more."

"Matt! What on earth do you mean?"

She put her lips close against his ear to say: "Right into the big elm. You said you could. So 't we'd never have to leave each other any more."

"Why, what are you talking of? You're crazy!"

"I'm not crazy; but I will be if I leave you."

"Oh, Matt, Matt—" he groaned.

She tightened her fierce hold about his neck. Her face lay close to his face.

"Ethan, where'll I go if I leave you? I don't know how to get along alone. You said so yourself just now. Nobody but you was ever good to me. And there'll be that strange girl in the house... and she'll sleep

in my bed, where I used to lay nights and listen to hear you come up the stairs...”

The words were like fragments torn from his heart. With them came the hated vision of the house he was going back to—of the stairs he would have to go up every night, of the woman who would wait for him there. And the sweetness of Mattie’s avowal, the wild wonder of knowing at last that all that had happened to him had happened to her too, made the other vision more abhorrent, the other life more intolerable to return to...

Her pleadings still came to him between short sobs, but he no longer heard what she was saying. Her hat had slipped back and he was stroking her hair. He wanted to get the feeling of it into his hand, so that it would sleep there like a seed in winter. Once he found her mouth again, and they seemed to be by the pond together in the burning August sun. But his cheek touched hers, and it was cold and full of weeping, and he saw the road to the Flats under the night and heard the whistle of the train up the line.

The spruces swathed them in blackness and silence. They might have been in their coffins underground. He said to himself: “Perhaps it’ll feel like this...” and then again: “After this I sha’n’t feel anything...”

Suddenly he heard the old sorrel whinny across the road, and thought: “He’s wondering why he doesn’t get his supper...”

“Come!” Mattie whispered, tugging at his hand.

Her sombre violence constrained him: she seemed the embodied instrument of fate. He pulled the sled out, blinking like a night-bird as he passed from the shade of the spruces into the transparent dusk of the open. The slope below them was deserted. All Starkfield was at supper, and not a figure crossed the open space before the church. The sky, swollen with the clouds that announce a thaw, hung as low as before a summer storm. He strained his eyes through the dimness, and they seemed less keen, less capable than usual.

He took his seat on the sled and Mattie instantly placed herself in front of him. Her hat had fallen into the snow and his lips were in her hair. He stretched out his legs, drove his heels into the road to keep



the sled from slipping forward, and bent her head back between his hands. Then suddenly he sprang up again.

"Get up," he ordered her.

It was the tone she always heeded, but she cowered down in her seat, repeating vehemently: "No, no, no!"

"Get up!"

"Why?"

"I want to sit in front."

"No, no! How can you steer in front?"

"I don't have to. We'll follow the track."

They spoke in smothered whispers, as though the night were listening.

"Get up! Get up!" he urged her; but she kept on repeating: "Why do you want to sit in front?"

"Because I—because I want to feel you holding me," he stammered, and dragged her to her feet.

The answer seemed to satisfy her, or else she yielded to the power of his voice. He bent down, feeling in the obscurity for the glassy slide worn by preceding coasters, and placed the runners carefully between its edges. She waited while he seated himself with crossed legs in the front of the sled; then she crouched quickly down at his back and clasped her arms about him. Her breath in his neck set him shuddering again, and he almost sprang from his seat. But in a flash he remembered the alternative. She was right: this was better than parting. He leaned back and drew her mouth to his...

Just as they started he heard the sorrel's whinny again, and the familiar wistful call, and all the confused images it brought with it, went with him down the first reach of the road. Half-way down there was a sudden drop, then a rise, and after that another long delirious descent. As they took wing for this it seemed to him that they were flying indeed, flying far up into the cloudy night, with Starkfield immeasurably below them, falling away like a speck in space... Then the big elm shot up ahead, lying in wait for them at the bend of the road, and he said between his teeth: "We can fetch it; I know we can fetch it—"

As they flew toward the tree Mattie pressed her arms tighter, and her blood seemed to be in his veins. Once or twice the sled swerved a little under them. He slanted his body to keep it headed for the elm, repeating to himself again and again: "I know we can fetch it"; and little phrases she had spoken ran through his head and danced before him on the air. The big tree loomed bigger and closer, and as they bore down on it he thought: "It's waiting for us: it seems to know." But suddenly his wife's face, with twisted monstrous lineaments, thrust itself between him and his goal, and he made an instinctive movement to brush it aside. The sled swerved in response, but he righted it again, kept it straight, and drove down on the black projecting mass. There was a last instant when the air shot past him like millions of fiery wires; and then the elm...

The sky was still thick, but looking straight up he saw a single star, and tried vaguely to reckon whether it were Sirius, or—or—The effort tired him too much, and he closed his heavy lids and thought that he would sleep... The stillness was so profound that he heard a little animal twittering somewhere near by under the snow. It made a small frightened cheep like a field mouse, and he wondered languidly if it were hurt. Then he understood that it must be in pain: pain so excruciating that he seemed, mysteriously, to feel it shooting through his own body. He tried in vain to roll over in the direction of the sound, and stretched his left arm out across the snow. And now it was as though he felt rather than heard the twittering; it seemed to be under his palm, which rested on something soft and springy. The thought of the animal's suffering was intolerable to him and he struggled to raise himself, and could not because a rock, or some huge mass, seemed to be lying on him. But he continued to finger about cautiously with his left hand, thinking he might get hold of the little creature and help it; and all at once he knew that the soft thing he had touched was Mattie's hair and that his hand was on her face.

He dragged himself to his knees, the monstrous load on him

moving with him as he moved, and his hand went over and over her face, and he felt that the twittering came from her lips...

He got his face down close to hers, with his ear to her mouth, and in the darkness he saw her eyes open and heard her say his name.

"Oh, Matt, I thought we'd fetched it," he moaned; and far off, up the hill, he heard the sorrel whinny, and thought: "I ought to be getting him his feed..."

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THE QUERULOUS DRONE ceased as I entered Frome's kitchen, and of the two women sitting there I could not tell which had been the speaker.

One of them, on my appearing, raised her tall bony figure from her seat, not as if to welcome me—for she threw me no more than a brief glance of surprise—but simply to set about preparing the meal which Frome's absence had delayed. A slatternly calico wrapper hung from her shoulders and the wisps of her thin grey hair were drawn away from a high forehead and fastened at the back by a broken comb. She had pale opaque eyes which revealed nothing and reflected nothing, and her narrow lips were of the same sallow colour as her face.

The other woman was much smaller and slighter. She sat huddled in an arm-chair near the stove, and when I came in she turned her head quickly toward me, without the least corresponding movement of her body. Her hair was as grey as her companion's, her face as bloodless and shrivelled, but amber-tinted, with swarthy shadows sharpening the nose and hollowing the temples. Under her shapeless dress her body kept its limp immobility, and her dark eyes had the bright witch-like stare that disease of the spine sometimes gives.

Even for that part of the country the kitchen was a poor-looking place. With the exception of the dark-eyed woman's chair, which looked like a soiled relic of luxury bought at a country auction, the furniture was of the roughest kind. Three coarse china plates and a

broken-nosed milk-jug had been set on a greasy table scored with knife-cuts, and a couple of straw-bottomed chairs and a kitchen dresser of unpainted pine stood meagrely against the plaster walls.

"My, it's cold here! The fire must be 'most out," Frome said, glancing about him apologetically as he followed me in.

The tall woman, who had moved away from us toward the dresser, took no notice; but the other, from her cushioned niche, answered complainingly, in a high thin voice. "It's on'y just been made up this very minute. Zeena fell asleep and slep' ever so long, and I thought I'd be frozen stiff before I could wake her up and get her to 'tend to it."

I knew then that it was she who had been speaking when we entered.

Her companion, who was just coming back to the table with the remains of a cold mince-pie in a battered pie-dish, set down her unappetising burden without appearing to hear the accusation brought against her.

Frome stood hesitatingly before her as she advanced; then he looked at me and said: "This is my wife, Mis' Frome." After another interval he added, turning toward the figure in the arm-chair: "And this is Miss Mattie Silver..."

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Mrs. Hale, tender soul, had pictured me as lost in the Flats and buried under a snow-drift; and so lively was her satisfaction on seeing me safely restored to her the next morning that I felt my peril had caused me to advance several degrees in her favour.

Great was her amazement, and that of old Mrs. Varnum, on learning that Ethan Frome's old horse had carried me to and from Corbury Junction through the worst blizzard of the winter; greater still their surprise when they heard that his master had taken me in for the night.

Beneath their wondering exclamations I felt a secret curiosity to know what impressions I had received from my night in the Frome

household, and divined that the best way of breaking down their reserve was to let them try to penetrate mine. I therefore confined myself to saying, in a matter-of-fact tone, that I had been received with great kindness, and that Frome had made a bed for me in a room on the ground-floor which seemed in happier days to have been fitted up as a kind of writing-room or study.

“Well,” Mrs. Hale mused, “in such a storm I suppose he felt he couldn’t do less than take you in—but I guess it went hard with Ethan. I don’t believe but what you’re the only stranger has set foot in that house for over twenty years. He’s that proud he don’t even like his oldest friends to go there; and I don’t know as any do, any more, except myself and the doctor...”

“You still go there, Mrs. Hale?” I ventured.

“I used to go a good deal after the accident, when I was first married; but after awhile I got to think it made ’em feel worse to see us. And then one thing and another came, and my own troubles... But I generally make out to drive over there round about New Year’s, and once in the summer. Only I always try to pick a day when Ethan’s off somewheres. It’s bad enough to see the two women sitting there—but his face, when he looks round that bare place, just kills me... You see, I can look back and call it up in his mother’s day, before their troubles.”

Old Mrs. Varnum, by this time, had gone up to bed, and her daughter and I were sitting alone, after supper, in the austere seclusion of the horse-hair parlour. Mrs. Hale glanced at me tentatively, as though trying to see how much footing my conjectures gave her; and I guessed that if she had kept silence till now it was because she had been waiting, through all the years, for some one who should see what she alone had seen.

I waited to let her trust in me gather strength before I said: “Yes, it’s pretty bad, seeing all three of them there together.”

She drew her mild brows into a frown of pain. “It was just awful from the beginning. I was here in the house when they were carried up—they laid Mattie Silver in the room you’re in. She and I were great friends, and she was to have been my bridesmaid in the

spring... When she came to I went up to her and stayed all night. They gave her things to quiet her, and she didn't know much till to'rd morning, and then all of a sudden she woke up just like herself, and looked straight at me out of her big eyes, and said... Oh, I don't know why I'm telling you all this," Mrs. Hale broke off, crying.

She took off her spectacles, wiped the moisture from them, and put them on again with an unsteady hand. "It got about the next day," she went on, "that Zeena Frome had sent Mattie off in a hurry because she had a hired girl coming, and the folks here could never rightly tell what she and Ethan were doing that night coasting, when they'd ought to have been on their way to the Flats to ketch the train... I never knew myself what Zeena thought—I don't to this day. Nobody knows Zeena's thoughts. Anyhow, when she heard o' the accident she came right in and stayed with Ethan over to the minister's, where they'd carried him. And as soon as the doctors said that Mattie could be moved, Zeena sent for her and took her back to the farm."

"And there she's been ever since?"

Mrs. Hale answered simply: "There was nowhere else for her to go;" and my heart tightened at the thought of the hard compulsions of the poor.

"Yes, there she's been," Mrs. Hale continued, "and Zeena's done for her, and done for Ethan, as good as she could. It was a miracle, considering how sick she was—but she seemed to be raised right up just when the call came to her. Not as she's ever given up doctoring, and she's had sick spells right along; but she's had the strength given her to care for those two for over twenty years, and before the accident came she thought she couldn't even care for herself."

Mrs. Hale paused a moment, and I remained silent, plunged in the vision of what her words evoked. "It's horrible for them all," I murmured.

"Yes: it's pretty bad. And they ain't any of 'em easy people either. Mattie was, before the accident; I never knew a sweeter nature. But she's suffered too much—that's what I always say when folks tell me how she's soured. And Zeena, she was always cranky. Not

but what she bears with Mattie wonderful—I've seen that myself. But sometimes the two of them get going at each other, and then Ethan's face'd break your heart... When I see that, I think it's him that suffers most... anyhow it ain't Zeena, because she ain't got the time... It's a pity, though," Mrs. Hale ended, sighing, "that they're all shut up there'n that one kitchen. In the summertime, on pleasant days, they move Mattie into the parlour, or out in the door-yard, and that makes it easier... but winters there's the fires to be thought of; and there ain't a dime to spare up at the Fromes."

Mrs. Hale drew a deep breath, as though her memory were eased of its long burden, and she had no more to say; but suddenly an impulse of complete avowal seized her.

She took off her spectacles again, leaned toward me across the bead-work table-cover, and went on with lowered voice: "There was one day, about a week after the accident, when they all thought Mattie couldn't live. Well, I say it's a pity she did. I said it right out to our minister once, and he was shocked at me. Only he wasn't with me that morning when she first came to... And I say, if she'd ha' died, Ethan might ha' lived; and the way they are now, I don't see's there's much difference between the Fromes up at the farm and the Fromes down in the graveyard; 'cept that down there they're all quiet, and the women have got to hold their tongues."

# 68. The School Days of an Indian Girl by Zitkala-Sa

*Published: 1921*

## I. THE LAND OF RED APPLES

There were eight in our party of bronzed children who were going East with the missionaries. Among us were three young braves, two tall girls, and we three little ones, Judéwin, Thowin, and I.

We had been very impatient to start on our journey to the Red Apple Country, which, we were told, lay a little beyond the great circular horizon of the Western prairie. Under a sky of rosy apples we dreamt of roaming as freely and happily as we had chased the cloud shadows on the Dakota plains. We had anticipated much pleasure from a ride on the iron horse, but the throngs of staring palefaces disturbed and troubled us.

On the train, fair women, with tottering babies on each arm, stopped their haste and scrutinized the children of absent mothers. Large men, with heavy bundles in their hands, halted near by, and riveted their glassy blue eyes upon us.

I sank deep into the corner of my seat, for I resented being watched. Directly in front of me, children who were no larger than I hung themselves upon the backs of their seats, with their bold white faces toward me. Sometimes they took their forefingers out of their mouths and pointed at my moccasined feet. Their mothers, instead of reproving such rude curiosity, looked closely at me, and attracted their children's further notice to my blanket. This embarrassed me, and kept me constantly on the verge of tears.

I sat perfectly still, with my eyes downcast, daring only now and



then to shoot long glances around me. Chancing to turn to the window at my side, I was quite breathless upon seeing one familiar object. It was the telegraph pole which strode by at short paces. Very near my mother's dwelling, along the edge of a road thickly bordered with wild sunflowers, some poles like these had been planted by white men. Often I had stopped, on my way down the road, to hold my ear against the pole, and, hearing its low moaning, I used to wonder what the paleface had done to hurt it. Now I sat watching for each pole that glided by to be the last one.

In this way I had forgotten my uncomfortable surroundings, when I heard one of my comrades call out my name. I saw the missionary standing very near, tossing candies and gums into our midst. This amused us all, and we tried to see who could catch the most of the sweetmeats.

Though we rode several days inside of the iron horse, I do not recall a single thing about our luncheons.

It was night when we reached the school grounds. The lights from the windows of the large buildings fell upon some of the icied trees that stood beneath them. We were led toward an open door, where the brightness of the lights within flooded out over the heads of the excited palefaces who blocked our way. My body trembled more from fear than from the snow I trod upon.

Entering the house, I stood close against the wall. The strong glaring light in the large whitewashed room dazzled my eyes. The noisy hurrying of hard shoes upon a bare wooden floor increased the whirring in my ears. My only safety seemed to be in keeping next to the wall. As I was wondering in which direction to escape from all this confusion, two warm hands grasped me firmly, and in the same moment I was tossed high in midair. A rosy-cheeked paleface woman caught me in her arms. I was both frightened and insulted by such trifling. I stared into her eyes, wishing her to let me stand on my own feet, but she jumped me up and down with increasing enthusiasm. My mother had never made a plaything of her wee daughter. Remembering this I began to cry aloud.

They misunderstood the cause of my tears, and placed me at a

white table loaded with food. There our party were united again. As I did not hush my crying, one of the older ones whispered to me, "Wait until you are alone in the night."

It was very little I could swallow besides my sobs, that evening.

"Oh, I want my mother and my brother Dawée! I want to go to my aunt!" I pleaded; but the ears of the palefaces could not hear me.

From the table we were taken along an upward incline of wooden boxes, which I learned afterward to call a stairway. At the top was a quiet hall, dimly lighted. Many narrow beds were in one straight line down the entire length of the wall. In them lay sleeping brown faces, which peeped just out of the coverings. I was tucked into bed with one of the tall girls, because she talked to me in my mother tongue and seemed to soothe me.

I had arrived in the wonderful land of rosy skies, but I was not happy, as I had thought I should be. My long travel and the bewildering sights had exhausted me. I fell asleep, heaving deep, tired sobs. My tears were left to dry themselves in streaks, because neither my aunt nor my mother was near to wipe them away.

## II. THE CUTTING OF MY LONG HAIR

The first day in the land of apples was a bitter-cold one; for the snow still covered the ground, and the trees were bare. A large bell rang for breakfast, its loud metallic voice crashing through the belfry overhead and into our sensitive ears. The annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors gave us no peace. The constant clash of harsh noises, with an undercurrent of many voices murmuring an unknown tongue, made a bedlam within which I was securely tied. And though my spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all was useless.

A paleface woman, with white hair, came up after us. We were placed in a line of girls who were marching into the dining room. These were Indian girls, in stiff shoes and closely clinging dresses.

The small girls wore sleeved aprons and shingled hair. As I walked noiselessly in my soft moccasins, I felt like sinking to the floor, for my blanket had been stripped from my shoulders. I looked hard at the Indian girls, who seemed not to care that they were even more immodestly dressed than I, in their tightly fitting clothes. While we marched in, the boys entered at an opposite door. I watched for the three young braves who came in our party. I spied them in the rear ranks, looking as uncomfortable as I felt. A small bell was tapped, and each of the pupils drew a chair from under the table. Supposing this act meant they were to be seated, I pulled out mine and at once slipped into it from one side. But when I turned my head, I saw that I was the only one seated, and all the rest at our table remained standing. Just as I began to rise, looking shyly around to see how chairs were to be used, a second bell was sounded. All were seated at last, and I had to crawl back into my chair again. I heard a man's voice at one end of the hall, and I looked around to see him. But all the others hung their heads over their plates. As I glanced at the long chain of tables, I caught the eyes of a paleface woman upon me. Immediately I dropped my eyes, wondering why I was so keenly watched by the strange woman. The man ceased his mutterings, and then a third bell was tapped. Every one picked up his knife and fork and began eating. I began crying instead, for by this time I was afraid to venture anything more.

But this eating by formula was not the hardest trial in that first day. Late in the morning, my friend Judéwin gave me a terrible warning. Judéwin knew a few words of English; and she had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long, heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!

We discussed our fate some moments, and when Judéwin said, "We have to submit, because they are strong," I rebelled.

"No, I will not submit! I will struggle first!" I answered.

I watched my chance, and when no one noticed, I disappeared. I

crept up the stairs as quietly as I could in my squeaking shoes,—my moccasins had been exchanged for shoes. Along the hall I passed, without knowing whither I was going. Turning aside to an open door, I found a large room with three white beds in it. The windows were covered with dark green curtains, which made the room very dim. Thankful that no one was there, I directed my steps toward the corner farthest from the door. On my hands and knees I crawled under the bed, and cuddled myself in the dark corner.

From my hiding place I peered out, shuddering with fear whenever I heard footsteps near by. Though in the hall loud voices were calling my name, and I knew that even Judéwin was searching for me, I did not open my mouth to answer. Then the steps were quickened and the voices became excited. The sounds came nearer and nearer. Women and girls entered the room. I held my breath and watched them open closet doors and peep behind large trunks. Some one threw up the curtains, and the room was filled with sudden light. What caused them to stoop and look under the bed I do not know. I remember being dragged out, though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair.

I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder.

### III. THE SNOW EPISODE

A short time after our arrival we three Dakotas were playing in the

snowdrift. We were all still deaf to the English language, excepting Judéwin, who always heard such puzzling things. One morning we learned through her ears that we were forbidden to fall lengthwise in the snow, as we had been doing, to see our own impressions. However, before many hours we had forgotten the order, and were having great sport in the snow, when a shrill voice called us. Looking up, we saw an imperative hand beckoning us into the house. We shook the snow off ourselves, and started toward the woman as slowly as we dared.

Judéwin said: "Now the paleface is angry with us. She is going to punish us for falling into the snow. If she looks straight into your eyes and talks loudly, you must wait until she stops. Then, after a tiny pause, say, 'No.'" The rest of the way we practiced upon the little word "no."

As it happened, Thowin was summoned to judgment first. The door shut behind her with a click.

Judéwin and I stood silently listening at the keyhole. The paleface woman talked in very severe tones. Her words fell from her lips like crackling embers, and her inflection ran up like the small end of a switch. I understood her voice better than the things she was saying. I was certain we had made her very impatient with us. Judéwin heard enough of the words to realize all too late that she had taught us the wrong reply.

"Oh, poor Thowin!" she gasped, as she put both hands over her ears.

Just then I heard Thowin's tremulous answer, "No."

With an angry exclamation, the woman gave her a hard spanking. Then she stopped to say something. Judéwin said it was this: "Are you going to obey my word the next time?"

Thowin answered again with the only word at her command, "No."

This time the woman meant her blows to smart, for the poor frightened girl shrieked at the top of her voice. In the midst of the whipping the blows ceased abruptly, and the woman asked another question: "Are you going to fall in the snow again?"

Thowin gave her bad password another trial. We heard her say

feebly,

“No! No!”

With this the woman hid away her half-worn slipper, and led the child out, stroking her black shorn head. Perhaps it occurred to her that brute force is not the solution for such a problem. She did nothing to Judéwin nor to me. She only returned to us our unhappy comrade, and left us alone in the room.

During the first two or three seasons misunderstandings as ridiculous as this one of the snow episode frequently took place, bringing unjustifiable frights and punishments into our little lives.

Within a year I was able to express myself somewhat in broken English. As soon as I comprehended a part of what was said and done, a mischievous spirit of revenge possessed me. One day I was called in from my play for some misconduct. I had disregarded a rule which seemed to me very needlessly binding. I was sent into the kitchen to mash the turnips for dinner. It was noon, and steaming dishes were hastily carried into the dining-room. I hated turnips, and their odor which came from the brown jar was offensive to me. With fire in my heart, I took the wooden tool that the paleface woman held out to me. I stood upon a step, and, grasping the handle with both hands, I bent in hot rage over the turnips. I worked my vengeance upon them. All were so busily occupied that no one noticed me. I saw that the turnips were in a pulp, and that further beating could not improve them; but the order was, “Mash these turnips,” and mash them I would! I renewed my energy; and as I sent the masher into the bottom of the jar, I felt a satisfying sensation that the weight of my body had gone into it.

Just here a paleface woman came up to my table. As she looked into the jar, she shoved my hands roughly aside. I stood fearless and angry. She placed her red hands upon the rim of the jar. Then she gave one lift and stride away from the table. But lo! the pulpy contents fell through the crumbled bottom to the floor! She spared me no scolding phrases that I had earned. I did not heed them. I felt triumphant in my revenge, though deep within me I was a wee bit sorry to have broken the jar.

As I sat eating my dinner, and saw that no turnips were served, I whooped in my heart for having once asserted the rebellion within me.

## IV. THE DEVIL

Among the legends the old warriors used to tell me were many stories of evil spirits. But I was taught to fear them no more than those who stalked about in material guise. I never knew there was an insolent chieftain among the bad spirits, who dared to array his forces against the Great Spirit, until I heard this white man's legend from a paleface woman.

Out of a large book she showed me a picture of the white man's devil. I looked in horror upon the strong claws that grew out of his fur-covered fingers. His feet were like his hands. Trailing at his heels was a scaly tail tipped with a serpent's open jaws. His face was a patchwork: he had bearded cheeks, like some I had seen palefaces wear; his nose was an eagle's bill, and his sharp-pointed ears were pricked up like those of a sly fox. Above them a pair of cow's horns curved upward. I trembled with awe, and my heart throbbed in my throat, as I looked at the king of evil spirits. Then I heard the paleface woman say that this terrible creature roamed loose in the world, and that little girls who disobeyed school regulations were to be tortured by him.

That night I dreamt about this evil divinity. Once again I seemed to be in my mother's cottage. An Indian woman had come to visit my mother. On opposite sides of the kitchen stove, which stood in the center of the small house, my mother and her guest were seated in straight-backed chairs. I played with a train of empty spools hitched together on a string. It was night, and the wick burned feebly. Suddenly I heard some one turn our door-knob from without.

My mother and the woman hushed their talk, and both looked

toward the door. It opened gradually. I waited behind the stove. The hinges squeaked as the door was slowly, very slowly pushed inward.

Then in rushed the devil! He was tall! He looked exactly like the picture I had seen of him in the white man's papers. He did not speak to my mother, because he did not know the Indian language, but his glittering yellow eyes were fastened upon me. He took long strides around the stove, passing behind the woman's chair. I threw down my spools, and ran to my mother. He did not fear her, but followed closely after me. Then I ran round and round the stove, crying aloud for help. But my mother and the woman seemed not to know my danger. They sat still, looking quietly upon the devil's chase after me. At last I grew dizzy. My head revolved as on a hidden pivot. My knees became numb, and doubled under my weight like a pair of knife blades without a spring. Beside my mother's chair I fell in a heap. Just as the devil stooped over me with outstretched claws my mother awoke from her quiet indifference, and lifted me on her lap. Whereupon the devil vanished, and I was awake.

On the following morning I took my revenge upon the devil. Stealing into the room where a wall of shelves was filled with books, I drew forth *The Stories of the Bible*. With a broken slate pencil I carried in my apron pocket, I began by scratching out his wicked eyes. A few moments later, when I was ready to leave the room, there was a ragged hole in the page where the picture of the devil had once been.

## V. IRON ROUTINE

A loud-clamoring bell awakened us at half-past six in the cold winter mornings. From happy dreams of Western rolling lands and unlassoed freedom we tumbled out upon chilly bare floors back again into a paleface day. We had short time to jump into our shoes and clothes, and wet our eyes with icy water, before a small hand bell was vigorously rung for roll call.



There were too many drowsy children and too numerous orders for the day to waste a moment in any apology to nature for giving her children such a shock in the early morning. We rushed downstairs, bounding over two high steps at a time, to land in the assembly room.

A paleface woman, with a yellow-covered roll book open on her arm and a gnawed pencil in her hand, appeared at the door. Her small, tired face was coldly lighted with a pair of large gray eyes.

She stood still in a halo of authority, while over the rim of her spectacles her eyes pried nervously about the room. Having glanced at her long list of names and called out the first one, she tossed up her chin and peered through the crystals of her spectacles to make sure of the answer "Here."

Relentlessly her pencil black-marked our daily records if we were not present to respond to our names, and no chum of ours had done it successfully for us. No matter if a dull headache or the painful cough of slow consumption had delayed the absentee, there was only time enough to mark the tardiness. It was next to impossible to leave the iron routine after the civilizing machine had once begun its day's buzzing; and as it was inbred in me to suffer in silence rather than to appeal to the ears of one whose open eyes could not see my pain, I have many times trudged in the day's harness heavy-footed, like a dumb sick brute.

Once I lost a dear classmate. I remember well how she used to mope along at my side, until one morning she could not raise her head from her pillow. At her deathbed I stood weeping, as the paleface woman sat near her moistening the dry lips. Among the folds of the bedclothes I saw the open pages of the white man's Bible. The dying Indian girl talked disconnectedly of Jesus the Christ and the paleface who was cooling her swollen hands and feet.

I grew bitter, and censured the woman for cruel neglect of our physical ills. I despised the pencils that moved automatically, and the one teaspoon which dealt out, from a large bottle, healing to a row of variously ailing Indian children. I blamed the hard-working, well-meaning, ignorant woman who was inculcating in our hearts

her superstitious ideas. Though I was sullen in all my little troubles, as soon as I felt better I was ready again to smile upon the cruel woman. Within a week I was again actively testing the chains which tightly bound my individuality like a mummy for burial.

The melancholy of those black days has left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have since gone by. These sad memories rise above those of smoothly grinding school days. Perhaps my Indian nature is the moaning wind which stirs them now for their present record. But, however tempestuous this is within me, it comes out as the low voice of a curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears that are bent with compassion to hear it.

## VI. FOUR STRANGE SUMMERS

After my first three years of school, I roamed again in the Western country through four strange summers.

During this time I seemed to hang in the heart of chaos, beyond the touch or voice of human aid. My brother, being almost ten years my senior, did not quite understand my feelings. My mother had never gone inside of a schoolhouse, and so she was not capable of comforting her daughter who could read and write. Even nature seemed to have no place for me. I was neither a wee girl nor a tall one; neither a wild Indian nor a tame one. This deplorable situation was the effect of my brief course in the East, and the unsatisfactory “teenth” in a girl’s years.

It was under these trying conditions that, one bright afternoon, as I sat restless and unhappy in my mother’s cabin, I caught the sound of the spirited step of my brother’s pony on the road which passed by our dwelling. Soon I heard the wheels of a light buckboard, and Dawée’s familiar “Ho!” to his pony. He alighted upon the bare ground in front of our house. Tying his pony to one of the projecting

corner logs of the low-roofed cottage, he stepped upon the wooden doorstep.

I met him there with a hurried greeting, and, as I passed by, he looked a quiet “What?” into my eyes.

When he began talking with my mother, I slipped the rope from the pony’s bridle. Seizing the reins and bracing my feet against the dashboard, I wheeled around in an instant. The pony was ever ready to try his speed. Looking backward, I saw Dawée waving his hand to me. I turned with the curve in the road and disappeared. I followed the winding road which crawled upward between the bases of little hillocks. Deep water-worn ditches ran parallel on either side. A strong wind blew against my cheeks and fluttered my sleeves. The pony reached the top of the highest hill, and began an even race on the level lands. There was nothing moving within that great circular horizon of the Dakota prairies save the tall grasses, over which the wind blew and rolled off in long, shadowy waves.

Within this vast wigwam of blue and green I rode reckless and insignificant. It satisfied my small consciousness to see the white foam fly from the pony’s mouth.

Suddenly, out of the earth a coyote came forth at a swinging trot that was taking the cunning thief toward the hills and the village beyond. Upon the moment’s impulse, I gave him a long chase and a wholesome fright. As I turned away to go back to the village, the wolf sank down upon his haunches for rest, for it was a hot summer day; and as I drove slowly homeward, I saw his sharp nose still pointed at me, until I vanished below the margin of the hilltops.

In a little while I came in sight of my mother’s house. Dawée stood in the yard, laughing at an old warrior who was pointing his forefinger, and again waving his whole hand, toward the hills. With his blanket drawn over one shoulder, he talked and motioned excitedly. Dawée turned the old man by the shoulder and pointed me out to him.

“Oh, han!” (Oh, yes) the warrior muttered, and went his way. He had climbed the top of his favorite barren hill to survey the surrounding prairies, when he spied my chase after the coyote.

His keen eyes recognized the pony and driver. At once uneasy for my safety, he had come running to my mother's cabin to give her warning. I did not appreciate his kindly interest, for there was an unrest gnawing at my heart.

As soon as he went away, I asked Dawée about something else.

"No, my baby sister, I cannot take you with me to the party tonight," he replied. Though I was not far from fifteen, and I felt that before long I should enjoy all the privileges of my tall cousin, Dawée persisted in calling me his baby sister.

That moonlight night, I cried in my mother's presence when I heard the jolly young people pass by our cottage. They were no more young braves in blankets and eagle plumes, nor Indian maids with prettily painted cheeks. They had gone three years to school in the East, and had become civilized. The young men wore the white man's coat and trousers, with bright neckties. The girls wore tight muslin dresses, with ribbons at neck and waist. At these gatherings they talked English. I could speak English almost as well as my brother, but I was not properly dressed to be taken along. I had no hat, no ribbons, and no close-fitting gown. Since my return from school I had thrown away my shoes, and wore again the soft moccasins.

While Dawée was busily preparing to go I controlled my tears. But when I heard him bounding away on his pony, I buried my face in my arms and cried hot tears.

My mother was troubled by my unhappiness. Coming to my side, she offered me the only printed matter we had in our home. It was an Indian Bible, given her some years ago by a missionary. She tried to console me. "Here, my child, are the white man's papers. Read a little from them," she said most piously.

I took it from her hand, for her sake; but my enraged spirit felt more like burning the book, which afforded me no help, and was a perfect delusion to my mother. I did not read it, but laid it unopened on the floor, where I sat on my feet. The dim yellow light of the braided muslin burning in a small vessel of oil flickered and sizzled in the awful silent storm which followed my rejection of the Bible.

Now my wrath against the fates consumed my tears before they reached my eyes. I sat stony, with a bowed head. My mother threw a shawl over her head and shoulders, and stepped out into the night.

After an uncertain solitude, I was suddenly aroused by a loud cry piercing the night. It was my mother's voice wailing among the barren hills which held the bones of buried warriors. She called aloud for her brothers' spirits to support her in her helpless misery. My fingers Grey icy cold, as I realized that my unrestrained tears had betrayed my suffering to her, and she was grieving for me.

Before she returned, though I knew she was on her way, for she had ceased her weeping, I extinguished the light, and leaned my head on the window sill.

Many schemes of running away from my surroundings hovered about in my mind. A few more moons of such a turmoil drove me away to the eastern school. I rode on the white man's iron steed, thinking it would bring me back to my mother in a few winters, when I should be grown tall, and there would be congenial friends awaiting me.

## VII. INCURRING MY MOTHER'S DISPLEASURE

In the second journey to the East I had not come without some precautions. I had a secret interview with one of our best medicine men, and when I left his wigwam I carried securely in my sleeve a tiny bunch of magic roots. This possession assured me of friends wherever I should go. So absolutely did I believe in its charms that I wore it through all the school routine for more than a year. Then, before I lost my faith in the dead roots, I lost the little buckskin bag containing all my good luck.

At the close of this second term of three years I was the proud owner of my first diploma. The following autumn I ventured upon a college career against my mother's will.

I had written for her approval, but in her reply I found no encouragement. She called my notice to her neighbors' children, who had completed their education in three years. They had returned to their homes, and were then talking English with the frontier settlers. Her few words hinted that I had better give up my slow attempt to learn the white man's ways, and be content to roam over the prairies and find my living upon wild roots. I silenced her by deliberate disobedience.

Thus, homeless and heavy-hearted, I began anew my life among strangers.

As I hid myself in my little room in the college dormitory, away from the scornful and yet curious eyes of the students, I pined for sympathy. Often I wept in secret, wishing I had gone West, to be nourished by my mother's love, instead of remaining among a cold race whose hearts were frozen hard with prejudice.

During the fall and winter seasons I scarcely had a real friend, though by that time several of my classmates were courteous to me at a safe distance.

My mother had not yet forgiven my rudeness to her, and I had no moment for letter-writing. By daylight and lamplight, I spun with reeds and thistles, until my hands were tired from their weaving, the magic design which promised me the white man's respect.

At length, in the spring term, I entered an oratorical contest among the various classes. As the day of competition approached, it did not seem possible that the event was so near at hand, but it came. In the chapel the classes assembled together, with their invited guests. The high platform was carpeted, and gaily festooned with college colors. A bright white light illumined the room, and outlined clearly the great polished beams that arched the domed ceiling. The assembled crowds filled the air with pulsating murmurs. When the hour for speaking arrived all were hushed. But on the wall the old clock which pointed out the trying moment ticked calmly on.

One after another I saw and heard the orators. Still, I could not realize that they longed for the favorable decision of the judges as much as I did. Each contestant received a loud burst of applause,

and some were cheered heartily. Too soon my turn came, and I paused a moment behind the curtains for a deep breath. After my concluding words, I heard the same applause that the others had called out.

Upon my retreating steps, I was astounded to receive from my fellow-students a large bouquet of roses tied with flowing ribbons. With the lovely flowers I fled from the stage. This friendly token was a rebuke to me for the hard feelings I had borne them.

Later, the decision of the judges awarded me the first place. Then there was a mad uproar in the hall, where my classmates sang and shouted my name at the top of their lungs; and the disappointed students howled and brayed in fearfully dissonant tin trumpets. In this excitement, happy students rushed forward to offer their congratulations. And I could not conceal a smile when they wished to escort me in a procession to the students' parlor, where all were going to calm themselves. Thanking them for the kind spirit which prompted them to make such a proposition, I walked alone with the night to my own little room.

A few weeks afterward, I appeared as the college representative in another contest. This time the competition was among orators from different colleges in our State. It was held at the State capital, in one of the largest opera houses.

Here again was a strong prejudice against my people. In the evening, as the great audience filled the house, the student bodies began warring among themselves. Fortunately, I was spared witnessing any of the noisy wrangling before the contest began. The slurs against the Indian that stained the lips of our opponents were already burning like a dry fever within my breast.

But after the orations were delivered a deeper burn awaited me. There, before that vast ocean of eyes, some college rowdies threw out a large white flag, with a drawing of a most forlorn Indian girl on it. Under this they had printed in bold black letters words that ridiculed the college which was represented by a "squaw." Such worse than barbarian rudeness embittered me. While we waited for the verdict of the judges, I gleamed fiercely upon the throngs

of palefaces. My teeth were hard set, as I saw the white flag still floating insolently in the air.

Then anxiously we watched the man carry toward the stage the envelope containing the final decision.

There were two prizes given, that night, and one of them was mine!

The evil spirit laughed within me when the white flag dropped out of sight, and the hands which hurled it hung limp in defeat.

Leaving the crowd as quickly as possible, I was soon in my room. The rest of the night I sat in an armchair and gazed into the crackling fire. I laughed no more in triumph when thus alone. The little taste of victory did not satisfy a hunger in my heart. In my mind I saw my mother far away on the Western plains, and she was holding a charge against me.



# 69. From "The Souls of Black Folk" by W.E.B. Dubois

*Published: 1903*

## The Forethought

Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here at the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line. I pray you, then, receive my little book in all charity, studying my words with me, forgiving mistake and foible for sake of the faith and passion that is in me, and seeking the grain of truth hidden there.

I have sought here to sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in which ten thousand thousand Americans live and strive. First, in two chapters I have tried to show what Emancipation meant to them, and what was its aftermath. In a third chapter I have pointed out the slow rise of personal leadership, and criticized candidly the leader who bears the chief burden of his race to-day. Then, in two other chapters I have sketched in swift outline the two worlds within and without the Veil, and thus have come to the central problem of training men for life. Venturing now into deeper detail, I have in two chapters studied the struggles of the massed millions of the black peasantry, and in another have sought to make clear the present relations of the sons of master and man. Leaving, then, the white world, I have stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses,—the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its

greater souls. All this I have ended with a tale twice told but seldom written, and a chapter of song.

Some of these thoughts of mine have seen the light before in other guise. For kindly consenting to their republication here, in altered and extended form, I must thank the publishers of the Atlantic Monthly, The World's Work, the Dial, The New World, and the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. Before each chapter, as now printed, stands a bar of the Sorrow Songs,—some echo of haunting melody from the only American music which welled up from black souls in the dark past. And, finally, need I add that I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil?

W.E.B Du B.

ATLANTA, GA., FEB. 1, 1903

## I: Of Our Spiritual Strivings

O water, voice of my heart, crying in the sand,  
All night long crying with a mournful cry,  
As I lie and listen, and cannot understand  
The voice of my heart in my side or the voice of the sea,  
O water, crying for rest, is it I, is it I?  
All night long the water is crying to me.

Unresting water, there shall never be rest  
Till the last moon droop and the last tide fail,  
And the fire of the end begin to burn in the west;  
And the heart shall be weary and wonder and cry like the sea,  
All life long crying without avail,  
As the water all night long is crying to me.

ARTHUR SYMONS.

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter

round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.

And yet, being a problem is a strange experience, – peculiar even for one who has never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe. It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England, where the dark Housatonic winds between Hoosac and Taghkanic to the sea. In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards – ten cents a package – and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card, – refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. That sky was bluest when I could beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads. Alas, with the years all this fine contempt began to fade; for the words I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine. But they should not keep these prizes, I said; some, all, I would wrest from them. Just how I would do it I could never decide: by reading law, by healing the sick, by telling the wonderful tales that swam in my head,—some way. With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter

cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house? The shades of the prison-house closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopelessly, watch the streak of blue above.

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.

This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius. These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed, or forgotten. The shadow of a mighty Negro past flits through the tale of Ethiopia the Shadowy and of Egypt the Sphinx. Through history, the powers of single black men flash here and there like falling

stars, and die sometimes before the world has rightly gauged their brightness. Here in America, in the few days since Emancipation, the black man's turning hither and thither in hesitant and doubtful striving has often made his very strength to lose effectiveness, to seem like absence of power, like weakness. And yet it is not weakness, – it is the contradiction of double aims. The double-aimed struggle of the black artisan – on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde – could only result in making him a poor craftsman, for he had but half a heart in either cause. By the poverty and ignorance of his people, the Negro minister or doctor was tempted toward quackery and demagoguery; and by the criticism of the other world, toward ideals that made him ashamed of his lowly tasks. The would-be black savant was confronted by the paradox that the knowledge his people needed was a twice-told tale to his white neighbors, while the knowledge which would teach the white world was Greek to his own flesh and blood. The innate love of harmony and beauty that set the ruder souls of his people a-dancing and a-singing raised but confusion and doubt in the soul of the black artist; for the beauty revealed to him was the soul-beauty of a race which his larger audience despised, and he could not articulate the message of another people. This waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people, – has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves.

Away back in the days of bondage they thought to see in one divine event the end of all doubt and disappointment; few men ever worshipped Freedom with half such unquestioning faith as did the American Negro for two centuries. To him, so far as he thought and dreamed, slavery was indeed the sum of all villainies, the cause of all sorrow, the root of all prejudice; Emancipation was the key to a promised land of sweeter beauty than ever stretched before

the eyes of wearied Israelites. In song and exhortation swelled one refrain – Liberty; in his tears and curses the God he implored had Freedom in his right hand. At last it came, – suddenly, fearfully, like a dream. With one wild carnival of blood and passion came the message in his own plaintive cadences: –

“Shout, O children!

Shout, you're free!

For God has bought your liberty!”

Years have passed away since then, – ten, twenty, forty; forty years of national life, forty years of renewal and development, and yet the swarthy spectre sits in its accustomed seat at the Nation's feast. In vain do we cry to this our vastest social problem: –

“Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves

Shall never tremble!”

The Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land. Whatever of good may have come in these years of change, the shadow of a deep disappointment rests upon the Negro people, – a disappointment all the more bitter because the unattained ideal was unbounded save by the simple ignorance of a lowly people.

The first decade was merely a prolongation of the vain search for freedom, the boon that seemed ever barely to elude their grasp, – like a tantalizing will-o'-the-wisp, maddening and misleading the headless host. The holocaust of war, the terrors of the Ku-Klux Klan, the lies of carpet-baggers, the disorganization of industry, and the contradictory advice of friends and foes, left the bewildered serf with no new watchword beyond the old cry for freedom. As the time flew, however, he began to grasp a new idea. The ideal of liberty demanded for its attainment powerful means, and these the Fifteenth Amendment gave him. The ballot, which before he had looked upon as a visible sign of freedom, he now regarded as the chief means of gaining and perfecting the liberty with which war had partially endowed him. And why not? Had not votes made war and emancipated millions? Had not votes enfranchised the freedmen? Was anything impossible to a power that had done all

this? A million black men started with renewed zeal to vote themselves into the kingdom. So the decade flew away, the revolution of 1876 came, and left the half-free serf weary, wondering, but still inspired. Slowly but steadily, in the following years, a new vision began gradually to replace the dream of political power, – a powerful movement, the rise of another ideal to guide the unguided, another pillar of fire by night after a clouded day. It was the ideal of “book-learning”; the curiosity, born of compulsory ignorance, to know and test the power of the cabalistic letters of the white man, the longing to know. Here at last seemed to have been discovered the mountain path to Canaan; longer than the highway of Emancipation and law, steep and rugged, but straight, leading to heights high enough to overlook life.

Up the new path the advance guard toiled, slowly, heavily, doggedly; only those who have watched and guided the faltering feet, the misty minds, the dull understandings, of the dark pupils of these schools know how faithfully, how piteously, this people strove to learn. It was weary work. The cold statistician wrote down the inches of progress here and there, noted also where here and there a foot had slipped or some one had fallen. To the tired climbers, the horizon was ever dark, the mists were often cold, the Canaan was always dim and far away. If, however, the vistas disclosed as yet no goal, no resting-place, little but flattery and criticism, the journey at least gave leisure for reflection and self-examination; it changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect. In those sombre forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself, – darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another. For the first time he sought to analyze the burden he bore upon his back, that dead-weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named Negro problem. He felt his poverty; without a cent, without a home, without land, tools, or savings, he had entered into competition with rich, landed, skilled neighbors.

To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships. He felt the weight of his ignorance, – not simply of letters, but of life, of business, of the humanities; the accumulated sloth and shirking and awkwardness of decades and centuries shackled his hands and feet. Nor was his burden all poverty and ignorance. The red stain of bastardy, which two centuries of systematic legal defilement of Negro women had stamped upon his race, meant not only the loss of ancient African chastity, but also the hereditary weight of a mass of corruption from white adulterers, threatening almost the obliteration of the Negro home.

A people thus handicapped ought not to be asked to race with the world, but rather allowed to give all its time and thought to its own social problems. But alas! while sociologists gleefully count his bastards and his prostitutes, the very soul of the toiling, sweating black man is darkened by the shadow of a vast despair. Men call the shadow prejudice, and learnedly explain it as the natural defence of culture against barbarism, learning against ignorance, purity against crime, the “higher” against the “lower” races. To which the Negro cries Amen! and swears that to so much of this strange prejudice as is founded on just homage to civilization, culture, righteousness, and progress, he humbly bows and meekly does obeisance. But before that nameless prejudice that leaps beyond all this he stands helpless, dismayed, and well-nigh speechless; before that personal disrespect and mockery, the ridicule and systematic humiliation, the distortion of fact and wanton license of fancy, the cynical ignoring of the better and the boisterous welcoming of the worse, the all-pervading desire to inculcate disdain for everything black, from Toussaint to the devil, – before this there rises a sickening despair that would disarm and discourage any nation save that black host to whom “discouragement” is an unwritten word.

But the facing of so vast a prejudice could not but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals which ever accompany repression and breed in an atmosphere of contempt and hate. Whisperings and portents came



home upon the four winds: Lo! we are diseased and dying, cried the dark hosts; we cannot write, our voting is vain; what need of education, since we must always cook and serve? And the Nation echoed and enforced this self-criticism, saying: Be content to be servants, and nothing more; what need of higher culture for half-men? Away with the black man's ballot, by force or fraud, – and behold the suicide of a race! Nevertheless, out of the evil came something of good, – the more careful adjustment of education to real life, the clearer perception of the Negroes' social responsibilities, and the sobering realization of the meaning of progress.

So dawned the time of *Sturm und Drang*: storm and stress to-day rocks our little boat on the mad waters of the world-sea; there is within and without the sound of conflict, the burning of body and rending of soul; inspiration strives with doubt, and faith with vain questionings. The bright ideals of the past, – physical freedom, political power, the training of brains and the training of hands, – all these in turn have waxed and waned, until even the last grows dim and overcast. Are they all wrong, – all false? No, not that, but each alone was over-simple and incomplete, – the dreams of a credulous race-childhood, or the fond imaginings of the other world which does not know and does not want to know our power. To be really true, all these ideals must be melted and welded into one. The training of the schools we need to-day more than ever, – the training of deft hands, quick eyes and ears, and above all the broader, deeper, higher culture of gifted minds and pure hearts. The power of the ballot we need in sheer self-defence, – else what shall save us from a second slavery? Freedom, too, the long-sought, we still seek, – the freedom of life and limb, the freedom to work and think, the freedom to love and aspire. Work, culture, liberty, – all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together, each growing and aiding each, and all striving toward that vaster ideal that swims before the Negro people, the ideal of human brotherhood, gained through the unifying ideal of Race; the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not

in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic, in order that some day on American soil two world-races may give each to each those characteristics both so sadly lack. We the darker ones come even now not altogether empty-handed: there are to-day no truer exponents of the pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence than the American Negroes; there is no true American music but the wild sweet melodies of the Negro slave; the American fairy tales and folklore are Indian and African; and, all in all, we black men seem the sole oasis of simple faith and reverence in a dusty desert of dollars and smartness. Will America be poorer if she replace her brutal dyspeptic blundering with light-hearted but determined Negro humility? or her coarse and cruel wit with loving jovial good-humor? or her vulgar music with the soul of the Sorrow Songs?

Merely a concrete test of the underlying principles of the great republic is the Negro Problem, and the spiritual striving of the freedmen's sons is the travail of souls whose burden is almost beyond the measure of their strength, but who bear it in the name of an historic race, in the name of this the land of their fathers' fathers, and in the name of human opportunity.

And now what I have briefly sketched in large outline let me on coming pages tell again in many ways, with loving emphasis and deeper detail, that men may listen to the striving in the souls of black folk.

# 70. The Mule-Bone by Langston Hughes and Zora Hurstun

*Published: 1930*

## A COMEDY OF NEGRO LIFE IN THREE ACTS

BY LANGSTON HUGHES and ZORA HURSTON

### CHARACTERS

JIM WESTON: Guitarist, Methodist, slightly arrogant, aggressive, somewhat self-important, ready with his tongue.

DAVE CARTER: Dancer, Baptist, soft, happy-go-lucky character, slightly dumb and unable to talk rapidly and wittily.

DAISY TAYLOR: Methodist, domestic servant, plump, dark and sexy, self-conscious of clothes and appeal, fickle.

JOE CLARK: The Mayor, storekeeper and postmaster, arrogant, ignorant and powerful in a self-assertive way, large, fat man, Methodist.

ELDER SIMMS: Methodist minister, newcomer in town, ambitious, small and fly, but not very intelligent.

ELDER CHILDERS: Big, loose-jointed, slow spoken but not dumb. Long resident in the town, calm and sure of himself.

KATIE CARTER: Dave's aunt, little old wizened dried-up lady.

MRS. HATTIE CLARK: The Mayor's wife, fat and flabby mulatto high-pitched voice.

THE MRS. REV. SIMMS: Large and aggressive.

THE MRS. REV. Just a wife who thinks of details.

CHILDERS:

LUM BOGER: Young town marshall about twenty, tall, gangly, with big flat feet, liked to show off in public.

TEET MILLER: Village vamp who is jealous of DAISY.

LIGE MOSELY: A village wag.

WALTER THOMAS: Another village wag.

ADA LEWIS: A promiscuous lover.

DELLA LEWIS: Baptist, poor housekeeper, mother of ADA.

BOOTSIE PITTS: A local vamp.

MRS. DILCIE ANDERSON: Village housewife, Methodist.

WILLIE NIXON: Methodist, short runt.

## ACT I

SETTING: The raised porch of JOE CLARK'S Store and the street in front. Porch stretches almost completely across the stage, with a plank bench at either end. At the center of the porch three steps leading from street. Rear of porch, center, door to the store. On either side are single windows on which signs, at left, "POST OFFICE", and at right, "GENERAL STORE" are painted. Soap boxes, axe handles, small kegs, etc., on porch on which townspeople sit and lounge during action. Above the roof of the porch the "false front", or imitation second story of the shop is seen with large sign painted across it "JOE CLARK'S GENERAL STORE". Large kerosine street lamp on post at right in front of porch.

Saturday afternoon and the villagers are gathered around the store. Several men sitting on boxes at edge of porch chewing sugar cane, spitting tobacco juice, arguing, some whittling, others eating

peanuts. During the act the women all dressed up in starched dresses parade in and out of store. People buying groceries, kids playing in the street, etc. General noise of conversation, laughter and children shouting. But when the curtain rises there is momentary lull for cane-chewing. At left of porch four men are playing cards on a soap box, and seated on the edge of the porch at extreme right two children are engaged in a checker game, with the board on the floor between them.

When the curtain goes up the following characters are discovered on the porch: MAYOR JOE CLARK, the storekeeper; DEACON HAMBO; DEACON GOODWIN; Old Man MATT BRAZZLE; WILL CODY; SYKES JONES; LUM BOGER, the young town marshall; LIGE MOSELY and WALTER THOMAS, two village wags; TOM NIXON and SAM MOSELY, and several others, seated on boxes, kegs, benches and floor of the porch. TONY TAYLOR is sitting on steps of porch with empty basket. MRS. TAYLOR comes out with her arms full of groceries, empties them into basket and goes back in store. All the men are chewing sugar cane earnestly with varying facial expressions. The noise of the breaking and sucking of cane can be clearly heard in the silence. Occasionally the laughter and shouting of children is heard nearby off stage.

HAMBO: (To BRAZZLE) Say, Matt, gimme a jint or two of dat green cane—dis ribbon cane is hard.

LIGE: Yeah, and you ain't got de chears in yo' parlor you useter have.

HAMBO: Dat's all right, Lige, but I betcha right now wid dese few teeth I got I kin eat up more cane'n you kin grow.

LIGE: I know you kin and that's de reason I ain't going to tempt you. But youse gettin' old in lots of ways—look at dat bald-head—just as clean as my hand. (Exposes his palm).

HAMBO: Don't keer if it tis—I don't want nothin'—not even hair—between me and God. (General laughter—LIGE joins in as well. Cane chewing keeps up. Silence for a moment.)

(Off stage a high shrill voice can be heard calling:)

VOICE: Sister Mosely, Oh, Sister Mosely! (A pause) Miz Mosely!

(Very irritated) Oh, Sister Mattie! You hear me out here—you just won't answer!

VOICE OF MRS. MOSELY: Whoo-ee ... somebody calling me?

VOICE OF MRS. ROBERTS: (Angrily) Never mind now—you couldn't come when I called you. I don't want yo' lil ole weasley turnip greens. (Silence)

MATT BRAZZLE: Sister Roberts is en town agin! If she was mine, I'll be hen-fired if I wouldn't break her down in de lines (loins)—good as dat man is to her!

HAMBO: I wish she was mine jes' one day—de first time she open her mouf to beg *anybody*, I'd lam her wid lightning.

JOE CLARK: I God, Jake Roberts buys mo' rations out dis store than any man in dis town. I don't see to my Maker whut she do wid it all.... Here she come....

(ENTER MRS. JAKE ROBERTS, a heavy light brown woman with a basket on her arm. A boy about ten walks beside her carrying a small child about a year old straddle of his back. Her skirts are sweeping the ground. She walks up to the step, puts one foot upon the steps and looks forlornly at all the men, then fixes her look on JOE CLARK.)

MRS. ROBERTS: Evenin', Brother Mayor.

CLARK: Howdy do, Mrs. Roberts. How's yo' husband?

MRS. ROBERTS: (Beginning her professional whine): He ain't much and I ain't much and my chillun is poly. We ain't got 'nough to eat! Lawd, Mr. Clark, gimme a lil piece of side meat to cook us a pot of greens.

CLARK: Aw gwan, Sister Roberts. You got plenty bacon home. Last week Jake bought....

MRS. ROBERTS: (Frantically) Lawd, Mist' Clark, how long you think dat lil piece of meat last me an' my chillun? Lawd, me and my chillun is *hongry*! God knows, Jake don't fee-eed me!

(MR. CLARK sits unmoved. MRS. ROBERTS advances upon him)  
Mist' Clark!

CLARK: I God, woman, don't keep on after me! Every time I look, youse round here beggin' for everything you see.

LIGE: And whut she don't see she whoops for it just de same.

MRS. ROBERTS: (In dramatic begging pose) Mist' Clark! Ain't you boin' do nuthin' for me? And you see me and my poor chillun is starvin'....

CLARK: (Exasperated rises) I God, woman, a man can't git no peace wid somebody like you in town. (He goes angrily into the store followed by MRS. ROBERTS. The boy sits down on the edge of the porch sucking the baby's thumb.)

VOICE OF MRS. ROBERTS: A piece 'bout dis wide....

VOICE OF CLARK: I God, naw! Yo' husband done bought you plenty meat, nohow.

VOICE OF MRS. ROBERTS: (In great anguish) Ow! Mist' Clark! Don't you cut dat lil tee-ninchy piece of meat for me and my chillun! (Sound of running feet inside the store.) I ain't a going to tetch it!

VOICE OF CLARK: Well, don't touch it then. That's all you'll git outa me.

VOICE OF MRS. ROBERTS: (Calmer) Well, hand it chear den. Lawd, me and my chillun is so hongry.... Jake don't fee-eed me. (She re-enters by door of store with the slab of meat in her hand and an outraged look on her face. She gazes all about her for sympathy.) Lawd, me and my poor chillun is so hongry ... and some folks has \_every\_thing and they's so stingy and gripin'.... Lawd knows, Jake don't fee-eed me! (She exits right on this line followed by the boy with the baby on his back.)

(All the men gaze behind her, then at each other and shake their heads.)

HAMBO: Poor Jak.... I'm really sorry for dat man. If she was mine I'd beat her till her ears hung down like a Georgy mule.

WALTER THOMAS: I'd beat her till she smell like onions.

LIGE: I'd romp on her till she slack like lime.

NIXON: I'd stomp her till she rope like okra.

VOICE OF MRS. ROBERTS: (Off stage right) Lawd, Miz Lewis, you goin' give me dat lil han'ful of greens for me and my chillun. Why

dat ain't a eye-full. I ought not to take 'em ... but me and my chillun is so hongry.... Some folks is so stingy and gripin'! Lawd knows, Tony don't *feed* me!

(The noise of cane-chewing is heard again. Enter JOE LINDSAY left with a gun over his shoulder and the large leg bone of a mule in the other hand. He approaches the step wearily.)

HAMBO: Well, did you git any partridges, Joe?

JOE: (Resting his gun and seating himself) Nope, but I made de feathers fly.

HAMBO: I don't see no birds.

JOE: Oh, the feathers flew off on de birds.

LIGE: I don't see nothin' but dat bone. Look lak you done kilt a cow and et 'im raw out in de woods.

JOE: Don't y'all know dat hock-bone?

WALTER: How you reckon we gointer know every hock-bone in Orange County sight unseen?

JOE: (Standing the bone up on the floor of the porch) Dis is a hock-bone of Brazzle's ole yaller mule.

(General pleased interest. Everybody wants to touch it.)

BRAZZLE: (Coming forward) Well, sir! (Takes bone in both hands and looks up and down the length of it) If 'tain't my ole mule! This sho was one hell of a mule, too. He'd fight every inch in front of de plow ... he'd turn over de mowing machine ... run away wid de wagon ... and you better not look like you wanten *ride* 'im!

LINDSAY: (Laughing) Yeah, I 'member seein' you comin' down de road just so ... (He limps wid one hand on his buttocks) one day.

BRAZZLE: Dis mule was so evil he used to try to bite and kick when I'd go in de stable to feed 'im.

WALTER: He was too mean to git fat. He was so skinny you could do a week's washing on his ribs for a washboard and hang 'em up on his hip-bones to dry.

LIGE: I 'member one day, Brazzle, you sent yo' boy to Winter Park after some groceries wid a basket. So here he went down de road ridin' dis mule wid dis basket on his arm.... Whut you reckon dat ole



contrary mule done when he got to dat crooked place in de road going round Park Lake? He turnt right round and went through de handle of dat basket ... wid de boy still up on his back. (General laughter)

BRAZZLE: Yeah, he up and died one Sat'day just for spite ... but he was too contrary to lay down on his side like a mule orter and die decent. Naw, he made out to lay down on his narrer contracted back and die wid his feets sticking straight up in de air just so. (He gets down on his back and illustrates.) We drug him out to de swamp wid 'im dat way, didn't we, Hambo?

JOE CLARK: I God, Brazzle, we all seen it. Didn't we all go to de draggin' out? More folks went to yo' mule's draggin' out than went to last school closing.... Bet there ain't been a thing right in mule-hell for four years.

HAMBO: Been dat long since he been dead?

CLARK: I God, yes. He died de week after I started to cutting' dat new ground.

(The bone is passing from hand to hand. At last a boy about twelve takes it. He has just walked up and is proudly handling the bone when a woman's voice is heard off stage right.)

VOICE: Senator! Senator!! Oh, you Senator?

BOY: (Turning displeased mutters) Aw, shux. (Loudly) Ma'm?

VOICE: If you don't come here you better!

SENATOR: Yes ma'am. (He drops bone on ground down stage and trots off frowning.) Soon as we men git to doing something dese wimmen.... (Exits, right.)

(Enter TEET and BOOTSIE left, clean and primped in voile dresses just alike. They speak diffidently and enter store. The men admire them casually.)

LIGE: Them girls done turned out to be right good-looking.

WALTER: Teet ain't as pretty now as she was a few years back. She used to be fat as a butter ball wid legs just like two whiskey-kegs. She's too skinny since she got her growth.

CODY: Ain't none of 'em pretty as dat Miss Daisy. God! She's pretty as a speckled pup.

LIGE: But she was sho nuff ugly when she was little ... little ole hard black knot. She sho has changed since she been away up North. If she ain't pretty now, there ain't a hound dog in Georgy.

(Re-enter SENATOR BAILEY and stops on the steps. He addresses JOE

CLARK.)

SENATOR: Mist' Clark....

HAMBO: (To Senator) Ain't you got no manners? We all didn't sleep wid you last night.

SENATOR: (Embarrassed) Good evening, everybody.

ALL THE MEN: Good evening, son, boy, Senator, etc.

SENATOR: Mist' Clark, mama said is Daisy been here dis evenin'?

JOE CLARK: Ain't laid my eyes on her. Ain't she working over in Maitland?

SENATOR: Yessuh ... but she's off today and mama sent her down here to get de groceries.

JOE CLARK: Well, tell yo' ma I ain't seen her.

SENATOR: Well, she say to tell you when she come, to tell her ma say she better git home and dat quick.

JOE CLARK: I will. (Exit BOY right.)

LIGE: Bet she's off somewhere wid Dave or Jim.

WALTER: I don't bet it ... I know it. She's got them two in de go-long.

(Re-enter TEET and BOOTSIE from store. TEET has a letter and BOOTSIE two or three small parcels. The men look up with interest as they come out on the porch.)

WALTER: (Winking) Whut's dat you got, Teet ... letter from Dave?

TEET: (Flouncing) Naw indeed! It's a letter from my B-I-T-sweetie! (Rolls her eyes and hips.)

WALTER: (Winking) Well, ain't Dave yo' B-I-T-sweetie? I thought y'all was 'bout to git married. Everywhere I looked dis summer 'twas you and Dave, Bootsie and Jim. I thought all of y'all would've done jumped over de broomstick by now.

TEET: (Flourishing letter) Don't tell it to me ... tell it to the ever-loving Mr. Albert Johnson way over in Apopka.

BOOTSIE: (Rolling her eyes) Oh, tell 'em 'bout the ever-loving Mr. Jimmy Cox from Altamont. Oh, I can't stand to see my baby lose.

HAMBO: It's lucky y'all girls done got some more fellers, cause look like Daisy done treed both Jim and Dave at once, or they done treed here one.

TEET: Let her have 'em ... nobody don't keer. They don't handle de "In

God we trust" lak my Johnson. He's head bellman at de hotel.

BOOTSIE: Mr. Cox got money's grandma and old grandpa change. (The girls exit huffily.)

LINDSAY: (To HAMBO, pseudo-seriously) You oughtn't tease dem gals lak dat.

HAMBO: Oh, I laks to see gals all mad. But dem boys is crazy sho nuff.

Before Daisy come back here they both had a good-looking gal a piece.

Now they 'bout to fall out and fight over half a gal a piece. Neither one won't give over and let de other one have her.

LIGE: And she ain't thinking too much 'bout no one man. (Looks off left.) Here she come now. God! She got a mean walk on her!

WALTER: Yeah, man. She handles a lot of traffic! Oh, mama, throw it in de river ... papa'll come git it!

LINDSAY: Aw, shut up, you married men!

LIGE: Man don't go blind cause he gits married, do he? (Enter DAISY hurriedly. Stops at step a moment. She is dressed in sheer organdie, white shoes and stockings.)

DAISY: Good evening, everybody. (Walks up on the porch.)

ALL THE MEN: (Very pleasantly) Good evening, Miss Daisy.

DAISY: (To CLARK) Mama sent me after some meal and flour and some bacon and sausage oil.

CLARK: Senator been here long time ago hunting you.

DAISY: (Frightened) Did he? Oo ... Mist' Clark, hurry up and fix it for me. (She starts on in the store.)

LINDSAY: (Giving her his seat) You better wait here, Daisy.

(WALTER kicks LIGE to call his attention to LINDSAY'S attitude)

It's powerful hot in dat store. Lemme run fetch 'em out to you.

LIGE: (To LINDSAY) *Run!* Joe Lindsay, you ain't been able to run since de big bell rung. Look at dat gray beard.

LINDSAY: Thank God, I ain't gray all over. I'm just as good a man right now as any of you young 'uns. (He hurries on into the store.)

WALTER: Daisy, where's yo' two body guards? It don't look natural to see you thout nary one of 'em.

DAISY: (Archly) I ain't got no body guards. I don't know what you talkin' about.

LIGE: Aw, don' try to come dat over us, Daisy. You know who we talkin' 'bout all right ... but if you want me to come out flat footed ... where's Jim and Dave?

DAISY: Ain't they playin' somewhere for de white folks?

LIGE: (To WALTER) Will you listen at dis gal, Walter? (To DAISY) When

I ain't been long seen you and Dave going down to de Lake.

DAISY: (Frightened) Don't y'all run tell mama where I been.

WALTER: Well, you tell us which one you laks de best and we'll wipe our mouf (Gesture) and say nothin'. Dem boys been de best of friends all they life, till both of 'em took after you ... then good-bye, Katy bar de door!

DAISY: (Affected innocence) Ain't they still playin' and dancin' together?

LIGE: Yeah, but that's 'bout all they do 'gree on these days. That's de way it is wid men, young and old.... I don't keer how long they been friends and how thick they been ... a woman kin come between 'em. David and Jonather never would have been friends so long if Jonather had of been any great hand wid de wimmen. You ain't never seen no two roosters that likes one another.

DAISY: I ain't tried to break 'em up.

WALTER: Course you ain't. You don't have to. All two boys need to do is to git stuck on de same girl and they done broke up ... *right now!* Wimmen is something can't be divided equal.

(Re-enter JOE LINDSAY and CLARK with the groceries. DAISY jumps up and grabs the packages.)

LIGE: (To DAISY) Want some of us ... me ... to go long and tote yo' things for you?

DAISY: (Nervously) Naw, mama is riding her high horse today. Long as I been gone it wouldn't do for me to come walking up wid nobody. (She exits hurriedly right.)

(All the men watch her out of sight in silence.)

CLARK: (Sighing) I God, know whut Daisy puts me in de mind of?

HAMBO: No, what? (They all lean together.)

CLARK: I God, a great big mango ... a sweet smell, you know, Th a strong flavor, but not something you could mash up like a strawberry. Something with a body to it.

(General laughter, but not obscene.)

HAMBO: (Admiringly) Joe Clark! I didn't know you had it in you!

(MRS. CLARK enters from store door and they all straighten up guiltily)

CLARK: (Angrily to his wife) Now whut do you want? I God, the minute I set down, here you come....

MRS. CLARK: Somebody want a stamp, Jody. You know you don't 'low me to bove wid de post office. (HE rises sullenly and goes inside the store.)

BRAZZLE: Say, Hambo, I didn't see you at our Sunday School picnic.

HAMBO: (Slicing some plug-cut tobacco) Nope, wan't there dis time.

WALTER: Looka here, Hambo. Y'all Baptist carry dis close-communion business too far. If a person ain't half drown'd in de lake and half et up by alligators, y'all think he ain't baptized, so you can't take communion wid him. Now I reckon you can't even drink lemonade and eat chicken perlow wid us.

HAMBO: My Lord, boy, youse just *full* of words. Now, in de first place, if this year's picnic was lak de one y'all had last year ... you ain't had no lemonade for us Baptists to turn down. You had a big ole barrel of rain water wid about a pound of sugar in it and one lemon cut up over de top of it.

LIGE: Man, you sho kin mold 'em!

WALTER: Well, I went to de Baptist picnic wid my mouf all set to eat chicken, when lo and behold y'all had chitlings! Do Jesus!

LINDSAY: Hold on there a minute. There was plenty chicken at dat picnic, which I do know is right.

WALTER: Only chicken I seen was half a chicken yo' pastor musta tried to swaller whole cause he was choked stiff as a board when I come long ... wid de whole deacon's board beating him in de back, trying to knock it out his throat.

LIGE: Say, dat puts me in de mind of a Baptist brother that was crazy 'bout de preachers and de preacher was crazy 'bout feeding his face. So his son got tired of trying to beat dese stump-knockers to de grub on the table, so one day he throwed out some slams 'bout dese preachers. Dat made his old man mad, so he tole his son to git out. He boy ast him "Where must I go, papa?" He says, "Go on to hell I reckon ... I don't keer where you go."

So de boy left and was gone seven years. He come back one cold, windy night and rapped on de door. "Who dat?" de old man ast him "It's me, Jack." De old man opened de door, so glad to see his son agin, and tole Jack to come in. He did and looked all round de place. Seven or eight preachers was sitting round de fire eatin' and drinkin'.

"Where you been all dis time, Jack?" de old man ast him.

"I been to hell," Jack tole him.

"Tell us how it is down there, Jack."

"Well," he says, "It's just like it is here ... you can't git to de fire for de preachers."

HAMBO: Boy, you kin lie just like de cross-ties from Jacksonville to Key West. De presidin' elder must come round on his circuit teaching y'all how to tell 'em, cause you couldn't lie dat good just natural.

WALTER: Can't nobody beat Baptist folks lying ... and I ain't never found out how come you think youse so important.

LINDSAY: Ain't we got de finest and de biggest church? Macedonia Baptist will hold more folks than any two buildings in town.

LIGE: Thass right, y'all got a heap more church than you got members to go in it.

HAMBO: Thass all right ... y'all ain't got neither de church nor de members. Everything that's had in this town got to be held in our church.

(Re-enter JOE CLARK.)

CLARK: What you-all talkin'?

HAMBO: Come on out, Tush Hawg, lemme beat you some checkers. I'm tired of fending and proving wid dese boys ain't got no hair on they chest yet.

CLARK: I God, you mean you gointer get beat. You can't handle me ...  
I'm a tush hawg.

HAMBO: Well, I'm going to draw dem tushes right now. (To two small boys using checker board on edge of porch.) Here you chilluns, let de Mayor and me have that board. Go on out an' play an' give us grown folks a little peace. (The children go down stage and call out:)

SMALL BOY: Hey, Senator. Hey, Marthy. Come on let's play chick-me, chick-me, cranie-crow.

CHILD'S VOICE: (Off stage) All right! Come on, Jessie! (Enter several children, led by SENATOR, and a game begins in front of the store as JOE CLARK and HAMBO play checkers.)

JOE CLARK: I God! Hambo, you can't play no checkers.

HAMBO: (As they seat themselves at the check board) Aw, man, if you wasn't de Mayor I'd beat you all de time.

(The children get louder and louder, drowning out the men's voices.)

SMALL GIRL: I'm gointer be de hen.

BOY: And I'm gointer be de hawk. Lemme git maself a stick to mark wid.

(The boy who is the hawk squats center stage with a short twig in his hand. The largest girl lines up the other children behind her.)

GIRL: (Mother Hen) (Looking back over her flock): Y'all ketch holt of one 'Nother's clothes so de hawk can't git yuh. (They do.) You all straight now?

CHILDREN: Yeah. (The march around the hawk commences.)

HEN AND CHICKS:

Chick mah chick mah craney crow  
Went to de well to wash ma toe  
When I come back ma chick was gone  
What time, ole witch?

HAWK: (Making a tally on the ground) One!

HEN AND CHICKS: (Repeat song and march.)

HAWK: (Scoring again) Two!

(Can be repeated any number of times.)

HAWK: Four. (He rises and imitates a hawk flying and trying to catch a chicken. Calling in a high voice:) Chickee.

HEN: (Flapping wings to protect her young) My chickens sleep.

HAWK: Chickee. (During all this the hawk is feinting and darting in his efforts to catch a chicken, and the chickens are dancing defensively, the hen trying to protect them.)

HEN: My chicken's sleep.

HAWK: I shall have a chick.

HEN: You shan't have a chick.

HAWK: I'm goin' home. (Flies off)

HEN: Dere's de road.

HAWK: My pot's a boilin'.

HEN: Let it boil.

HAWK: My guts a growlin'.

HEN: Let 'em growl.

HAWK: I must have a chick.

HEN: You shan't have n'airn.

HAWK: My mama's sick.

HEN: Let her die.

HAWK: Chickie!

HEN: My chicken's sleep.

(HAWK darts quickly around the hen and grabs a chicken and leads him off and places his captive on his knees at the store porch. After a brief bit of dancing he catches another, then a third, etc.)

HAMBO: (At the checker board, his voice rising above the noise of the playing children, slapping his sides jubilantly) Ha! Ha! I got you now. Go ahead on and move, Joe Clark ... jus' go ahead on and move.



LOUNGERS: (Standing around two checker players) Ol' Deacon's got you now.

ANOTHER VOICE: Don't see how he can beat the Mayor like that.

ANOTHER VOICE: Got him in the Louisville loop. (These remarks are drowned by the laughter of the playing children directly in front of the porch. MAYOR JOE CLARK disturbed in his concentration on the checkers and peeved at being beaten suddenly turns toward the children, throwing up his hands.)

CLARK: Get on 'way from here, you limbs of Satan, making all that racket so a man can't hear his ears. Go on, go on!

(THE MAYOR looks about excitedly for the town marshall. Seeing him playing cards on the other side of porch, he bellows:)

Lum Boger, why'n't you git these kids away from here! What kind of a marshall is you? All this passle of young'uns around here under grown people's feet, creatin' disorder in front of my store.

(LUM BOGER puts his cards down lazily, comes down stage and scatters the children away. One saucy little girl refuses to move.)

LUM BOGER: Why'nt you go on away from here, Matilda? Didn't you hear me tell you-all to move?

LITTLE MATILDA: (Defiantly) I ain't goin' nowhere. You ain't none of my mama. (Jerking herself free from him as LUM touches her.) My mama in the store and she told me to wait out here. So take that, ol' Lum.

LUM BOGER: You impudent little huzzy, you! You must smell yourself ... youse so fresh.

MATILDA: The wind musta changed and you smell your own top lip.

LUM BOGER: Don't make me have to grab you and take you down a buttonhole lower.

MATILDA: (Switching her little head) Go ahead on and grab me. You sho can't kill me, and if you kill me, you sho can't eat me. (She marches into the store.)

SENATOR: (Derisively from behind stump) Ol' dumb Lum! Hey! Hey!

(LITTLE BOY at edge of stage thumbs his nose at the marshall.)

(LUM lumbers after the small boy. Both exit.)

HAMBO: (To CLARK who has been thinking all this while what move to make) You ain't got but one move ... go ahead on and make it. What's de matter, Mayor?

CLARK: (Moving his checker) Aw, here.

HAMBO: (Triumphant) Now! Look at him, boys. I'm gonna laugh in notes. (Laughing to the scale and jumping a checker each time) Do, sol, fa, me, lo ... one! (Jumping another checker) La, sol, fa, me, do ... two! (Another jump.) Do sol, re, me, lo ... three! (Jumping a third.) Lo sol, fa, me, re ... four! (The crowd begins to roar with laughter. LUM BOGER returns, looking on. Children come drifting back again playing chick-me-chick-me-cranie crow.)

VOICE: Oh, ha! Done got the ol' tush hog.

ANOTHER VOICE: Thought you couldn't be beat, Brother Mayor?

CLARK: (Peeved, gets up and goes into the store mumbling) Oh, I coulda beat you if I didn't have this store on my mind. Saturday afternoon and I got work to do. Lum, ain't I told you to keep them kids from playin' right in front of this store?

(LUM makes a pass at the nearest half-grown boy. The kids dart around him teasingly.)

ANOTHER VOICE: Eh, heh.... Hambo done run him on his store ... done run the ol' coon in his hole.

ANOTHER VOICE: That ain't good politics, Hambo, beatin' the Mayor.

ANOTHER VOICE: Well, Hambo, you don't got to be so hard at checkers, come on let's see what you can do with de cards. Lum Boger there got his hands full nursin' the chilluns.

ANOTHER VOICE: (At the table) We ain't playin' for money, nohow, Deacon. We just playin' a little Florida Flip.

HAMBO: Ya all can't play no Florida Flip. When I was a sinner there wasn't a man in this state could beat me playin' that game. But I'm a deacon in Macedonia Baptist now and I don't bother with the cards no more.

VOICE AT CARD TABLE: All right, then, come on here Tony (To man with basket on steps.) let me catch your jack.

TAYLOR: (Looking toward door) I don't reckon I got time. I guess my wife gonna get through buying out that store some time or other and want to go home.

OLD MAN: (On opposite side of porch from card game) I bet my wife would know better than expect me to sit around and wait for her with a basket. Whyn't you tell her to tote it on home herself?

TAYLOR: (Sighing and shaking his head.) Eh, Lawd!

VOICE AT CARD TABLE: Look like we can't get nobody to come into this game. Seem like everybody's scared a us. Come on back here, Lum, and take your hand. (LUM makes a final futile gesture at the children.)

LUM: Ain't I tole you little haitians to stay away from here?

(CHILDREN scatter teasingly only to return to their play in front of the store later on. LUM comes up on the porch and re-joins the card game. Just as he gets seated, MRS. CLARK comes to the door of the store and calls him.)

MRS. CLARK: (Drawlingly) Columbus!

LUM: (Wearily) Ma'am?

MRS. CLARK: De Mayor say for you to go round in de back yard and tie up old lady Jackson's mule what's trampin' aup all de tomatoes in my garden.

LUM: All right. (Leaving card game.) Wait till I come back, folkses.

LIGE: Oh, hum! (Yawning and putting down the deck of cards) Lum's sho a busy marshall. Say, ain't Dave and Jim been round here yet? I feel kinder like hearin' a little music 'bout now.

BOY: Naw, they ain't been here today. You-all know they ain't so thick nohow as they was since Daisy Bailey come back and they started runnin' after her.

WOMAN: You mean since she started runnin' after them, the young hussy.

MRS. CLARK: (In doorway) She don't mean 'em no good.

WALTER: That's a shame, ain't it now? (Enter LUM from around back of store. He jumps on the porch and takes his place at the card box.)

LUM: (To the waiting players) All right, boys! Turn it on and let the bad luck happen.

LIGE: My deal. (He begins shuffling the cards with an elaborate fan-shape movement.)

VOICE AT TABLE: Look out there, Lige, you shuffling mighty lot. Don't carry the cub to us.

LIGE: Aw, we ain't gonna cheat you ... we gonna beat you. (He slams down the cards for LUM BOGER to cut.) Wanta cut 'em?

LUM: No, ain't no need of cutting a rabbit out when you can twist him out. Deal 'em. (LIGE deals out the cards.)

CLARK'S VOICE: (Inside the store) You, Mattie! (MRS. CLARK, who has been standing in the DOE, quickly turns and goes inside.)

LIGE: Y-e-e-e! Spades! (The game is started.)

LUM: Didn't snatch that jack, did you?

LIGE: Aw, no, ain't snatched no jack. Play.

WALTER: (LUM'S partner) Well, here it is, partner. What you want me to play for you?

LUM: Play jus' like I'm in New York, partner. But we gotta try to catch that jack.

LIGE: (Threateningly) Stick out your hand and draw back a nub.

(WALTER THOMAS plays.)

WALTER: I'm playin' a diamond for you, partner.

LUM: I done tole you you ain't got no partner.

LIGE: Heh, Heh! Partner, we got 'em. Pull off wid your king. Dey got to play 'em. (When that trick is turned, triumphantly:) Didn't I tell you, partner? (Stands on his feet and slams down with his ace violently) Now, come up under this ace. Aw, hah, look at ol' low, partner. I knew I was gonna catch 'em. (When LUM plays) Ho, ho, there goes the queen.... Now, the jack's a gentleman.... Now, I'm playin' my knots. (Everybody plays and the hand is ended.) Partner, high, low, jack and the game and four.

WALTER: Give me them cards. I believe you-all done give me the cub that time. Look at me ... this is Booker T Washington dealing these cards. (Shuffles cards grandly and gives them to LIGE to cut.) Wanta cut 'em?

LIGE: Yeah, cut 'em and shoot 'em. I'd cut behind my ma. (He cuts the cards.)

WALTER: (Turning to player at left, FRANK, LIGE'S partner) What you saying, Frank?

FRANK: I'm beggin'. (LIGE is trying to peep at cards.)

WALTER: (Turning to LIGE) Stop peepin' at them cards, Lige. (To FRANK)

Did you say you was beggin' or standin'?

FRANK: I'm beggin'.

WALTER: Get up off your knees. Go ahead and tell 'em I sent you.

FRANK: Well, that makes us four.

WALTER: I don't care if you is. (Pulls a quarter out of his pocket and lays it down on the box.) Twenty-five cents says I know the best one. Let's go. (Everybody puts down a quarter.)

FRANK: What you want me to play for you partner?

LIGE: Play me a club. (The play goes around to dealer, WALTER, who gets up and takes the card off the top of the deck and slams it down on the table.)

WALTER: Get up ol' deuce of deamonds and gallop off with your load.

(TO LUM) Partner, how many times you seen the deck?

LUM: Two times.

WALTER: Well, then I'm gonna pull off, partner. Watch this ol' queen. (Everyone plays) Ha! Ha! Wash day and no soap. (Takes the jack of diamonds and sticks him up on his forehead. Stands up on his feet.) Partner, I'm dumping to you ... play your king. (When it comes to his play LUM, too, stands up. The others get up and they, too, excitedly slam their cards down.) Now, come on in this kitchen and let me splice that cabbage! (He slams down the ace of diamonds. Pats the jack on his forehead, sings:) Hey, hey, back up, jenny, get your load. (Talking) Dump to that jack, boys, dump to it. High, low, jack and the game and four. One to go. We're four wid you, boys.

LIGE: Yeah, but you-all playin' catch-up.

FRANK: Gimme them cards ... lemme deal some.

LIGE: Frank, now you really got responsibility on you. They's got one game on us.

FRANK: Aw, man, I'm gonna deal 'em up a mess. This deal's in the White House. (He shuffles and puts the cards down for WALTER to cut.) Cut 'em.

WALTER: Nope, I never cut green timber. (FRANK deals and turns the card up.)

FRANK: Hearts, boys. (He turns up an ace.)

LUM: Aw, you snatched that ace, nigger.

WALTER: Yeah, they done carried the cub to us, partner.

LIGE: Oh, he didn't do no such a thing. That ace was turned fair. We jus' too hard for you ... we eats our dinner out a the blacksmith shop.

WALTER: Aw, you all cheatin'. You know it wasn't fair.

FRANK: Aw, shut up, you all jus' whoopin' and hollerin' for nothin'. Tryin' to bully the game. (FRANK and LIGE rise and shake hands grandly.)

LIGE: Mr. Hoover, you sho is a noble president. We done stuck these niggers full of cobs. They done got scared to play us.

LIGE (?) Scared to play you? Get back down to this table, let me spread my mess.

LOUNGER: Yonder comes Elder Simms. You all better squat that rabbit.

They'll be having you all up in the church for playin' cards.

(FRANK grabs up the cards and puts them in his pocket quickly. Everybody picks up the money and looks unconcerned as the preacher enters. Enter ELDER SIMMS with his two prim-looking little children by the hand.)

ELDER SIMMS: How do, children. Right warm for this time in November, ain't it?

VOICE: Yes sir, Reverend, sho is. How's Sister Simms?

SIMMS: She's feelin' kinda po'ly today. (Goes on in store with his children)

VOICE: (Whispering loudly) Don't see how that great big ole

powerful woman could be sick. Look like she could go bear huntin' with her fist.

ANOTHER VOICE: She look jus' as good as you-all's Baptist pastor's wife. Pshaw, you ain't seen no big woman, nohow, man. I seen one once so big she went to whip her little boy and he run up under her belly and hid six months 'fore she could find him.

ANOTHER VOICE: Well, I knowed a woman so little that she had to get up on a soap box to look over a grain of sand.

(REV. SIMMS comes out of store, each child behind him sucking a stick of candy.)

SIMMS: (To his children) Run on home to your mother and don't get dirty on the way. (The two children start primly off down the street but just out of sight one of them utters a loud cry.)

SIMMS'S CHILD: (Off stage) Papa, papa. Nunkie's trying to lick my candy.

SIMMS: I told you to go on and leave them other children alone.

VOICE ON PORCH: (Kidding) Lum, why'n't you tend to your business.

(TOWN MARSHALL rises and shoos the children off again.)

LUM: You all varmint leave them nice chillun alone.

LIGE: (Continuing the lying on porch) Well, you all done seen so much, but I bet you ain't never seen a snake as big as the one I saw when I was a boy up in middle Georgia. He was so big couldn't hardly move his self. He laid in one spot so long he growed moss on him and everybody thought he was a log, till one day I set down on him and went to sleep, and when I woke up that snake done crawled to Florida. (Loud laughter.)

FRANK: (Seriously) Layin' all jokes aside though now, you all remember that rattlesnake I killed last year was almost as big as that Georgia snake.

VOICE: How big, you say it was, Frank?

FRANK: Maybe not quite as big as that, but jus' about fourteen feet.

VOICE: (Derisively) Gimme that lyin' snake. That snake wasn't but

four foot long when you killed him last year and you done growed him ten feet in a year.

ANOTHER VOICE: Well, I don't know about that. Some of the snakes around here is powerful long. I went out in my front yard yesterday right after the rain and killed a great big ol' cottonmouth.

SIMMS: This sho is a snake town. I certainly can't raise no chickens for 'em. They kill my little biddies jus' as fast as they hatch out. And yes ... if I hadn't cut them weeds out of the street in front of my parsonage, me or some of my folks woulda been snake-bit right at our front door. (To whole crowd) Whyn't you all cut down these weeds and clean up these streets?

HAMBO: Well, the Mayor ain't said nothin' 'bout it.

SIMMS: When the folks misbehaves in this town I think they oughta lock 'em up in a jail and make 'em work their fine out on the streets, then these weeds would be cut down.

VOICE: How we gonna do that when we ain't got no jail?

SIMMS: Well, you sho needs a jail ... you-all needs a whole lot of improvements round this town. I ain't never pastored no town so way-back as this one here.

CLARK: (Who has lately emerged from the store, fanning himself, overhears this last remark and bristles up) What's that you say 'bout this town?

SIMMS: I say we needs some improvements here in this town ... that's what.

CLARK: (In a powerful voice) And what improvements you figgers we needs?

SIMMS: A whole heap. Now, for one thing we really does need a jail, Mayor. We oughta stop runnin' these people out of town that misbehaves, and lock 'em up. Others towns has jails, everytown I ever pastored had a jail. Don't see how come we can't have one.

CLARK: (Towering angrily above the preacher) Now, wait a minute, Simms. Don't you reckon the man who knows how to start a town knows how to run it? I paid two hundred dollars out of this right hand for this land and walked out here and started this town befo' you was born. I ain't like some of you new niggers, come here



when grapes' ripe. I was here to cut new ground, and I been Mayor ever since.

SIMMS: Well, there ain't no sense in no one man stayin' Mayor all the time.

CLARK: Well, it's my town and I can be mayor jus' as long as I want to. It was me that put this town on the map.

SIMMS: What map you put it on, Joe Clark? I ain't seen it on no map.

CLARK: (Indignant) I God! Listen here, Elder Simms. If you don't like the way I run this town, just' take your flat feets right on out and git yonder crost the woods. You ain't been here long enough to say nothin' nohow.

HAMBO: (From a nail keg) Yeah, you Methodist niggers always telling people how to run things.

TAYLOR: (Practically unheard by the others) We do so know how to run things, don't we? Ain't Brother Mayor a Methodist, and ain't the school-teacher a ...? (His remarks are drowned out by the others.)

SIMMS: No, we don't like the way you're runnin' things. Now looka here, (Pointing at the Marshall) You got that lazy Lum Boger here for marshall and he ain't old enough to be dry behind his ears yet ... and all these able-bodied means in this town! You won't 'low nobody else to run a store 'ceptin' you. And looka yonder (happening to notice the street light) only street lamp in town, you got in front of your place. (Indignantly) We pay the taxes and you got the lamp.

VILLAGER: Don't you-all fuss now. How come you two always yam-yamming at each other?

CLARK: How come this fly-by-night Methodist preacher over here ... ain't been here three months ... tries to stand up on my store porch and tries to tell me how to run my town? (MATTIE CLARK, the Mayor's wife, comes timidly to the door, wiping her hands on her apron.) Ain't no man gonna tell me how to run my town. I God, I 'lected myself in and I'm gonna run it. (Turns and sees wife standing in door. Commandingly.) I God, Mattie, git on back in there and wait on that store!

MATTIE: (Timidly) Jody, somebody else wantin' stamps.

CLARK: I God, woman, what good is you? Gwan, git in. Look like between women and preachers a man can't have no peace. (Exit CLARK.)

SIMMS: (Continuing his argument) Now, when I pastored in Jacksonville you oughta see what kinda jails they got there....

LOUNGER: White folks needs jails. We colored folks don't need no jail.

ANOTHER VILLAGER: Yes, we do, too. Elder Simms is right....

(The argument becomes a hubbub of voices.)

TAYLOR: (Putting down his basket) Now, I tell you a jail....

MRS. TAYLOR: (Emerging from the store door, arms full of groceries, looking at her husband) Yeah, and if you don't shut up and git these rations home I'm gonna be worse on you than a jail and six judges. Pickup that basket and let's go. (TONY meekly picks up the basket and he and his wife exit as the sound of an approaching guitar is heard off stage.)

(Two carelessly dressed, happy-go-lucky fellows enter together. One is fingering a guitar without playing any particular tune, and the other has his hat cocked over his eyes in a burlesque, dude-like manner. There are casual greetings.)

WALTER: Hey, there, bums, how's tricks?

LIGE: What yo' sayin', boys?

HAMBO: Good evenin' sons.

LIGE: How did you-all make out this evenin', boys?

JIM: Oh, them white folks at the party shelled out right well. Kept Dave busy pickin' it up. How much did we make today, Dave?

DAVE: (Striking his pocket) I don't know, boy, but feels right heavy here. Kept me pickin' up money just like this.... (As JIM picks a few dance chords, Dave gives a dance imitation of how he picked up the coins from the ground as the white folks threw them.) We count it after while. Woulda divided up with you already if you hadn't left me when you seen Daisy comin' by. Let's sit down on the porch and rest now.

LIGE: She sho is lookin' stylish and pretty since she come back

with her white folks from up North. Wearin' the swellest clothes. And that coal-black hair of hers jus' won't quit.

MATTIE CLARK: (In doorway) I don't see what the mens always hanging after Daisy Taylor for.

CLARK: (Turning around on the porch) I God, you back here again. Who's tendin' that store? (MATTIE disappears inside.)

DAVE: Well, she always did look like new money to me when she was here before.

JIM: Well, that's all you ever did get was a look.

DAVE: That's all you know! I bet I get more than that now.

JIM: You might git it but I'm the man to use it. I'm a bottom fish.

DAVE: Aw, man. You musta been walking round here fast asleep when

Daisy was in this county last. You ain't seen de go I had with her.

JIM: No, I ain't seen it. Bet you didn't have no letter from her while she been away.

DAVE: Bet you didn't neither.

JIM: Well, it's just cause she can't write. If she knew how to scratch with a pencil I'd had a ton of 'em.

DAVE: Shaw, man! I'd had a post office full of 'em.

OLD WOMAN: You-all ought to be shame, carrying on over a brazen heifer like Daisy Taylor. Jus' cause she's been up North and come back, I reckon you cutting de fool sho 'nough now. She ain't studying none of you-all nohow. All she wants is what you got in your pocket.

JIM: I likes her but she won't git nothin' outa me. She never did. I wouldn't give a poor consumed cripple crab a crutch to cross the River Jurdon.

DAVE: I know I ain't gonna give no woman nothin'. I wouldn't give a dog a doughnut if he treed a terrapin.

LIGE: Youse a cottontail dispute ... both of you. You'd give her anything you got. You'd give her Georgia with a fence 'round it.

OLD MAN: Yeah, and she'd take it, too.

LINDSAY: Don't distrimate the woman like that. That ain't

nothing but hogism. Ain't nothin' the matter with Daisy, she's all right.

(Enter TEETS and BOOTSIE tittering coyly and switching themselves.)

BOOTSIE: Is you seen my mama?

OLD WOMAN: You know you ain't lookin' for no mama. Jus' come back down here to show your shape and fan around awhile. (BOOTSIE and TEETS going into the store.)

BOOTSIE & TEETS: No, we ain't. We'se come to get our mail.

OLD WOMAN: (After girls enter store) Why don't you all keep up some attention to these nice girls here, Bootsie and Teets. They wants to marry.

DAVE: Aw, who thinkin' 'bout marryin' now? They better stay home and eat their own pa's rations. I gotta buy myself some shoes.

JIM: The woman I'm gonna marry ain't born yet and her maw is dead.

(GIRLS come out giggling and exit.) (JIM begins to strum his guitar lightly at first as the talk goes on.)

CLARK: (To DAVE and JIM) Two of the finest gals that ever lived and friendly jus' like you-all is. You two boys better take 'em back and stop them shiftless ways.

HAMBO: Yeah, hurry up and do somethin'! I wants to taste a piece yo' weddin' cake.

JIM: (Embarrassed but trying to be jocular) Whut you trying to rush me up so fast?... Look at Will Cody here (Pointing to little man on porch) he been promising to bring his already wife down for two months ... and nair one of us ain't seen her yet.

DAVE: Yeah, how you speck me to haul in a brand new wife when he can't lead a wagon-broke wife eighteen miles? Me, I'm going git one soon's Cody show me his'n. (General sly laughter at CODY'S expense.)

WALTER: (Snaps his fingers and pretends to remember something) Thass right, Cody. I been intending to tell you.... I know where you kin buy a ready-built house for you and yo' wife. (Calls into the store.) Hey, Clark, cime on out here and tell Cody 'bout dat

Bradley house. (To CODY.) I know you wants to git a place of yo' own so you kin settle down.

HAMBO: He done moved so much since he been here till every time he walk out in his back yeard his chickens lay down and cross they legs.

LINDSAY: Cody, I thought you tole us you was going up to Sanford to bring dat 'oman down here last Sat'day.

LIGE: That ain't de way he tole me 'bout it. Look, fellers, (Getting up and putting one hand on his hips and one finger of the other hand against his chin coquettishly) Where you reckon I'll be next Sat'day night?... Sittin' up side of Miz Cody. (Great burst of laughter.)

SYKES JONES: (Laughing) Know what de folks tole me in Sanford? Dat was another man's wife. (Guffaws.)

CODY: (Feebly) Aw, you don't know whut you talkin' bout.

JONES: Naw, I don't know, but de folks in Sanford does. (Laughing) Dey tell me when dat lady's husband come home Sat'day night, ole Cody jumped out de window. De man grabbed his old repeater and run out in de yard to head him off. When Cody seen him come round de corner de house (Gesture) he flopped his wings and flew up on de fence. De man thowed dat shotgun dead on him. (Laughs) Den, man! Cody flopped his wings lak a buzzard (Gesture) and sailed on off. De man dropped to his knees lak dis (Gesture of kneeling on one knee and taking aim) Die! die! die! (Supposedly sound of shots as the gun is moved in a circle following the course of Cody's supposed flight) Cody just flew right on off and lit on a hill two miles off. Then, man! (Gesture of swift flight) In ten minutes he was back here in Eatonville and in he bed.

WALTER: I passed there and seen his house shakin', but I didn't know how come.

HAMBO: Aw, leave de boy alone.... If you don't look out some of y'all going to have to break his record.

LIGE: I'm prepared to break it now. (General laughter.)

JIM: Well, anyhow, I don't want to marry and leave Dave ... yet awhile. (Picking a chord.)

DAVE: And I ain't gonna leave Jim. We been palling around together ever since we hollered titty mama, ain't we, boy?

JIM: Sho is. (Music of the guitar increases in volume. DAVE shuffles a few steps and the two begin to sing.)

JIM:

Rabbit on the log.

I ain't got no dog.

How am I gonna git him?

God knows.

DAVE:

Rabbit on the log.

Ain't got no dog.

Shoot him with my rifle

Bam! Bam!

(Some of the villagers join in song and others get up and march around the porch in time with the music. BOOTSIE and TEETS re-enter, TEETS sticking her letter down the neck of her blouse. JOE LINDSAY grabs TEETS and WALTER THOMAS grabs BOOTSIE. There is dancing, treating and general jollification. Little children dance the parse-me-la. The music fills the air just as the sun begins to go down. Enter DAISY TAYLOR coming down the road toward the store.)

CLARK: (Bawls out from the store porch) I God, there's Daisy again.

(Most of the dancing stops, the music slows down and then stops completely. DAVE and JIM greet DAISY casually as she approaches the porch.)

JIM: Well, Daisy, we knows you, too.

DAVE: Gal, youse jus' as pretty as a speckled pup.

DAISY: (Giggling) I see you two boys always playin' and singin' together. That music sounded right good floating down the road.

JIM: Yeah, child, we'se been playin' for the white folks all week. We'se playin' for the colored now.

DAVE: (Showing off, twirling his dancing feet) Yeah, we're standin' on our abstract and livin' on our income.

OLD MAN: Um-ump, but they ain't never workin'. Just round here playing as usual.

JIM: Some folks think you ain't workin' lessen you smellin' a mule. (He sits back down on box and picks at his guitar.) Think you gotta be beatin' a man to his barn every mornin'.

VOICE: Glad to be round home with we-all again, ain't you Daisy?

DAISY: Is I glad? I jus' got off special early this evenin' to come over here and see everybody. I was kinda 'fraid sundown would catch me 'fore I got round that lake. Don't know how I'm gonna walk back to my workin' place in the dark by muself.

DAVE: Don't no girl as good-lookin' as you is have to go home by herself tonight.

JIM: No, cause I'm here.

DAVE: (To DAISY) Don't you trust yourself round that like wid all them 'gators and moccasins with that nigger there, Daisy (Pointing at JIM) He's jus' full of rabbit blood. What you need is a real man ... with good feet. (Cutting a dance step.)

DAISY: I ain't thinking 'bout goin' home yet. I'm goin' in the store.

JIM: What you want in the store?

DAISY: I want some gum.

DAVE: (Starting toward door) Girl, you don't have to go in there to git no gum. I'll go in there and buy you a carload of gum. What kind you want?

DAISY: Bubble gum. (DAVE goes in the store with his hand in his pocket. The sun is setting and the twilight deepens.)

JIM: (Pulling package out of his pocket and laughing) Here your gum, baby. What it takes to please the ladies, I totes it. I don't have to go get it, like Dave. What you gimme for it?

DAISY: A bushel and a peck, and a hug around the neck. (She embraces JIM playfully. He hands her the gum, patting his shoulder as he sits on box.) Oh, thank you. Youse a ready man.

JIM: Yeah, there's a lot of good parts to me. You can have West Tampa if you want it.

DAISY: You always was a nice quiet boy, Jim.

DAVE: (Emerging from the store with a package of gum) Here's

your gum,  
Daisy.

JIM: Oh, youse late. She's done got gum now. Chaw that yourself.

DAVE: (Slightly peeved and surprised) Hunh, you mighty fast here now with Daisy but you wasn't that fast gettin' out of that white man's chicken house last week.

JIM: Who you talkin' 'bout?

DAVE: Hoo-oo? (Facetiously) You ain't no owl. Your feet don't fit no limb.

JIM: Aw, nigger, hush.

DAVE: Aw, hush, yourself. (He walks away for a minute as DAISY turns to meet some newcomers. DAVE throws his package of gum down on the ground. It breaks and several children scramble for the pieces. An old man, very drunk, carrying an empty jug enters on left and staggers tipsily across stage.) (MAYOR JOE CLARK emerges from the store and looks about for his marshall.)

CLARK: (Bellowing) Lum Boger!

LUM BOGER: (Eating a stalk of cane) Yessir!

CLARK: I God, Lum, take your lazy self off that keg and go light that town lamp. All summer long you eatin' up my melon, and all winter long you chawin' up my cane. What you think this town is payin' you for? Laying round here doin' nothin'? Can't you see it's gettin' dark?

(LUM BOGER rises lazily and takes the soap box down stage, stands on it to light the lamp, discovers no oil in it and goes in store. In a few moments he comes out of store, fills the lamp and lights it.)

DAISY: (Coming back toward JIM) Ain't you all gonna play and sing a little somethin' for me? I ain't heard your all's music much for so long.

JIM: Play anything you want, Daisy. Don't make no difference what 'tis I can pick it. Where's that old coon, Dave? (Looking around for his partner.)

LIGE: (Calling Dave, who is leaning against post at opposite end of porch) Come here, an' get warmed up for Daisy.

DAVE: Aw, ma throat's tired.



JIM: Leave the baby be.

DAISY: Come on, sing a little, Dave.

DAVE: (Going back toward Jim) Well, seeing who's asking ... all right.

What song yo like, Daisy?

DAISY: Um-m. Lemme think.

VOICE ON PORCH: "Got on the train, didn't have no fare".

DAISY: (Gaily) Yes, that one. That's a good one.

JIM: (Begins to tune up. DAVE touches Daisy's hand.)

VOICE: (In fun) Hunh, you all wouldn't play at the hall last week when we asked you.

VOICE OF SPITEFUL OLD WOMAN: Daisy wasn't here then.

ANOTHER VOICE: (Teasingly) All you got to do to some men is to shake a skirt tail in their face and they goes off their head.

DAVE: (To JIM who is still tuning up) Come if you're comin' boy, let's go if you gwine. (The full melody of the guitar comes out in a lively, old-fashioned tune.)

VOICE: All right now, boys, do it for Daisy jus' as good as you do for dem white folks over in Maitland.

DAVE & JIM: (Beginning to sing)

Got on the train,

Didn't have no fare,

But I rode some,

I rode some.

Got on the train,

Didn't have no fare,

But I rode some,

But I rode some.

Got on the train,

Didn't have no fare,

Conductor asked me what I'm doin' there,

But I rode some!

Grabbed me by the neck

And led me to the door.

But I rode some,

But I rode some.  
Grabbed me by the neck  
And led me to the door.  
But I rode some,  
But I rode some.  
Grabbed me by the neck,  
And led me to the door.  
Rapped me cross the head with a forty-four,  
But I rode some.

First thing I saw in jail  
Was a pot of peas.  
But I rode some,  
But I rode some.  
First thing I saw in jail  
Was a pot of peas.  
But I rode some,  
But I rode some.  
The peas was good,  
The meat was fat,  
Fell in love with the chain gang jus' for that,  
But I rode some.

(DAVE acts out the song in dancing pantomime and when it ends there are shouts and general exclamations of approval from the crowd.)

VOICES: I don't blame them white folks for goin' crazy 'bout that....

OLD MAN: Oh, when I was a young boy I used to swing the gals round on that piece.

DAISY: (TO JIM) Seem like your playin' gits better and better.

DAVE: (Quickly) And how 'bout my singin'? (Everybody laughs.)

VOICES IN THE CROWD: Ha! Ha! Ol' Dave's gittin' jealous when she speaks o' Jim.

JIM: (To DAVE, in fun) Ain't nothin' to it but my playin'. You ain't got no singin' voice. If that's singin', God's a gopher.

DAVE: (Half-seriously) My singin' is a whole lot better'n your

playin'. You jus' go along and fram. The reason why the white folks gives us money is cause I'm singin'.

JIM: Yeah?

DAVE: And you can't dance.

VOICE IN THE CROWD: You oughta dance. Big as your feet is, Dave.

DAISY: (Diplomatically) Both of you all is wonderful and I would like to see Dave dance a little.

DAVE: There now, I told you. What did I tell you. (To JIM) Stop woofing and pick a little tune there so that I can show Daisy somethin'.

JIM: Pick a tune? I bet if you fool with me I'll pick your bones jus' like a buzzard did the rabbit. You can't sing and now you wants to dance.

DAVE: Yeah, and I'll lam your head. Come on and play, good-for-nothing.

JIM: All right, then. You say you can dance ... show these people what you can do. But don't bring that little stuff I been seein' you doin' all these years. (JIM plays and DAVE dances, various members of the crowd keep time with their hands and feet, DAISY looks on enjoying herself immensely.)

DAISY: (As DAVE cuts a very fancy step) I ain't seen nothin' like this up North. Dave you sho hot.

(As DAVE cuts a more complicated step the crowd applauds, but just as the show begins to get good, suddenly JIM stops playing.)

DAVE: (Surprised) What's the matter, buddy?

JIM: (Envious of the attention DAVE has been getting from DAISY, disgustedly) Oh, nigger, I'm tired of seein' you cut the fool. 'Sides that, I been playin' all afternoon for the white folks.

DAISY: But I though you was playin' for me now, Jim.

JIM: Yeah, I'd play all night long for you, but I'm gettin' sick of Dave round here showin' off. Let him git somethin' and play for himself if he can. (An OLD MAN with a lighted lantern enters.)

DAISY: (Coyly) Well, honey, play some more for me, then, and don't

mind Dave. I reckon he done danced enough. Play me “Shake That Thing”.

OLD MAN WITH LANTERN: Sho, you ain’t stopped, is you, boy? Music sound mighty good floatin’ down that dark road.

OLD WOMAN: Yeah, Jim, go on play a little more. Don’t get to acting so niggerish this evening.

DAVE: Aw, let the ol’ darky alone. Nobody don’t want to hear him play, nohow. I know I don’t.

JIM: Well, I’m gonna play. (And he begins to pick “Shake That Thing”.

TEETS and BOOTSIE begin to dance with LIGE MOSELY and FRANK WARRICK.

As the tune gets good, DAVE cannot resist the music either.)

DAVE: Old nigger’s eveil but he sho can play. (He begins to do a few steps by himself, then twirls around in front of DAISY and approaches her. DAISY, overcome by the music, begins to step rhythmically toward DAVE and together they dance unobserved by JIM, absorbed in picking his guitar.)

DAISY: Look here, baby, at this new step I learned up North.

DAVE: You can show me anything, sugar lump.

DAISY: Hold me tight now. (But just as they begin the new movement JIM notices DAISY and DAVE. He stops playing again and lays his guitar down.)

VOICES IN THE CROWD: (Disgustedly) Aw, come on, Jim.... You must be jealous....

JIM: No, I ain’t jealous. I jus’ get tired of seein’ that ol’ nigger clownin’ all the time.

DAVE: (Laughing and pointing to JIM on porch) Look at that mad baby. Take that lip up off the ground. Got your mouth stuck out jus’ because some one is enjoying themselves. (He comes up and pushes JIM playfully.)

JIM: You better go head and let me alone. (TO DAISY) Come here, Daisy!

LIGE: That’s just what I say. Niggers can’t have no fun without someone getting mad ... specially over a woman.

JIM: I ain't mad.... Daisy, 'scuse me, honey, but that fool, Dave....

DAVE: I ain't mad neither.... Jim always tryin' to throw off on me.  
But you can't joke him.

DAISY: (Soothingly) Aw, now, now!

JIM: You ain't jokin'. You means that, nigger. And if you tryin' to get hot, first thing, you can pull of my blue shirt you put on this morning.

DAVE: Youse a got that wrong. I ain't got on no shirt of yours.

JIM: Yes, you is got on my shirt, too. Don't tell me you ain't got on my shirt.

DAVE: Well, even if I is, you can just lift your big plantations out of my shoes. You can just foot it home barefooted.

JIM: You try to take any shoes offa me!

LIGE: (Pacifying them) Aw, there ain't no use of all that. What you all want to start this quarreling for over a little jokin'.

JIM: Nobody's quarreling.... I'm just playin' a little for Daisy and Dave's out there clownin' with her.

CLARK: (In doorway) I ain't gonna have no fussin' round my store, no way. Shut up, you all.

JIM: Well, Mayor Clark, I ain't mad with him. We'se been friends all our lives. He's slept in my bed and wore my clothes and et my grub....

DAVE: I et your grub? And many time as you done laid down with your belly full of my grandma's collard greens. You done et my meat and bread a whole lot more times than I et your stewed fish-heads.

JIM: I'd rather eat stewed fish-heads than steal out of other folkses houses so much till you went to sleep on the roost and fell down one night and broke up the settin' hen. (Loud laughter from the crowd)

DAVE: Youse a liar if you say I stole anybody's chickens. I didn't have to. But you ... 'fore you started goin' around with me, playin' that little box of yours, you was so hungry you had the white mouth. If it wasn't for these white folks throwin' me money for my dancin', you would be thin as a whisper right now.

JIM: (Laughing sarcastically) Your dancin'! You been leapin' around

here like a tailless monkey in a wash pot for a long time and nobody was payin' no 'tention to you, till I come along playing.

LINDSAY: Boys, boys, that ain't no way for friends to carry on.

DAISY: Well, if you all gonna keep up this quarrelin' and carryin' on I'm goin' home. 'Bout time for me to be gittin' back to my white folks anyhow. It's dark now. I'm goin', even if I have to go by myself. I shouldn't a stopped by here nohow.

JIM: (Stopping his quarrel) You ain't gonna go home by yourself. I'm goin' with you.

DAVE: (Singing softly)

It may be so,

I don't know.

But it sounds to me

Like a lie.

WALTER: Dave ain't got as much rabbit blood as folks thought.

DAVE: Tell 'em 'bout me. (Turns to DAISY) Won't you choose a treat on me, Miss Daisy, 'fore we go?

DAISY: (Coyly) Yessir, thank you. I wants a drink of soda water.

(DAVE pulls his hat down over his eyes, whirls around and offers his arm to DAISY. They strut into the store, DAVE gazing contemptuously at JIM as he passes. Crowd roars with laughter, much to the embarrassment of JIM.)

LIGE: Ol' fast Dave jus' runnin' the hog right over you, Jim.

WALTER: Thought you was such a hot man.

LUM BOGER: Want me to go in there and put Daisy under arrest and bring her to you?

JIM: (Sitting down on the edge of porch with one foot on the step and lights a cigarette pretending not to be bothered.) Aw, I'll get her when I want her. Let him treat her, but see who struts around that lake and down the railroad with her by and by.

(DAVE and DAISY emerge from the store, each holding a bottle of red soda pop and laughing together. As they start down the steps DAVE accidentally steps on JIM's outstretched foot. JIM jumps up and pushes DAVE back, causing him to spill the red soda all over his white shirt front.)

JIM: Stay off my foot, you big ox.

DAVE: Well, you don't have to wet me all up, do you, and me in company? Why don't you put your damn foot in your pocket?

DAISY: (Wiping DAVE'S shirt front with her handkerchief) Aw, ain't that too bad.

JIM: (To DAVE) Well, who's shirt did I wet? It's mine, anyhow, ain't it?

DAVE: (Belligerently) Well, if it's your shirt, then you come take it off me. I'm tired of your lip.

JIM: Well, I will.

DAVE: Well, put your fist where you lip is. (Pushing DAISY aside.)

DAISY: (Frightened) I want to go home. Now, don't you all boys fight.

(JIM attempts to come up the steps. DAVE pushes him back and he stumbles and falls in the dust. General excitement as the crowd senses a fight.)

LITTLE BOY: (On the edge of crowd) Fight, fight, you're no kin. Kill one another, won't be no sin. Fight, fight, you're no kin.

(JIM jumps up and rushes for DAVE as the latter starts down the steps. DAVE meets him with his fist squarely in the face and causes him to step backward, confused.)

DAISY: (Still on porch, half crying) Aw, my Lawd! I want to go home.

(General hubbub, women's cries of "Don't let 'em fight." "Why don't somebody stop 'em?" "What kind of men is you all, sit there and let them boys fight like that." Men's voices urging the fight: "Aw, let 'em fight." "Go for him, Dave." "Slug him, Jim.")

JIM makes another rush toward the steps. He staggers DAVE. DAVE knocks JIM sprawling once more. This time JIM grabs the mule bone as he rises, rushes DAVE, strikes DAVE over the head with it and knocks him out. DAVE falls prone on his back. There is great excitement.)

OLD WOMAN: (Screams) Lawdy, is he kilt? (Several men rush to the fallen man.)

VOICE: Run down to the pump and get a dipper o' water.

CLARK: (To his wife in door) Mattie, come out of that store with a bottle of witch hazely oil quick as you can. Jim Weston, I'm gonna arrest you for this. You Lum Boger. Where is that marshall? Lum Boger! (LUM BOGER detaches himself from the crowd.) Arrest Jim.

LUM: (Grabs JIM'S arm, relieves him of the mule bone and looks helplessly at the Mayor.) Now I got him arrested, what's I going to do with him?

CLARK: Lock him up back yonder in my barn till Monday when we'll have the trial in de Baptist Church.

LINDSAY: Yeah, just like all the rest of them Methodists ... always tryin' to take undercurrents on people.

WALTER: Ain't no worse then some of you Baptists, nohow. You all don't run this town. We got jus' as much to say as you have.

CLARK: (Angrily to both men) Shut up! Done had enough arguing in front of my place. (To LUM BOGER) Take that boy on and lock him up in my barn. And save that mule bone for evidence.

(LUM BOGER leads JIM off toward the back of the store. A crowd follows him. Other men and women are busy applying restoratives to DAVE. DAISY stands alone, unnoticed in the center of the stage.)

DAISY: (Worriedly) Now, who's gonna take me home?

:::: *CURTAIN*::::

## ACT TWO

### SCENE I

SETTING: Village street scene; huge oak tree upstage center; a house or two on back drop. When curtain goes up, Sister LUCY TAYLOR is seen standing under the tree. She is painfully spelling it out.



(Enter SISTER THOMAS, a younger woman (In her thirties) at left.)

SISTER THOMAS: Evenin', Sis Taylor.

SISTER TAYLOR: Evenin'. (Returns to the notice)

SISTER THOMAS: Whut you doin'? Readin' dat notice Joe Clark put up 'bout de meeting? (Approaches tree)

SISTER TAYLOR: Is dat whut it says? I ain't much on readin' since I had my teeth pulled out. You know if you pull out dem eye teeth you ruins' yo' eye sight. (Turns back to notice) Whut it say?

SISTER THOMAS: (Reading notice) "The trial of Jim Weston for assault and battery on Dave Carter wid a dangerous weapon will be held at Macedonia Baptist Church on Monday, November 10, at three o'clock. All are welcome. By order of J. Clark, Mayor of Eatonville, Florida." (Turning to SISTER TAYLOR) Hit's makin' on to three now.

SISTER TAYLOR: You mean it's right *now*. (Looks up at sun to tell time) Lemme go git ready to be at de trial 'cause I'm sho goin' to be there an' I ain't goin' to bite my tongue neither.

SISTER THOMAS: I done went an' crapped a mess of collard greens for supper. I better go put 'em on 'cause Lawd knows when we goin' to git outa there an' my husband is one of them dat's gointer eat don't keer whut happen. I bet if judgment day was to happen tomorrow he'd speck I orter fix him a bucket to carry long. (She moves to exit, right)

SISTER TAYLOR: All men favors they guts, chile. But what you think of all dis mess they got goin' on round here?

SISTER THOMAS: I just think it's a sin an' a shame befo' de livin' justice de way dese Baptists' niggers is runnin' round here carryin' on.

SISTER TAYLOR: Oh, they been puttin' out the brags ever since Sat'day night 'bout whut they gointer do to Jim. They thinks they runs this town. They tell me Rev. CHILDERS preached a sermon on it yistiddy.

SISTER THOMAS: Lawd help us! He can't preach an' he look like 10 cents worth of have-mercy let lone gittin' up dere tryin' to throw slams at us. Now all Elder Simms done wuz to explain to us our

rights ... whut you think 'bout Joe Clarke runnin' round here takin' up for these ole Baptist niggers?

SISTER TAYLOR: De puzzle-gut rascal ... we oughter have him up in conference an' put him out de Methdis' faith. He don't b'long in there—wanter tun dat boy outa town for nothin'.

SISTER THOMAS: But we all know how come he so hot to law Jim outa town—hit's to dig de foundation out from under Elder Simms.

SISTER TAYLOR: Whut he wants do dat for?

SISTER THOMAS: 'Cause he wants to be a God-know-it-all an' a God-do-it-all an' Simms is de onliest one in this town whut will buck up to him.

(Enter SISTER JONES, walking leisurely)

SISTER JONES: Hello, Hoyt, hello, Lucy.

SISTER TAYLOR: Goin' to de meetin'?

SISTER JONES: Done got my clothes on de line an' I'm bound to be dere.

SISTER THOMAS: Gointer testify for Jim?

SISTER JONES: Naw, I reckon—don't make such difference to me which way de drop fall.... 'Tain't neither one of 'em much good.

SISTER TAYLOR: I know it. I know it, Ida. But dat ain't de point. De crow we wants to pick is: Is we gointer set still an' let dese Baptist tell us when to plant an' when to pluck up?

SISTER JONES: Dat is something to think about when you come to think 'bout it. (Starts to move on) Guess I better go ahead—see y'all later an tell you straighter.

(Enter ELDER SIMMS, right, walking fast, Bible under his arm, almost collides with SISTER JONES as she exits.)

SIMMS: Oh, 'scuse me, Sister Jones. (She nods and smiles and exits.)

How you do, Sister Taylor, Sister Thomas.

BOTH: Good evenin', Elder.

SIMMS: Sho is a hot day.

SISTER TAYLOR: Yeah, de bear is walkin' de earth lak a natural man.

SISTER THOMAS: Reverend, look like you headed de wrong way. It's almost time for de trial an' youse all de dependence we got.

SIMMS: I know it. I'm tryin' to find de marshall so we kin go after Jim. I wants a chance to talk wid him a minute before court sets.

SISTER TAYLOR: Y'think he'll come clear?

SIMMS: (Proudly) I *know* it! (Shakes the Bible) I'm goin' to law 'em from Genesis to Revelation.

SISTER THOMAS: Give it to 'em, Elder. Wear 'em out!

SIMMS: We'se liable to havea new Mayor when all dis dust settle. Well,

I better scuffle on down de road. (Exits, left.)

SISTER THOMAS: Lord, lemme gwan home an' put dese greens on. (Looks off stage left) Here come Mayor Clark now, wid his belly settin' out in front of him like a cow catcher! His name oughter be Mayor Belly.

SISTER TAYLOR: (Arms akimbo) Jus' look at him! Tryin' to look like a jigadier Breneral.

(Enter CLARK hot and perspiring. They look at him coldly.)

CLARK: I God, de bear got me! (Silence for a moment) How y'all feelin', ladies?

SISTER TAYLOR: Brother Mayor, I ain't one of these folks dat bite my tongue an' bust my gall—whut's inside got to come out! I can't see to my rest why you cloakin' in wid dese Baptist buzzards 'ginst yo' own church.

MAYOR CLARK: I ain't cloakin' in wid *none*. I'm de Mayor of dis whole town I stands for de right an' ginst de wrong—I don't keer who it kill or cure.

SISTER THOMAS: You think it's right to be runnin' dat boy off for nothin'?

CLARK: I God! You call knockin' a man in de head wid a mule bone nothin'? 'Nother thin; I done missed nine of my best-layin' hens. I ain't sayin' Jim got 'em, but different people has tole me he burries a powerful lot of feathers in his back yard. I God, I'm a ruint man! (He starts towards the right exit, but LUM BOGER enters right.) I God, Lum, I been lookin' for you all day. It's almost three o'clock. (Hands

him a key from his ring) Take dis key an' go fetch Jim Weston on to de church.

LUM: Have you got yo' gavel from de lodge-room?

CLARK: I God, that's right, Lum. I'll go get it from de lodge room whilst you go git de bone an' de prisoner. Hurry up! You walk like dead lice droppin' off you. (He exits right while LUM crosses stage towards left.)

SISTER TAYLOR: Lum, Elder Simms been huntin' you—he's gone on down 'bout de barn. (She gestures)

LUM BOGER: I reckon I'll overtake him. (Exit left.)

SISTER THOMAS: I better go put dese greens on. My husband will kill me if he don't find no supper ready. Here come Mrs. Blunt. She oughter feel like a penny's worth of have-mercy wid all dis stink behind her daughter.

SISTER TAYLOR: Chile, some folks don't keer. They don't raise they chillun; they drags 'em up. God knows if dat Daisy wuz mine, I'd throw her down an' put a hundred lashes on her back wid a plow-line. Here she come in de store Sat'day night (Acts coy and coquettish, burlesques DAISY'S walk) a wringing and a twisting!

(Enter MRS. BLUNT, left.)

MRS. BLUNT: How y'all sisters?

SISTER THOMAS: Very well, Miz Blunt, how you?

MRS. BLUNT: Oh, so-so.

MRS. TAYLOR: I'm kickin', but not high.

MRS. BLUNT: Well, thank God you still on prayin' ground an' in a Bible country. Me, I ain't so many today. De niggers got my Daisy's name all mixed up in dis mess.

MRS. TAYLOR: You musn't mind dat, Sister Blunt. People jus' *will* talk. They's talkin' in New York an' they's talkin' in Georgy an' they's talkin' in Italy.

SISTER THOMAS: Chile, if you talk folkses talk, they'll have you in de graveyard or in Chattahoochee one. You can't pay no 'tention to talk.

MRS. BLUNT: Well, I know one thing. De man or women, chick or child, grizzly or gray, that tells me to my face anything wrong

'bout mychile, I'm goin' to take my fist (Rolls up right sleeve and gestures with right fist) and knock they teeth down they throat. (She looks ferocious) 'Case y'all know I raised my Daisy right round my feet till I let her go up north last year wid them white folks. I'd rather her to be in de white folks' kitchen than walkin' de streets like some of dese girls round here. If I do say so, I done raised a lady. She can't help it if all dese mens get stuck on her.

MRS. TAYLOR: You'se tellin' de truth, Sister Blunt. That's whut I always say: Don't confidence dese niggers. Do, they'll sho put you in de street.

MRS. THOMAS: Naw indeed, never syndicate wid niggers. Do, they will distriminate you. They'll be an *anybody*. You goin' to de trial, ain't you?

MRS. BLUNT: Just as sho as you snore. An' they better leave Daisy's name outa dis, too. I done told her and told her to come straight home from her work. Naw, she had to stop by dat store and skin her gums back wid dem trashy niggers. She better not leave them white folks today to come traipsin' over here scornin' her name all up wid dis nigger mess. Do, I'll kill her. No daughter of mine ain't goin' to do as she please, long as she live under de sound of my voice. (She crosses to right.)

MRS. THOMAS: That's right, Sister Blunt. I glory in yo' spunk. Lord, I better go put on my supper.

(As MRS. BLUNT exits, right, REV. CHILDERS enters left with DAVE and

DEACON LINDSAY and SISTER LEWIS. Very hostile glances from SISTERS

THOMAS and TAYLOR toward the others.)

CHILDERS: Good evenin', folks.

(SISTERS THOMAS and TAYLOR just grunt. MRS. THOMAS moves a step or two towards exit. Flirts her skirts and exits.)

LINDSAY: (Angrily) Whut's de matter, y'all? Cat got yo' tongue?

MRS. TAYLOR: More matter than you kin scatter all over Cincinnatti.

LINDSAY: Go 'head on, Lucy Taylor. Go 'head on. You know a very

little of yo' sugar sweetens my coffee. Go 'head on. Everytime you lift yo' arm you smell like a nest of yellow hammers.

MRS. TAYLOR: Go 'head on yo'self. Yo' head look like it done wore out three bodies. Talkin' 'bout *me* smellin'—you smell lak a nest of grand daddies yo'self.

LINDSAY: Aw rock on down de road, 'oman. Ah, don't wantuh change words wid yuh. Youse too ugly.

MRS. TAYLOR: You ain't nobody's pretty baby, yo'self. You so ugly I betcha yo' wife have to spread uh sheet over yo' head tuh let sleep slip up on yuh.

LINDSAY: (Threatening) You better git way from me while you able. I done tole you I don't wanta break a breath wid you. It's uh whole heap better tuh walk off on yo' own legs than it is to be toted off. I'm tired of yo' achin' round here. You fool wid me now an' I'll knock you into doll rags, Tony or no Tony.

MRS. TAYLOR: (Jumping up in his face) Hit me? Hit me! I dare you tuh hit me. If you take dat dare, you'll steal uh hawg an' eat his hair.

LINDSAY: Lemme gwan down to dat church befo' you make me stomp you.

(He exits, right.)

MRS. TAYLOR: You mean you'll git stomped. Ah'm goin' to de trial, too. De nex trial gointer be *me* for kickin' some uh you Baptist niggers around.

(A great noise is heard off stage left. The angry and jeering voices of children. MRS. TAYLOR looks off left and takes a step or two towards left exit as the noise comes nearer.)

VOICE OF ONE CHILD: Tell her! Tell her! Turn her up and smell her. Yo' mama ain't got nothin' to do wid me.

MRS. TAYLOR: (Hollering off left) You lil Baptis' haitians leave them chillun alone. If you don't, you better!

(Enter about ten children struggling and wrestling in a bunch. MRS. TAYLOR looks about on the ground for a stick to strike the children with.)

VOICE OF CHILD: Hey! Hey! He's skeered tuh knock it off. Coward!

MRS. TAYLOR: If y'all don't git on home!

SASSY LITTLE GIRL: (Standing akimbo) I know you better not touch me, do my mama will 'tend to you.

MRS. TAYLOR: (Making as if to strike her.) Shet up you nasty lil heifer, sassin' me! You ain't half raised.

(The little girl shakes herself at MRS. TAYLOR and is joined by two or three others.)

MRS. TAYLOR: (Walkin' towards right exit.) I'm goin' on down to de church an' tell yo' mammy. But she ain't been half raised herself. (She exits right with several children making faces behind her.)

ONE BOY: (To sassy GIRL) Aw, haw! Y'all ol' Baptis' ain't got no bookcase in yo' chuch. We went there one day an' I saw uh soda cracker box settin' up in de corner so I set down on it. (Pointing at sassy GIRL) Know what ole Mary Ella say? (Jeering laughter) Willie, you git up off our library! Haw! Haw!

MARY ELLA: Y'all ole Meth'dis' ain't got no window panes in yo' ole church.

ANOTHER GIRL: (Takes center of stand, hands akimbo and shakes her hips) I don't keer whut y'all say, I'm a Meth'dis' bred an' uh Meth'dis' born an' when I'm dead there'll be uh Meth'dis' gone.

MARY ELLA: (Snaps fingers under other girl's nose and starts singing.

Several join her.)

Oh Baptis', Baptis' is my name

My name's written on high

I got my lick in de Baptis' church

Gointer eat up de Meth'dis' pie.

(The Methodist children jeer and make faces. The Baptist camp make faces back; for a full minute there is silence while each camp tries to outdo the other in face making. The Baptist makes the last face.)

METHODIST BOY: Come on, less us don't notice 'em. Less gwan down to de church an' hear de trial.

MARY ELLA: Y'all ain't de onliest ones kin go. We goin', too.

WILLIE: Aw, haw! Copy cats! (Makes face) Dat's right. Follow on behind us lak uh puppy dog tail. (They start walking toward right

exit, switching their clothes behind.) Dat's right. Follow on behind us lak uh puppy dog tail. (They start walking toward right exit, switching their clothes behind.)

(Baptist children stage a rush and struggle to get in front of the Methodists. They finally succeed in flinging some of the Methodist children to the ground and some behind them and walk towards right exit haughtily switching their clothes.)

WILLIE: (Whispers to his crowd) Less go round by Mosely's lot an' beat 'em there!

OTHERS: All right!

WILLIE: (Yellin' to Baptists) We wouldn't walk behind no ole Baptists!

(The Methodists turn and walk off towards left exit, switching their clothes as the Baptists are doing.)

## *SLOW CURTAIN*

**Zora Neale Hurston** (January 7, 1891– January 28, 1960) was an American novelist, short story writer, folklorist, and anthropologist. Of Hurston's four novels and more than 50 published short stories, plays, and essays, she is best known for her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

**James Mercer Langston Hughes** (February 1, 1902 – May 22, 1967) was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist from Joplin, Missouri.

He was one of the earliest innovators of the then-new literary art form called jazz poetry. Hughes is best known as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance in New York City. He famously wrote about the period that “the negro was in vogue,” which was later paraphrased as “when Harlem was in vogue.”



# 71. The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People by Oscar Wilde

*Published:* 1895

## THE PERSONS IN THE PLAY

- John Worthing, J.P.
- Algernon Moncrieff
- Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D.
- Merriman, Butler
- Lane, Manservant
- Lady Bracknell
- Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax
- Cecily Cardew
- Miss Prism, Governess

## THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I. Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half-Moon Street, W.

ACT II. The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton.

ACT III. Drawing-Room at the Manor House, Woolton.

TIME: The Present.

# FIRST ACT

## SCENE

Morning-room in Algernon's flat in Half-Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room.

[**Lane** is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, **Algernon** enters.]

**Algernon.** Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

**Lane.** I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.

**Algernon.** I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately—any one can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for Life.

**Lane.** Yes, sir.

**Algernon.** And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

**Lane.** Yes, sir. [Hands them on a salver.]

**Algernon.** [Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa.] Oh! . . . by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.

**Lane.** Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint.

**Algernon.** Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

**Lane.** I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand.

**Algernon.** Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralising as that?

**Lane.** I believe it is a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married

once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

**Algernon.** [Languidly.] I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

**Lane.** No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

**Algernon.** Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

**Lane.** Thank you, sir. [**Lane** goes out.]

**Algernon.** Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility.

[Enter **Lane**.]

**Lane.** Mr. Ernest Worthing.

[Enter **Jack**.]

[**Lane** goes out.]

**Algernon.** How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town?

**Jack.** Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy!

**Algernon.** [Stiffly.] I believe it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?

**Jack.** [Sitting down on the sofa.] In the country.

**Algernon.** What on earth do you do there?

**Jack.** [Pulling off his gloves.] When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

**Algernon.** And who are the people you amuse?

**Jack.** [Airily.] Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

**Algernon.** Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

**Jack.** Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

**Algernon.** How immensely you must amuse them! [Goes over and takes sandwich.] By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?

**Jack.** Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such reckless extravagance in one so young? Who is coming to tea?

**Algernon.** Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

**Jack.** How perfectly delightful!

**Algernon.** Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

**Jack.** May I ask why?

**Algernon.** My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.

**Jack.** I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

**Algernon.** I thought you had come up for pleasure? . . . I call that business.

**Jack.** How utterly unromantic you are!

**Algernon.** I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

**Jack.** I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted.

**Algernon.** Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in Heaven—[**Jack** puts out his hand to take a sandwich. **Algernon** at once interferes.] Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. [Takes one and eats it.]

**Jack.** Well, you have been eating them all the time.

**Algernon.** That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. [Takes plate from below.] Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen. Gwendolen is devoted to bread and butter.

**Jack.** [Advancing to table and helping himself.] And very good bread and butter it is too.

**Algernon.** Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat as if you were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be.

**Jack.** Why on earth do you say that?

**Algernon.** Well, in the first place girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right.

**Jack.** Oh, that is nonsense!

**Algernon.** It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts for the extraordinary number of bachelors that one sees all over the place. In the second place, I don't give my consent.

**Jack.** Your consent!

**Algernon.** My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. [Rings bell.]

**Jack.** Cecily! What on earth do you mean? What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily! I don't know any one of the name of Cecily.

[Enter **Lane**.]

**Algernon.** Bring me that cigarette case Mr. Worthing left in the smoking-room the last time he dined here.

**Lane.** Yes, sir. [**Lane** goes out.]

**Jack.** Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time? I wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it. I was very nearly offering a large reward.

**Algernon.** Well, I wish you would offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard up.

**Jack.** There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found.

[Enter **Lane** with the cigarette case on a salver. **Algernon** takes it at once. **Lane** goes out.]

**Algernon.** I think that is rather mean of you, Ernest, I must say. [Opens case and examines it.] However, it makes no matter, for,

now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing isn't yours after all.

**Jack.** Of course it's mine. [Moving to him.] You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

**Algernon.** Oh! it is absurd to have a hard and fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read.

**Jack.** I am quite aware of the fact, and I don't propose to discuss modern culture. It isn't the sort of thing one should talk of in private. I simply want my cigarette case back.

**Algernon.** Yes; but this isn't your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a present from some one of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know any one of that name.

**Jack.** Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

**Algernon.** Your aunt!

**Jack.** Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy.

**Algernon.** [Retreating to back of sofa.] But why does she call herself little Cecily if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? [Reading.] 'From little Cecily with her fondest love.'

**Jack.** [Moving to sofa and kneeling upon it.] My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. You seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt! That is absurd! For Heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case. [Follows **Algernon** round the room.]

**Algernon.** Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.' There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out. Besides, your name isn't Jack at all; it is Ernest.

**Jack.** It isn't Ernest; it's Jack.

**Algernon.** You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to every one as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them. [Taking it from case.] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany.' I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to any one else. [Puts the card in his pocket.]

**Jack.** Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

**Algernon.** Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

**Jack.** My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression.

**Algernon.** Well, that is exactly what dentists always do. Now, go on! Tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.

**Jack.** Bunburyist? What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

**Algernon.** I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

**Jack.** Well, produce my cigarette case first.

**Algernon.** Here it is. [Hands cigarette case.] Now produce your explanation, and pray make it improbable. [Sits on sofa.]

**Jack.** My dear fellow, there is nothing improbable about my explanation at all. In fact it's perfectly ordinary. Old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me in his will guardian to his grand-daughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle from motives of respect that you could

not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

**Algernon.** Where is that place in the country, by the way?

**Jack.** That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited . . . I may tell you candidly that the place is not in Shropshire.

**Algernon.** I suspected that, my dear fellow! I have Bunbured all over Shropshire on two separate occasions. Now, go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

**Jack.** My dear Algy, I don't know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple.

**Algernon.** The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!

**Jack.** That wouldn't be at all a bad thing.

**Algernon.** Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that to people who haven't been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers. What you really are is a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

**Jack.** What on earth do you mean?

**Algernon.** You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to go down into the country whenever I choose. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for instance, I wouldn't be able to dine with you at Willis's to-night, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta for more than a week.



**Jack.** I haven't asked you to dine with me anywhere to-night.

**Algernon.** I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations. It is very foolish of you. Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations.

**Jack.** You had much better dine with your Aunt Augusta.

**Algernon.** I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. To begin with, I dined there on Monday, and once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations. In the second place, whenever I do dine there I am always treated as a member of the family, and sent down with either no woman at all, or two. In the third place, I know perfectly well whom she will place me next to, to-night. She will place me next Mary Farquhar, who always flirts with her own husband across the dinner-table. That is not very pleasant. Indeed, it is not even decent . . . and that sort of thing is enormously on the increase. The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public. Besides, now that I know you to be a confirmed Bunburyist I naturally want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules.

**Jack.** I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me, I am going to kill my brother, indeed I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a little too much interested in him. It is rather a bore. So I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr. . . . with your invalid friend who has the absurd name.

**Algernon.** Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to me extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

**Jack.** That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly won't want to know Bunbury.

**Algernon.** Then your wife will. You don't seem to realise, that in married life three is company and two is none.

**Jack.** [Sententiously.] That, my dear young friend, is the theory

that the corrupt French Drama has been propounding for the last fifty years.

**Algernon.** Yes; and that the happy English home has proved in half the time.

**Jack.** For heaven's sake, don't try to be cynical. It's perfectly easy to be cynical.

**Algernon.** My dear fellow, it isn't easy to be anything nowadays. There's such a lot of beastly competition about. [The sound of an electric bell is heard.] Ah! that must be Aunt Augusta. Only relatives, or creditors, ever ring in that Wagnerian manner. Now, if I get her out of the way for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity for proposing to Gwendolen, may I dine with you to-night at Willis's?

**Jack.** I suppose so, if you want to.

**Algernon.** Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them.

[Enter **Lane**.]

**Lane.** Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.

[**Algernon** goes forward to meet them. Enter **Lady Bracknell** and **Gwendolen**.]

**Lady Bracknell.** Good afternoon, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving very well.

**Algernon.** I'm feeling very well, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** That's not quite the same thing. In fact the two things rarely go together. [Sees **Jack** and bows to him with icy coldness.]

**Algernon.** [To **Gwendolen**.] Dear me, you are smart!

**Gwendolen.** I am always smart! Am I not, Mr. Worthing?

**Jack.** You're quite perfect, Miss Fairfax.

**Gwendolen.** Oh! I hope I am not that. It would leave no room for developments, and I intend to develop in many directions. [**Gwendolen** and **Jack** sit down together in the corner.]

**Lady Bracknell.** I'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a woman so altered; she looks

quite twenty years younger. And now I'll have a cup of tea, and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me.

**Algernon.** Certainly, Aunt Augusta. [Goes over to tea-table.]

**Lady Bracknell.** Won't you come and sit here, Gwendolen?

**Gwendolen.** Thanks, mamma, I'm quite comfortable where I am.

**Algernon.** [Picking up empty plate in horror.] Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.

**Lane.** [Gravely.] There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir. I went down twice.

**Algernon.** No cucumbers!

**Lane.** No, sir. Not even for ready money.

**Algernon.** That will do, Lane, thank you.

**Lane.** Thank you, sir. [Goes out.]

**Algernon.** I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers, not even for ready money.

**Lady Bracknell.** It really makes no matter, Algernon. I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now.

**Algernon.** I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.

**Lady Bracknell.** It certainly has changed its colour. From what cause I, of course, cannot say. [**Algernon** crosses and hands tea.] Thank you. I've quite a treat for you to-night, Algernon. I am going to send you down with Mary Farquhar. She is such a nice woman, and so attentive to her husband. It's delightful to watch them.

**Algernon.** I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you to-night after all.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Frowning.] I hope not, Algernon. It would put my table completely out. Your uncle would have to dine upstairs. Fortunately he is accustomed to that.

**Algernon.** It is a great bore, and, I need hardly say, a terrible disappointment to me, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. [Exchanges glances with **Jack**.] They seem to think I should be with him.

**Lady Bracknell.** It is very strange. This Mr. Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

**Algernon.** Yes; poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid.

**Lady Bracknell.** Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice . . . as far as any improvement in his ailment goes. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception, and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when every one has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much.

**Algernon.** I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta, if he is still conscious, and I think I can promise you he'll be all right by Saturday. Of course the music is a great difficulty. You see, if one plays good music, people don't listen, and if one plays bad music people don't talk. But I'll run over the programme I've drawn out, if you will kindly come into the next room for a moment.

**Lady Bracknell.** Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you. [Rising, and following **Algernon**.] I'm sure the programme will be delightful, after a few expurgations. French songs I cannot possibly allow. People always seem to think that they are improper, and either look shocked, which is vulgar, or laugh, which is worse. But German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so. Gwendolen, you will accompany me.

**Gwendolen.** Certainly, mamma.

[**Lady Bracknell** and **Algernon** go into the music-room, **Gwendolen** remains behind.]

**Jack.** Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

**Gwendolen.** Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr.

Worthing. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else. And that makes me so nervous.

**Jack.** I do mean something else.

**Gwendolen.** I thought so. In fact, I am never wrong.

**Jack.** And I would like to be allowed to take advantage of Lady Bracknell's temporary absence . . .

**Gwendolen.** I would certainly advise you to do so. Mamma has a way of coming back suddenly into a room that I have often had to speak to her about.

**Jack.** [Nervously.] Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl . . . I have ever met since . . . I met you.

**Gwendolen.** Yes, I am quite well aware of the fact. And I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. For me you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. [**Jack** looks at her in amazement.] We live, as I hope you know, Mr. Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines, and has reached the provincial pulpits, I am told; and my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you.

**Jack.** You really love me, Gwendolen?

**Gwendolen.** Passionately!

**Jack.** Darling! You don't know how happy you've made me.

**Gwendolen.** My own Ernest!

**Jack.** But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

**Gwendolen.** But your name is Ernest.

**Jack.** Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

**Gwendolen.** [Glibly.] Ah! that is clearly a metaphysical

speculation, and like most metaphysical speculations has very little reference at all to the actual facts of real life, as we know them.

**Jack.** Personally, darling, to speak quite candidly, I don't much care about the name of Ernest . . . I don't think the name suits me at all.

**Gwendolen.** It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

**Jack.** Well, really, Gwendolen, I must say that I think there are lots of other much nicer names. I think Jack, for instance, a charming name.

**Gwendolen.** Jack? . . . No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations . . . I have known several Jacks, and they all, without exception, were more than usually plain. Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really safe name is Ernest.

**Jack.** Gwendolen, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once. There is no time to be lost.

**Gwendolen.** Married, Mr. Worthing?

**Jack.** [Astounded.] Well . . . surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

**Gwendolen.** I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.

**Jack.** Well . . . may I propose to you now?

**Gwendolen.** I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly before-hand that I am fully determined to accept you.

**Jack.** Gwendolen!

**Gwendolen.** Yes, Mr. Worthing, what have you got to say to me?

**Jack.** You know what I have got to say to you.

**Gwendolen.** Yes, but you don't say it.

**Jack.** Gwendolen, will you marry me? [Goes on his knees.]

**Gwendolen.** Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

**Jack.** My own one, I have never loved any one in the world but you.

**Gwendolen.** Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl-friends tell me so. What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite, blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present. [Enter **Lady Bracknell**.]

**Lady Bracknell.** Mr. Worthing! Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.

**Gwendolen.** Mamma! [He tries to rise; she restrains him.] I must beg you to retire. This is no place for you. Besides, Mr. Worthing has not quite finished yet.

**Lady Bracknell.** Finished what, may I ask?

**Gwendolen.** I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, mamma. [They rise together.]

**Lady Bracknell.** Pardon me, you are not engaged to any one. When you do become engaged to some one, I, or your father, should his health permit him, will inform you of the fact. An engagement should come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant, as the case may be. It is hardly a matter that she could be allowed to arrange for herself . . . And now I have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. While I am making these inquiries, you, Gwendolen, will wait for me below in the carriage.

**Gwendolen.** [Reproachfully.] Mamma!

**Lady Bracknell.** In the carriage, Gwendolen! [**Gwendolen** goes to the door. She and **Jack** blow kisses to each other behind **Lady Bracknell's** back. **Lady Bracknell** looks vaguely about as if she could not understand what the noise was. Finally turns round.] Gwendolen, the carriage!

**Gwendolen.** Yes, mamma. [Goes out, looking back at **Jack**.]

**Lady Bracknell.** [Sitting down.] You can take a seat, Mr. Worthing.

[Looks in her pocket for note-book and pencil.]

**Jack.** Thank you, Lady Bracknell, I prefer standing.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Pencil and note-book in hand.] I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke?

**Jack.** Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

**Lady Bracknell.** I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?

**Jack.** Twenty-nine.

**Lady Bracknell.** A very good age to be married at. I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?

**Jack.** [After some hesitation.] I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.

**Lady Bracknell.** I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. What is your income?

**Jack.** Between seven and eight thousand a year.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Makes a note in her book.] In land, or in investments?

**Jack.** In investments, chiefly.

**Lady Bracknell.** That is satisfactory. What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a



pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said about land.

**Jack.** I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it, about fifteen hundred acres, I believe; but I don't depend on that for my real income. In fact, as far as I can make out, the poachers are the only people who make anything out of it.

**Lady Bracknell.** A country house! How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature, like Gwendolen, could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

**Jack.** Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. Of course, I can get it back whenever I like, at six months' notice.

**Lady Bracknell.** Lady Bloxham? I don't know her.

**Jack.** Oh, she goes about very little. She is a lady considerably advanced in years.

**Lady Bracknell.** Ah, nowadays that is no guarantee of respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square?

**Jack.** 149.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Shaking her head.] The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered.

**Jack.** Do you mean the fashion, or the side?

**Lady Bracknell.** [Sternly.] Both, if necessary, I presume. What are your politics?

**Jack.** Well, I am afraid I really have none. I am a Liberal Unionist.

**Lady Bracknell.** Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in the evening, at any rate. Now to minor matters. Are your parents living?

**Jack.** I have lost both my parents.

**Lady Bracknell.** To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?

**Jack.** I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me . . . I don't actually know who I am by birth. I was . . . well, I was found.

**Lady Bracknell.** Found!

**Jack.** The late Mr. Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

**Lady Bracknell.** Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

**Jack.** [Gravely.] In a hand-bag.

**Lady Bracknell.** A hand-bag?

**Jack.** [Very seriously.] Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a hand-bag—a somewhat large, black leather hand-bag, with handles to it—an ordinary hand-bag in fact.

**Lady Bracknell.** In what locality did this Mr. James, or Thomas, Cardew come across this ordinary hand-bag?

**Jack.** In the cloak-room at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own.

**Lady Bracknell.** The cloak-room at Victoria Station?

**Jack.** Yes. The Brighton line.

**Lady Bracknell.** The line is immaterial. Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to? As for the particular locality in which the hand-bag was found, a cloak-room at a railway station might serve to conceal a social indiscretion—has probably, indeed, been used for that purpose before now—but it could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognised position in good society.

**Jack.** May I ask you then what you would advise me to do? I need

hardly say I would do anything in the world to ensure Gwendolen's happiness.

**Lady Bracknell.** I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over.

**Jack.** Well, I don't see how I could possibly manage to do that. I can produce the hand-bag at any moment. It is in my dressing-room at home. I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.

**Lady Bracknell.** Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing!

[**Lady Bracknell** sweeps out in majestic indignation.]

**Jack.** Good morning! [**Algernon**, from the other room, strikes up the Wedding March. Jack looks perfectly furious, and goes to the door.] For goodness' sake don't play that ghastly tune, Algy. How idiotic you are!

[The music stops and **Algernon** enters cheerily.]

**Algernon.** Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean to say Gwendolen refused you? I know it is a way she has. She is always refusing people. I think it is most ill-natured of her.

**Jack.** Oh, Gwendolen is as right as a trivet. As far as she is concerned, we are engaged. Her mother is perfectly unbearable. Never met such a Gorgon . . . I don't really know what a Gorgon is like, but I am quite sure that Lady Bracknell is one. In any case, she is a monster, without being a myth, which is rather unfair . . . I beg your pardon, Algy, I suppose I shouldn't talk about your own aunt in that way before you.

**Algernon.** My dear boy, I love hearing my relations abused. It is the only thing that makes me put up with them at all. Relations are simply a tedious pack of people, who haven't got the remotest knowledge of how to live, nor the smallest instinct about when to die.

**Jack.** Oh, that is nonsense!

**Algernon.** It isn't!

**Jack.** Well, I won't argue about the matter. You always want to argue about things.

**Algernon.** That is exactly what things were originally made for.

**Jack.** Upon my word, if I thought that, I'd shoot myself . . . [A pause.] You don't think there is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy?

**Algernon.** All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his.

**Jack.** Is that clever?

**Algernon.** It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation in civilised life should be.

**Jack.** I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left.

**Algernon.** We have.

**Jack.** I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk about?

**Algernon.** The fools? Oh! about the clever people, of course.

**Jack.** What fools!

**Algernon.** By the way, did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?

**Jack.** [In a very patronising manner.] My dear fellow, the truth isn't quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice, sweet, refined girl. What extraordinary ideas you have about the way to behave to a woman!

**Algernon.** The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her, if she is pretty, and to some one else, if she is plain.

**Jack.** Oh, that is nonsense.

**Algernon.** What about your brother? What about the profligate Ernest?

**Jack.** Oh, before the end of the week I shall have got rid of him.

I'll say he died in Paris of apoplexy. Lots of people die of apoplexy, quite suddenly, don't they?

**Algernon.** Yes, but it's hereditary, my dear fellow. It's a sort of thing that runs in families. You had much better say a severe chill.

**Jack.** You are sure a severe chill isn't hereditary, or anything of that kind?

**Algernon.** Of course it isn't!

**Jack.** Very well, then. My poor brother Ernest to carried off suddenly, in Paris, by a severe chill. That gets rid of him.

**Algernon.** But I thought you said that . . . Miss Cardew was a little too much interested in your poor brother Ernest? Won't she feel his loss a good deal?

**Jack.** Oh, that is all right. Cecily is not a silly romantic girl, I am glad to say. She has got a capital appetite, goes long walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons.

**Algernon.** I would rather like to see Cecily.

**Jack.** I will take very good care you never do. She is excessively pretty, and she is only just eighteen.

**Algernon.** Have you told Gwendolen yet that you have an excessively pretty ward who is only just eighteen?

**Jack.** Oh! one doesn't blurt these things out to people. Cecily and Gwendolen are perfectly certain to be extremely great friends. I'll bet you anything you like that half an hour after they have met, they will be calling each other sister.

**Algernon.** Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first. Now, my dear boy, if we want to get a good table at Willis's, we really must go and dress. Do you know it is nearly seven?

**Jack.** [Irritably.] Oh! It always is nearly seven.

**Algernon.** Well, I'm hungry.

**Jack.** I never knew you when you weren't . . .

**Algernon.** What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?

**Jack.** Oh no! I loathe listening.

**Algernon.** Well, let us go to the Club?

**Jack.** Oh, no! I hate talking.

**Algernon.** Well, we might trot round to the Empire at ten?

**Jack.** Oh, no! I can't bear looking at things. It is so silly.

**Algernon.** Well, what shall we do?

**Jack.** Nothing!

**Algernon.** It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind.

[Enter **Lane**.]

**Lane.** Miss Fairfax.

[Enter **Gwendolen**. **Lane** goes out.]

**Algernon.** Gwendolen, upon my word!

**Gwendolen.** Algy, kindly turn your back. I have something very particular to say to Mr. Worthing.

**Algernon.** Really, Gwendolen, I don't think I can allow this at all.

**Gwendolen.** Algy, you always adopt a strictly immoral attitude towards life. You are not quite old enough to do that.

[**Algernon** retires to the fireplace.]

**Jack.** My own darling!

**Gwendolen.** Ernest, we may never be married. From the expression on mamma's face I fear we never shall. Few parents nowadays pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old-fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out. Whatever influence I ever had over mamma, I lost at the age of three. But although she may prevent us from becoming man and wife, and I may marry some one else, and marry often, nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you.

**Jack.** Dear Gwendolen!

**Gwendolen.** The story of your romantic origin, as related to me by mamma, with unpleasing comments, has naturally stirred the deeper fibres of my nature. Your Christian name has an irresistible fascination. The simplicity of your character makes you exquisitely incomprehensible to me. Your town address at the Albany I have. What is your address in the country?

**Jack.** The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire.

[**Algernon**, who has been carefully listening, smiles to himself, and

writes the address on his shirt-cuff. Then picks up the Railway Guide.]

**Gwendolen.** There is a good postal service, I suppose? It may be necessary to do something desperate. That of course will require serious consideration. I will communicate with you daily.

**Jack.** My own one!

**Gwendolen.** How long do you remain in town?

**Jack.** Till Monday.

**Gwendolen.** Good! Algy, you may turn round now.

**Algernon.** Thanks, I've turned round already.

**Gwendolen.** You may also ring the bell.

**Jack.** You will let me see you to your carriage, my own darling?

**Gwendolen.** Certainly.

**Jack.** [To **Lane**, who now enters.] I will see Miss Fairfax out.

**Lane.** Yes, sir. [**Jack** and **Gwendolen** go off.]

[**Lane** presents several letters on a salver to **Algernon**. It is to be surmised that they are bills, as **Algernon**, after looking at the envelopes, tears them up.]

**Algernon.** A glass of sherry, Lane.

**Lane.** Yes, sir.

**Algernon.** To-morrow, Lane, I'm going Bunburying.

**Lane.** Yes, sir.

**Algernon.** I shall probably not be back till Monday. You can put up my dress clothes, my smoking jacket, and all the Bunbury suits . .

**Lane.** Yes, sir. [Handing sherry.]

**Algernon.** I hope to-morrow will be a fine day, Lane.

**Lane.** It never is, sir.

**Algernon.** Lane, you're a perfect pessimist.

**Lane.** I do my best to give satisfaction, sir.

[Enter **Jack**. **Lane** goes off.]

**Jack.** There's a sensible, intellectual girl! the only girl I ever cared for in my life. [**Algernon** is laughing immoderately.] What on earth are you so amused at?

**Algernon.** Oh, I'm a little anxious about poor Bunbury, that is all.

**Jack.** If you don't take care, your friend Bunbury will get you into a serious scrape some day.

**Algernon.** I love scrapes. They are the only things that are never serious.

**Jack.** Oh, that's nonsense, Algy. You never talk anything but nonsense.

**Algernon.** Nobody ever does.

[**Jack** looks indignantly at him, and leaves the room. **Algernon** lights a cigarette, reads his shirt-cuff, and smiles.]

## ACT DROP

## SECOND ACT

### SCENE

Garden at the Manor House. A flight of grey stone steps leads up to the house. The garden, an old-fashioned one, full of roses. Time of year, July. Basket chairs, and a table covered with books, are set under a large yew-tree.

[**Miss Prism** discovered seated at the table. **Cecily** is at the back watering flowers.]

**Miss Prism.** [Calling.] Cecily, Cecily! Surely such a utilitarian occupation as the watering of flowers is rather Moulton's duty than yours? Especially at a moment when intellectual pleasures await you. Your German grammar is on the table. Pray open it at page fifteen. We will repeat yesterday's lesson.

**Cecily.** [Coming over very slowly.] But I don't like German. It isn't at all a becoming language. I know perfectly well that I look quite plain after my German lesson.



**Miss Prism.** Child, you know how anxious your guardian is that you should improve yourself in every way. He laid particular stress on your German, as he was leaving for town yesterday. Indeed, he always lays stress on your German when he is leaving for town.

**Cecily.** Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious! Sometimes he is so serious that I think he cannot be quite well.

**Miss Prism.** [Drawing herself up.] Your guardian enjoys the best of health, and his gravity of demeanour is especially to be commended in one so comparatively young as he is. I know no one who has a higher sense of duty and responsibility.

**Cecily.** I suppose that is why he often looks a little bored when we three are together.

**Miss Prism.** Cecily! I am surprised at you. Mr. Worthing has many troubles in his life. Idle merriment and triviality would be out of place in his conversation. You must remember his constant anxiety about that unfortunate young man his brother.

**Cecily.** I wish Uncle Jack would allow that unfortunate young man, his brother, to come down here sometimes. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism. I am sure you certainly would. You know German, and geology, and things of that kind influence a man very much. [**Cecily** begins to write in her diary.]

**Miss Prism.** [Shaking her head.] I do not think that even I could produce any effect on a character that according to his own brother's admission is irretrievably weak and vacillating. Indeed I am not sure that I would desire to reclaim him. I am not in favour of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice. As a man sows so let him reap. You must put away your diary, Cecily. I really don't see why you should keep a diary at all.

**Cecily.** I keep a diary in order to enter the wonderful secrets of my life. If I didn't write them down, I should probably forget all about them.

**Miss Prism.** Memory, my dear Cecily, is the diary that we all carry about with us.

**Cecily.** Yes, but it usually chronicles the things that have never

happened, and couldn't possibly have happened. I believe that Memory is responsible for nearly all the three-volume novels that Mudie sends us.

**Miss Prism.** Do not speak slightly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

**Cecily.** Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever you are! I hope it did not end happily? I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.

**Miss Prism.** The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.

**Cecily.** I suppose so. But it seems very unfair. And was your novel ever published?

**Miss Prism.** Alas! no. The manuscript unfortunately was abandoned. [**Cecily** starts.] I use the word in the sense of lost or mislaid. To your work, child, these speculations are profitless.

**Cecily.** [Smiling.] But I see dear Dr. Chasuble coming up through the garden.

**Miss Prism.** [Rising and advancing.] Dr. Chasuble! This is indeed a pleasure.

[Enter **Canon Chasuble**.]

**Chasuble.** And how are we this morning? Miss Prism, you are, I trust, well?

**Cecily.** Miss Prism has just been complaining of a slight headache. I think it would do her so much good to have a short stroll with you in the Park, Dr. Chasuble.

**Miss Prism.** Cecily, I have not mentioned anything about a headache.

**Cecily.** No, dear Miss Prism, I know that, but I felt instinctively that you had a headache. Indeed I was thinking about that, and not about my German lesson, when the Rector came in.

**Chasuble.** I hope, Cecily, you are not inattentive.

**Cecily.** Oh, I am afraid I am.

**Chasuble.** That is strange. Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would hang upon her lips. [**Miss Prism** glares.] I

spoke metaphorically.—My metaphor was drawn from bees. Ahem! Mr. Worthing, I suppose, has not returned from town yet?

**Miss Prism.** We do not expect him till Monday afternoon.

**Chasuble.** Ah yes, he usually likes to spend his Sunday in London. He is not one of those whose sole aim is enjoyment, as, by all accounts, that unfortunate young man his brother seems to be. But I must not disturb Egeria and her pupil any longer.

**Miss Prism.** Egeria? My name is Lætitia, Doctor.

**Chasuble.** [Bowing.] A classical allusion merely, drawn from the Pagan authors. I shall see you both no doubt at Evensong?

**Miss Prism.** I think, dear Doctor, I will have a stroll with you. I find I have a headache after all, and a walk might do it good.

**Chasuble.** With pleasure, Miss Prism, with pleasure. We might go as far as the schools and back.

**Miss Prism.** That would be delightful. Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. The chapter on the Fall of the Rupee you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational. Even these metallic problems have their melodramatic side.

[Goes down the garden with **Dr. Chasuble.**]

**Cecily.** [Picks up books and throws them back on table.] Horrid Political Economy! Horrid Geography! Horrid, horrid German!

[Enter **Merriman** with a card on a salver.]

**Merriman.** Mr. Ernest Worthing has just driven over from the station. He has brought his luggage with him.

**Cecily.** [Takes the card and reads it.] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany, W.' Uncle Jack's brother! Did you tell him Mr. Worthing was in town?

**Merriman.** Yes, Miss. He seemed very much disappointed. I mentioned that you and Miss Prism were in the garden. He said he was anxious to speak to you privately for a moment.

**Cecily.** Ask Mr. Ernest Worthing to come here. I suppose you had better talk to the housekeeper about a room for him.

**Merriman.** Yes, Miss.

[**Merriman** goes off.]

**Cecily.** I have never met any really wicked person before. I feel rather frightened. I am so afraid he will look just like every one else.

[Enter **Algernon**, very gay and debonnaire.] He does!

**Algernon.** [Raising his hat.] You are my little cousin Cecily, I'm sure.

**Cecily.** You are under some strange mistake. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually tall for my age. [**Algernon** is rather taken aback.] But I am your cousin Cecily. You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest.

**Algernon.** Oh! I am not really wicked at all, cousin Cecily. You mustn't think that I am wicked.

**Cecily.** If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.

**Algernon.** [Looks at her in amazement.] Oh! Of course I have been rather reckless.

**Cecily.** I am glad to hear it.

**Algernon.** In fact, now you mention the subject, I have been very bad in my own small way.

**Cecily.** I don't think you should be so proud of that, though I am sure it must have been very pleasant.

**Algernon.** It is much pleasanter being here with you.

**Cecily.** I can't understand how you are here at all. Uncle Jack won't be back till Monday afternoon.

**Algernon.** That is a great disappointment. I am obliged to go up by the first train on Monday morning. I have a business appointment that I am anxious . . . to miss?

**Cecily.** Couldn't you miss it anywhere but in London?

**Algernon.** No: the appointment is in London.

**Cecily.** Well, I know, of course, how important it is not to keep a business engagement, if one wants to retain any sense of the beauty of life, but still I think you had better wait till Uncle Jack arrives. I know he wants to speak to you about your emigrating.

**Algernon.** About my what?

**Cecily.** Your emigrating. He has gone up to buy your outfit.

**Algernon.** I certainly wouldn't let Jack buy my outfit. He has no taste in neckties at all.

**Cecily.** I don't think you will require neckties. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.

**Algernon.** Australia! I'd sooner die.

**Cecily.** Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.

**Algernon.** Oh, well! The accounts I have received of Australia and the next world, are not particularly encouraging. This world is good enough for me, cousin Cecily.

**Cecily.** Yes, but are you good enough for it?

**Algernon.** I'm afraid I'm not that. That is why I want you to reform me. You might make that your mission, if you don't mind, cousin Cecily.

**Cecily.** I'm afraid I've no time, this afternoon.

**Algernon.** Well, would you mind my reforming myself this afternoon?

**Cecily.** It is rather Quixotic of you. But I think you should try.

**Algernon.** I will. I feel better already.

**Cecily.** You are looking a little worse.

**Algernon.** That is because I am hungry.

**Cecily.** How thoughtless of me. I should have remembered that when one is going to lead an entirely new life, one requires regular and wholesome meals. Won't you come in?

**Algernon.** Thank you. Might I have a buttonhole first? I never have any appetite unless I have a buttonhole first.

**Cecily.** A Marechal Niel? [Picks up scissors.]

**Algernon.** No, I'd sooner have a pink rose.

**Cecily.** Why? [Cuts a flower.]

**Algernon.** Because you are like a pink rose, Cousin Cecily.

**Cecily.** I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like that. Miss Prism never says such things to me.

**Algernon.** Then Miss Prism is a short-sighted old lady. [Cecily puts the rose in his buttonhole.] You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

**Cecily.** Miss Prism says that all good looks are a snare.

**Algernon.** They are a snare that every sensible man would like to be caught in.

**Cecily.** Oh, I don't think I would care to catch a sensible man. I shouldn't know what to talk to him about.

[They pass into the house. **Miss Prism** and **Dr. Chasuble** return.]

**Miss Prism.** You are too much alone, dear Dr. Chasuble. You should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a womanthrope, never!

**Chasuble.** [With a scholar's shudder.] Believe me, I do not deserve so neologistic a phrase. The precept as well as the practice of the Primitive Church was distinctly against matrimony.

**Miss Prism.** [Sententiously.] That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day. And you do not seem to realise, dear Doctor, that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray.

**Chasuble.** But is a man not equally attractive when married?

**Miss Prism.** No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.

**Chasuble.** And often, I've been told, not even to her.

**Miss Prism.** That depends on the intellectual sympathies of the woman. Maturity can always be depended on. Ripeness can be trusted. Young women are green. [Dr. Chasuble starts.] I spoke horticulturally. My metaphor was drawn from fruits. But where is Cecily?

**Chasuble.** Perhaps she followed us to the schools.

[Enter **Jack** slowly from the back of the garden. He is dressed in the deepest mourning, with crape hatband and black gloves.]

**Miss Prism.** Mr. Worthing!

**Chasuble.** Mr. Worthing?

**Miss Prism.** This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you till Monday afternoon.

**Jack.** [Shakes **Miss Prism's** hand in a tragic manner.] I have returned sooner than I expected. Dr. Chasuble, I hope you are well?

**Chasuble.** Dear Mr. Worthing, I trust this garb of woe does not betoken some terrible calamity?

**Jack.** My brother.

**Miss Prism.** More shameful debts and extravagance?

**Chasuble.** Still leading his life of pleasure?

**Jack.** [Shaking his head.] Dead!

**Chasuble.** Your brother Ernest dead?

**Jack.** Quite dead.

**Miss Prism.** What a lesson for him! I trust he will profit by it.

**Chasuble.** Mr. Worthing, I offer you my sincere condolence. You have at least the consolation of knowing that you were always the most generous and forgiving of brothers.

**Jack.** Poor Ernest! He had many faults, but it is a sad, sad blow.

**Chasuble.** Very sad indeed. Were you with him at the end?

**Jack.** No. He died abroad; in Paris, in fact. I had a telegram last night from the manager of the Grand Hotel.

**Chasuble.** Was the cause of death mentioned?

**Jack.** A severe chill, it seems.

**Miss Prism.** As a man sows, so shall he reap.

**Chasuble.** [Raising his hand.] Charity, dear Miss Prism, charity! None of us are perfect. I myself am peculiarly susceptible to draughts. Will the interment take place here?

**Jack.** No. He seems to have expressed a desire to be buried in Paris.

**Chasuble.** In Paris! [Shakes his head.] I fear that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last. You would no doubt wish me to make some slight allusion to this tragic domestic affliction next Sunday. [**Jack** presses his hand convulsively.] My sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness can be adapted to almost any occasion, joyful, or, as in the present case, distressing. [All sigh.] I have preached it at harvest celebrations, christenings,

confirmations, on days of humiliation and festal days. The last time I delivered it was in the Cathedral, as a charity sermon on behalf of the Society for the Prevention of Discontent among the Upper Orders. The Bishop, who was present, was much struck by some of the analogies I drew.

**Jack.** Ah! that reminds me, you mentioned christenings I think, Dr. Chasuble? I suppose you know how to christen all right? [**Dr. Chasuble** looks astounded.] I mean, of course, you are continually christening, aren't you?

**Miss Prism.** It is, I regret to say, one of the Rector's most constant duties in this parish. I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is.

**Chasuble.** But is there any particular infant in whom you are interested, Mr. Worthing? Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not?

**Jack.** Oh yes.

**Miss Prism.** [Bitterly.] People who live entirely for pleasure usually are.

**Jack.** But it is not for any child, dear Doctor. I am very fond of children. No! the fact is, I would like to be christened myself, this afternoon, if you have nothing better to do.

**Chasuble.** But surely, Mr. Worthing, you have been christened already?

**Jack.** I don't remember anything about it.

**Chasuble.** But have you any grave doubts on the subject?

**Jack.** I certainly intend to have. Of course I don't know if the thing would bother you in any way, or if you think I am a little too old now.

**Chasuble.** Not at all. The sprinkling, and, indeed, the immersion of adults is a perfectly canonical practice.

**Jack.** Immersion!

**Chasuble.** You need have no apprehensions. Sprinkling is all that is necessary, or indeed I think advisable. Our weather is so changeable. At what hour would you wish the ceremony performed?



**Jack.** Oh, I might trot round about five if that would suit you.

**Chasuble.** Perfectly, perfectly! In fact I have two similar ceremonies to perform at that time. A case of twins that occurred recently in one of the outlying cottages on your own estate. Poor Jenkins the carter, a most hard-working man.

**Jack.** Oh! I don't see much fun in being christened along with other babies. It would be childish. Would half-past five do?

**Chasuble.** Admirably! Admirably! [Takes out watch.] And now, dear Mr. Worthing, I will not intrude any longer into a house of sorrow. I would merely beg you not to be too much bowed down by grief. What seem to us bitter trials are often blessings in disguise.

**Miss Prism.** This seems to me a blessing of an extremely obvious kind.

[Enter **Cecily** from the house.]

**Cecily.** Uncle Jack! Oh, I am pleased to see you back. But what horrid clothes you have got on! Do go and change them.

**Miss Prism.** Cecily!

**Chasuble.** My child! my child! [**Cecily** goes towards **Jack**; he kisses her brow in a melancholy manner.]

**Cecily.** What is the matter, Uncle Jack? Do look happy! You look as if you had toothache, and I have got such a surprise for you. Who do you think is in the dining-room? Your brother!

**Jack.** Who?

**Cecily.** Your brother Ernest. He arrived about half an hour ago.

**Jack.** What nonsense! I haven't got a brother.

**Cecily.** Oh, don't say that. However badly he may have behaved to you in the past he is still your brother. You couldn't be so heartless as to disown him. I'll tell him to come out. And you will shake hands with him, won't you, Uncle Jack? [Runs back into the house.]

**Chasuble.** These are very joyful tidings.

**Miss Prism.** After we had all been resigned to his loss, his sudden return seems to me peculiarly distressing.

**Jack.** My brother is in the dining-room? I don't know what it all means. I think it is perfectly absurd.

[Enter **Algernon** and **Cecily** hand in hand. They come slowly up to **Jack**.]

**Jack.** Good heavens! [Motions **Algernon** away.]

**Algernon.** Brother John, I have come down from town to tell you that I am very sorry for all the trouble I have given you, and that I intend to lead a better life in the future. [**Jack** glares at him and does not take his hand.]

**Cecily.** Uncle Jack, you are not going to refuse your own brother's hand?

**Jack.** Nothing will induce me to take his hand. I think his coming down here disgraceful. He knows perfectly well why.

**Cecily.** Uncle Jack, do be nice. There is some good in every one. Ernest has just been telling me about his poor invalid friend Mr. Bunbury whom he goes to visit so often. And surely there must be much good in one who is kind to an invalid, and leaves the pleasures of London to sit by a bed of pain.

**Jack.** Oh! he has been talking about Bunbury, has he?

**Cecily.** Yes, he has told me all about poor Mr. Bunbury, and his terrible state of health.

**Jack.** Bunbury! Well, I won't have him talk to you about Bunbury or about anything else. It is enough to drive one perfectly frantic.

**Algernon.** Of course I admit that the faults were all on my side. But I must say that I think that Brother John's coldness to me is peculiarly painful. I expected a more enthusiastic welcome, especially considering it is the first time I have come here.

**Cecily.** Uncle Jack, if you don't shake hands with Ernest I will never forgive you.

**Jack.** Never forgive me?

**Cecily.** Never, never, never!

**Jack.** Well, this is the last time I shall ever do it. [Shakes with **Algernon** and glares.]

**Chasuble.** It's pleasant, is it not, to see so perfect a reconciliation? I think we might leave the two brothers together.

**Miss Prism.** Cecily, you will come with us.

**Cecily.** Certainly, Miss Prism. My little task of reconciliation is over.

**Chasuble.** You have done a beautiful action to-day, dear child.

**Miss Prism.** We must not be premature in our judgments.

**Cecily.** I feel very happy. [They all go off except **Jack** and **Algernon**.]

**Jack.** You young scoundrel, Algy, you must get out of this place as soon as possible. I don't allow any Bunburying here.

[Enter **Merriman**.]

**Merriman.** I have put Mr. Ernest's things in the room next to yours, sir. I suppose that is all right?

**Jack.** What?

**Merriman.** Mr. Ernest's luggage, sir. I have unpacked it and put it in the room next to your own.

**Jack.** His luggage?

**Merriman.** Yes, sir. Three portmanteaus, a dressing-case, two hat-boxes, and a large luncheon-basket.

**Algernon.** I am afraid I can't stay more than a week this time.

**Jack.** Merriman, order the dog-cart at once. Mr. Ernest has been suddenly called back to town.

**Merriman.** Yes, sir. [Goes back into the house.]

**Algernon.** What a fearful liar you are, Jack. I have not been called back to town at all.

**Jack.** Yes, you have.

**Algernon.** I haven't heard any one call me.

**Jack.** Your duty as a gentleman calls you back.

**Algernon.** My duty as a gentleman has never interfered with my pleasures in the smallest degree.

**Jack.** I can quite understand that.

**Algernon.** Well, Cecily is a darling.

**Jack.** You are not to talk of Miss Cardew like that. I don't like it.

**Algernon.** Well, I don't like your clothes. You look perfectly ridiculous in them. Why on earth don't you go up and change? It is perfectly childish to be in deep mourning for a man who is actually

staying for a whole week with you in your house as a guest. I call it grotesque.

**Jack.** You are certainly not staying with me for a whole week as a guest or anything else. You have got to leave . . . by the four-five train.

**Algernon.** I certainly won't leave you so long as you are in mourning. It would be most unfriendly. If I were in mourning you would stay with me, I suppose. I should think it very unkind if you didn't.

**Jack.** Well, will you go if I change my clothes?

**Algernon.** Yes, if you are not too long. I never saw anybody take so long to dress, and with such little result.

**Jack.** Well, at any rate, that is better than being always over-dressed as you are.

**Algernon.** If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated.

**Jack.** Your vanity is ridiculous, your conduct an outrage, and your presence in my garden utterly absurd. However, you have got to catch the four-five, and I hope you will have a pleasant journey back to town. This Bunburying, as you call it, has not been a great success for you.

[Goes into the house.]

**Algernon.** I think it has been a great success. I'm in love with Cecily, and that is everything.

[Enter **Cecily** at the back of the garden. She picks up the can and begins to water the flowers.] But I must see her before I go, and make arrangements for another Bunbury. Ah, there she is.

**Cecily.** Oh, I merely came back to water the roses. I thought you were with Uncle Jack.

**Algernon.** He's gone to order the dog-cart for me.

**Cecily.** Oh, is he going to take you for a nice drive?

**Algernon.** He's going to send me away.

**Cecily.** Then have we got to part?

**Algernon.** I am afraid so. It's a very painful parting.

**Cecily.** It is always painful to part from people whom one has

known for a very brief space of time. The absence of old friends one can endure with equanimity. But even a momentary separation from anyone to whom one has just been introduced is almost unbearable.

**Algernon.** Thank you.

[Enter **Merriman**.]

**Merriman.** The dog-cart is at the door, sir. [**Algernon** looks appealingly at **Cecily**.]

**Cecily.** It can wait, Merriman for . . . five minutes.

**Merriman.** Yes, Miss. [Exit **Merriman**.]

**Algernon.** I hope, Cecily, I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.

**Cecily.** I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. If you will allow me, I will copy your remarks into my diary. [Goes over to table and begins writing in diary.]

**Algernon.** Do you really keep a diary? I'd give anything to look at it. May I?

**Cecily.** Oh no. [Puts her hand over it.] You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy. But pray, Ernest, don't stop. I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached 'absolute perfection'. You can go on. I am quite ready for more.

**Algernon.** [Somewhat taken aback.] Ahem! Ahem!

**Cecily.** Oh, don't cough, Ernest. When one is dictating one should speak fluently and not cough. Besides, I don't know how to spell a cough. [Writes as **Algernon** speaks.]

**Algernon.** [Speaking very rapidly.] Cecily, ever since I first looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

**Cecily.** I don't think that you should tell me that you love me wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. Hopelessly doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?

**Algernon.** Cecily!

[Enter **Merriman**.]

**Merriman**. The dog-cart is waiting, sir.

**Algernon**. Tell it to come round next week, at the same hour.

**Merriman**. [Looks at **Cecily**, who makes no sign.] Yes, sir.

[**Merriman** retires.]

**Cecily**. Uncle Jack would be very much annoyed if he knew you were staying on till next week, at the same hour.

**Algernon**. Oh, I don't care about Jack. I don't care for anybody in the whole world but you. I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won't you?

**Cecily**. You silly boy! Of course. Why, we have been engaged for the last three months.

**Algernon**. For the last three months?

**Cecily**. Yes, it will be exactly three months on Thursday.

**Algernon**. But how did we become engaged?

**Cecily**. Well, ever since dear Uncle Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, you of course have formed the chief topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And of course a man who is much talked about is always very attractive. One feels there must be something in him, after all. I daresay it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

**Algernon**. Darling! And when was the engagement actually settled?

**Cecily**. On the 14th of February last. Worn out by your entire ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the matter one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself I accepted you under this dear old tree here. The next day I bought this little ring in your name, and this is the little bangle with the true lover's knot I promised you always to wear.

**Algernon**. Did I give you this? It's very pretty, isn't it?

**Cecily**. Yes, you've wonderfully good taste, Ernest. It's the excuse I've always given for your leading such a bad life. And this is the box in which I keep all your dear letters. [Kneels at table, opens box, and produces letters tied up with blue ribbon.]

**Algernon.** My letters! But, my own sweet Cecily, I have never written you any letters.

**Cecily.** You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you. I wrote always three times a week, and sometimes oftener.

**Algernon.** Oh, do let me read them, Cecily?

**Cecily.** Oh, I couldn't possibly. They would make you far too conceited. [Replaces box.] The three you wrote me after I had broken off the engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little.

**Algernon.** But was our engagement ever broken off?

**Cecily.** Of course it was. On the 22nd of last March. You can see the entry if you like. [Shows diary.] 'To-day I broke off my engagement with Ernest. I feel it is better to do so. The weather still continues charming.'

**Algernon.** But why on earth did you break it off? What had I done? I had done nothing at all. Cecily, I am very much hurt indeed to hear you broke it off. Particularly when the weather was so charming.

**Cecily.** It would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn't been broken off at least once. But I forgave you before the week was out.

**Algernon.** [Crossing to her, and kneeling.] What a perfect angel you are, Cecily.

**Cecily.** You dear romantic boy. [He kisses her, she puts her fingers through his hair.] I hope your hair curls naturally, does it?

**Algernon.** Yes, darling, with a little help from others.

**Cecily.** I am so glad.

**Algernon.** You'll never break off our engagement again, Cecily?

**Cecily.** I don't think I could break it off now that I have actually met you. Besides, of course, there is the question of your name.

**Algernon.** Yes, of course. [Nervously.]

**Cecily.** You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest. [**Algernon** rises, **Cecily** also.] There is something in that

name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.

**Algernon.** But, my dear child, do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name?

**Cecily.** But what name?

**Algernon.** Oh, any name you like—Algernon—for instance . . .

**Cecily.** But I don't like the name of Algernon.

**Algernon.** Well, my own dear, sweet, loving little darling, I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon. It is not at all a bad name. In fact, it is rather an aristocratic name. Half of the chaps who get into the Bankruptcy Court are called Algernon. But seriously, Cecily . . . [Moving to her] . . . if my name was Algy, couldn't you love me?

**Cecily.** [Rising.] I might respect you, Ernest, I might admire your character, but I fear that I should not be able to give you my undivided attention.

**Algernon.** Ahem! Cecily! [Picking up hat.] Your Rector here is, I suppose, thoroughly experienced in the practice of all the rites and ceremonials of the Church?

**Cecily.** Oh, yes. Dr. Chasuble is a most learned man. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows.

**Algernon.** I must see him at once on a most important christening—I mean on most important business.

**Cecily.** Oh!

**Algernon.** I shan't be away more than half an hour.

**Cecily.** Considering that we have been engaged since February the 14th, and that I only met you to-day for the first time, I think it is rather hard that you should leave me for so long a period as half an hour. Couldn't you make it twenty minutes?

**Algernon.** I'll be back in no time.

[Kisses her and rushes down the garden.]

**Cecily.** What an impetuous boy he is! I like his hair so much. I must enter his proposal in my diary.

[Enter **Merriman**.]



**Merriman.** A Miss Fairfax has just called to see Mr. Worthing. On very important business, Miss Fairfax states.

**Cecily.** Isn't Mr. Worthing in his library?

**Merriman.** Mr. Worthing went over in the direction of the Rectory some time ago.

**Cecily.** Pray ask the lady to come out here; Mr. Worthing is sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea.

**Merriman.** Yes, Miss. [Goes out.]

**Cecily.** Miss Fairfax! I suppose one of the many good elderly women who are associated with Uncle Jack in some of his philanthropic work in London. I don't quite like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them.

[Enter **Merriman**.]

**Merriman.** Miss Fairfax.

[Enter **Gwendolen**.]

[Exit **Merriman**.]

**Cecily.** [Advancing to meet her.] Pray let me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew.

**Gwendolen.** Cecily Cardew? [Moving to her and shaking hands.] What a very sweet name! Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. I like you already more than I can say. My first impressions of people are never wrong.

**Cecily.** How nice of you to like me so much after we have known each other such a comparatively short time. Pray sit down.

**Gwendolen.** [Still standing up.] I may call you Cecily, may I not?

**Cecily.** With pleasure!

**Gwendolen.** And you will always call me Gwendolen, won't you?

**Cecily.** If you wish.

**Gwendolen.** Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

**Cecily.** I hope so. [A pause. They both sit down together.]

**Gwendolen.** Perhaps this might be a favourable opportunity for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell. You have never heard of papa, I suppose?

**Cecily.** I don't think so.

**Gwendolen.** Outside the family circle, papa, I am glad to say, is

entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be. The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive. Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?

**Cecily.** Oh! not at all, Gwendolen. I am very fond of being looked at.

**Gwendolen.** [After examining **Cecily** carefully through a lorgnette.] You are here on a short visit, I suppose.

**Cecily.** Oh no! I live here.

**Gwendolen.** [Severely.] Really? Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?

**Cecily.** Oh no! I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations.

**Gwendolen.** Indeed?

**Cecily.** My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous task of looking after me.

**Gwendolen.** Your guardian?

**Cecily.** Yes, I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

**Gwendolen.** Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him! He grows more interesting hourly. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. [Rising and going to her.] I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But I am bound to state that now that I know that you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing a wish you were—well, just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. In fact, if I may speak candidly—

**Cecily.** Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid.

**Gwendolen.** Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two, and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong upright nature. He is the very soul of

truth and honour. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others. Modern, no less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to. If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable.

**Cecily.** I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

**Gwendolen.** Yes.

**Cecily.** Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is my guardian. It is his brother—his elder brother.

**Gwendolen.** [Sitting down again.] Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

**Cecily.** I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

**Gwendolen.** Ah! that accounts for it. And now that I think of it I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men. Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind. I was growing almost anxious. It would have been terrible if any cloud had come across a friendship like ours, would it not? Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

**Cecily.** Quite sure. [A pause.] In fact, I am going to be his.

**Gwendolen.** [Inquiringly.] I beg your pardon?

**Cecily.** [Rather shy and confidently.] Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

**Gwendolen.** [Quite politely, rising.] My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to me. The announcement will appear in the *Morning Post* on Saturday at the latest.

**Cecily.** [Very politely, rising.] I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago. [Shows diary.]

**Gwendolen.** [Examines diary through her lorgnette carefully.] It

is certainly very curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5.30. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so. [Produces diary of her own.] I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train. I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim.

**Cecily.** It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendolen, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind.

**Gwendolen.** [Meditatively.] If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once, and with a firm hand.

**Cecily.** [Thoughtfully and sadly.] Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it after we are married.

**Gwendolen.** Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? You are presumptuous. On an occasion of this kind it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. It becomes a pleasure.

**Cecily.** Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you? This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade.

**Gwendolen.** [Satirically.] I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.

[Enter **Merriman**, followed by the footman. He carries a salver, table cloth, and plate stand. **Cecily** is about to retort. The presence of the servants exercises a restraining influence, under which both girls chafe.]

**Merriman.** Shall I lay tea here as usual, Miss?

**Cecily.** [Sternly, in a calm voice.] Yes, as usual. [**Merriman** begins to clear table and lay cloth. A long pause. **Cecily** and **Gwendolen** glare at each other.]

**Gwendolen.** Are there many interesting walks in the vicinity, Miss Cardew?

**Cecily.** Oh! yes! a great many. From the top of one of the hills quite close one can see five counties.

**Gwendolen.** Five counties! I don't think I should like that; I hate crowds.

**Cecily.** [Sweetly.] I suppose that is why you live in town? [Gwendolen bites her lip, and beats her foot nervously with her parasol.]

**Gwendolen.** [Looking round.] Quite a well-kept garden this is, Miss Cardew.

**Cecily.** So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

**Gwendolen.** I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

**Cecily.** Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London.

**Gwendolen.** Personally I cannot understand how anybody manages to exist in the country, if anybody who is anybody does. The country always bores me to death.

**Cecily.** Ah! This is what the newspapers call agricultural depression, is it not? I believe the aristocracy are suffering very much from it just at present. It is almost an epidemic amongst them, I have been told. May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?

**Gwendolen.** [With elaborate politeness.] Thank you. [Aside.] Detestable girl! But I require tea!

**Cecily.** [Sweetly.] Sugar?

**Gwendolen.** [Superciliously.] No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more. [Cecily looks angrily at her, takes up the tongs and puts four lumps of sugar into the cup.]

**Cecily.** [Severely.] Cake or bread and butter?

**Gwendolen.** [In a bored manner.] Bread and butter, please. Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

**Cecily.** [Cuts a very large slice of cake, and puts it on the tray.] Hand that to Miss Fairfax.

[Merriman does so, and goes out with footman. Gwendolen drinks the tea and makes a grimace. Puts

down cup at once, reaches out her hand to the bread and butter, looks at it, and finds it is cake. Rises in indignation.]

**Gwendolen.** You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I am known for the gentleness of my disposition, and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far.

**Cecily.** [Rising.] To save my poor, innocent, trusting boy from the machinations of any other girl there are no lengths to which I would not go.

**Gwendolen.** From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. I felt that you were false and deceitful. I am never deceived in such matters. My first impressions of people are invariably right.

**Cecily.** It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am trespassing on your valuable time. No doubt you have many other calls of a similar character to make in the neighbourhood.

[Enter **Jack.**]

**Gwendolen.** [Catching sight of him.] Ernest! My own Ernest!

**Jack.** Gwendolen! Darling! [Offers to kiss her.]

**Gwendolen.** [Draws back.] A moment! May I ask if you are engaged to be married to this young lady? [Points to **Cecily.**]

**Jack.** [Laughing.] To dear little Cecily! Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

**Gwendolen.** Thank you. You may! [Offers her cheek.]

**Cecily.** [Very sweetly.] I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is at present round your waist is my guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

**Gwendolen.** I beg your pardon?

**Cecily.** This is Uncle Jack.

**Gwendolen.** [Receding.] Jack! Oh!

[Enter **Algernon.**]

**Cecily.** Here is Ernest.

**Algernon.** [Goes straight over to **Cecily** without noticing any one else.] My own love! [Offers to kiss her.]

**Cecily.** [Drawing back.] A moment, Ernest! May I ask you—are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

**Algernon.** [Looking round.] To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen!

**Cecily.** Yes! to good heavens, Gwendolen, I mean to Gwendolen.

**Algernon.** [Laughing.] Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

**Cecily.** Thank you. [Presenting her cheek to be kissed.] You may. [Algernon kisses her.]

**Gwendolen.** I felt there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr. Algernon Moncrieff.

**Cecily.** [Breaking away from Algernon.] Algernon Moncrieff! Oh! [The two girls move towards each other and put their arms round each other's waists as if for protection.]

**Cecily.** Are you called Algernon?

**Algernon.** I cannot deny it.

**Cecily.** Oh!

**Gwendolen.** Is your name really John?

**Jack.** [Standing rather proudly.] I could deny it if I liked. I could deny anything if I liked. But my name certainly is John. It has been John for years.

**Cecily.** [To Gwendolen.] A gross deception has been practised on both of us.

**Gwendolen.** My poor wounded Cecily!

**Cecily.** My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

**Gwendolen.** [Slowly and seriously.] You will call me sister, will you not? [They embrace. Jack and Algernon groan and walk up and down.]

**Cecily.** [Rather brightly.] There is just one question I would like to be allowed to ask my guardian.

**Gwendolen.** An admirable idea! Mr. Worthing, there is just one question I would like to be permitted to put to you. Where is your brother Ernest? We are both engaged to be married to your brother

Ernest, so it is a matter of some importance to us to know where your brother Ernest is at present.

**Jack.** [Slowly and hesitatingly.] Gwendolen—Cecily—it is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. It is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However, I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all. I never had a brother in my life, and I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future.

**Cecily.** [Surprised.] No brother at all?

**Jack.** [Cheerily.] None!

**Gwendolen.** [Severely.] Had you never a brother of any kind?

**Jack.** [Pleasantly.] Never. Not even of any kind.

**Gwendolen.** I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to any one.

**Cecily.** It is not a very pleasant position for a young girl suddenly to find herself in. Is it?

**Gwendolen.** Let us go into the house. They will hardly venture to come after us there.

**Cecily.** No, men are so cowardly, aren't they?

[They retire into the house with scornful looks.]

**Jack.** This ghastly state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose?

**Algernon.** Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is. The most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.

**Jack.** Well, you've no right whatsoever to Bunbury here.

**Algernon.** That is absurd. One has a right to Bunbury anywhere one chooses. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

**Jack.** Serious Bunburyist! Good heavens!

**Algernon.** Well, one must be serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life. I happen to be serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest idea. About everything, I should fancy. You have such an absolutely trivial nature.



**Jack.** Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of this wretched business is that your friend Bunbury is quite exploded. You won't be able to run down to the country quite so often as you used to do, dear Algy. And a very good thing too.

**Algernon.** Your brother is a little off colour, isn't he, dear Jack? You won't be able to disappear to London quite so frequently as your wicked custom was. And not a bad thing either.

**Jack.** As for your conduct towards Miss Cardew, I must say that your taking in a sweet, simple, innocent girl like that is quite inexcusable. To say nothing of the fact that she is my ward.

**Algernon.** I can see no possible defence at all for your deceiving a brilliant, clever, thoroughly experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax. To say nothing of the fact that she is my cousin.

**Jack.** I wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen, that is all. I love her.

**Algernon.** Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

**Jack.** There is certainly no chance of your marrying Miss Cardew.

**Algernon.** I don't think there is much likelihood, Jack, of you and Miss Fairfax being united.

**Jack.** Well, that is no business of yours.

**Algernon.** If it was my business, I wouldn't talk about it. [Begins to eat muffins.] It is very vulgar to talk about one's business. Only people like stock-brokers do that, and then merely at dinner parties.

**Jack.** How can you sit there, calmly eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble, I can't make out. You seem to me to be perfectly heartless.

**Algernon.** Well, I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs. One should always eat muffins quite calmly. It is the only way to eat them.

**Jack.** I say it's perfectly heartless your eating muffins at all, under the circumstances.

**Algernon.** When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. Indeed, when I am in really great trouble, as any one who knows me intimately will tell you, I refuse everything except

food and drink. At the present moment I am eating muffins because I am unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins. [Rising.]

**Jack.** [Rising.] Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way. [Takes muffins from **Algernon**.]

**Algernon.** [Offering tea-cake.] I wish you would have tea-cake instead. I don't like tea-cake.

**Jack.** Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own muffins in his own garden.

**Algernon.** But you have just said it was perfectly heartless to eat muffins.

**Jack.** I said it was perfectly heartless of you, under the circumstances. That is a very different thing.

**Algernon.** That may be. But the muffins are the same. [He seizes the muffin-dish from **Jack**.]

**Jack.** Algy, I wish to goodness you would go.

**Algernon.** You can't possibly ask me to go without having some dinner. It's absurd. I never go without my dinner. No one ever does, except vegetarians and people like that. Besides I have just made arrangements with Dr. Chasuble to be christened at a quarter to six under the name of Ernest.

**Jack.** My dear fellow, the sooner you give up that nonsense the better. I made arrangements this morning with Dr. Chasuble to be christened myself at 5.30, and I naturally will take the name of Ernest. Gwendolen would wish it. We can't both be christened Ernest. It's absurd. Besides, I have a perfect right to be christened if I like. There is no evidence at all that I have ever been christened by anybody. I should think it extremely probable I never was, and so does Dr. Chasuble. It is entirely different in your case. You have been christened already.

**Algernon.** Yes, but I have not been christened for years.

**Jack.** Yes, but you have been christened. That is the important thing.

**Algernon.** Quite so. So I know my constitution can stand it. If you are not quite sure about your ever having been christened, I must say I think it rather dangerous your venturing on it now. It

might make you very unwell. You can hardly have forgotten that some one very closely connected with you was very nearly carried off this week in Paris by a severe chill.

**Jack.** Yes, but you said yourself that a severe chill was not hereditary.

**Algernon.** It usen't to be, I know—but I daresay it is now. Science is always making wonderful improvements in things.

**Jack.** [Picking up the muffin-dish.] Oh, that is nonsense; you are always talking nonsense.

**Algernon.** Jack, you are at the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left. [Takes them.] I told you I was particularly fond of muffins.

**Jack.** But I hate tea-cake.

**Algernon.** Why on earth then do you allow tea-cake to be served up for your guests? What ideas you have of hospitality!

**Jack.** Algernon! I have already told you to go. I don't want you here. Why don't you go!

**Algernon.** I haven't quite finished my tea yet! and there is still one muffin left. [**Jack** groans, and sinks into a chair. **Algernon** still continues eating.]

## ACT DROP

## THIRD ACT

## SCENE

Morning-room at the Manor House.

[**Gwendolen** and **Cecily** are at the window, looking out into the garden.]

**Gwendolen.** The fact that they did not follow us at once into the house, as any one else would have done, seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.

**Cecily.** They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance.

**Gwendolen.** [After a pause.] They don't seem to notice us at all. Couldn't you cough?

**Cecily.** But I haven't got a cough.

**Gwendolen.** They're looking at us. What effrontery!

**Cecily.** They're approaching. That's very forward of them.

**Gwendolen.** Let us preserve a dignified silence.

**Cecily.** Certainly. It's the only thing to do now. [Enter **Jack** followed by **Algernon**. They whistle some dreadful popular air from a British Opera.]

**Gwendolen.** This dignified silence seems to produce an unpleasant effect.

**Cecily.** A most distasteful one.

**Gwendolen.** But we will not be the first to speak.

**Cecily.** Certainly not.

**Gwendolen.** Mr. Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you. Much depends on your reply.

**Cecily.** Gwendolen, your common sense is invaluable. Mr. Moncrieff, kindly answer me the following question. Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother?

**Algernon.** In order that I might have an opportunity of meeting you.

**Cecily.** [To **Gwendolen**.] That certainly seems a satisfactory explanation, does it not?

**Gwendolen.** Yes, dear, if you can believe him.

**Cecily.** I don't. But that does not affect the wonderful beauty of his answer.

**Gwendolen.** True. In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing. Mr. Worthing, what explanation can you offer to me for pretending to have a brother? Was it in order that

you might have an opportunity of coming up to town to see me as often as possible?

**Jack.** Can you doubt it, Miss Fairfax?

**Gwendolen.** I have the gravest doubts upon the subject. But I intend to crush them. This is not the moment for German scepticism. [Moving to **Cecily**.] Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory, especially Mr. Worthing's. That seems to me to have the stamp of truth upon it.

**Cecily.** I am more than content with what Mr. Moncrieff said. His voice alone inspires one with absolute credulity.

**Gwendolen.** Then you think we should forgive them?

**Cecily.** Yes. I mean no.

**Gwendolen.** True! I had forgotten. There are principles at stake that one cannot surrender. Which of us should tell them? The task is not a pleasant one.

**Cecily.** Could we not both speak at the same time?

**Gwendolen.** An excellent idea! I nearly always speak at the same time as other people. Will you take the time from me?

**Cecily.** Certainly. [**Gwendolen** beats time with uplifted finger.]

**Gwendolen** and **Cecily** [Speaking together.] Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all!

**Jack** and **Algernon** [Speaking together.] Our Christian names! Is that all? But we are going to be christened this afternoon.

**Gwendolen.** [To **Jack**.] For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

**Jack.** I am.

**Cecily.** [To **Algernon**.] To please me you are ready to face this fearful ordeal?

**Algernon.** I am!

**Gwendolen.** How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes! Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned, men are infinitely beyond us.

**Jack.** We are. [Clasps hands with **Algernon**.]

**Cecily.** They have moments of physical courage of which we women know absolutely nothing.

**Gwendolen.** [To **Jack.**] Darling!

**Algernon.** [To **Cecily.**] Darling! [They fall into each other's arms.]

[Enter **Merriman.** When he enters he coughs loudly, seeing the situation.]

**Merriman.** Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell!

**Jack.** Good heavens!

[Enter **Lady Bracknell.** The couples separate in alarm.  
Exit **Merriman.**]

**Lady Bracknell.** Gwendolen! What does this mean?

**Gwendolen.** Merely that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing, mamma.

**Lady Bracknell.** Come here. Sit down. Sit down immediately. Hesitation of any kind is a sign of mental decay in the young, of physical weakness in the old. [Turns to **Jack.**] Apprised, sir, of my daughter's sudden flight by her trusty maid, whose confidence I purchased by means of a small coin, I followed her at once by a luggage train. Her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a permanent income on Thought. I do not propose to undeceive him. Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question. I would consider it wrong. But of course, you will clearly understand that all communication between yourself and my daughter must cease immediately from this moment. On this point, as indeed on all points, I am firm.

**Jack.** I am engaged to be married to Gwendolen Lady Bracknell!

**Lady Bracknell.** You are nothing of the kind, sir. And now, as regards Algernon! . . . Algernon!

**Algernon.** Yes, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** May I ask if it is in this house that your invalid friend Mr. Bunbury resides?

**Algernon.** [Stammering.] Oh! No! Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact, Bunbury is dead.

**Lady Bracknell.** Dead! When did Mr. Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely sudden.

**Algernon.** [Airily.] Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

**Lady Bracknell.** What did he die of?

**Algernon.** Bunbury? Oh, he was quite exploded.

**Lady Bracknell.** Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage? I was not aware that Mr. Bunbury was interested in social legislation. If so, he is well punished for his morbidity.

**Algernon.** My dear Aunt Augusta, I mean he was found out! The doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, that is what I mean—so Bunbury died.

**Lady Bracknell.** He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians. I am glad, however, that he made up his mind at the last to some definite course of action, and acted under proper medical advice. And now that we have finally got rid of this Mr. Bunbury, may I ask, Mr. Worthing, who is that young person whose hand my nephew Algernon is now holding in what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary manner?

**Jack.** That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward. [**Lady Bracknell** bows coldly to **Cecily**.]

**Algernon.** I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** I beg your pardon?

**Cecily.** Mr. Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell.

**Lady Bracknell.** [With a shiver, crossing to the sofa and sitting down.] I do not know whether there is anything peculiarly exciting in the air of this particular part of Hertfordshire, but the number of engagements that go on seems to me considerably above the proper average that statistics have laid down for our guidance. I think some preliminary inquiry on my part would not be out of place. Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I merely desire information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a Terminus. [**Jack** looks perfectly furious, but restrains himself.]

**Jack.** [In a clear, cold voice.] Miss Cardew is the grand-daughter

of the late Mr. Thomas Cardew of 149 Belgrave Square, S.W.; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Sporrán, Fifeshire, N.B.

**Lady Bracknell.** That sounds not unsatisfactory. Three addresses always inspire confidence, even in tradesmen. But what proof have I of their authenticity?

**Jack.** I have carefully preserved the Court Guides of the period. They are open to your inspection, Lady Bracknell.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Grimly.] I have known strange errors in that publication.

**Jack.** Miss Cardew's family solicitors are Messrs. Markby, Markby, and Markby.

**Lady Bracknell.** Markby, Markby, and Markby? A firm of the very highest position in their profession. Indeed I am told that one of the Mr. Markby's is occasionally to be seen at dinner parties. So far I am satisfied.

**Jack.** [Very irritably.] How extremely kind of you, Lady Bracknell! I have also in my possession, you will be pleased to hear, certificates of Miss Cardew's birth, baptism, whooping cough, registration, vaccination, confirmation, and the measles; both the German and the English variety.

**Lady Bracknell.** Ah! A life crowded with incident, I see; though perhaps somewhat too exciting for a young girl. I am not myself in favour of premature experiences. [Rises, looks at her watch.] Gwendolen! the time approaches for our departure. We have not a moment to lose. As a matter of form, Mr. Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any little fortune?

**Jack.** Oh! about a hundred and thirty thousand pounds in the Funds. That is all. Goodbye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to have seen you.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Sitting down again.] A moment, Mr. Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. Few girls of the present day have any really solid qualities, any of the qualities that last, and improve with time. We live, I regret to say, in an age of surfaces. [To Cecily.] Come over here, dear.



[**Cecily** goes across.] Pretty child! your dress is sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as Nature might have left it. But we can soon alter all that. A thoroughly experienced French maid produces a really marvellous result in a very brief space of time. I remember recommending one to young Lady Lancing, and after three months her own husband did not know her.

**Jack.** And after six months nobody knew her.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Glares at **Jack** for a few moments. Then bends, with a practised smile, to **Cecily**.] Kindly turn round, sweet child. [**Cecily** turns completely round.] No, the side view is what I want. [**Cecily** presents her profile.] Yes, quite as I expected. There are distinct social possibilities in your profile. The two weak points in our age are its want of principle and its want of profile. The chin a little higher, dear. Style largely depends on the way the chin is worn. They are worn very high, just at present. Algernon!

**Algernon.** Yes, Aunt Augusta!

**Lady Bracknell.** There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew's profile.

**Algernon.** Cecily is the sweetest, dearest, prettiest girl in the whole world. And I don't care twopence about social possibilities.

**Lady Bracknell.** Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. [To **Cecily**.] Dear child, of course you know that Algernon has nothing but his debts to depend upon. But I do not approve of mercenary marriages. When I married Lord Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind. But I never dreamed for a moment of allowing that to stand in my way. Well, I suppose I must give my consent.

**Algernon.** Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** Cecily, you may kiss me!

**Cecily.** [Kisses her.] Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

**Lady Bracknell.** You may also address me as Aunt Augusta for the future.

**Cecily.** Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon.

**Algernon.** Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

**Cecily.** Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

**Lady Bracknell.** To speak frankly, I am not in favour of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage, which I think is never advisable.

**Jack.** I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Lady Bracknell, but this engagement is quite out of the question. I am Miss Cardew's guardian, and she cannot marry without my consent until she comes of age. That consent I absolutely decline to give.

**Lady Bracknell.** Upon what grounds may I ask? Algernon is an extremely, I may almost say an ostentatiously, eligible young man. He has nothing, but he looks everything. What more can one desire?

**Jack.** It pains me very much to have to speak frankly to you, Lady Bracknell, about your nephew, but the fact is that I do not approve at all of his moral character. I suspect him of being untruthful. [Algernon and Cecily look at him in indignant amazement.]

**Lady Bracknell.** Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible! He is an Oxonian.

**Jack.** I fear there can be no possible doubt about the matter. This afternoon during my temporary absence in London on an important question of romance, he obtained admission to my house by means of the false pretence of being my brother. Under an assumed name he drank, I've just been informed by my butler, an entire pint bottle of my Perrier-Jouet, Brut, '89; wine I was specially reserving for myself. Continuing his disgraceful deception, he succeeded in the course of the afternoon in alienating the affections of my only ward. He subsequently stayed to tea, and devoured every single muffin. And what makes his conduct all the more heartless is, that he was perfectly well aware from the first that I have no brother, that I never had a brother, and that I don't intend to have a brother, not even of any kind. I distinctly told him so myself yesterday afternoon.

**Lady Bracknell.** Ahem! Mr. Worthing, after careful consideration I have decided entirely to overlook my nephew's conduct to you.

**Jack.** That is very generous of you, Lady Bracknell. My own decision, however, is unalterable. I decline to give my consent.

**Lady Bracknell.** [To Cecily.] Come here, sweet child. [Cecily goes over.] How old are you, dear?

**Cecily.** Well, I am really only eighteen, but I always admit to twenty when I go to evening parties.

**Lady Bracknell.** You are perfectly right in making some slight alteration. Indeed, no woman should ever be quite accurate about her age. It looks so calculating . . . [In a meditative manner.] Eighteen, but admitting to twenty at evening parties. Well, it will not be very long before you are of age and free from the restraints of tutelage. So I don't think your guardian's consent is, after all, a matter of any importance.

**Jack.** Pray excuse me, Lady Bracknell, for interrupting you again, but it is only fair to tell you that according to the terms of her grandfather's will Miss Cardew does not come legally of age till she is thirty-five.

**Lady Bracknell.** That does not seem to me to be a grave objection. Thirty-five is a very attractive age. London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained thirty-five for years. Lady Dumbleton is an instance in point. To my own knowledge she has been thirty-five ever since she arrived at the age of forty, which was many years ago now. I see no reason why our dear Cecily should not be even still more attractive at the age you mention than she is at present. There will be a large accumulation of property.

**Cecily.** Algy, could you wait for me till I was thirty-five?

**Algernon.** Of course I could, Cecily. You know I could.

**Cecily.** Yes, I felt it instinctively, but I couldn't wait all that time. I hate waiting even five minutes for anybody. It always makes me rather cross. I am not punctual myself, I know, but I do like punctuality in others, and waiting, even to be married, is quite out of the question.

**Algernon.** Then what is to be done, Cecily?

**Cecily.** I don't know, Mr. Moncrieff.

**Lady Bracknell.** My dear Mr. Worthing, as Miss Cardew states positively that she cannot wait till she is thirty-five—a remark which I am bound to say seems to me to show a somewhat impatient nature—I would beg of you to reconsider your decision.

**Jack.** But my dear Lady Bracknell, the matter is entirely in your own hands. The moment you consent to my marriage with Gwendolen, I will most gladly allow your nephew to form an alliance with my ward.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Rising and drawing herself up.] You must be quite aware that what you propose is out of the question.

**Jack.** Then a passionate celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to.

**Lady Bracknell.** That is not the destiny I propose for Gwendolen. Algernon, of course, can choose for himself. [Pulls out her watch.] Come, dear, [**Gwendolen** rises] we have already missed five, if not six, trains. To miss any more might expose us to comment on the platform.

[Enter **Dr. Chasuble**.]

**Chasuble.** Everything is quite ready for the christenings.

**Lady Bracknell.** The christenings, sir! Is not that somewhat premature?

**Chasuble.** [Looking rather puzzled, and pointing to **Jack** and **Algernon**.] Both these gentlemen have expressed a desire for immediate baptism.

**Lady Bracknell.** At their age? The idea is grotesque and irreligious! Algernon, I forbid you to be baptized. I will not hear of such excesses. Lord Bracknell would be highly displeased if he learned that that was the way in which you wasted your time and money.

**Chasuble.** Am I to understand then that there are to be no christenings at all this afternoon?

**Jack.** I don't think that, as things are now, it would be of much practical value to either of us, Dr. Chasuble.

**Chasuble.** I am grieved to hear such sentiments from you, Mr. Worthing. They savour of the heretical views of the Anabaptists,

views that I have completely refuted in four of my unpublished sermons. However, as your present mood seems to be one peculiarly secular, I will return to the church at once. Indeed, I have just been informed by the pew-opener that for the last hour and a half Miss Prism has been waiting for me in the vestry.

**Lady Bracknell.** [Starting.] Miss Prism! Did I hear you mention a Miss Prism?

**Chasuble.** Yes, Lady Bracknell. I am on my way to join her.

**Lady Bracknell.** Pray allow me to detain you for a moment. This matter may prove to be one of vital importance to Lord Bracknell and myself. Is this Miss Prism a female of repellent aspect, remotely connected with education?

**Chasuble.** [Somewhat indignantly.] She is the most cultivated of ladies, and the very picture of respectability.

**Lady Bracknell.** It is obviously the same person. May I ask what position she holds in your household?

**Chasuble.** [Severely.] I am a celibate, madam.

**Jack.** [Interposing.] Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell, has been for the last three years Miss Cardew's esteemed governess and valued companion.

**Lady Bracknell.** In spite of what I hear of her, I must see her at once. Let her be sent for.

**Chasuble.** [Looking off.] She approaches; she is nigh.

[Enter **Miss Prism** hurriedly.]

**Miss Prism.** I was told you expected me in the vestry, dear Canon. I have been waiting for you there for an hour and three-quarters. [Catches sight of **Lady Bracknell**, who has fixed her with a stony glare. **Miss Prism** grows pale and quails. She looks anxiously round as if desirous to escape.]

**Lady Bracknell.** [In a severe, judicial voice.] Prism! [**Miss Prism** bows her head in shame.] Come here, Prism! [**Miss Prism** approaches in a humble manner.] Prism! Where is that baby? [General consternation. The **Canon** starts back in horror. **Algernon** and **Jack** pretend to be anxious to shield **Cecily** and **Gwendolen** from hearing the details of a terrible

public scandal.] Twenty-eight years ago, Prism, you left Lord Bracknell's house, Number 104, Upper Grosvenor Street, in charge of a perambulator that contained a baby of the male sex. You never returned. A few weeks later, through the elaborate investigations of the Metropolitan police, the perambulator was discovered at midnight, standing by itself in a remote corner of Bayswater. It contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality. [**Miss Prism** starts in involuntary indignation.] But the baby was not there! [Every one looks at **Miss Prism**.] Prism! Where is that baby? [A pause.]

**Miss Prism.** Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that I do not know. I only wish I did. The plain facts of the case are these. On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is for ever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in its perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old, but capacious hand-bag in which I had intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, for which I never can forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the basinette, and placed the baby in the hand-bag.

**Jack.** [Who has been listening attentively.] But where did you deposit the hand-bag?

**Miss Prism.** Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing.

**Jack.** Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the hand-bag that contained that infant.

**Miss Prism.** I left it in the cloak-room of one of the larger railway stations in London.

**Jack.** What railway station?

**Miss Prism.** [Quite crushed.] Victoria. The Brighton line. [Sinks into a chair.]

**Jack.** I must retire to my room for a moment. Gwendolen, wait here for me.

**Gwendolen.** If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life. [Exit **Jack** in great excitement.]

**Chasuble.** What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

**Lady Bracknell.** I dare not even suspect, Dr. Chasuble. I need hardly tell you that in families of high position strange coincidences are not supposed to occur. They are hardly considered the thing.

[Noises heard overhead as if some one was throwing trunks about. Every one looks up.]

**Cecily.** Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated.

**Chasuble.** Your guardian has a very emotional nature.

**Lady Bracknell.** This noise is extremely unpleasant. It sounds as if he was having an argument. I dislike arguments of any kind. They are always vulgar, and often convincing.

**Chasuble.** [Looking up.] It has stopped now. [The noise is redoubled.]

**Lady Bracknell.** I wish he would arrive at some conclusion.

**Gwendolen.** This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last.  
[Enter **Jack** with a hand-bag of black leather in his hand.]

**Jack.** [Rushing over to **Miss Prism**.] Is this the hand-bag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.

**Miss Prism.** [Calmly.] It seems to be mine. Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of a Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington. And here, on the lock, are my initials. I had forgotten that in an extravagant mood I had had them placed there. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it so unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years.

**Jack.** [In a pathetic voice.] Miss Prism, more is restored to you than this hand-bag. I was the baby you placed in it.

**Miss Prism.** [Amazed.] You?

**Jack.** [Embracing her.] Yes . . . mother!

**Miss Prism.** [Recoiling in indignant astonishment.] Mr. Worthing! I am unmarried!

**Jack.** Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious blow. But after

all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you. [Tries to embrace her again.]

**Miss Prism.** [Still more indignant.] Mr. Worthing, there is some error. [Pointing to **Lady Bracknell**.] There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

**Jack.** [After a pause.] Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

**Lady Bracknell.** I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not altogether please you. You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.

**Jack.** Algernon's elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother! Cecily,—how could you have ever doubted that I had a brother? [Seizes hold of **Algernon**.] Dr. Chasuble, my unfortunate brother. Miss Prism, my unfortunate brother. Gwendolen, my unfortunate brother. Algernon, you young scoundrel, you will have to treat me with more respect in the future. You have never behaved to me like a brother in all your life.

**Algernon.** Well, not till to-day, old boy, I admit. I did my best, however, though I was out of practice.

[Shakes hands.]

**Gwendolen.** [To **Jack**.] My own! But what own are you? What is your Christian name, now that you have become some one else?

**Jack.** Good heavens! . . . I had quite forgotten that point. Your decision on the subject of my name is irrevocable, I suppose?

**Gwendolen.** I never change, except in my affections.

**Cecily.** What a noble nature you have, Gwendolen!

**Jack.** Then the question had better be cleared up at once. Aunt Augusta, a moment. At the time when Miss Prism left me in the hand-bag, had I been christened already?

**Lady Bracknell.** Every luxury that money could buy, including christening, had been lavished on you by your fond and doting parents.



**Jack.** Then I was christened! That is settled. Now, what name was I given? Let me know the worst.

**Lady Bracknell.** Being the eldest son you were naturally christened after your father.

**Jack.** [Irritably.] Yes, but what was my father's Christian name?

**Lady Bracknell.** [Meditatively.] I cannot at the present moment recall what the General's Christian name was. But I have no doubt he had one. He was eccentric, I admit. But only in later years. And that was the result of the Indian climate, and marriage, and indigestion, and other things of that kind.

**Jack.** Algy! Can't you recollect what our father's Christian name was?

**Algernon.** My dear boy, we were never even on speaking terms. He died before I was a year old.

**Jack.** His name would appear in the Army Lists of the period, I suppose, Aunt Augusta?

**Lady Bracknell.** The General was essentially a man of peace, except in his domestic life. But I have no doubt his name would appear in any military directory.

**Jack.** The Army Lists of the last forty years are here. These delightful records should have been my constant study. [Rushes to bookcase and tears the books out.] M. Generals . . . Mallam, Maxbohm, Magley, what ghastly names they have—Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff! Lieutenant 1840, Captain, Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel, General 1869, Christian names, Ernest John. [Puts book very quietly down and speaks quite calmly.] I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I? Well, it is Ernest after all. I mean it naturally is Ernest.

**Lady Bracknell.** Yes, I remember now that the General was called Ernest, I knew I had some particular reason for disliking the name.

**Gwendolen.** Ernest! My own Ernest! I felt from the first that you could have no other name!

**Jack.** Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?

**Gwendolen.** I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.

**Jack.** My own one!

**Chasuble.** [To **Miss Prism.**] Lætitia! [Embraces her]

**Miss Prism.** [Enthusiastically.] Frederick! At last!

**Algernon.** Cecily! [Embraces her.] At last!

**Jack.** Gwendolen! [Embraces her.] At last!

**Lady Bracknell.** My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality.

**Jack.** On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I've now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

## TABLEAU

# 72. A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen

*Published: 1879*

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- Torvald Helmer
- Nora, his wife
- Doctor Rank
- Mrs Linde
- Nils Krogstad
- Helmer's three young children
- Anne, their nurse
- A Housemaid
- A Porter

[The action takes place in Helmer's house.]

## ACT I

[SCENE.—A room furnished comfortably and tastefully, but not extravagantly. At the back, a door to the right leads to the entrance-hall, another to the left leads to Helmer's study. Between the doors stands a piano. In the middle of the left-hand wall is a door, and beyond it a window. Near the window are a round table, arm-chairs and a small sofa. In the right-hand wall, at the farther end, another door; and on the same side, nearer the footlights, a stove, two easy chairs and a rocking-chair; between the stove and the door, a small

table. Engravings on the walls; a cabinet with china and other small objects; a small book-case with well-bound books. The floors are carpeted, and a fire burns in the stove.

It is winter. A bell rings in the hall; shortly afterwards the door is heard to open. Enter NORA, humming a tune and in high spirits. She is in outdoor dress and carries a number of parcels; these she lays on the table to the right. She leaves the outer door open after her, and through it is seen a PORTER who is carrying a Christmas Tree and a basket, which he gives to the MAID who has opened the door.]

Nora. Hide the Christmas Tree carefully, Helen. Be sure the children do not see it until this evening, when it is dressed. [To the PORTER, taking out her purse.] How much?

Porter. Sixpence.

Nora. There is a shilling. No, keep the change. [The PORTER thanks her, and goes out. NORA shuts the door. She is laughing to herself, as she takes off her hat and coat. She takes a packet of macaroons from her pocket and eats one or two; then goes cautiously to her husband's door and listens.] Yes, he is in. [Still humming, she goes to the table on the right.]

Helmer [calls out from his room]. Is that my little lark twittering out there?

Nora [busy opening some of the parcels]. Yes, it is!

Helmer. Is it my little squirrel bustling about?

Nora. Yes!

Helmer. When did my squirrel come home?

Nora. Just now. [Puts the bag of macaroons into her pocket and wipes her mouth.] Come in here, Torvald, and see what I have bought.

Helmer. Don't disturb me. [A little later, he opens the door and looks into the room, pen in hand.] Bought, did you say? All these things? Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again?

Nora. Yes but, Torvald, this year we really can let ourselves go a little. This is the first Christmas that we have not needed to economise.

Helmer. Still, you know, we can't spend money recklessly.

Nora. Yes, Torvald, we may be a wee bit more reckless now, mayn't we? Just a tiny wee bit! You are going to have a big salary and earn lots and lots of money.

Helmer. Yes, after the New Year; but then it will be a whole quarter before the salary is due.

Nora. Pooh! we can borrow until then.

Helmer. Nora! [Goes up to her and takes her playfully by the ear.] The same little featherhead! Suppose, now, that I borrowed fifty pounds today, and you spent it all in the Christmas week, and then on New Year's Eve a slate fell on my head and killed me, and—

Nora [putting her hands over his mouth]. Oh! don't say such horrid things.

Helmer. Still, suppose that happened,—what then?

Nora. If that were to happen, I don't suppose I should care whether I owed money or not.

Helmer. Yes, but what about the people who had lent it?

Nora. They? Who would bother about them? I should not know who they were.

Helmer. That is like a woman! But seriously, Nora, you know what I think about that. No debt, no borrowing. There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt. We two have kept bravely on the straight road so far, and we will go on the same way for the short time longer that there need be any struggle.

Nora [moving towards the stove]. As you please, Torvald.

Helmer [following her]. Come, come, my little skylark must not droop her wings. What is this! Is my little squirrel out of temper? [Taking out his purse.] Nora, what do you think I have got here?

Nora [turning round quickly]. Money!

Helmer. There you are. [Gives her some money.] Do you think I don't know what a lot is wanted for housekeeping at Christmas-time?

Nora [counting]. Ten shillings—a pound—two pounds! Thank you, thank you, Torvald; that will keep me going for a long time.

Helmer. Indeed it must.

Nora. Yes, yes, it will. But come here and let me show you what I have bought. And all so cheap! Look, here is a new suit for Ivar, and a sword; and a horse and a trumpet for Bob; and a doll and dolly's bedstead for Emmy,—they are very plain, but anyway she will soon break them in pieces. And here are dress-lengths and handkerchiefs for the maids; old Anne ought really to have something better.

Helmer. And what is in this parcel?

Nora [crying out]. No, no! you mustn't see that until this evening.

Helmer. Very well. But now tell me, you extravagant little person, what would you like for yourself?

Nora. For myself? Oh, I am sure I don't want anything.

Helmer. Yes, but you must. Tell me something reasonable that you would particularly like to have.

Nora. No, I really can't think of anything—unless, Torvald—

Helmer. Well?

Nora [playing with his coat buttons, and without raising her eyes to his]. If you really want to give me something, you might—you might—

Helmer. Well, out with it!

Nora [speaking quickly]. You might give me money, Torvald. Only just as much as you can afford; and then one of these days I will buy something with it.

Helmer. But, Nora—

Nora. Oh, do! dear Torvald; please, please do! Then I will wrap it up in beautiful gilt paper and hang it on the Christmas Tree. Wouldn't that be fun?

Helmer. What are little people called that are always wasting money?

Nora. Spendthrifts—I know. Let us do as you suggest, Torvald, and then I shall have time to think what I am most in want of. That is a very sensible plan, isn't it?

Helmer [smiling]. Indeed it is—that is to say, if you were really to save out of the money I give you, and then really buy something for

yourself. But if you spend it all on the housekeeping and any number of unnecessary things, then I merely have to pay up again.

Nora. Oh but, Torvald—

Helmer. You can't deny it, my dear little Nora. [Puts his arm round her waist.] It's a sweet little spendthrift, but she uses up a deal of money. One would hardly believe how expensive such little persons are!

Nora. It's a shame to say that. I do really save all I can.

Helmer [laughing]. That's very true,—all you can. But you can't save anything!

Nora [smiling quietly and happily]. You haven't any idea how many expenses we skylarks and squirrels have, Torvald.

Helmer. You are an odd little soul. Very like your father. You always find some new way of wheedling money out of me, and, as soon as you have got it, it seems to melt in your hands. You never know where it has gone. Still, one must take you as you are. It is in the blood; for indeed it is true that you can inherit these things, Nora.

Nora. Ah, I wish I had inherited many of papa's qualities.

Helmer. And I would not wish you to be anything but just what you are, my sweet little skylark. But, do you know, it strikes me that you are looking rather—what shall I say—rather uneasy today?

Nora. Do I?

Helmer. You do, really. Look straight at me.

Nora [looks at him]. Well?

Helmer [wagging his finger at her]. Hasn't Miss Sweet Tooth been breaking rules in town today?

Nora. No; what makes you think that?

Helmer. Hasn't she paid a visit to the confectioner's?

Nora. No, I assure you, Torvald—

Helmer. Not been nibbling sweets?

Nora. No, certainly not.

Helmer. Not even taken a bite at a macaroon or two?

Nora. No, Torvald, I assure you really—

Helmer. There, there, of course I was only joking.

Nora [going to the table on the right]. I should not think of going against your wishes.

Helmer. No, I am sure of that; besides, you gave me your word- [Going up to her.] Keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself, my darling. They will all be revealed tonight when the Christmas Tree is lit, no doubt.

Nora. Did you remember to invite Doctor Rank?

Helmer. No. But there is no need; as a matter of course he will come to dinner with us. However, I will ask him when he comes in this morning. I have ordered some good wine. Nora, you can't think how I am looking forward to this evening.

Nora. So am I! And how the children will enjoy themselves, Torvald!

Helmer. It is splendid to feel that one has a perfectly safe appointment, and a big enough income. It's delightful to think of, isn't it?

Nora. It's wonderful!

Helmer. Do you remember last Christmas? For a full three weeks beforehand you shut yourself up every evening until long after midnight, making ornaments for the Christmas Tree, and all the other fine things that were to be a surprise to us. It was the dullest three weeks I ever spent!

Nora. I didn't find it dull.

Helmer [smiling]. But there was precious little result, Nora.

Nora. Oh, you shouldn't tease me about that again. How could I help the cat's going in and tearing everything to pieces?

Helmer. Of course you couldn't, poor little girl. You had the best of intentions to please us all, and that's the main thing. But it is a good thing that our hard times are over.

Nora. Yes, it is really wonderful.

Helmer. This time I needn't sit here and be dull all alone, and you needn't ruin your dear eyes and your pretty little hands-

Nora [clapping her hands]. No, Torvald, I needn't any longer, need I! It's wonderfully lovely to hear you say so! [Taking his arm.] Now I will tell you how I have been thinking we ought to arrange things,



Torvald. As soon as Christmas is over—[A bell rings in the hall.] There's the bell. [She tidies the room a little.] There's some one at the door. What a nuisance!

Helmer. If it is a caller, remember I am not at home.

Maid [in the doorway]. A lady to see you, ma'am,—a stranger.

Nora. Ask her to come in.

Maid [to HELMER]. The doctor came at the same time, sir.

Helmer. Did he go straight into my room?

Maid. Yes, sir.

[HELMER goes into his room. The MAID ushers in Mrs Linde, who is in travelling dress, and shuts the door.]

Mrs Linde [in a dejected and timid voice]. How do you do, Nora?

Nora [doubtfully]. How do you do—

Mrs Linde. You don't recognise me, I suppose.

Nora. No, I don't know—yes, to be sure, I seem to—[Suddenly.] Yes! Christine! Is it really you?

Mrs Linde. Yes, it is I.

Nora. Christine! To think of my not recognising you! And yet how could I—[In a gentle voice.] How you have altered, Christine!

Mrs Linde. Yes, I have indeed. In nine, ten long years—

Nora. Is it so long since we met? I suppose it is. The last eight years have been a happy time for me, I can tell you. And so now you have come into the town, and have taken this long journey in winter—that was plucky of you.

Mrs Linde. I arrived by steamer this morning.

Nora. To have some fun at Christmas-time, of course. How delightful! We will have such fun together! But take off your things. You are not cold, I hope. [Helps her.] Now we will sit down by the stove, and be cosy. No, take this armchair; I will sit here in the rocking-chair. [Takes her hands.] Now you look like your old self again; it was only the first moment—You are a little paler, Christine, and perhaps a little thinner.

Mrs Linde. And much, much older, Nora.

Nora. Perhaps a little older; very, very little; certainly not much. [Stops suddenly and speaks seriously.] What a thoughtless

creature I am, chattering away like this. My poor, dear Christine, do forgive me.

Mrs Linde. What do you mean, Nora?

Nora [gently]. Poor Christine, you are a widow.

Mrs Linde. Yes; it is three years ago now.

Nora. Yes, I knew; I saw it in the papers. I assure you, Christine, I meant ever so often to write to you at the time, but I always put it off and something always prevented me.

Mrs Linde. I quite understand, dear.

Nora. It was very bad of me, Christine. Poor thing, how you must have suffered. And he left you nothing?

Mrs Linde. No.

Nora. And no children?

Mrs Linde. No.

Nora. Nothing at all, then.

Mrs Linde. Not even any sorrow or grief to live upon.

Nora [looking incredulously at her]. But, Christine, is that possible?

Mrs Linde [smiles sadly and strokes her hair]. It sometimes happens, Nora.

Nora. So you are quite alone. How dreadfully sad that must be. I have three lovely children. You can't see them just now, for they are out with their nurse. But now you must tell me all about it.

Mrs Linde. No, no; I want to hear about you.

Nora. No, you must begin. I mustn't be selfish today; today I must only think of your affairs. But there is one thing I must tell you. Do you know we have just had a great piece of good luck?

Mrs Linde. No, what is it?

Nora. Just fancy, my husband has been made manager of the Bank!

Mrs Linde. Your husband? What good luck!

Nora. Yes, tremendous! A barrister's profession is such an uncertain thing, especially if he won't undertake unsavoury cases; and naturally Torvald has never been willing to do that, and I quite agree with him. You may imagine how pleased we are! He is to take up his work in the Bank at the New Year, and then he will have a

big salary and lots of commissions. For the future we can live quite differently—we can do just as we like. I feel so relieved and so happy, Christine! It will be splendid to have heaps of money and not need to have any anxiety, won't it?

Mrs Linde. Yes, anyhow I think it would be delightful to have what one needs.

Nora. No, not only what one needs, but heaps and heaps of money.

Mrs Linde [smiling]. Nora, Nora, haven't you learned sense yet? In our schooldays you were a great spendthrift.

Nora [laughing]. Yes, that is what Torvald says now. [Wags her finger at her.] But "Nora, Nora" is not so silly as you think. We have not been in a position for me to waste money. We have both had to work.

Mrs Linde. You too?

Nora. Yes; odds and ends, needlework, crotchet-work, embroidery, and that kind of thing. [Dropping her voice.] And other things as well. You know Torvald left his office when we were married? There was no prospect of promotion there, and he had to try and earn more than before. But during the first year he overworked himself dreadfully. You see, he had to make money every way he could, and he worked early and late; but he couldn't stand it, and fell dreadfully ill, and the doctors said it was necessary for him to go south.

Mrs Linde. You spent a whole year in Italy, didn't you?

Nora. Yes. It was no easy matter to get away, I can tell you. It was just after Ivar was born; but naturally we had to go. It was a wonderfully beautiful journey, and it saved Torvald's life. But it cost a tremendous lot of money, Christine.

Mrs Linde. So I should think.

Nora. It cost about two hundred and fifty pounds. That's a lot, isn't it?

Mrs Linde. Yes, and in emergencies like that it is lucky to have the money.

Nora. I ought to tell you that we had it from papa.

Mrs Linde. Oh, I see. It was just about that time that he died, wasn't it?

Nora. Yes; and, just think of it, I couldn't go and nurse him. I was expecting little Ivar's birth every day and I had my poor sick Torvald to look after. My dear, kind father—I never saw him again, Christine. That was the saddest time I have known since our marriage.

Mrs Linde. I know how fond you were of him. And then you went off to Italy?

Nora. Yes; you see we had money then, and the doctors insisted on our going, so we started a month later.

Mrs Linde. And your husband came back quite well?

Nora. As sound as a bell!

Mrs Linde. But—the doctor?

Nora. What doctor?

Mrs Linde. I thought your maid said the gentleman who arrived here just as I did, was the doctor?

Nora. Yes, that was Doctor Rank, but he doesn't come here professionally. He is our greatest friend, and comes in at least once every day. No, Torvald has not had an hour's illness since then, and our children are strong and healthy and so am I. [Jumps up and claps her hands.] Christine! Christine! it's good to be alive and happy!—But how horrid of me; I am talking of nothing but my own affairs. [Sits on a stool near her, and rests her arms on her knees.] You mustn't be angry with me. Tell me, is it really true that you did not love your husband? Why did you marry him?

Mrs Linde. My mother was alive then, and was bedridden and helpless, and I had to provide for my two younger brothers; so I did not think I was justified in refusing his offer.

Nora. No, perhaps you were quite right. He was rich at that time, then?

Mrs Linde. I believe he was quite well off. But his business was a precarious one; and, when he died, it all went to pieces and there was nothing left.

Nora. And then?—

Mrs Linde. Well, I had to turn my hand to anything I could

find—first a small shop, then a small school, and so on. The last three years have seemed like one long working-day, with no rest. Now it is at an end, Nora. My poor mother needs me no more, for she is gone; and the boys do not need me either; they have got situations and can shift for themselves.

Nora. What a relief you must feel if—

Mrs Linde. No, indeed; I only feel my life unspeakably empty. No one to live for anymore. [Gets up restlessly.] That was why I could not stand the life in my little backwater any longer. I hope it may be easier here to find something which will busy me and occupy my thoughts. If only I could have the good luck to get some regular work—office work of some kind—

Nora. But, Christine, that is so frightfully tiring, and you look tired out now. You had far better go away to some watering-place.

Mrs Linde [walking to the window]. I have no father to give me money for a journey, Nora.

Nora [rising]. Oh, don't be angry with me!

Mrs Linde [going up to her]. It is you that must not be angry with me, dear. The worst of a position like mine is that it makes one so bitter. No one to work for, and yet obliged to be always on the lookout for chances. One must live, and so one becomes selfish. When you told me of the happy turn your fortunes have taken—you will hardly believe it—I was delighted not so much on your account as on my own.

Nora. How do you mean?—Oh, I understand. You mean that perhaps Torvald could get you something to do.

Mrs Linde. Yes, that was what I was thinking of.

Nora. He must, Christine. Just leave it to me; I will broach the subject very cleverly—I will think of something that will please him very much. It will make me so happy to be of some use to you.

Mrs Linde. How kind you are, Nora, to be so anxious to help me! It is doubly kind in you, for you know so little of the burdens and troubles of life.

Nora. I—? I know so little of them?

Mrs Linde [smiling]. My dear! Small household cares and that sort of thing!—You are a child, Nora.

Nora [tosses her head and crosses the stage]. You ought not to be so superior.

Mrs Linde. No?

Nora. You are just like the others. They all think that I am incapable of anything really serious—

Mrs Linde. Come, come—

Nora.—that I have gone through nothing in this world of cares.

Mrs Linde. But, my dear Nora, you have just told me all your troubles.

Nora. Pooh!—those were trifles. [Lowering her voice.] I have not told you the important thing.

Mrs Linde. The important thing? What do you mean?

Nora. You look down upon me altogether, Christine—but you ought not to. You are proud, aren't you, of having worked so hard and so long for your mother?

Mrs Linde. Indeed, I don't look down on anyone. But it is true that I am both proud and glad to think that I was privileged to make the end of my mother's life almost free from care.

Nora. And you are proud to think of what you have done for your brothers?

Mrs Linde. I think I have the right to be.

Nora. I think so, too. But now, listen to this; I too have something to be proud and glad of.

Mrs Linde. I have no doubt you have. But what do you refer to?

Nora. Speak low. Suppose Torvald were to hear! He mustn't on any account—no one in the world must know, Christine, except you.

Mrs Linde. But what is it?

Nora. Come here. [Pulls her down on the sofa beside her.] Now I will show you that I too have something to be proud and glad of. It was I who saved Torvald's life.

Mrs Linde. "Saved"? How?

Nora. I told you about our trip to Italy. Torvald would never have recovered if he had not gone there—

Mrs Linde. Yes, but your father gave you the necessary funds.

Nora [smiling]. Yes, that is what Torvald and all the others think, but—

Mrs Linde. But—

Nora. Papa didn't give us a shilling. It was I who procured the money.

Mrs Linde. You? All that large sum?

Nora. Two hundred and fifty pounds. What do you think of that?

Mrs Linde. But, Nora, how could you possibly do it? Did you win a prize in the Lottery?

Nora [contemptuously]. In the Lottery? There would have been no credit in that.

Mrs Linde. But where did you get it from, then? Nora [humming and smiling with an air of mystery]. Hm, hm! Aha!

Mrs Linde. Because you couldn't have borrowed it.

Nora. Couldn't I? Why not?

Mrs Linde. No, a wife cannot borrow without her husband's consent.

Nora [tossing her head]. Oh, if it is a wife who has any head for business—a wife who has the wit to be a little bit clever—

Mrs Linde. I don't understand it at all, Nora.

Nora. There is no need you should. I never said I had borrowed the money. I may have got it some other way. [Lies back on the sofa.] Perhaps I got it from some other admirer. When anyone is as attractive as I am—

Mrs Linde. You are a mad creature.

Nora. Now, you know you're full of curiosity, Christine.

Mrs Linde. Listen to me, Nora dear. Haven't you been a little bit imprudent?

Nora [sits up straight]. Is it imprudent to save your husband's life?

Mrs Linde. It seems to me imprudent, without his knowledge, to—

Nora. But it was absolutely necessary that he should not know! My goodness, can't you understand that? It was necessary he should have no idea what a dangerous condition he was in. It was to me that the doctors came and said that his life was in danger, and that

the only thing to save him was to live in the south. Do you suppose I didn't try, first of all, to get what I wanted as if it were for myself? I told him how much I should love to travel abroad like other young wives; I tried tears and entreaties with him; I told him that he ought to remember the condition I was in, and that he ought to be kind and indulgent to me; I even hinted that he might raise a loan. That nearly made him angry, Christine. He said I was thoughtless, and that it was his duty as my husband not to indulge me in my whims and caprices—as I believe he called them. Very well, I thought, you must be saved—and that was how I came to devise a way out of the difficulty—

Mrs Linde. And did your husband never get to know from your father that the money had not come from him?

Nora. No, never. Papa died just at that time. I had meant to let him into the secret and beg him never to reveal it. But he was so ill then—alas, there never was any need to tell him.

Mrs Linde. And since then have you never told your secret to your husband?

Nora. Good Heavens, no! How could you think so? A man who has such strong opinions about these things! And besides, how painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly independence, to know that he owed me anything! It would upset our mutual relations altogether; our beautiful happy home would no longer be what it is now.

Mrs Linde. Do you mean never to tell him about it?

Nora [meditatively, and with a half smile]. Yes—someday, perhaps, after many years, when I am no longer as nice-looking as I am now. Don't laugh at me! I mean, of course, when Torvald is no longer as devoted to me as he is now; when my dancing and dressing-up and reciting have palled on him; then it may be a good thing to have something in reserve—[Breaking off.] What nonsense! That time will never come. Now, what do you think of my great secret, Christine? Do you still think I am of no use? I can tell you, too, that this affair has caused me a lot of worry. It has been by no means easy for me to meet my engagements punctually. I may tell you



that there is something that is called, in business, quarterly interest, and another thing called payment in installments, and it is always so dreadfully difficult to manage them. I have had to save a little here and there, where I could, you understand. I have not been able to put aside much from my housekeeping money, for Torvald must have a good table. I couldn't let my children be shabbily dressed; I have felt obliged to use up all he gave me for them, the sweet little darlings!

Mrs Linde. So it has all had to come out of your own necessities of life, poor Nora?

Nora. Of course. Besides, I was the one responsible for it. Whenever Torvald has given me money for new dresses and such things, I have never spent more than half of it; I have always bought the simplest and cheapest things. Thank Heaven, any clothes look well on me, and so Torvald has never noticed it. But it was often very hard on me, Christine—because it is delightful to be really well dressed, isn't it?

Mrs Linde. Quite so.

Nora. Well, then I have found other ways of earning money. Last winter I was lucky enough to get a lot of copying to do; so I locked myself up and sat writing every evening until quite late at night. Many a time I was desperately tired; but all the same it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man.

Mrs Linde. How much have you been able to pay off in that way?

Nora. I can't tell you exactly. You see, it is very difficult to keep an account of a business matter of that kind. I only know that I have paid every penny that I could scrape together. Many a time I was at my wits' end. [Smiles.] Then I used to sit here and imagine that a rich old gentleman had fallen in love with me—

Mrs Linde. What! Who was it?

Nora. Be quiet!—that he had died; and that when his will was opened it contained, written in big letters, the instruction: “The lovely Mrs Nora Helmer is to have all I possess paid over to her at once in cash.”

Mrs Linde. But, my dear Nora—who could the man be?

Nora. Good gracious, can't you understand? There was no old gentleman at all; it was only something that I used to sit here and imagine, when I couldn't think of any way of procuring money. But it's all the same now; the tiresome old person can stay where he is, as far as I am concerned; I don't care about him or his will either, for I am free from care now. [Jumps up.] My goodness, it's delightful to think of, Christine! Free from care! To be able to be free from care, quite free from care; to be able to play and romp with the children; to be able to keep the house beautifully and have everything just as Torvald likes it! And, think of it, soon the spring will come and the big blue sky! Perhaps we shall be able to take a little trip—perhaps I shall see the sea again! Oh, it's a wonderful thing to be alive and be happy. [A bell is heard in the hall.]

Mrs Linde [rising]. There is the bell; perhaps I had better go.

Nora. No, don't go; no one will come in here; it is sure to be for Torvald.

Servant [at the hall door]. Excuse me, ma'am—there is a gentleman to see the master, and as the doctor is with him—

Nora. Who is it?

Krogstad [at the door]. It is I, Mrs Helmer. [Mrs LINDE starts, trembles, and turns to the window.]

Nora [takes a step towards him, and speaks in a strained, low voice]. You? What is it? What do you want to see my husband about?

Krogstad. Bank business—in a way. I have a small post in the Bank, and I hear your husband is to be our chief now—

Nora. Then it is—

Krogstad. Nothing but dry business matters, Mrs Helmer; absolutely nothing else.

Nora. Be so good as to go into the study, then. [She bows indifferently to him and shuts the door into the hall; then comes back and makes up the fire in the stove.]

Mrs Linde. Nora—who was that man?

Nora. A lawyer, of the name of Krogstad.

Mrs Linde. Then it really was he.

Nora. Do you know the man?

Mrs Linde. I used to—many years ago. At one time he was a solicitor's clerk in our town.

Nora. Yes, he was.

Mrs Linde. He is greatly altered.

Nora. He made a very unhappy marriage.

Mrs Linde. He is a widower now, isn't he?

Nora. With several children. There now, it is burning up. [Shuts the door of the stove and moves the rocking-chair aside.]

Mrs Linde. They say he carries on various kinds of business.

Nora. Really! Perhaps he does; I don't know anything about it. But don't let us think of business; it is so tiresome.

Doctor Rank [comes out of HELMER'S study. Before he shuts the door he calls to him]. No, my dear fellow, I won't disturb you; I would rather go in to your wife for a little while. [Shuts the door and sees Mrs LINDE.] I beg your pardon; I am afraid I am disturbing you too.

Nora. No, not at all. [Introducing him]. Doctor Rank, Mrs Linde.

Rank. I have often heard Mrs Linde's name mentioned here. I think I passed you on the stairs when I arrived, MrsLinde?

Mrs Linde. Yes, I go up very slowly; I can't manage stairs well.

Rank. Ah! some slight internal weakness?

Mrs Linde. No, the fact is I have been overworking myself.

Rank. Nothing more than that? Then I suppose you have come to town to amuse yourself with our entertainments?

Mrs Linde. I have come to look for work.

Rank. Is that a good cure for overwork?

Mrs Linde. One must live, Doctor Rank.

Rank. Yes, the general opinion seems to be that it is necessary.

Nora. Look here, Doctor Rank—you know you want to live.

Rank. Certainly. However wretched I may feel, I want to prolong the agony as long as possible. All my patients are like that. And so are those who are morally diseased; one of them, and a bad case too, is at this very moment with Helmer—

Mrs Linde [sadly]. Ah!

Nora. Whom do you mean?

Rank. A lawyer of the name of Krogstad, a fellow you don't know at all. He suffers from a diseased moral character, Mrs Helmer; but even he began talking of its being highly important that he should live.

Nora. Did he? What did he want to speak to Torvald about?

Rank. I have no idea; I only heard that it was something about the Bank.

Nora. I didn't know this—what's his name—Krogstad had anything to do with the Bank.

Rank. Yes, he has some sort of appointment there. [To Mrs Linde.] I don't know whether you find also in your part of the world that there are certain people who go zealously snuffing about to smell out moral corruption, and, as soon as they have found some, put the person concerned into some lucrative position where they can keep their eye on him. Healthy natures are left out in the cold.

Mrs Linde. Still I think the sick are those who most need taking care of.

Rank [shrugging his shoulders]. Yes, there you are. That is the sentiment that is turning Society into a sick-house.

[NORA, who has been absorbed in her thoughts, breaks out into smothered laughter and claps her hands.]

Rank. Why do you laugh at that? Have you any notion what Society really is?

Nora. What do I care about tiresome Society? I am laughing at something quite different, something extremely amusing. Tell me, Doctor Rank, are all the people who are employed in the Bank dependent on Torvald now?

Rank. Is that what you find so extremely amusing?

Nora [smiling and humming]. That's my affair! [Walking about the room.] It's perfectly glorious to think that we have—that Torvald has so much power over so many people. [Takes the packet from her pocket.] Doctor Rank, what do you say to a macaroon?

Rank. What, macaroons? I thought they were forbidden here.

Nora. Yes, but these are some Christine gave me.

Mrs Linde. What! I?—

Nora. Oh, well, don't be alarmed! You couldn't know that Torvald had forbidden them. I must tell you that he is afraid they will spoil my teeth. But, bah!—once in a way—That's so, isn't it, Doctor Rank? By your leave! [Puts a macaroon into his mouth.] You must have one too, Christine. And I shall have one, just a little one—or at most two. [Walking about.] I am tremendously happy. There is just one thing in the world now that I should dearly love to do.

Rank. Well, what is that?

Nora. It's something I should dearly love to say, if Torvald could hear me.

Rank. Well, why can't you say it?

Nora. No, I daren't; it's so shocking.

Mrs Linde. Shocking?

Rank. Well, I should not advise you to say it. Still, with us you might. What is it you would so much like to say if Torvald could hear you?

Nora. I should just love to say—Well, I'm damned!

Rank. Are you mad?

Mrs Linde. Nora, dear—!

Rank. Say it, here he is!

Nora [hiding the packet]. Hush! Hush! Hush! [HELMER comes out of his room, with his coat over his arm and his hat in his hand.]

Nora. Well, Torvald dear, have you got rid of him?

Helmer. Yes, he has just gone.

Nora. Let me introduce you—this is Christine, who has come to town.

Helmer. Christine—? Excuse me, but I don't know—

Nora. Mrs Linde, dear; Christine Linde.

Helmer. Of course. A school friend of my wife's, I presume?

Mrs Linde. Yes, we have known each other since then.

Nora. And just think, she has taken a long journey in order to see you.

Helmer. What do you mean?

Mrs Linde. No, really, I—

Nora. Christine is tremendously clever at book-keeping, and she

is frightfully anxious to work under some clever man, so as to perfect herself—

Helmer. Very sensible, Mrs Linde.

Nora. And when she heard you had been appointed manager of the Bank—the news was telegraphed, you know—she travelled here as quick as she could. Torvald, I am sure you will be able to do something for Christine, for my sake, won't you?

Helmer. Well, it is not altogether impossible. I presume you are a widow, Mrs Linde?

Mrs Linde. Yes.

Helmer. And have had some experience of book-keeping?

Mrs Linde. Yes, a fair amount.

Helmer. Ah! well, it's very likely I may be able to find something for you—

Nora [clapping her hands]. What did I tell you? What did I tell you?

Helmer. You have just come at a fortunate moment, Mrs Linde.

Mrs Linde. How am I to thank you?

Helmer. There is no need. [Puts on his coat.] But today you must excuse me—

Rank. Wait a minute; I will come with you. [Brings his fur coat from the hall and warms it at the fire.]

Nora. Don't be long away, Torvald dear.

Helmer. About an hour, not more.

Nora. Are you going too, Christine?

Mrs Linde [putting on her cloak]. Yes, I must go and look for a room.

Helmer. Oh, well then, we can walk down the street together.

Nora [helping her]. What a pity it is we are so short of space here; I am afraid it is impossible for us—

Mrs Linde. Please don't think of it! Goodbye, Nora dear, and many thanks.

Nora. Goodbye for the present. Of course you will come back this evening. And you too, Dr. Rank. What do you say? If you are well enough? Oh, you must be! Wrap yourself up well. [They go to

the door all talking together. Children's voices are heard on the staircase.]

Nora. There they are! There they are! [She runs to open the door. The NURSE comes in with the children.] Come in! Come in! [Stoops and kisses them.] Oh, you sweet blessings! Look at them, Christine! Aren't they darlings?

Rank. Don't let us stand here in the draught.

Helmer. Come along, Mrs Linde; the place will only be bearable for a mother now!

[RANK, HELMER, and Mrs Linde go downstairs. The NURSE comes forward with the children; NORA shuts the hall door.]

Nora. How fresh and well you look! Such red cheeks like apples and roses. [The children all talk at once while she speaks to them.] Have you had great fun? That's splendid! What, you pulled both Emmy and Bob along on the sledge? –both at once? –that was good. You are a clever boy, Ivar. Let me take her for a little, Anne. My sweet little baby doll! [Takes the baby from the MAID and dances it up and down.] Yes, yes, mother will dance with Bob too. What! Have you been snowballing? I wish I had been there too! No, no, I will take their things off, Anne; please let me do it, it is such fun. Go in now, you look half frozen. There is some hot coffee for you on the stove.

[The NURSE goes into the room on the left. NORA takes off the children's things and throws them about, while they all talk to her at once.]

Nora. Really! Did a big dog run after you? But it didn't bite you? No, dogs don't bite nice little dolly children. You mustn't look at the parcels, Ivar. What are they? Ah, I daresay you would like to know. No, no—it's something nasty! Come, let us have a game! What shall we play at? Hide and Seek? Yes, we'll play Hide and Seek. Bob shall hide first. Must I hide? Very well, I'll hide first. [She and the children laugh and shout, and romp in and out of the room; at last NORA hides under the table, the children rush in and out for her, but do not see her; they hear her smothered laughter, run to the table, lift up the cloth and find her. Shouts of laughter. She crawls forward and pretends to frighten them. Fresh laughter. Meanwhile there has

been a knock at the hall door, but none of them has noticed it. The door is half opened, and KROGSTAD appears, he waits a little; the game goes on.]

Krogstad. Excuse me, Mrs Helmer.

Nora [with a stifled cry, turns round and gets up on to her knees]. Ah! what do you want?

Krogstad. Excuse me, the outer door was ajar; I suppose someone forgot to shut it.

Nora [rising]. My husband is out, Mr. Krogstad.

Krogstad. I know that.

Nora. What do you want here, then?

Krogstad. A word with you.

Nora. With me?-[To the children, gently.] Go in to nurse. What? No, the strange man won't do mother any harm. When he has gone we will have another game. [She takes the children into the room on the left, and shuts the door after them.] You want to speak to me?

Krogstad. Yes, I do.

Nora. Today? It is not the first of the month yet.

Krogstad. No, it is Christmas Eve, and it will depend on yourself what sort of a Christmas you will spend.

Nora. What do you mean? Today it is absolutely impossible for me-

Krogstad. We won't talk about that until later on. This is something different. I presume you can give me a moment?

Nora. Yes-yes, I can-although-

Krogstad. Good. I was in Olsen's Restaurant and saw your husband going down the street-

Nora. Yes?

Krogstad. With a lady.

Nora. What then?

Krogstad. May I make so bold as to ask if it was a Mrs Linde?

Nora. It was.

Krogstad. Just arrived in town?

Nora. Yes, today.

Krogstad. She is a great friend of yours, isn't she?



Nora. She is. But I don't see—

Krogstad. I knew her too, once upon a time.

Nora. I am aware of that.

Krogstad. Are you? So you know all about it; I thought as much. Then I can ask you, without beating about the bush—is Mrs Linde to have an appointment in the Bank?

Nora. What right have you to question me, Mr. Krogstad?—You, one of my husband's subordinates! But since you ask, you shall know. Yes, Mrs Linde is to have an appointment. And it was I who pleaded her cause, Mr. Krogstad, let me tell you that.

Krogstad. I was right in what I thought, then.

Nora [walking up and down the stage]. Sometimes one has a tiny little bit of influence, I should hope. Because one is a woman, it does not necessarily follow that—. When anyone is in a subordinate position, Mr. Krogstad, they should really be careful to avoid offending anyone who—who—

Krogstad. Who has influence?

Nora. Exactly.

Krogstad [changing his tone]. Mrs Helmer, you will be so good as to use your influence on my behalf.

Nora. What? What do you mean?

Krogstad. You will be so kind as to see that I am allowed to keep my subordinate position in the Bank.

Nora. What do you mean by that? Who proposes to take your post away from you?

Krogstad. Oh, there is no necessity to keep up the pretence of ignorance. I can quite understand that your friend is not very anxious to expose herself to the chance of rubbing shoulders with me; and I quite understand, too, whom I have to thank for being turned off.

Nora. But I assure you—

Krogstad. Very likely; but, to come to the point, the time has come when I should advise you to use your influence to prevent that.

Nora. But, Mr. Krogstad, I have no influence.

Krogstad. Haven't you? I thought you said yourself just now—

Nora. Naturally I did not mean you to put that construction on it. I! What should make you think I have any influence of that kind with my husband?

Krogstad. Oh, I have known your husband from our student days. I don't suppose he is any more unassailable than other husbands.

Nora. If you speak slightly of my husband, I shall turn you out of the house.

Krogstad. You are bold, Mrs Helmer.

Nora. I am not afraid of you any longer. As soon as the New Year comes, I shall in a very short time be free of the whole thing.

Krogstad [controlling himself]. Listen to me, Mrs Helmer. If necessary, I am prepared to fight for my small post in the Bank as if I were fighting for my life.

Nora. So it seems.

Krogstad. It is not only for the sake of the money; indeed, that weighs least with me in the matter. There is another reason—well, I may as well tell you. My position is this. I daresay you know, like everybody else, that once, many years ago, I was guilty of an indiscretion.

Nora. I think I have heard something of the kind.

Krogstad. The matter never came into court; but every way seemed to be closed to me after that. So I took to the business that you know of. I had to do something; and, honestly, I don't think I've been one of the worst. But now I must cut myself free from all that. My sons are growing up; for their sake I must try and win back as much respect as I can in the town. This post in the Bank was like the first step up for me—and now your husband is going to kick me downstairs again into the mud.

Nora. But you must believe me, Mr. Krogstad; it is not in my power to help you at all.

Krogstad. Then it is because you haven't the will; but I have means to compel you.

Nora. You don't mean that you will tell my husband that I owe you money?

Krogstad. Hm!—suppose I were to tell him?

Nora. It would be perfectly infamous of you. [Sobbing.] To think of his learning my secret, which has been my joy and pride, in such an ugly, clumsy way—that he should learn it from you! And it would put me in a horribly disagreeable position—

Krogstad. Only disagreeable?

Nora [impetuously]. Well, do it, then!—and it will be the worse for you. My husband will see for himself what a blackguard you are, and you certainly won't keep your post then.

Krogstad. I asked you if it was only a disagreeable scene at home that you were afraid of?

Nora. If my husband does get to know of it, of course he will at once pay you what is still owing, and we shall have nothing more to do with you.

Krogstad [coming a step nearer]. Listen to me, Mrs Helmer. Either you have a very bad memory or you know very little of business. I shall be obliged to remind you of a few details.

Nora. What do you mean?

Krogstad. When your husband was ill, you came to me to borrow two hundred and fifty pounds.

Nora. I didn't know anyone else to go to.

Krogstad. I promised to get you that amount—

Nora. Yes, and you did so.

Krogstad. I promised to get you that amount, on certain conditions. Your mind was so taken up with your husband's illness, and you were so anxious to get the money for your journey, that you seem to have paid no attention to the conditions of our bargain. Therefore it will not be amiss if I remind you of them. Now, I promised to get the money on the security of a bond which I drew up.

Nora. Yes, and which I signed.

Krogstad. Good. But below your signature there were a few lines constituting your father a surety for the money; those lines your father should have signed.

Nora. Should? He did sign them.

Krogstad. I had left the date blank; that is to say, your father

should himself have inserted the date on which he signed the paper. Do you remember that?

Nora. Yes, I think I remember—

Krogstad. Then I gave you the bond to send by post to your father. Is that not so?

Nora. Yes.

Krogstad. And you naturally did so at once, because five or six days afterwards you brought me the bond with your father's signature. And then I gave you the money.

Nora. Well, haven't I been paying it off regularly?

Krogstad. Fairly so, yes. But—to come back to the matter in hand—that must have been a very trying time for you, Mrs Helmer?

Nora. It was, indeed.

Krogstad. Your father was very ill, wasn't he?

Nora. He was very near his end.

Krogstad. And died soon afterwards?

Nora. Yes.

Krogstad. Tell me, Mrs Helmer, can you by any chance remember what day your father died?—on what day of the month, I mean.

Nora. Papa died on the 29th of September.

Krogstad. That is correct; I have ascertained it for myself. And, as that is so, there is a discrepancy [taking a paper from his pocket] which I cannot account for.

Nora. What discrepancy? I don't know—

Krogstad. The discrepancy consists, Mrs Helmer, in the fact that your father signed this bond three days after his death.

Nora. What do you mean? I don't understand—

Krogstad. Your father died on the 29th of September. But, look here; your father has dated his signature the 2nd of October. It is a discrepancy, isn't it? [NORA is silent.] Can you explain it to me? [NORA is still silent.] It is a remarkable thing, too, that the words "2nd of October," as well as the year, are not written in your father's handwriting but in one that I think I know. Well, of course it can be explained; your father may have forgotten to date his signature, and someone else may have dated it haphazard before

they knew of his death. There is no harm in that. It all depends on the signature of the name; and that is genuine, I suppose, Mrs Helmer? It was your father himself who signed his name here?

Nora [after a short pause, throws her head up and looks defiantly at him]. No, it was not. It was I that wrote papa's name.

Krogstad. Are you aware that is a dangerous confession?

Nora. In what way? You shall have your money soon.

Krogstad. Let me ask you a question; why did you not send the paper to your father?

Nora. It was impossible; papa was so ill. If I had asked him for his signature, I should have had to tell him what the money was to be used for; and when he was so ill himself I couldn't tell him that my husband's life was in danger—it was impossible.

Krogstad. It would have been better for you if you had given up your trip abroad.

Nora. No, that was impossible. That trip was to save my husband's life; I couldn't give that up.

Krogstad. But did it never occur to you that you were committing a fraud on me?

Nora. I couldn't take that into account; I didn't trouble myself about you at all. I couldn't bear you, because you put so many heartless difficulties in my way, although you knew what a dangerous condition my husband was in.

Krogstad. Mrs Helmer, you evidently do not realise clearly what it is that you have been guilty of. But I can assure you that my one false step, which lost me all my reputation, was nothing more or nothing worse than what you have done.

Nora. You? Do you ask me to believe that you were brave enough to run a risk to save your wife's life?

Krogstad. The law cares nothing about motives.

Nora. Then it must be a very foolish law.

Krogstad. Foolish or not, it is the law by which you will be judged, if I produce this paper in court.

Nora. I don't believe it. Is a daughter not to be allowed to spare her dying father anxiety and care? Is a wife not to be allowed to save

her husband's life? I don't know much about law; but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that. Have you no knowledge of such laws—you who are a lawyer? You must be a very poor lawyer, Mr. Krogstad.

Krogstad. Maybe. But matters of business—such business as you and I have had together—do you think I don't understand that? Very well. Do as you please. But let me tell you this—if I lose my position a second time, you shall lose yours with me. [He bows, and goes out through the hall.]

Nora [appears buried in thought for a short time, then tosses her head]. Nonsense! Trying to frighten me like that!—I am not so silly as he thinks. [Begins to busy herself putting the children's things in order.] And yet—? No, it's impossible! I did it for love's sake.

The Children [in the doorway on the left]. Mother, the stranger man has gone out through the gate.

Nora. Yes, dears, I know. But, don't tell anyone about the stranger man. Do you hear? Not even papa.

Children. No, mother; but will you come and play again?

Nora. No, no,—not now.

Children. But, mother, you promised us.

Nora. Yes, but I can't now. Run away in; I have such a lot to do. Run away in, my sweet little darlings. [She gets them into the room by degrees and shuts the door on them; then sits down on the sofa, takes up a piece of needlework and sews a few stitches, but soon stops.] No! [Throws down the work, gets up, goes to the hall door and calls out.] Helen! bring the Tree in. [Goes to the table on the left, opens a drawer, and stops again.] No, no! it is quite impossible!

Maid [coming in with the Tree]. Where shall I put it, ma'am?

Nora. Here, in the middle of the floor.

Maid. Shall I get you anything else?

Nora. No, thank you. I have all I want. [Exit MAID.]

Nora [begins dressing the tree]. A candle here—and flowers here—The horrible man! It's all nonsense—there's nothing wrong. The tree shall be splendid! I will do everything I can think of to please

you, Torvald!—I will sing for you, dance for you—[HELMER comes in with some papers under his arm.] Oh! are you back already?

Helmer. Yes. Has anyone been here?

Nora. Here? No.

Helmer. That is strange. I saw Krogstad going out of the gate.

Nora. Did you? Oh yes, I forgot, Krogstad was here for a moment.

Helmer. Nora, I can see from your manner that he has been here begging you to say a good word for him.

Nora. Yes.

Helmer. And you were to appear to do it of your own accord; you were to conceal from me the fact of his having been here; didn't he beg that of you too?

Nora. Yes, Torvald, but—

Helmer. Nora, Nora, and you would be a party to that sort of thing? To have any talk with a man like that, and give him any sort of promise? And to tell me a lie into the bargain?

Nora. A lie—?

Helmer. Didn't you tell me no one had been here? [Shakes his finger at her.] My little songbird must never do that again. A songbird must have a clean beak to chirp with—no false notes! [Puts his arm round her waist.] That is so, isn't it? Yes, I am sure it is. [Lets her go.] We will say no more about it. [Sits down by the stove.] How warm and snug it is here! [Turns over his papers.]

Nora [after a short pause, during which she busies herself with the Christmas Tree.] Torvald!

Helmer. Yes.

Nora. I am looking forward tremendously to the fancy-dress ball at the Stenborgs' the day after tomorrow.

Helmer. And I am tremendously curious to see what you are going to surprise me with.

Nora. It was very silly of me to want to do that.

Helmer. What do you mean?

Nora. I can't hit upon anything that will do; everything I think of seems so silly and insignificant.

Helmer. Does my little Nora acknowledge that at last?

Nora [standing behind his chair with her arms on the back of it].  
Are you very busy, Torvald?

Helmer. Well–

Nora. What are all those papers?

Helmer. Bank business.

Nora. Already?

Helmer. I have got authority from the retiring manager to undertake the necessary changes in the staff and in the rearrangement of the work; and I must make use of the Christmas week for that, so as to have everything in order for the new year.

Nora. Then that was why this poor Krogstad–

Helmer. Hm!

Nora [leans against the back of his chair and strokes his hair]. If you hadn't been so busy I should have asked you a tremendously big favour, Torvald.

Helmer. What is that? Tell me.

Nora. There is no one has such good taste as you. And I do so want to look nice at the fancy-dress ball. Torvald, couldn't you take me in hand and decide what I shall go as, and what sort of a dress I shall wear?

Helmer. Aha! so my obstinate little woman is obliged to get someone to come to her rescue?

Nora. Yes, Torvald, I can't get along a bit without your help.

Helmer. Very well, I will think it over, we shall manage to hit upon something.

Nora. That is nice of you. [Goes to the Christmas Tree. A short pause.] How pretty the red flowers look–. But, tell me, was it really something very bad that this Krogstad was guilty of?

Helmer. He forged someone's name. Have you any idea what that means?

Nora. Isn't it possible that he was driven to do it by necessity?

Helmer. Yes; or, as in so many cases, by imprudence. I am not so heartless as to condemn a man altogether because of a single false step of that kind.

Nora. No, you wouldn't, would you, Torvald?



Helmer. Many a man has been able to retrieve his character, if he has openly confessed his fault and taken his punishment.

Nora. Punishment—?

Helmer. But Krogstad did nothing of that sort; he got himself out of it by a cunning trick, and that is why he has gone under altogether.

Nora. But do you think it would—?

Helmer. Just think how a guilty man like that has to lie and play the hypocrite with every one, how he has to wear a mask in the presence of those near and dear to him, even before his own wife and children. And about the children—that is the most terrible part of it all, Nora.

Nora. How?

Helmer. Because such an atmosphere of lies infects and poisons the whole life of a home. Each breath the children take in such a house is full of the germs of evil.

Nora [coming nearer him]. Are you sure of that?

Helmer. My dear, I have often seen it in the course of my life as a lawyer. Almost everyone who has gone to the bad early in life has had a deceitful mother.

Nora. Why do you only say—mother?

Helmer. It seems most commonly to be the mother's influence, though naturally a bad father's would have the same result. Every lawyer is familiar with the fact. This Krogstad, now, has been persistently poisoning his own children with lies and dissimulation; that is why I say he has lost all moral character. [Holds out his hands to her.] That is why my sweet little Nora must promise me not to plead his cause. Give me your hand on it. Come, come, what is this? Give me your hand. There now, that's settled. I assure you it would be quite impossible for me to work with him; I literally feel physically ill when I am in the company of such people.

Nora [takes her hand out of his and goes to the opposite side of the Christmas Tree]. How hot it is in here; and I have such a lot to do.

Helmer [getting up and putting his papers in order]. Yes, and I

must try and read through some of these before dinner; and I must think about your costume, too. And it is just possible I may have something ready in gold paper to hang up on the Tree. [Puts his hand on her head.] My precious little singing-bird! [He goes into his room and shuts the door after him.]

Nora [after a pause, whispers]. No, no—it isn't true. It's impossible; it must be impossible.

[The NURSE opens the door on the left.]

Nurse. The little ones are begging so hard to be allowed to come in to mamma.

Nora. No, no, no! Don't let them come in to me! You stay with them, Anne.

Nurse. Very well, ma'am. [Shuts the door.]

Nora [pale with terror]. Deprave my little children? Poison my home? [A short pause. Then she tosses her head.] It's not true. It can't possibly be true.

## ACT TWO

[THE SAME SCENE.—THE Christmas Tree is in the corner by the piano, stripped of its ornaments and with burnt-down candle-ends on its dishevelled branches. NORA'S cloak and hat are lying on the sofa. She is alone in the room, walking about uneasily. She stops by the sofa and takes up her cloak.]

Nora [drops her cloak]. Someone is coming now! [Goes to the door and listens.] No—it is no one. Of course, no one will come today, Christmas Day—nor tomorrow either. But, perhaps—[opens the door and looks out]. No, nothing in the letterbox; it is quite empty. [Comes forward.] What rubbish! of course he can't be in earnest about it. Such a thing couldn't happen; it is impossible—I have three little children.

[Enter the NURSE from the room on the left, carrying a big cardboard box.]

Nurse. At last I have found the box with the fancy dress.

Nora. Thanks; put it on the table.

Nurse [doing so]. But it is very much in want of mending.

Nora. I should like to tear it into a hundred thousand pieces.

Nurse. What an idea! It can easily be put in order—just a little patience.

Nora. Yes, I will go and get Mrs Linde to come and help me with it.

Nurse. What, out again? In this horrible weather? You will catch cold, ma'am, and make yourself ill.

Nora. Well, worse than that might happen. How are the children?

Nurse. The poor little souls are playing with their Christmas presents, but—

Nora. Do they ask much for me?

Nurse. You see, they are so accustomed to have their mamma with them.

Nora. Yes, but, nurse, I shall not be able to be so much with them now as I was before.

Nurse. Oh well, young children easily get accustomed to anything.

Nora. Do you think so? Do you think they would forget their mother if she went away altogether?

Nurse. Good heavens!—went away altogether?

Nora. Nurse, I want you to tell me something I have often wondered about—how could you have the heart to put your own child out among strangers?

Nurse. I was obliged to, if I wanted to be little Nora's nurse.

Nora. Yes, but how could you be willing to do it?

Nurse. What, when I was going to get such a good place by it? A poor girl who has got into trouble should be glad to. Besides, that wicked man didn't do a single thing for me.

Nora. But I suppose your daughter has quite forgotten you.

Nurse. No, indeed she hasn't. She wrote to me when she was confirmed, and when she was married.

Nora [putting her arms round her neck]. Dear old Anne, you were a good mother to me when I was little.

Nurse. Little Nora, poor dear, had no other mother but me.

Nora. And if my little ones had no other mother, I am sure you would—What nonsense I am talking! [Opens the box.] Go in to them. Now I must—. You will see tomorrow how charming I shall look.

Nurse. I am sure there will be no one at the ball so charming as you, ma'am. [Goes into the room on the left.]

Nora [begins to unpack the box, but soon pushes it away from her]. If only I dared go out. If only no one would come. If only I could be sure nothing would happen here in the meantime. Stuff and nonsense! No one will come. Only I mustn't think about it. I will brush my muff. What lovely, lovely gloves! Out of my thoughts, out of my thoughts! One, two, three, four, five, six— [Screams.] Ah! there is someone coming—. [Makes a movement towards the door, but stands irresolute.]

[Enter Mrs Linde from the hall, where she has taken off her cloak and hat.]

Nora. Oh, it's you, Christine. There is no one else out there, is there? How good of you to come!

Mrs Linde. I heard you were up asking for me.

Nora. Yes, I was passing by. As a matter of fact, it is something you could help me with. Let us sit down here on the sofa. Look here. Tomorrow evening there is to be a fancy-dress ball at the Stenborgs', who live above us; and Torvald wants me to go as a Neapolitan fisher-girl, and dance the Tarantella that I learned at Capri.

Mrs Linde. I see; you are going to keep up the character.

Nora. Yes, Torvald wants me to. Look, here is the dress; Torvald had it made for me there, but now it is all so torn, and I haven't any idea—

Mrs Linde. We will easily put that right. It is only some of the trimming come unsewn here and there. Needle and thread? Now then, that's all we want.

Nora. It is nice of you.

Mrs Linde [sewing]. So you are going to be dressed up tomorrow  
Nora. I will tell you what—I shall come in for a moment and see you in your fine feathers. But I have completely forgotten to thank you for a delightful evening yesterday.

Nora [gets up, and crosses the stage]. Well, I don't think yesterday was as pleasant as usual. You ought to have come to town a little earlier, Christine. Certainly Torvald does understand how to make a house dainty and attractive.

Mrs Linde. And so do you, it seems to me; you are not your father's daughter for nothing. But tell me, is Doctor Rank always as depressed as he was yesterday?

Nora. No; yesterday it was very noticeable. I must tell you that he suffers from a very dangerous disease. He has consumption of the spine, poor creature. His father was a horrible man who committed all sorts of excesses; and that is why his son was sickly from childhood, do you understand?

Mrs Linde [dropping her sewing]. But, my dearest Nora, how do you know anything about such things?

Nora [walking about]. Pooh! When you have three children, you get visits now and then from—from married women, who know something of medical matters, and they talk about one thing and another.

Mrs Linde [goes on sewing. A short silence]. Does Doctor Rank come here everyday?

Nora. Everyday regularly. He is Torvald's most intimate friend, and a great friend of mine too. He is just like one of the family.

Mrs Linde. But tell me this—is he perfectly sincere? I mean, isn't he the kind of man that is very anxious to make himself agreeable?

Nora. Not in the least. What makes you think that?

Mrs Linde. When you introduced him to me yesterday, he declared he had often heard my name mentioned in this house; but afterwards I noticed that your husband hadn't the slightest idea who I was. So how could Doctor Rank—?

Nora. That is quite right, Christine. Torvald is so absurdly fond of me that he wants me absolutely to himself, as he says. At first he used to seem almost jealous if I mentioned any of the dear folk at home, so naturally I gave up doing so. But I often talk about such things with Doctor Rank, because he likes hearing about them.

Mrs Linde. Listen to me, Nora. You are still very like a child in

many things, and I am older than you in many ways and have a little more experience. Let me tell you this—you ought to make an end of it with Doctor Rank.

Nora. What ought I to make an end of?

Mrs Linde. Of two things, I think. Yesterday you talked some nonsense about a rich admirer who was to leave you money—

Nora. An admirer who doesn't exist, unfortunately! But what then?

Mrs Linde. Is Doctor Rank a man of means?

Nora. Yes, he is.

Mrs Linde. And has no one to provide for?

Nora. No, no one; but—

Mrs Linde. And comes here everyday?

Nora. Yes, I told you so.

Mrs Linde. But how can this well-bred man be so tactless?

Nora. I don't understand you at all.

Mrs Linde. Don't prevaricate, Nora. Do you suppose I don't guess who lent you the two hundred and fifty pounds?

Nora. Are you out of your senses? How can you think of such a thing! A friend of ours, who comes here everyday! Do you realise what a horribly painful position that would be?

Mrs Linde. Then it really isn't he?

Nora. No, certainly not. It would never have entered into my head for a moment. Besides, he had no money to lend then; he came into his money afterwards.

Mrs Linde. Well, I think that was lucky for you, my dear Nora.

Nora. No, it would never have come into my head to ask Doctor Rank. Although I am quite sure that if I had asked him—

Mrs Linde. But of course you won't.

Nora. Of course not. I have no reason to think it could possibly be necessary. But I am quite sure that if I told Doctor Rank—

Mrs Linde. Behind your husband's back?

Nora. I must make an end of it with the other one, and that will be behind his back too. I must make an end of it with him.

Mrs Linde. Yes, that is what I told you yesterday, but—

Nora [walking up and down]. A man can put a thing like that straight much easier than a woman—

Mrs Linde. One's husband, yes.

Nora. Nonsense! [Standing still.] When you pay off a debt you get your bond back, don't you?

Mrs Linde. Yes, as a matter of course.

Nora. And can tear it into a hundred thousand pieces, and burn it up—the nasty dirty paper!

Mrs Linde [looks hard at her, lays down her sewing and gets up slowly]. Nora, you are concealing something from me.

Nora. Do I look as if I were?

Mrs Linde. Something has happened to you since yesterday morning. Nora, what is it?

Nora [going nearer to her]. Christine! [Listens.] Hush! there's Torvald come home. Do you mind going in to the children for the present? Torvald can't bear to see dressmaking going on. Let Anne help you.

Mrs Linde [gathering some of the things together]. Certainly—but I am not going away from here until we have had it out with one another. [She goes into the room on the left, as HELMER comes in from the hall.]

Nora [going up to HELMER]. I have wanted you so much, Torvald dear.

Helmer. Was that the dressmaker?

Nora. No, it was Christine; she is helping me to put my dress in order. You will see I shall look quite smart.

Helmer. Wasn't that a happy thought of mine, now?

Nora. Splendid! But don't you think it is nice of me, too, to do as you wish?

Helmer. Nice?—because you do as your husband wishes? Well, well, you little rogue, I am sure you did not mean it in that way. But I am not going to disturb you; you will want to be trying on your dress, I expect.

Nora. I suppose you are going to work.

Helmer. Yes. [Shows her a bundle of papers.] Look at that. I have just been into the bank. [Turns to go into his room.]

Nora. Torvald.

Helmer. Yes.

Nora. If your little squirrel were to ask you for something very, very prettily—?

Helmer. What then?

Nora. Would you do it?

Helmer. I should like to hear what it is, first.

Nora. Your squirrel would run about and do all her tricks if you would be nice, and do what she wants.

Helmer. Speak plainly.

Nora. Your skylark would chirp about in every room, with her song rising and falling—

Helmer. Well, my skylark does that anyhow.

Nora. I would play the fairy and dance for you in the moonlight, Torvald.

Helmer. Nora—you surely don't mean that request you made to me this morning?

Nora [going near him]. Yes, Torvald, I beg you so earnestly—

Helmer. Have you really the courage to open up that question again?

Nora. Yes, dear, you must do as I ask; you must let Krogstad keep his post in the bank.

Helmer. My dear Nora, it is his post that I have arranged Mrs Linde shall have.

Nora. Yes, you have been awfully kind about that; but you could just as well dismiss some other clerk instead of Krogstad.

Helmer. This is simply incredible obstinacy! Because you chose to give him a thoughtless promise that you would speak for him, I am expected to—

Nora. That isn't the reason, Torvald. It is for your own sake. This fellow writes in the most scurrilous newspapers; you have told me so yourself. He can do you an unspeakable amount of harm. I am frightened to death of him—



Helmer. Ah, I understand; it is recollections of the past that scare you.

Nora. What do you mean?

Helmer. Naturally you are thinking of your father.

Nora. Yes—yes, of course. Just recall to your mind what these malicious creatures wrote in the papers about papa, and how horribly they slandered him. I believe they would have procured his dismissal if the Department had not sent you over to inquire into it, and if you had not been so kindly disposed and helpful to him.

Helmer. My little Nora, there is an important difference between your father and me. Your father's reputation as a public official was not above suspicion. Mine is, and I hope it will continue to be so, as long as I hold my office.

Nora. You never can tell what mischief these men may contrive. We ought to be so well off, so snug and happy here in our peaceful home, and have no cares—you and I and the children, Torvald! That is why I beg you so earnestly—

Helmer. And it is just by interceding for him that you make it impossible for me to keep him. It is already known at the Bank that I mean to dismiss Krogstad. Is it to get about now that the new manager has changed his mind at his wife's bidding—

Nora. And what if it did?

Helmer. Of course!—if only this obstinate little person can get her way! Do you suppose I am going to make myself ridiculous before my whole staff, to let people think that I am a man to be swayed by all sorts of outside influence? I should very soon feel the consequences of it, I can tell you! And besides, there is one thing that makes it quite impossible for me to have Krogstad in the Bank as long as I am manager.

Nora. Whatever is that?

Helmer. His moral failings I might perhaps have overlooked, if necessary—

Nora. Yes, you could—couldn't you?

Helmer. And I hear he is a good worker, too. But I knew him when we were boys. It was one of those rash friendships that so often

prove an incubus in afterlife. I may as well tell you plainly, we were once on very intimate terms with one another. But this tactless fellow lays no restraint on himself when other people are present. On the contrary, he thinks it gives him the right to adopt a familiar tone with me, and every minute it is "I say, Helmer, old fellow!" and that sort of thing. I assure you it is extremely painful for me. He would make my position in the Bank intolerable.

Nora. Torvald, I don't believe you mean that.

Helmer. Don't you? Why not?

Nora. Because it is such a narrow-minded way of looking at things.

Helmer. What are you saying? Narrow-minded? Do you think I am narrow-minded?

Nora. No, just the opposite, dear—and it is exactly for that reason.

Helmer. It's the same thing. You say my point of view is narrow-minded, so I must be so too. Narrow-minded! Very well—I must put an end to this. [Goes to the hall door and calls.] Helen!

Nora. What are you going to do?

Helmer [looking among his papers]. Settle it. [Enter MAID.] Look here; take this letter and go downstairs with it at once. Find a messenger and tell him to deliver it, and be quick. The address is on it, and here is the money.

Maid. Very well, sir. [Exit with the letter.]

Helmer [putting his papers together]. Now then, little Miss Obstinate.

Nora [breathlessly]. Torvald—what was that letter?

Helmer. Krogstad's dismissal.

Nora. Call her back, Torvald! There is still time. Oh Torvald, call her back! Do it for my sake—for your own sake—for the children's sake! Do you hear me, Torvald? Call her back! You don't know what that letter can bring upon us.

Helmer. It's too late.

Nora. Yes, it's too late.

Helmer. My dear Nora, I can forgive the anxiety you are in, although really it is an insult to me. It is, indeed. Isn't it an insult to

think that I should be afraid of a starving quill-driver's vengeance? But I forgive you nevertheless, because it is such eloquent witness to your great love for me. [Takes her in his arms.] And that is as it should be, my own darling Nora. Come what will, you may be sure I shall have both courage and strength if they be needed. You will see I am man enough to take everything upon myself.

Nora [in a horror-stricken voice]. What do you mean by that?

Helmer. Everything, I say—

Nora [recovering herself]. You will never have to do that.

Helmer. That's right. Well, we will share it, Nora, as man and wife should. That is how it shall be. [Caressing her.] Are you content now? There! There!—not these frightened dove's eyes! The whole thing is only the wildest fancy!—Now, you must go and play through the Tarantella and practise with your tambourine. I shall go into the inner office and shut the door, and I shall hear nothing; you can make as much noise as you please. [Turns back at the door.] And when Rank comes, tell him where he will find me. [Nods to her, takes his papers and goes into his room, and shuts the door after him.]

Nora [bewildered with anxiety, stands as if rooted to the spot, and whispers]. He was capable of doing it. He will do it. He will do it in spite of everything.—No, not that! Never, never! Anything rather than that! Oh, for some help, some way out of it! [The door-bell rings.] Doctor Rank! Anything rather than that—anything, whatever it is! [She puts her hands over her face, pulls herself together, goes to the door and opens it. RANK is standing without, hanging up his coat. During the following dialogue it begins to grow dark.]

Nora. Good day, Doctor Rank. I knew your ring. But you mustn't go in to Torvald now; I think he is busy with something.

Rank. And you?

Nora [brings him in and shuts the door after him]. Oh, you know very well I always have time for you.

Rank. Thank you. I shall make use of as much of it as I can.

Nora. What do you mean by that? As much of it as you can?

Rank. Well, does that alarm you?

Nora. It was such a strange way of putting it. Is anything likely to happen?

Rank. Nothing but what I have long been prepared for. But I certainly didn't expect it to happen so soon.

Nora [gripping him by the arm]. What have you found out? Doctor Rank, you must tell me.

Rank [sitting down by the stove]. It is all up with me. And it can't be helped.

Nora [with a sigh of relief]. Is it about yourself?

Rank. Who else? It is no use lying to one's self. I am the most wretched of all my patients, Mrs Helmer. Lately I have been taking stock of my internal economy. Bankrupt! Probably within a month I shall lie rotting in the churchyard.

Nora. What an ugly thing to say!

Rank. The thing itself is cursedly ugly, and the worst of it is that I shall have to face so much more that is ugly before that. I shall only make one more examination of myself; when I have done that, I shall know pretty certainly when it will be that the horrors of dissolution will begin. There is something I want to tell you. Helmer's refined nature gives him an unconquerable disgust at everything that is ugly; I won't have him in my sick-room.

Nora. Oh, but, Doctor Rank—

Rank. I won't have him there. Not on any account. I bar my door to him. As soon as I am quite certain that the worst has come, I shall send you my card with a black cross on it, and then you will know that the loathsome end has begun.

Nora. You are quite absurd today. And I wanted you so much to be in a really good humour.

Rank. With death stalking beside me?—To have to pay this penalty for another man's sin? Is there any justice in that? And in every single family, in one way or another, some such inexorable retribution is being exacted—

Nora [putting her hands over her ears]. Rubbish! Do talk of something cheerful.

Rank. Oh, it's a mere laughing matter, the whole thing. My poor innocent spine has to suffer for my father's youthful amusements.

Nora [sitting at the table on the left]. I suppose you mean that he was too partial to asparagus and pate de foie gras, don't you?

Rank. Yes, and to truffles.

Nora. Truffles, yes. And oysters too, I suppose?

Rank. Oysters, of course, that goes without saying.

Nora. And heaps of port and champagne. It is sad that all these nice things should take their revenge on our bones.

Rank. Especially that they should revenge themselves on the unlucky bones of those who have not had the satisfaction of enjoying them.

Nora. Yes, that's the saddest part of it all.

Rank [with a searching look at her]. Hm!–

Nora [after a short pause]. Why did you smile?

Rank. No, it was you that laughed.

Nora. No, it was you that smiled, Doctor Rank!

Rank [rising]. You are a greater rascal than I thought.

Nora. I am in a silly mood today.

Rank. So it seems.

Nora [putting her hands on his shoulders]. Dear, dear Doctor Rank, death mustn't take you away from Torvald and me.

Rank. It is a loss you would easily recover from. Those who are gone are soon forgotten.

Nora [looking at him anxiously]. Do you believe that?

Rank. People form new ties, and then–

Nora. Who will form new ties?

Rank. Both you and Helmer, when I am gone. You yourself are already on the high road to it, I think. What did that Mrs Linde want here last night?

Nora. Oho!–you don't mean to say you are jealous of poor Christine?

Rank. Yes, I am. She will be my successor in this house. When I am done for, this woman will–

Nora. Hush! don't speak so loud. She is in that room.

Rank. Today again. There, you see.

Nora. She has only come to sew my dress for me. Bless my soul, how unreasonable you are! [Sits down on the sofa.] Be nice now, Doctor Rank, and tomorrow you will see how beautifully I shall dance, and you can imagine I am doing it all for you—and for Torvald too, of course. [Takes various things out of the box.] Doctor Rank, come and sit down here, and I will show you something.

Rank [sitting down]. What is it?

Nora. Just look at those!

Rank. Silk stockings.

Nora. Flesh-coloured. Aren't they lovely? It is so dark here now, but tomorrow—. No, no, no! you must only look at the feet. Oh well, you may have leave to look at the legs too.

Rank. Hm!—

Nora. Why are you looking so critical? Don't you think they will fit me?

Rank. I have no means of forming an opinion about that.

Nora [looks at him for a moment]. For shame! [Hits him lightly on the ear with the stockings.] That's to punish you. [Folds them up again.]

Rank. And what other nice things am I to be allowed to see?

Nora. Not a single thing more, for being so naughty. [She looks among the things, humming to herself.]

Rank [after a short silence]. When I am sitting here, talking to you as intimately as this, I cannot imagine for a moment what would have become of me if I had never come into this house.

Nora [smiling]. I believe you do feel thoroughly at home with us.

Rank [in a lower voice, looking straight in front of him]. And to be obliged to leave it all—

Nora. Nonsense, you are not going to leave it.

Rank [as before]. And not be able to leave behind one the slightest token of one's gratitude, scarcely even a fleeting regret—nothing but an empty place which the first comer can fill as well as any other.

Nora. And if I asked you now for a—? No!

Rank. For what?

Nora. For a big proof of your friendship–

Rank. Yes, yes!

Nora. I mean a tremendously big favour–

Rank. Would you really make me so happy for once?

Nora. Ah, but you don't know what it is yet.

Rank. No–but tell me.

Nora. I really can't, Doctor Rank. It is something out of all reason; it means advice, and help, and a favour–

Rank. The bigger a thing it is the better. I can't conceive what it is you mean. Do tell me. Haven't I your confidence?

Nora. More than anyone else. I know you are my truest and best friend, and so I will tell you what it is. Well, Doctor Rank, it is something you must help me to prevent. You know how devotedly, how inexpressibly deeply Torvald loves me; he would never for a moment hesitate to give his life for me.

Rank [leaning towards her]. Nora–do you think he is the only one–?

Nora [with a slight start]. The only one–?

Rank. The only one who would gladly give his life for your sake.

Nora [sadly]. Is that it?

Rank. I was determined you should know it before I went away, and there will never be a better opportunity than this. Now you know it, Nora. And now you know, too, that you can trust me as you would trust no one else.

Nora [rises, deliberately and quietly]. Let me pass.

Rank [makes room for her to pass him, but sits still]. Nora!

Nora [at the hall door]. Helen, bring in the lamp. [Goes over to the stove.] Dear Doctor Rank, that was really horrid of you.

Rank. To have loved you as much as anyone else does? Was that horrid?

Nora. No, but to go and tell me so. There was really no need–

Rank. What do you mean? Did you know–? [MAID enters with lamp, puts it down on the table, and goes out.] Nora–Mrs Helmer–tell me, had you any idea of this?

Nora. Oh, how do I know whether I had or whether I hadn't? I

really can't tell you—To think you could be so clumsy, Doctor Rank! We were getting on so nicely.

Rank. Well, at all events you know now that you can command me, body and soul. So won't you speak out?

Nora [looking at him]. After what happened?

Rank. I beg you to let me know what it is.

Nora. I can't tell you anything now.

Rank. Yes, yes. You mustn't punish me in that way. Let me have permission to do for you whatever a man may do.

Nora. You can do nothing for me now. Besides, I really don't need any help at all. You will find that the whole thing is merely fancy on my part. It really is so—of course it is! [Sits down in the rocking-chair, and looks at him with a smile.] You are a nice sort of man, Doctor Rank!—don't you feel ashamed of yourself, now the lamp has come?

Rank. Not a bit. But perhaps I had better go—for ever?

Nora. No, indeed, you shall not. Of course you must come here just as before. You know very well Torvald can't do without you.

Rank. Yes, but you?

Nora. Oh, I am always tremendously pleased when you come.

Rank. It is just that, that put me on the wrong track. You are a riddle to me. I have often thought that you would almost as soon be in my company as in Helmer's.

Nora. Yes—you see there are some people one loves best, and others whom one would almost always rather have as companions.

Rank. Yes, there is something in that.

Nora. When I was at home, of course I loved papa best. But I always thought it tremendous fun if I could steal down into the maids' room, because they never moralised at all, and talked to each other about such entertaining things.

Rank. I see—it is their place I have taken.

Nora [jumping up and going to him]. Oh, dear, nice Doctor Rank, I never meant that at all. But surely you can understand that being with Torvald is a little like being with papa—[Enter MAID from the hall.]



Maid. If you please, ma'am. [Whispers and hands her a card.]

Nora [glancing at the card]. Oh! [Puts it in her pocket.]

Rank. Is there anything wrong?

Nora. No, no, not in the least. It is only something—it is my new dress—

Rank. What? Your dress is lying there.

Nora. Oh, yes, that one; but this is another. I ordered it. Torvald mustn't know about it—

Rank. Oho! Then that was the great secret.

Nora. Of course. Just go in to him; he is sitting in the inner room. Keep him as long as—

Rank. Make your mind easy; I won't let him escape.

[Goes into HELMER'S room.]

Nora [to the MAID]. And he is standing waiting in the kitchen?

Maid. Yes; he came up the back stairs.

Nora. But didn't you tell him no one was in?

Maid. Yes, but it was no good.

Nora. He won't go away?

Maid. No; he says he won't until he has seen you, ma'am.

Nora. Well, let him come in—but quietly. Helen, you mustn't say anything about it to anyone. It is a surprise for my husband.

Maid. Yes, ma'am, I quite understand. [Exit.]

Nora. This dreadful thing is going to happen! It will happen in spite of me! No, no, no, it can't happen—it shan't happen! [She bolts the door of HELMER'S room. The MAID opens the hall door for KROGSTAD and shuts it after him. He is wearing a fur coat, high boots and a fur cap.]

Nora [advancing towards him]. Speak low—my husband is at home.

Krogstad. No matter about that.

Nora. What do you want of me?

Krogstad. An explanation of something.

Nora. Make haste then. What is it?

Krogstad. You know, I suppose, that I have got my dismissal.

Nora. I couldn't prevent it, Mr. Krogstad. I fought as hard as I could on your side, but it was no good.

Krogstad. Does your husband love you so little, then? He knows what I can expose you to, and yet he ventures—

Nora. How can you suppose that he has any knowledge of the sort?

Krogstad. I didn't suppose so at all. It would not be the least like our dear Torvald Helmer to show so much courage—

Nora. Mr. Krogstad, a little respect for my husband, please.

Krogstad. Certainly—all the respect he deserves. But since you have kept the matter so carefully to yourself, I make bold to suppose that you have a little clearer idea, than you had yesterday, of what it actually is that you have done?

Nora. More than you could ever teach me.

Krogstad. Yes, such a bad lawyer as I am.

Nora. What is it you want of me?

Krogstad. Only to see how you were, Mrs Helmer. I have been thinking about you all day long. A mere cashier, a quill-driver, a—well, a man like me—even he has a little of what is called feeling, you know.

Nora. Show it, then; think of my little children.

Krogstad. Have you and your husband thought of mine? But never mind about that. I only wanted to tell you that you need not take this matter too seriously. In the first place there will be no accusation made on my part.

Nora. No, of course not; I was sure of that.

Krogstad. The whole thing can be arranged amicably; there is no reason why anyone should know anything about it. It will remain a secret between us three.

Nora. My husband must never get to know anything about it.

Krogstad. How will you be able to prevent it? Am I to understand that you can pay the balance that is owing?

Nora. No, not just at present.

Krogstad. Or perhaps that you have some expedient for raising the money soon?

Nora. No expedient that I mean to make use of.

Krogstad. Well, in any case, it would have been of no use to you

now. If you stood there with ever so much money in your hand, I would never part with your bond.

Nora. Tell me what purpose you mean to put it to.

Krogstad. I shall only preserve it—keep it in my possession. No one who is not concerned in the matter shall have the slightest hint of it. So that if the thought of it has driven you to any desperate resolution—

Nora. It has.

Krogstad. If you had it in your mind to run away from your home—  
Nora. I had.

Krogstad. Or even something worse—

Nora. How could you know that?

Krogstad. Give up the idea.

Nora. How did you know I had thought of that?

Krogstad. Most of us think of that at first. I did, too—but I hadn't the courage.

Nora [faintly]. No more had I.

Krogstad [in a tone of relief]. No, that's it, isn't it—you hadn't the courage either?

Nora. No, I haven't—I haven't.

Krogstad. Besides, it would have been a great piece of folly. Once the first storm at home is over—. I have a letter for your husband in my pocket.

Nora. Telling him everything?

Krogstad. In as lenient a manner as I possibly could.

Nora [quickly]. He mustn't get the letter. Tear it up. I will find some means of getting money.

Krogstad. Excuse me, Mrs Helmer, but I think I told you just now—

Nora. I am not speaking of what I owe you. Tell me what sum you are asking my husband for, and I will get the money.

Krogstad. I am not asking your husband for a penny.

Nora. What do you want, then?

Krogstad. I will tell you. I want to rehabilitate myself, Mrs Helmer; I want to get on; and in that your husband must help me. For the last year and a half I have not had a hand in anything dishonourable,

amid all that time I have been struggling in most restricted circumstances. I was content to work my way up step by step. Now I am turned out, and I am not going to be satisfied with merely being taken into favour again. I want to get on, I tell you. I want to get into the Bank again, in a higher position. Your husband must make a place for me—

Nora. That he will never do!

Krogstad. He will; I know him; he dare not protest. And as soon as I am in there again with him, then you will see! Within a year I shall be the manager's right hand. It will be Nils Krogstad and not Torvald Helmer who manages the Bank.

Nora. That's a thing you will never see!

Krogstad. Do you mean that you will—?

Nora. I have courage enough for it now.

Krogstad. Oh, you can't frighten me. A fine, spoilt lady like you—

Nora. You will see, you will see.

Krogstad. Under the ice, perhaps? Down into the cold, coal-black water? And then, in the spring, to float up to the surface, all horrible and unrecognisable, with your hair fallen out—

Nora. You can't frighten me.

Krogstad. Nor you me. People don't do such things, Mrs Helmer. Besides, what use would it be? I should have him completely in my power all the same.

Nora. Afterwards? When I am no longer—

Krogstad. Have you forgotten that it is I who have the keeping of your reputation? [NORA stands speechlessly looking at him.] Well, now, I have warned you. Do not do anything foolish. When Helmer has had my letter, I shall expect a message from him. And be sure you remember that it is your husband himself who has forced me into such ways as this again. I will never forgive him for that. Goodbye, Mrs Helmer. [Exit through the hall.]

Nora [goes to the hall door, opens it slightly and listens.] He is going. He is not putting the letter in the box. Oh no, no! that's impossible! [Opens the door by degrees.] What is that? He is standing outside. He is not going downstairs. Is he hesitating? Can

he-? [A letter drops into the box; then KROGSTAD'S footsteps are heard, until they die away as he goes downstairs. NORA utters a stifled cry, and runs across the room to the table by the sofa. A short pause.]

Nora. In the letter-box. [Steals across to the hall door.] There it lies-Torvald, Torvald, there is no hope for us now!

[Mrs Linde comes in from the room on the left, carrying the dress.]

Mrs Linde. There, I can't see anything more to mend now. Would you like to try it on-?

Nora [in a hoarse whisper]. Christine, come here.

Mrs Linde [throwing the dress down on the sofa]. What is the matter with you? You look so agitated!

Nora. Come here. Do you see that letter? There, look-you can see it through the glass in the letter-box.

Mrs Linde. Yes, I see it.

Nora. That letter is from Krogstad.

Mrs Linde. Nora-it was Krogstad who lent you the money!

Nora. Yes, and now Torvald will know all about it.

Mrs Linde. Believe me, Nora, that's the best thing for both of you.

Nora. You don't know all. I forged a name.

Mrs Linde. Good heavens-!

Nora. I only want to say this to you, Christine-you must be my witness.

Mrs Linde. Your witness? What do you mean? What am I to-?

Nora. If I should go out of my mind-and it might easily happen-

Mrs Linde. Nora!

Nora. Or if anything else should happen to me-anything, for instance, that might prevent my being here-

Mrs Linde. Nora! Nora! you are quite out of your mind.

Nora. And if it should happen that there were some one who wanted to take all the responsibility, all the blame, you understand-

Mrs Linde. Yes, yes-but how can you suppose-?

Nora. Then you must be my witness, that it is not true, Christine. I am not out of my mind at all; I am in my right senses now, and I tell

you no one else has known anything about it; I, and I alone, did the whole thing. Remember that.

Mrs Linde. I will, indeed. But I don't understand all this.

Nora. How should you understand it? A wonderful thing is going to happen!

Mrs Linde. A wonderful thing?

Nora. Yes, a wonderful thing!—But it is so terrible, Christine; it mustn't happen, not for all the world.

Mrs Linde. I will go at once and see Krogstad.

Nora. Don't go to him; he will do you some harm.

Mrs Linde. There was a time when he would gladly do anything for my sake.

Nora. He?

Mrs Linde. Where does he live?

Nora. How should I know—? Yes [feeling in her pocket], here is his card. But the letter, the letter—!

Helmer [calls from his room, knocking at the door]. Nora! Nora [cries out anxiously]. Oh, what's that? What do you want?

Helmer. Don't be so frightened. We are not coming in; you have locked the door. Are you trying on your dress?

Nora. Yes, that's it. I look so nice, Torvald.

Mrs Linde [who has read the card]. I see he lives at the corner here.

Nora. Yes, but it's no use. It is hopeless. The letter is lying there in the box.

Mrs Linde. And your husband keeps the key?

Nora. Yes, always.

Mrs Linde. Krogstad must ask for his letter back unread, he must find some pretence—

Nora. But it is just at this time that Torvald generally—

Mrs Linde. You must delay him. Go in to him in the meantime. I will come back as soon as I can. [She goes out hurriedly through the hall door.]

Nora [goes to HELMER'S door, opens it and peeps in]. Torvald!

Helmer [from the inner room]. Well? May I venture at last to

come into my own room again? Come along, Rank, now you will see– [Halting in the doorway.] But what is this?

Nora. What is what, dear?

Helmer. Rank led me to expect a splendid transformation.

Rank [in the doorway]. I understood so, but evidently I was mistaken.

Nora. Yes, nobody is to have the chance of admiring me in my dress until tomorrow.

Helmer. But, my dear Nora, you look so worn out. Have you been practising too much?

Nora. No, I have not practised at all.

Helmer. But you will need to–

Nora. Yes, indeed I shall, Torvald. But I can't get on a bit without you to help me; I have absolutely forgotten the whole thing.

Helmer. Oh, we will soon work it up again.

Nora. Yes, help me, Torvald. Promise that you will! I am so nervous about it—all the people—. You must give yourself up to me entirely this evening. Not the tiniest bit of business—you mustn't even take a pen in your hand. Will you promise, Torvald dear?

Helmer. I promise. This evening I will be wholly and absolutely at your service, you helpless little mortal. Ah, by the way, first of all I will just– [Goes towards the hall door.]

Nora. What are you going to do there?

Helmer. Only see if any letters have come.

Nora. No, no! don't do that, Torvald!

Helmer. Why not?

Nora. Torvald, please don't. There is nothing there.

Helmer. Well, let me look. [Turns to go to the letter-box. NORA, at the piano, plays the first bars of the Tarantella. HELMER stops in the doorway.] Aha!

Nora. I can't dance tomorrow if I don't practise with you.

Helmer [going up to her]. Are you really so afraid of it, dear?

Nora. Yes, so dreadfully afraid of it. Let me practise at once; there is time now, before we go to dinner. Sit down and play for me, Torvald dear; criticise me, and correct me as you play.

Helmer. With great pleasure, if you wish me to. [Sits down at the piano.]

Nora [takes out of the box a tambourine and a long variegated shawl. She hastily drapes the shawl round her. Then she springs to the front of the stage and calls out]. Now play for me! I am going to dance!

[HELMER plays and NORA dances. RANK stands by the piano behind HELMER, and looks on.]

Helmer [as he plays]. Slower, slower!

Nora. I can't do it any other way.

Helmer. Not so violently, Nora!

Nora. This is the way.

Helmer [stops playing]. No, no—that is not a bit right.

Nora [laughing and swinging the tambourine]. Didn't I tell you so?

Rank. Let me play for her.

Helmer [getting up]. Yes, do. I can correct her better then.

[RANK sits down at the piano and plays. NORA dances more and more wildly. HELMER has taken up a position beside the stove, and during her dance gives her frequent instructions. She does not seem to hear him; her hair comes down and falls over her shoulders; she pays no attention to it, but goes on dancing. Enter Mrs Linde.]

Mrs Linde [standing as if spell-bound in the doorway]. Oh!—

Nora [as she dances]. Such fun, Christine!

Helmer. My dear darling Nora, you are dancing as if your life depended on it.

Nora. So it does.

Helmer. Stop, Rank; this is sheer madness. Stop, I tell you! [RANK stops playing, and NORA suddenly stands still. HELMER goes up to her.] I could never have believed it. You have forgotten everything I taught you.

Nora [throwing away the tambourine]. There, you see.

Helmer. You will want a lot of coaching.

Nora. Yes, you see how much I need it. You must coach me up to the last minute. Promise me that, Torvald!

Helmer. You can depend on me.



Nora. You must not think of anything but me, either today or tomorrow; you mustn't open a single letter—not even open the letter-box—

Helmer. Ah, you are still afraid of that fellow—

Nora. Yes, indeed I am.

Helmer. Nora, I can tell from your looks that there is a letter from him lying there.

Nora. I don't know; I think there is; but you must not read anything of that kind now. Nothing horrid must come between us until this is all over.

Rank [whispers to HELMER]. You mustn't contradict her.

Helmer [taking her in his arms]. The child shall have her way. But tomorrow night, after you have danced—

Nora. Then you will be free. [The MAID appears in the doorway to the right.]

Maid. Dinner is served, ma'am.

Nora. We will have champagne, Helen.

Maid. Very good, ma'am. [Exit.]

Helmer. Hullo!—are we going to have a banquet?

Nora. Yes, a champagne banquet until the small hours. [Calls out.] And a few macaroons, Helen—lots, just for once!

Helmer. Come, come, don't be so wild and nervous. Be my own little skylark, as you used.

Nora. Yes, dear, I will. But go in now and you too, Doctor Rank. Christine, you must help me to do up my hair.

Rank [whispers to HELMER as they go out]. I suppose there is nothing—she is not expecting anything?

Helmer. Far from it, my dear fellow; it is simply nothing more than this childish nervousness I was telling you of. [They go into the right-hand room.]

Nora. Well!

Mrs Linde. Gone out of town.

Nora. I could tell from your face.

Mrs Linde. He is coming home tomorrow evening. I wrote a note for him.

Nora. You should have let it alone; you must prevent nothing. After all, it is splendid to be waiting for a wonderful thing to happen.

Mrs Linde. What is it that you are waiting for?

Nora. Oh, you wouldn't understand. Go in to them, I will come in a moment. [Mrs Linde goes into the dining-room. NORA stands still for a little while, as if to compose herself. Then she looks at her watch.] Five o'clock. Seven hours until midnight; and then four-and-twenty hours until the next midnight. Then the Tarantella will be over. Twenty-four and seven? Thirty-one hours to live.

Helmer [from the doorway on the right]. Where's my little skylark?

Nora [going to him with her arms outstretched]. Here she is!

## ACT THREE

[THE SAME SCENE.—The table has been placed in the middle of the stage, with chairs around it. A lamp is burning on the table. The door into the hall stands open. Dance music is heard in the room above. Mrs Linde is sitting at the table idly turning over the leaves of a book; she tries to read, but does not seem able to collect her thoughts. Every now and then she listens intently for a sound at the outer door.]

Mrs Linde [looking at her watch]. Not yet—and the time is nearly up. If only he does not—. [Listens again.] Ah, there he is. [Goes into the hall and opens the outer door carefully. Light footsteps are heard on the stairs. She whispers.] Come in. There is no one here.

Krogstad [in the doorway]. I found a note from you at home. What does this mean?

Mrs Linde. It is absolutely necessary that I should have a talk with you.

Krogstad. Really? And is it absolutely necessary that it should be here?

Mrs Linde. It is impossible where I live; there is no private

entrance to my rooms. Come in; we are quite alone. The maid is asleep, and the Helmers are at the dance upstairs.

Krogstad [coming into the room]. Are the Helmers really at a dance tonight?

Mrs Linde. Yes, why not?

Krogstad. Certainly—why not?

Mrs Linde. Now, Nils, let us have a talk.

Krogstad. Can we two have anything to talk about?

Mrs Linde. We have a great deal to talk about.

Krogstad. I shouldn't have thought so.

Mrs Linde. No, you have never properly understood me.

Krogstad. Was there anything else to understand except what was obvious to all the world—a heartless woman jilts a man when a more lucrative chance turns up?

Mrs Linde. Do you believe I am as absolutely heartless as all that? And do you believe that I did it with a light heart?

Krogstad. Didn't you?

Mrs Linde. Nils, did you really think that?

Krogstad. If it were as you say, why did you write to me as you did at the time?

Mrs Linde. I could do nothing else. As I had to break with you, it was my duty also to put an end to all that you felt for me.

Krogstad [wringing his hands]. So that was it. And all this—only for the sake of money!

Mrs Linde. You must not forget that I had a helpless mother and two little brothers. We couldn't wait for you, Nils; your prospects seemed hopeless then.

Krogstad. That may be so, but you had no right to throw me over for anyone else's sake.

Mrs Linde. Indeed I don't know. Many a time did I ask myself if I had the right to do it.

Krogstad [more gently]. When I lost you, it was as if all the solid ground went from under my feet. Look at me now—I am a shipwrecked man clinging to a bit of wreckage.

Mrs Linde. But help may be near.

Krogstad. It was near; but then you came and stood in my way.

Mrs Linde. Unintentionally, Nils. It was only today that I learned it was your place I was going to take in the Bank.

Krogstad. I believe you, if you say so. But now that you know it, are you not going to give it up to me?

Mrs Linde. No, because that would not benefit you in the least.

Krogstad. Oh, benefit, benefit—I would have done it whether or no.

Mrs Linde. I have learned to act prudently. Life, and hard, bitter necessity have taught me that.

Krogstad. And life has taught me not to believe in fine speeches.

Mrs Linde. Then life has taught you something very reasonable. But deeds you must believe in?

Krogstad. What do you mean by that?

Mrs Linde. You said you were like a shipwrecked man clinging to some wreckage.

Krogstad. I had good reason to say so.

Mrs Linde. Well, I am like a shipwrecked woman clinging to some wreckage—no one to mourn for, no one to care for.

Krogstad. It was your own choice.

Mrs Linde. There was no other choice—then.

Krogstad. Well, what now?

Mrs Linde. Nils, how would it be if we two shipwrecked people could join forces?

Krogstad. What are you saying?

Mrs Linde. Two on the same piece of wreckage would stand a better chance than each on their own.

Krogstad. Christine I...

Mrs Linde. What do you suppose brought me to town?

Krogstad. Do you mean that you gave me a thought?

Mrs Linde. I could not endure life without work. All my life, as long as I can remember, I have worked, and it has been my greatest and only pleasure. But now I am quite alone in the world—my life is so dreadfully empty and I feel so forsaken. There is not the least

pleasure in working for one's self. Nils, give me someone and something to work for.

Krogstad. I don't trust that. It is nothing but a woman's overstrained sense of generosity that prompts you to make such an offer of yourself.

Mrs Linde. Have you ever noticed anything of the sort in me?

Krogstad. Could you really do it? Tell me—do you know all about my past life?

Mrs Linde. Yes.

Krogstad. And do you know what they think of me here?

Mrs Linde. You seemed to me to imply that with me you might have been quite another man.

Krogstad. I am certain of it.

Mrs Linde. Is it too late now?

Krogstad. Christine, are you saying this deliberately? Yes, I am sure you are. I see it in your face. Have you really the courage, then—?

Mrs Linde. I want to be a mother to someone, and your children need a mother. We two need each other. Nils, I have faith in your real character—I can dare anything together with you.

Krogstad [grasps her hands]. Thanks, thanks, Christine! Now I shall find a way to clear myself in the eyes of the world. Ah, but I forgot—

Mrs Linde [listening]. Hush! The Tarantella! Go, go!

Krogstad. Why? What is it?

Mrs Linde. Do you hear them up there? When that is over, we may expect them back.

Krogstad. Yes, yes—I will go. But it is all no use. Of course you are not aware what steps I have taken in the matter of the Helmers.

Mrs Linde. Yes, I know all about that.

Krogstad. And in spite of that have you the courage to—?

Mrs Linde. I understand very well to what lengths a man like you might be driven by despair.

Krogstad. If I could only undo what I have done!

Mrs Linde. You cannot. Your letter is lying in the letter-box now.

Krogstad. Are you sure of that?

Mrs Linde. Quite sure, but—

Krogstad [with a searching look at her]. Is that what it all means?—that you want to save your friend at any cost? Tell me frankly. Is that it?

Mrs Linde. Nils, a woman who has once sold herself for another's sake, doesn't do it a second time.

Krogstad. I will ask for my letter back.

Mrs Linde. No, no.

Krogstad. Yes, of course I will. I will wait here until Helmer comes; I will tell him he must give me my letter back—that it only concerns my dismissal—that he is not to read it—

Mrs Linde. No, Nils, you must not recall your letter.

Krogstad. But, tell me, wasn't it for that very purpose that you asked me to meet you here?

Mrs Linde. In my first moment of fright, it was. But twenty-four hours have elapsed since then, and in that time I have witnessed incredible things in this house. Helmer must know all about it. This unhappy secret must be disclosed; they must have a complete understanding between them, which is impossible with all this concealment and falsehood going on.

Krogstad. Very well, if you will take the responsibility. But there is one thing I can do in any case, and I shall do it at once.

Mrs Linde [listening]. You must be quick and go! The dance is over; we are not safe a moment longer.

Krogstad. I will wait for you below.

Mrs Linde. Yes, do. You must see me back to my door...

Krogstad. I have never had such an amazing piece of good fortune in my life! [Goes out through the outer door. The door between the room and the hall remains open.]

Mrs Linde [tidying up the room and laying her hat and cloak ready]. What a difference! what a difference! Someone to work for and live for—a home to bring comfort into. That I will do, indeed. I wish they would be quick and come—[Listens.] Ah, there they are now. I must put on my things. [Takes up her hat and cloak.

HELMER'S and NORA'S voices are heard outside; a key is turned, and HELMER brings NORA almost by force into the hall. She is in an Italian costume with a large black shawl around her; he is in evening dress, and a black domino which is flying open.]

Nora [hanging back in the doorway, and struggling with him]. No, no, no!—don't take me in. I want to go upstairs again; I don't want to leave so early.

Helmer. But, my dearest Nora—

Nora. Please, Torvald dear—please, please—only an hour more.

Helmer. Not a single minute, my sweet Nora. You know that was our agreement. Come along into the room; you are catching cold standing there. [He brings her gently into the room, in spite of her resistance.]

Mrs Linde. Good evening.

Nora. Christine!

Helmer. You here, so late, Mrs Linde?

Mrs Linde. Yes, you must excuse me; I was so anxious to see Nora in her dress.

Nora. Have you been sitting here waiting for me?

Mrs Linde. Yes, unfortunately I came too late, you had already gone upstairs; and I thought I couldn't go away again without having seen you.

Helmer [taking off NORA'S shawl]. Yes, take a good look at her. I think she is worth looking at. Isn't she charming, Mrs Linde?

Mrs Linde. Yes, indeed she is.

Helmer. Doesn't she look remarkably pretty? Everyone thought so at the dance. But she is terribly self-willed, this sweet little person. What are we to do with her? You will hardly believe that I had almost to bring her away by force.

Nora. Torvald, you will repent not having let me stay, even if it were only for half an hour.

Helmer. Listen to her, Mrs Linde! She had danced her Tarantella, and it had been a tremendous success, as it deserved—although possibly the performance was a trifle too realistic—a little more so, I mean, than was strictly compatible with the limitations of

art. But never mind about that! The chief thing is, she had made a success—she had made a tremendous success. Do you think I was going to let her remain there after that, and spoil the effect? No, indeed! I took my charming little Capri maiden—my capricious little Capri maiden, I should say—on my arm; took one quick turn round the room; a curtsey on either side, and, as they say in novels, the beautiful apparition disappeared. An exit ought always to be effective, Mrs Linde; but that is what I cannot make Nora understand. Pooh! this room is hot. [Throws his domino on a chair, and opens the door of his room.] Hullo! it's all dark in here. Oh, of course—excuse me—. [He goes in, and lights some candles.]

Nora [in a hurried and breathless whisper]. Well?

Mrs Linde [in a low voice]. I have had a talk with him.

Nora. Yes, and—

Mrs Linde. Nora, you must tell your husband all about it.

Nora [in an expressionless voice]. I knew it.

Mrs Linde. You have nothing to be afraid of as far as Krogstad is concerned; but you must tell him.

Nora. I won't tell him.

Mrs Linde. Then the letter will.

Nora. Thank you, Christine. Now I know what I must do. Hush—!

Helmer [coming in again]. Well, Mrs Linde, have you admired her?

Mrs Linde. Yes, and now I will say goodnight.

Helmer. What, already? Is this yours, this knitting?

Mrs Linde [taking it]. Yes, thank you, I had very nearly forgotten it.

Helmer. So you knit?

Mrs Linde. Of course.

Helmer. Do you know, you ought to embroider.

Mrs Linde. Really? Why?

Helmer. Yes, it's far more becoming. Let me show you. You hold the embroidery thus in your left hand, and use the needle with the right—like this—with a long, easy sweep. Do you see?

Mrs Linde. Yes, perhaps—

Helmer. But in the case of knitting—that can never be anything but



ungraceful; look here—the arms close together, the knitting—needles going up and down—it has a sort of Chinese effect—. That was really excellent champagne they gave us.

Mrs Linde. Well,—goodnight, Nora, and don't be self-willed any more.

Helmer. That's right, Mrs Linde.

Mrs Linde. Goodnight, Mr. Helmer.

Helmer [accompanying her to the door]. Goodnight, goodnight. I hope you will get home all right. I should be very happy to—but you haven't any great distance to go. Goodnight, goodnight. [She goes out; he shuts the door after her, and comes in again.] Ah!—at last we have got rid of her. She is a frightful bore, that woman.

Nora. Aren't you very tired, Torvald?

Helmer. No, not in the least.

Nora. Nor sleepy?

Helmer. Not a bit. On the contrary, I feel extraordinarily lively. And you?—you really look both tired and sleepy.

Nora. Yes, I am very tired. I want to go to sleep at once.

Helmer. There, you see it was quite right of me not to let you stay there any longer.

Nora. Everything you do is quite right, Torvald.

Helmer [kissing her on the forehead]. Now my little skylark is speaking reasonably. Did you notice what good spirits Rank was in this evening?

Nora. Really? Was he? I didn't speak to him at all.

Helmer. And I very little, but I have not for a long time seen him in such good form. [Looks for a while at her and then goes nearer to her.] It is delightful to be at home by ourselves again, to be all alone with you—you fascinating, charming little darling!

Nora. Don't look at me like that, Torvald.

Helmer. Why shouldn't I look at my dearest treasure?—at all the beauty that is mine, all my very own?

Nora [going to the other side of the table]. You mustn't say things like that to me tonight.

Helmer [following her]. You have still got the Tarantella in your

blood, I see. And it makes you more captivating than ever. Listen—the guests are beginning to go now. [In a lower voice.] Nora—soon the whole house will be quiet.

Nora. Yes, I hope so.

Helmer. Yes, my own darling Nora. Do you know, when I am out at a party with you like this, why I speak so little to you, keep away from you, and only send a stolen glance in your direction now and then?—do you know why I do that? It is because I make believe to myself that we are secretly in love, and you are my secretly promised bride, and that no one suspects there is anything between us.

Nora. Yes, yes—I know very well your thoughts are with me all the time.

Helmer. And when we are leaving, and I am putting the shawl over your beautiful young shoulders—on your lovely neck—then I imagine that you are my young bride and that we have just come from the wedding, and I am bringing you for the first time into our home—to be alone with you for the first time—quite alone with my shy little darling! All this evening I have longed for nothing but you. When I watched the seductive figures of the Tarantella, my blood was on fire; I could endure it no longer, and that was why I brought you down so early—

Nora. Go away, Torvald! You must let me go. I won't—

Helmer. What's that? You're joking, my little Nora! You won't—you won't? Am I not your husband—? [A knock is heard at the outer door.]

Nora [starting]. Did you hear—?

Helmer [going into the hall]. Who is it?

Rank [outside]. It is I. May I come in for a moment?

Helmer [in a fretful whisper]. Oh, what does he want now? [Aloud.] Wait a minute! [Unlocks the door.] Come, that's kind of you not to pass by our door.

Rank. I thought I heard your voice, and felt as if I should like to look in. [With a swift glance round.] Ah, yes!—these dear familiar rooms. You are very happy and cosy in here, you two.

Helmer. It seems to me that you looked after yourself pretty well upstairs too.

Rank. Excellently. Why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't one enjoy everything in this world?—at any rate as much as one can, and as long as one can. The wine was capital—

Helmer. Especially the champagne.

Rank. So you noticed that too? It is almost incredible how much I managed to put away!

Nora. Torvald drank a great deal of champagne tonight too.

Rank. Did he?

Nora. Yes, and he is always in such good spirits afterwards.

Rank. Well, why should one not enjoy a merry evening after a well-spent day?

Helmer. Well spent? I am afraid I can't take credit for that.

Rank [clapping him on the back]. But I can, you know!

Nora. Doctor Rank, you must have been occupied with some scientific investigation today.

Rank. Exactly.

Helmer. Just listen!—little Nora talking about scientific investigations!

Nora. And may I congratulate you on the result?

Rank. Indeed you may.

Nora. Was it favourable, then?

Rank. The best possible, for both doctor and patient—certainty.

Nora [quickly and searchingly]. Certainty?

Rank. Absolute certainty. So wasn't I entitled to make a merry evening of it after that?

Nora. Yes, you certainly were, Doctor Rank.

Helmer. I think so too, so long as you don't have to pay for it in the morning.

Rank. Oh well, one can't have anything in this life without paying for it.

Nora. Doctor Rank—are you fond of fancy-dress balls?

Rank. Yes, if there is a fine lot of pretty costumes.

Nora. Tell me—what shall we two wear at the next?

Helmer. Little featherbrain!—are you thinking of the next already?

Rank. We two? Yes, I can tell you. You shall go as a good fairy—

Helmer. Yes, but what do you suggest as an appropriate costume for that?

Rank. Let your wife go dressed just as she is in everyday life.

Helmer. That was really very prettily turned. But can't you tell us what you will be?

Rank. Yes, my dear friend, I have quite made up my mind about that.

Helmer. Well?

Rank. At the next fancy-dress ball I shall be invisible.

Helmer. That's a good joke!

Rank. There is a big black hat—have you never heard of hats that make you invisible? If you put one on, no one can see you.

Helmer [suppressing a smile]. Yes, you are quite right.

Rank. But I am clean forgetting what I came for. Helmer, give me a cigar—one of the dark Havanas.

Helmer. With the greatest pleasure. [Offers him his case.]

Rank [takes a cigar and cuts off the end]. Thanks.

Nora [striking a match]. Let me give you a light.

Rank. Thank you. [She holds the match for him to light his cigar.] And now goodbye!

Helmer. Goodbye, goodbye, dear old man!

Nora. Sleep well, Doctor Rank.

Rank. Thank you for that wish.

Nora. Wish me the same.

Rank. You? Well, if you want me to sleep well! And thanks for the light. [He nods to them both and goes out.]

Helmer [in a subdued voice]. He has drunk more than he ought.

Nora [absently]. Maybe. [HELMER takes a bunch of keys out of his pocket and goes into the hall.] Torvald! what are you going to do there?

Helmer. Emptying the letter-box; it is quite full; there will be no room to put the newspaper in tomorrow morning.

Nora. Are you going to work tonight?

Helmer. You know quite well I'm not. What is this? Someone has been at the lock.

Nora. At the lock—?

Helmer. Yes, someone has. What can it mean? I should never have thought the maid—. Here is a broken hairpin. Nora, it is one of yours.

Nora [quickly]. Then it must have been the children—

Helmer. Then you must get them out of those ways. There, at last I have got it open. [Takes out the contents of the letter-box, and calls to the kitchen.] Helen!—Helen, put out the light over the front door. [Goes back into the room and shuts the door into the hall. He holds out his hand full of letters.] Look at that—look what a heap of them there are. [Turning them over.] What on earth is that?

Nora [at the window]. The letter—No! Torvald, no!

Helmer. Two cards—of Rank's.

Nora. Of Doctor Rank's?

Helmer [looking at them]. Doctor Rank. They were on the top. He must have put them in when he went out.

Nora. Is there anything written on them?

Helmer. There is a black cross over the name. Look there—what an uncomfortable idea! It looks as if he were announcing his own death.

Nora. It is just what he is doing.

Helmer. What? Do you know anything about it? Has he said anything to you?

Nora. Yes. He told me that when the cards came it would be his leave-taking from us. He means to shut himself up and die.

Helmer. My poor old friend! Certainly I knew we should not have him very long with us. But so soon! And so he hides himself away like a wounded animal.

Nora. If it has to happen, it is best it should be without a word—don't you think so, Torvald?

Helmer [walking up and down]. He had so grown into our lives. I can't think of him as having gone out of them. He, with his sufferings and his loneliness, was like a cloudy background to our sunlit happiness. Well, perhaps it is best so. For him, anyway. [Standing still.] And perhaps for us too, Nora. We two are thrown quite upon

each other now. [Puts his arms round her.] My darling wife, I don't feel as if I could hold you tight enough. Do you know, Nora, I have often wished that you might be threatened by some great danger, so that I might risk my life's blood, and everything, for your sake.

Nora [disengages herself, and says firmly and decidedly]. Now you must read your letters, Torvald.

Helmer. No, no; not tonight. I want to be with you, my darling wife.

Nora. With the thought of your friend's death—

Helmer. You are right, it has affected us both. Something ugly has come between us—the thought of the horrors of death. We must try and rid our minds of that. Until then—we will each go to our own room.

Nora [hanging on his neck]. Goodnight, Torvald—Goodnight!

Helmer [kissing her on the forehead]. Goodnight, my little singing-bird. Sleep sound, Nora. Now I will read my letters through. [He takes his letters and goes into his room, shutting the door after him.]

Nora [gropes distractedly about, seizes HELMER'S domino, throws it round her, while she says in quick, hoarse, spasmodic whispers]. Never to see him again. Never! Never! [Puts her shawl over her head.] Never to see my children again either—never again. Never! Never!—Ah! the icy, black water—the unfathomable depths—If only it were over! He has got it now—now he is reading it. Goodbye, Torvald and my children! [She is about to rush out through the hall, when HELMER opens his door hurriedly and stands with an open letter in his hand.]

Helmer. Nora!

Nora. Ah!—

Helmer. What is this? Do you know what is in this letter?

Nora. Yes, I know. Let me go! Let me get out!

Helmer [holding her back]. Where are you going?

Nora [trying to get free]. You shan't save me, Torvald!

Helmer [reeling]. True? Is this true, that I read here? Horrible! No, no—it is impossible that it can be true.

Nora. It is true. I have loved you above everything else in the world.

Helmer. Oh, don't let us have any silly excuses.

Nora [taking a step towards him]. Torvald—!

Helmer. Miserable creature—what have you done?

Nora. Let me go. You shall not suffer for my sake. You shall not take it upon yourself.

Helmer. No tragic airs, please. [Locks the hall door.] Here you shall stay and give me an explanation. Do you understand what you have done? Answer me! Do you understand what you have done?

Nora [looks steadily at him and says with a growing look of coldness in her face]. Yes, now I am beginning to understand thoroughly.

Helmer [walking about the room]. What a horrible awakening! All these eight years—she who was my joy and pride—a hypocrite, a liar—worse, worse—a criminal! The unutterable ugliness of it all!—For shame! For shame! [NORA is silent and looks steadily at him. He stops in front of her.] I ought to have suspected that something of the sort would happen. I ought to have foreseen it. All your father's want of principle—be silent!—all your father's want of principle has come out in you. No religion, no morality, no sense of duty—. How I am punished for having winked at what he did! I did it for your sake, and this is how you repay me.

Nora. Yes, that's just it.

Helmer. Now you have destroyed all my happiness. You have ruined all my future. It is horrible to think of! I am in the power of an unscrupulous man; he can do what he likes with me, ask anything he likes of me, give me any orders he pleases—I dare not refuse. And I must sink to such miserable depths because of a thoughtless woman!

Nora. When I am out of the way, you will be free.

Helmer. No fine speeches, please. Your father had always plenty of those ready, too. What good would it be to me if you were out of the way, as you say? Not the slightest. He can make the affair known everywhere; and if he does, I may be falsely suspected of having

been a party to your criminal action. Very likely people will think I was behind it all—that it was I who prompted you! And I have to thank you for all this—you whom I have cherished during the whole of our married life. Do you understand now what it is you have done for me?

Nora [coldly and quietly]. Yes.

Helmer. It is so incredible that I can't take it in. But we must come to some understanding. Take off that shawl. Take it off, I tell you. I must try and appease him some way or another. The matter must be hushed up at any cost. And as for you and me, it must appear as if everything between us were just as before—but naturally only in the eyes of the world. You will still remain in my house, that is a matter of course. But I shall not allow you to bring up the children; I dare not trust them to you. To think that I should be obliged to say so to one whom I have loved so dearly, and whom I still—. No, that is all over. From this moment happiness is not the question; all that concerns us is to save the remains, the fragments, the appearance—

[A ring is heard at the front-door bell.]

Helmer [with a start]. What is that? So late! Can the worst—? Can he—? Hide yourself, Nora. Say you are ill.

[NORA stands motionless. HELMER goes and unlocks the hall door.]

Maid [half-dressed, comes to the door]. A letter for the mistress.

Helmer. Give it to me. [Takes the letter, and shuts the door.] Yes, it is from him. You shall not have it; I will read it myself.

Nora. Yes, read it.

Helmer [standing by the lamp]. I scarcely have the courage to do it. It may mean ruin for both of us. No, I must know. [Tears open the letter, runs his eye over a few lines, looks at a paper enclosed, and gives a shout of joy.] Nora! [She looks at him questioningly.] Nora!—No, I must read it once again—. Yes, it is true! I am saved! Nora, I am saved!

Nora. And I?

Helmer. You too, of course; we are both saved, both you and I. Look, he sends you your bond back. He says he regrets and



repents—that a happy change in his life—never mind what he says! We are saved, Nora! No one can do anything to you. Oh, Nora, Nora!—no, first I must destroy these hateful things. Let me see—. [Takes a look at the bond.] No, no, I won't look at it. The whole thing shall be nothing but a bad dream to me. [Tears up the bond and both letters, throws them all into the stove, and watches them burn.] There—now it doesn't exist any longer. He says that since Christmas Eve you—. These must have been three dreadful days for you, Nora.

Nora. I have fought a hard fight these three days.

Helmer. And suffered agonies, and seen no way out but—. No, we won't call any of the horrors to mind. We will only shout with joy, and keep saying, "It's all over! It's all over!" Listen to me, Nora. You don't seem to realise that it is all over. What is this?—such a cold, set face! My poor little Nora, I quite understand; you don't feel as if you could believe that I have forgiven you. But it is true, Nora, I swear it; I have forgiven you everything. I know that what you did, you did out of love for me.

Nora. That is true.

Helmer. You have loved me as a wife ought to love her husband. Only you had not sufficient knowledge to judge of the means you used. But do you suppose you are any the less dear to me, because you don't understand how to act on your own responsibility? No, no; only lean on me; I will advise you and direct you. I should not be a man if this womanly helplessness did not just give you a double attractiveness in my eyes. You must not think anymore about the hard things I said in my first moment of consternation, when I thought everything was going to overwhelm me. I have forgiven you, Nora; I swear to you I have forgiven you.

Nora. Thank you for your forgiveness. [She goes out through the door to the right.]

Helmer. No, don't go—. [Looks in.] What are you doing in there?

Nora [from within]. Taking off my fancy dress.

Helmer [standing at the open door]. Yes, do. Try and calm yourself, and make your mind easy again, my frightened little

singing-bird. Be at rest, and feel secure; I have broad wings to shelter you under. [Walks up and down by the door.] How warm and cosy our home is, Nora. Here is shelter for you; here I will protect you like a hunted dove that I have saved from a hawk's claws; I will bring peace to your poor beating heart. It will come, little by little, Nora, believe me. Tomorrow morning you will look upon it all quite differently; soon everything will be just as it was before. Very soon you won't need me to assure you that I have forgiven you; you will yourself feel the certainty that I have done so. Can you suppose I should ever think of such a thing as repudiating you, or even reproaching you? You have no idea what a true man's heart is like, Nora. There is something so indescribably sweet and satisfying, to a man, in the knowledge that he has forgiven his wife—forgiven her freely, and with all his heart. It seems as if that had made her, as it were, doubly his own; he has given her a new life, so to speak; and she has in a way become both wife and child to him. So you shall be for me after this, my little scared, helpless darling. Have no anxiety about anything, Nora; only be frank and open with me, and I will serve as will and conscience both to you—. What is this? Not gone to bed? Have you changed your things?

Nora [in everyday dress]. Yes, Torvald, I have changed my things now.

Helmer. But what for?—so late as this.

Nora. I shall not sleep tonight.

Helmer. But, my dear Nora—

Nora [looking at her watch]. It is not so very late. Sit down here, Torvald. You and I have much to say to one another. [She sits down at one side of the table.]

Helmer. Nora—what is this?—this cold, set face?

Nora. Sit down. It will take some time; I have a lot to talk over with you.

Helmer [sits down at the opposite side of the table]. You alarm me, Nora!—and I don't understand you.

Nora. No, that is just it. You don't understand me, and I have never understood you either—before tonight. No, you mustn't interrupt

me. You must simply listen to what I say. Torvald, this is a settling of accounts.

Helmer. What do you mean by that?

Nora [after a short silence]. Isn't there one thing that strikes you as strange in our sitting here like this?

Helmer. What is that?

Nora. We have been married now eight years. Does it not occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation?

Helmer. What do you mean by serious?

Nora. In all these eight years—longer than that—from the very beginning of our acquaintance, we have never exchanged a word on any serious subject.

Helmer. Was it likely that I would be continually and forever telling you about worries that you could not help me to bear?

Nora. I am not speaking about business matters. I say that we have never sat down in earnest together to try and get at the bottom of anything.

Helmer. But, dearest Nora, would it have been any good to you?

Nora. That is just it; you have never understood me. I have been greatly wronged, Torvald—first by papa and then by you.

Helmer. What! By us two—by us two, who have loved you better than anyone else in the world?

Nora [shaking her head]. You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me.

Helmer. Nora, what do I hear you saying?

Nora. It is perfectly true, Torvald. When I was at home with papa, he told me his opinion about everything, and so I had the same opinions; and if I differed from him I concealed the fact, because he would not have liked it. He called me his doll-child, and he played with me just as I used to play with my dolls. And when I came to live with you—

Helmer. What sort of an expression is that to use about our marriage?

Nora [undisturbed]. I mean that I was simply transferred from

papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as your else I pretended to, I am really not quite sure which—I think sometimes the one and sometimes the other. When I look back on it, it seems to me as if I had been living here like a poor woman—just from hand to mouth. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so. You and papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life.

Helmer. How unreasonable and how ungrateful you are, Nora! Have you not been happy here?

Nora. No, I have never been happy. I thought I was, but it has never really been so.

Helmer. Not—not happy!

Nora. No, only merry. And you have always been so kind to me. But our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was papa's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been, Torvald.

Helmer. There is some truth in what you say—exaggerated and strained as your view of it is. But for the future it shall be different. Playtime shall be over, and lesson-time shall begin.

Nora. Whose lessons? Mine, or the children's?

Helmer. Both yours and the children's, my darling Nora.

Nora. Alas, Torvald, you are not the man to educate me into being a proper wife for you.

Helmer. And you can say that!

Nora. And I—how am I fitted to bring up the children?

Helmer. Nora!

Nora. Didn't you say so yourself a little while ago—that you dare not trust me to bring them up?

Helmer. In a moment of anger! Why do you pay any heed to that?

Nora. Indeed, you were perfectly right. I am not fit for the task. There is another task I must undertake first. I must try and educate

myself—you are not the man to help me in that. I must do that for myself. And that is why I am going to leave you now.

Helmer [springing up]. What do you say?

Nora. I must stand quite alone, if I am to understand myself and everything about me. It is for that reason that I cannot remain with you any longer.

Helmer. Nora, Nora!

Nora. I am going away from here now, at once. I am sure Christine will take me in for the night—

Helmer. You are out of your mind! I won't allow it! I forbid you!

Nora. It is no use forbidding me anything any longer. I will take with me what belongs to myself. I will take nothing from you, either now or later.

Helmer. What sort of madness is this!

Nora. Tomorrow I shall go home—I mean, to my old home. It will be easiest for me to find something to do there.

Helmer. You blind, foolish woman!

Nora. I must try and get some sense, Torvald.

Helmer. To desert your home, your husband and your children! And you don't consider what people will say!

Nora. I cannot consider that at all. I only know that it is necessary for me.

Helmer. It's shocking. This is how you would neglect your most sacred duties.

Nora. What do you consider my most sacred duties?

Helmer. Do I need to tell you that? Are they not your duties to your husband and your children?

Nora. I have other duties just as sacred.

Helmer. That you have not. What duties could those be?

Nora. Duties to myself.

Helmer. Before all else, you are a wife and a mother.

Nora. I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are—or, at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be

found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.

Helmer. Can you not understand your place in your own home? Have you not a reliable guide in such matters as that?—have you no religion?

Nora. I am afraid, Torvald, I do not exactly know what religion is.

Helmer. What are you saying?

Nora. I know nothing but what the clergyman said, when I went to be confirmed. He told us that religion was this, and that, and the other. When I am away from all this, and am alone, I will look into that matter too. I will see if what the clergyman said is true, or at all events if it is true for me.

Helmer. This is unheard of in a girl of your age! But if religion cannot lead you aright, let me try and awaken your conscience. I suppose you have some moral sense? Or—answer me—am I to think you have none?

Nora. I assure you, Torvald, that is not an easy question to answer. I really don't know. The thing perplexes me altogether. I only know that you and I look at it in quite a different light. I am learning, too, that the law is quite another thing from what I supposed; but I find it impossible to convince myself that the law is right. According to it a woman has no right to spare her old dying father, or to save her husband's life. I can't believe that.

Helmer. You talk like a child. You don't understand the conditions of the world in which you live.

Nora. No, I don't. But now I am going to try. I am going to see if I can make out who is right, the world or I.

Helmer. You are ill, Nora; you are delirious; I almost think you are out of your mind.

Nora. I have never felt my mind so clear and certain as tonight.

Helmer. And is it with a clear and certain mind that you forsake your husband and your children?

Nora. Yes, it is.

Helmer. Then there is only one possible explanation.

Nora. What is that?

Helmer. You do not love me anymore.

Nora. No, that is just it.

Helmer. Nora!—and you can say that?

Nora. It gives me great pain, Torvald, for you have always been so kind to me, but I cannot help it. I do not love you any more.

Helmer [regaining his composure]. Is that a clear and certain conviction too?

Nora. Yes, absolutely clear and certain. That is the reason why I will not stay here any longer.

Helmer. And can you tell me what I have done to forfeit your love?

Nora. Yes, indeed I can. It was tonight, when the wonderful thing did not happen; then I saw you were not the man I had thought you were.

Helmer. Explain yourself better. I don't understand you.

Nora. I have waited so patiently for eight years; for, goodness knows, I knew very well that wonderful things don't happen every day. Then this horrible misfortune came upon me; and then I felt quite certain that the wonderful thing was going to happen at last. When Krogstad's letter was lying out there, never for a moment did I imagine that you would consent to accept this man's conditions. I was so absolutely certain that you would say to him: Publish the thing to the whole world. And when that was done—

Helmer. Yes, what then?—when I had exposed my wife to shame and disgrace?

Nora. When that was done, I was so absolutely certain, you would come forward and take everything upon yourself, and say: I am the guilty one.

Helmer. Nora—!

Nora. You mean that I would never have accepted such a sacrifice on your part? No, of course not. But what would my assurances have been worth against yours? That was the wonderful thing which I hoped for and feared; and it was to prevent that, that I wanted to kill myself.

Helmer. I would gladly work night and day for you, Nora—bear

sorrow and want for your sake. But no man would sacrifice his honour for the one he loves.

Nora. It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done.

Helmer. Oh, you think and talk like a heedless child.

Nora. Maybe. But you neither think nor talk like the man I could bind myself to. As soon as your fear was over—and it was not fear for what threatened me, but for what might happen to you—when the whole thing was past, as far as you were concerned it was exactly as if nothing at all had happened. Exactly as before, I was your little skylark, your doll, which you would in future treat with doubly gentle care, because it was so brittle and fragile. [Getting up.] Torvald—it was then it dawned upon me that for eight years I had been living here with a strange man, and had borne him three children—. Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself into little bits!

Helmer [sadly]. I see, I see. An abyss has opened between us—there is no denying it. But, Nora, would it not be possible to fill it up?

Nora. As I am now, I am no wife for you.

Helmer. I have it in me to become a different man.

Nora. Perhaps—if your doll is taken away from you.

Helmer. But to part!—to part from you! No, no, Nora, I can't understand that idea.

Nora [going out to the right]. That makes it all the more certain that it must be done. [She comes back with her cloak and hat and a small bag which she puts on a chair by the table.]

Helmer. Nora, Nora, not now! Wait until tomorrow.

Nora [putting on her cloak]. I cannot spend the night in a strange man's room.

Helmer. But can't we live here like brother and sister—?

Nora [putting on her hat]. You know very well that would not last long. [Puts the shawl round her.] Goodbye, Torvald. I won't see the little ones. I know they are in better hands than mine. As I am now, I can be of no use to them.

Helmer. But some day, Nora—some day?



Nora. How can I tell? I have no idea what is going to become of me.

Helmer. But you are my wife, whatever becomes of you.

Nora. Listen, Torvald. I have heard that when a wife deserts her husband's house, as I am doing now, he is legally freed from all obligations towards her. In any case, I set you free from all your obligations. You are not to feel yourself bound in the slightest way, any more than I shall. There must be perfect freedom on both sides. See, here is your ring back. Give me mine.

Helmer. That too?

Nora. That too.

Helmer. Here it is.

Nora. That's right. Now it is all over. I have put the keys here. The maids know all about everything in the house—better than I do. Tomorrow, after I have left her, Christine will come here and pack up my own things that I brought with me from home. I will have them sent after me.

Helmer. All over! All over!—Nora, shall you never think of me again?

Nora. I know I shall often think of you, the children, and this house.

Helmer. May I write to you, Nora?

Nora. No—never. You must not do that.

Helmer. But at least let me send you—

Nora. Nothing—nothing—

Helmer. Let me help you if you are in want.

Nora. No. I can receive nothing from a stranger.

Helmer. Nora—can I never be anything more than a stranger to you?

Nora [taking her bag]. Ah, Torvald, the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen.

Helmer. Tell me what that would be!

Nora. Both you and I would have to be so changed that—. Oh, Torvald, I don't believe any longer in wonderful things happening.

Helmer. But I will believe in it. Tell me! So changed that—?

Nora. That our life together would be a real wedlock. Goodbye. [She goes out through the hall.]

Helmer [sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands]. Nora! Nora! [Looks round, and rises.] Empty. She is gone. [A hope flashes across his mind.] The most wonderful thing of all—?

[The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.]

**Henrik Johan Ibsen** (20 March 1828 – 23 May 1906) was a major 19th-century Norwegian playwright, theatre director, and poet. He is often referred to as “the father of realism” and is one of the founders of Modernism in theatre. He is the most frequently performed dramatist in the world after Shakespeare, and *A Doll's House* became the world's most performed play by the early 20th century.

# 73. Trifles by Susan Glaspell

Published: 1916

## CHARACTERS

- GEORGE HENDERSON (County Attorney)
- HENRY PETERS (Sheriff)
- LEWIS HALE, A neighboring farmer
- MRS PETERS
- MRS HALE

SCENE: *The kitchen is the now abandoned farmhouse of JOHN WRIGHT, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order—unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table—other signs of incompleted work. At the rear the outer door opens and the SHERIFF comes in followed by the COUNTY ATTORNEY and HALE. The SHERIFF and HALE are men in middle life, the COUNTY ATTORNEY is a young man; all are much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women—the SHERIFF'S wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face. MRS HALE is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters. The women have come in slowly, and stand close together near the door.*

COUNTY ATTORNEY: *(rubbing his hands)* This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies.

MRS PETERS: *(after taking a step forward)* I'm not – cold.

SHERIFF: *(unbuttoning his overcoat and stepping away from the stove as if to mark the beginning of official business)* Now, Mr Hale,

before we move things about, you explain to Mr Henderson just what you saw when you came here yesterday morning.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: By the way, has anything been moved? Are things just as you left them yesterday?

SHERIFF: (*looking about*) It's just the same. When it dropped below zero last night I thought I'd better send Frank out this morning to make a fire for us – no use getting pneumonia with a big case on, but I told him not to touch anything except the stove – and you know Frank.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Somebody should have been left here yesterday.

SHERIFF: Oh – yesterday. When I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy – I want you to know I had my hands full yesterday. I knew you could get back from Omaha by today and as long as I went over everything here myself –

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Well, Mr Hale, tell just what happened when you came here yesterday morning.

HALE: Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes. We came along the road from my place and as I got here I said, I'm going to see if I can't get John Wright to go in with me on a party telephone. I spoke to Wright about it once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet—I guess you know about how much he talked himself; but I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it before his wife, though I said to Harry that I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John –

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Let's talk about that later, Mr Hale. I do want to talk about that, but tell now just what happened when you got to the house.

HALE: I didn't hear or see anything; I knocked at the door, and still it was all quiet inside. I knew they must be up, it was past eight o'clock. So I knocked again, and I thought I heard somebody say, 'Come in.' I wasn't sure, I'm not sure yet, but I opened the door—this door (*indicating the door by which the two women are still standing*) and there in that rocker – (*pointing to it*) sat Mrs Wright.

(*They all look at the rocker.*)

COUNTY ATTORNEY: What – was she doing?

HALE: She was rockin' back and forth. She had her apron in her hand and was kind of – pleating it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: And how did she – look?

HALE: Well, she looked queer.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: How do you mean – queer?

HALE: Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: How did she seem to feel about your coming?

HALE: Why, I don't think she minded – one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, 'How do, Mrs Wright it's cold, ain't it?' And she said, 'Is it?' – and went on kind of pleating at her apron. Well, I was surprised; she didn't ask me to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there, not even looking at me, so I said, 'I want to see John.' And then she – laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh. I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said a little sharp: 'Can't I see John?' 'No', she says, kind o' dull like. 'Ain't he home?' says I. 'Yes', says she, 'he's home'. 'Then why can't I see him?' I asked her, out of patience. "Cause he's dead", says she. 'Dead?' says I. She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth. 'Why – where is he?' says I, not knowing what to say. She just pointed upstairs—like that (*himself pointing to the room above*) I got up, with the idea of going up there. I walked from there to here—then I says, 'Why, what did he die of?' 'He died of a rope round his neck', says she, and just went on pleatin' at her apron. Well, I went out and called Harry. I thought I might – need help. We went upstairs and there he was lyin' –

COUNTY ATTORNEY: I think I'd rather have you go into that upstairs, where you can point it all out. Just go on now with the rest of the story.

HALE: Well, my first thought was to get that rope off. It looked ... (*stops, his face twitches*) ... but Harry, he went up to him, and he said, 'No, he's dead all right, and we'd better not touch anything.'

So we went back down stairs. She was still sitting that same way. 'Has anybody been notified?' I asked. 'No', says she unconcerned. 'Who did this, Mrs Wright?' said Harry. He said it business-like—and she stopped pleatin' of her apron. 'I don't know', she says. 'You don't know?' says Harry. 'No', says she. 'Weren't you sleepin' in the bed with him?' says Harry. 'Yes', says she, 'but I was on the inside'. 'Somebody slipped a rope round his neck and strangled him and you didn't wake up?' says Harry. 'I didn't wake up', she said after him. We must 'a looked as if we didn't see how that could be, for after a minute she said, 'I sleep sound'. Harry was going to ask her more questions but I said maybe we ought to let her tell her story first to the coroner, or the sheriff, so Harry went fast as he could to Rivers' place, where there's a telephone.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: And what did Mrs Wright do when she knew that you had gone for the coroner?

HALE: She moved from that chair to this one over here (*pointing to a small chair in the corner*) and just sat there with her hands held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me – scared, (*the COUNTY ATTORNEY, who has had his notebook out, makes a note*) I dunno, maybe it wasn't scared. I wouldn't like to say it was. Soon Harry got back, and then Dr Lloyd came, and you, Mr Peters, and so I guess that's all I know that you don't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*looking around*) I guess we'll go upstairs first – and then out to the barn and around there, (*to the SHERIFF*) You're convinced that there was nothing important here – nothing that would point to any motive.

SHERIFF: Nothing here but kitchen things.

(*The COUNTY ATTORNEY, after again looking around the kitchen, opens the door of a cupboard closet. He gets up on a chair and looks on a shelf. Pulls his hand away, sticky.*)

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Here's a nice mess.

(*The women draw nearer.*)

MRS PETERS: *(to the other woman)* Oh, her fruit; it did freeze, *(to the LAWYER)* She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.

SHERIFF: Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about.

HALE: Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.

*(The two women move a little closer together.)*

COUNTY ATTORNEY: *(with the gallantry of a young politician)* And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies? *(the women do not unbend. He goes to the sink, takes a dipperful of water from the pail and pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on the roller-towel, turns it for a cleaner place)* Dirty towels! *(kicks his foot against the pans under the sink)* Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?

MRS HALE: *(stiffly)* There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: To be sure. And yet *(with a little bow to her)* I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels. *(He gives it a pull to expose its length again.)*

MRS HALE: Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Ah, loyal to your sex, I see. But you and Mrs Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends, too.

MRS HALE: *(shaking her head)* I've not seen much of her of late years. I've not been in this house – it's more than a year.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: And why was that? You didn't like her?

MRS HALE: I liked her all well enough. Farmers' wives have their hands full, Mr Henderson. And then –

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Yes – ?

MRS HALE: *(looking about)* It never seemed a very cheerful place.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: No – it's not cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the homemaking instinct.

MRS HALE: Well, I don't know as Wright had, either.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: You mean that they didn't get on very well?

MRS HALE: No, I don't mean anything. But I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: I'd like to talk more of that a little later. I want to get the lay of things upstairs now. *(He goes to the left, where three steps lead to a stair door.)*

SHERIFF: I suppose anything Mrs Peters does'll be all right. She was to take in some clothes for her, you know, and a few little things. We left in such a hurry yesterday.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Yes, but I would like to see what you take, Mrs Peters, and keep an eye out for anything that might be of use to us.

MRS PETERS: Yes, Mr Henderson.

*(The women listen to the men's steps on the stairs, then look about the kitchen.)*

MRS HALE: I'd hate to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticising.

*(She arranges the pans under sink which the LAWYER had shoved out of place.)*

MRS PETERS: Of course it's no more than their duty.

MRS HALE: Duty's all right, but I guess that deputy sheriff that came out to make the fire might have got a little of this on. *(gives the roller towel a pull)* Wish I'd thought of that sooner. Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up when she had to come away in such a hurry.

MRS PETERS: *(who has gone to a small table in the left rear corner of the room, and lifted one end of a towel that covers a pan)* She had bread set. *(Stands still.)*

MRS HALE: *(eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the bread-box, which is on a low shelf at the other side of the room. Moves slowly toward it)* She was going to put this in there, *(picks up loaf, then abruptly drops it. In a manner of returning to familiar things)* It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. *(gets up on the chair and looks)* I think there's some here that's all right, Mrs Peters. Yes – here; *(holding it toward the window)* this is cherries, too. *(looking*



again) I declare I believe that's the only one. (*gets down, bottle in her hand. Goes to the sink and wipes it off on the outside*) She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer.

(*She puts the bottle on the big kitchen table, center of the room. With a sigh, is about to sit down in the rocking-chair. Before she is seated realizes what chair it is; with a slow look at it, steps back. The chair which she has touched rocks back and forth.*)

MRS PETERS: Well, I must get those things from the front room closet, (*she goes to the door at the right, but after looking into the other room, steps back*) You coming with me, Mrs Hale? You could help me carry them.

(*They go in the other room; reappear, MRS PETERS carrying a dress and skirt, MRS HALE following with a pair of shoes.*)

MRS PETERS: My, it's cold in there.

(*She puts the clothes on the big table, and hurries to the stove.*)

MRS HALE: (*examining the skirt*) Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that – oh, that was thirty years ago. This all you was to take in?

MRS PETERS: She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door. (*opens stair door and looks*) Yes, here it is.

(*Quickly shuts door leading upstairs.*)

MRS HALE: (*abruptly moving toward her*) Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS: Yes, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE: Do you think she did it?

MRS PETERS: (*in a frightened voice*) Oh, I don't know.

MRS HALE: Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit.

MRS PETERS: *(starts to speak, glances up, where footsteps are heard in the room above. In a low voice)* Mr Peters says it looks bad for her. Mr Henderson is awful sarcastic in a speech and he'll make fun of her sayin' she didn't wake up.

MRS HALE: Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake when they was slipping that rope under his neck.

MRS PETERS: No, it's strange. It must have been done awful crafty and still. They say it was such a – funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.

MRS HALE: That's just what Mr Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand.

MRS PETERS: Mr Henderson said coming out that what was needed for the case was a motive; something to show anger, or – sudden feeling.

MRS HALE: *(who is standing by the table)* Well, I don't see any signs of anger around here, *(she puts her hand on the dish towel which lies on the table, stands looking down at table, one half of which is clean, the other half messy)* It's wiped to here, *(makes a move as if to finish work, then turns and looks at loaf of bread outside the breadbox. Drops towel. In that voice of coming back to familiar things.)* Wonder how they are finding things upstairs. I hope she had it a little more red-up up there. You know, it seems kind of sneaking. Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her!

MRS PETERS: But Mrs Hale, the law is the law.

MRS HALE: I s'pose 'tis, *(unbuttoning her coat)* Better loosen up your things, Mrs Peters. You won't feel them when you go out.

*(MRS PETERS takes off her fur tippet, goes to hang it on hook at back of room, stands looking at the under part of the small corner table.)*

MRS PETERS: She was piecing a quilt. *(She brings the large sewing basket and they look at the bright pieces.)*

MRS HALE: It's log cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it? I wonder if she was goin' to quilt it or just knot it?

*(Footsteps have been heard coming down the stairs. The SHERIFF enters followed by HALE and the COUNTY ATTORNEY.)*

SHERIFF: They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it! *(The men laugh, the women look abashed.)*

COUNTY ATTORNEY: *(rubbing his hands over the stove)* Frank's fire didn't do much up there, did it? Well, let's go out to the barn and get that cleared up. *(The men go outside.)*

MRS HALE: *(resentfully)* I don't know as there's anything so strange, our takin' up our time with little things while we're waiting for them to get the evidence. *(she sits down at the big table smoothing out a block with decision)* I don't see as it's anything to laugh about.

MRS PETERS: *(apologetically)* Of course they've got awful important things on their minds.

*(Pulls up a chair and joins MRS HALE at the table.)*

MRS HALE: *(examining another block)* Mrs Peters, look at this one. Here, this is the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It's all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about!

*(After she has said this they look at each other, then start to glance back at the door. After an instant MRS HALE has pulled at a knot and ripped the sewing.)*

MRS PETERS: Oh, what are you doing, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE: *(mildly)* Just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good. *(threading a needle)* Bad sewing always made me fidgety.

MRS PETERS: *(nervously)* I don't think we ought to touch things.

MRS HALE: I'll just finish up this end. *(suddenly stopping and leaning forward)* Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS: Yes, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE: What do you suppose she was so nervous about?

MRS PETERS: Oh—I don't know. I don't know as she was nervous. I sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired. *(MRS HALE starts*

to say something, looks at MRS PETERS, then goes on sewing) Well I must get these things wrapped up. They may be through sooner than we think, (*putting apron and other things together*) I wonder where I can find a piece of paper, and string.

MRS HALE: In that cupboard, maybe.

MRS PETERS: (*looking in cupboard*) Why, here's a bird-cage, (*holds it up*) Did she have a bird, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE: Why, I don't know whether she did or not – I've not been here for so long. There was a man around last year selling canaries cheap, but I don't know as she took one; maybe she did. She used to sing real pretty herself.

MRS PETERS: (*glancing around*) Seems funny to think of a bird here. But she must have had one, or why would she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it.

MRS HALE: I s'pose maybe the cat got it.

MRS PETERS: No, she didn't have a cat. She's got that feeling some people have about cats – being afraid of them. My cat got in her room and she was real upset and asked me to take it out.

MRS HALE: My sister Bessie was like that. Queer, ain't it?

MRS PETERS: (*examining the cage*) Why, look at this door. It's broke. One hinge is pulled apart.

MRS HALE: (*looking too*) Looks as if someone must have been rough with it.

MRS PETERS: Why, yes.

(*She brings the cage forward and puts it on the table.*)

MRS HALE: I wish if they're going to find any evidence they'd be about it. I don't like this place.

MRS PETERS: But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs Hale. It would be lonesome for me sitting here alone.

MRS HALE: It would, wouldn't it? (*dropping her sewing*) But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs Peters. I wish I had come over sometimes when she was here. I – (*looking around the room*) – wish I had.

MRS PETERS: But of course you were awful busy, Mrs Hale – your house and your children.

MRS HALE: I could've come. I stayed away because

it weren't cheerful – and that's why I ought to have come. I – I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now – *(shakes her head)*

MRS PETERS: Well, you mustn't reproach yourself, Mrs Hale. Somehow we just don't see how it is with other folks until – something comes up.

MRS HALE: Not having children makes less work – but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in. Did you know John Wright, Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS: Not to know him; I've seen him in town. They say he was a good man.

MRS HALE: Yes – good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him – *(shivers)* Like a raw wind that gets to the bone, *(pauses, her eye falling on the cage)* I should think she would 'a wanted a bird. But what do you suppose went with it?

MRS PETERS: I don't know, unless it got sick and died.

*(She reaches over and swings the broken door, swings it again, both women watch it.)*

MRS HALE: You weren't raised round here, were you? *(MRS PETERS shakes her head)* You didn't know – her?

MRS PETERS: Not till they brought her yesterday.

MRS HALE: She – come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself – real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and – fluttery. How – she – did – change. *(silence; then as if struck by a happy thought and relieved to get back to everyday things)* Tell you what, Mrs Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind.

MRS PETERS: Why, I think that's a real nice idea, Mrs Hale. There couldn't possibly be any objection to it, could there? Now, just what would I take? I wonder if her patches are in here – and her things.

*(They look in the sewing basket.)*

MRS HALE: Here's some red. I expect this has got sewing things in

it. (*brings out a fancy box*) What a pretty box. Looks like something somebody would give you. Maybe her scissors are in here. (*Opens box. Suddenly puts her hand to her nose*) Why – (*MRS PETERS bends nearer, then turns her face away*) There's something wrapped up in this piece of silk.

MRS PETERS: Why, this isn't her scissors.

MRS HALE: (*lifting the silk*) Oh, Mrs Peters – it's –  
(*MRS PETERS bends closer.*)

MRS PETERS: It's the bird.

MRS HALE: (*jumping up*) But, Mrs Peters—look at it! It's neck! Look at its neck!

It's all – other side to.

MRS PETERS: Somebody – wrung – its – neck.

(*Their eyes meet. A look of growing comprehension, of horror. Steps are heard outside. MRS HALE slips box under quilt pieces, and sinks into her chair. Enter SHERIFF and COUNTY ATTORNEY. MRS PETERS rises.*)

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*as one turning from serious things to little pleasantries*) Well ladies, have you decided whether she was going to quilt it or knot it?

MRS PETERS: We think she was going to – knot it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Well, that's interesting, I'm sure. (*seeing the birdcage*) Has the bird flown?

MRS HALE: (*putting more quilt pieces over the box*) We think the – cat got it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*preoccupied*) Is there a cat?

(*MRS HALE glances in a quick covert way at MRS PETERS.*)

MRS PETERS: Well, not now. They're superstitious, you know. They leave.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*to SHERIFF PETERS, continuing an interrupted conversation*) No sign at all of anyone having come from the outside. Their own rope. Now let's go up again and go over it piece by piece. (*they start upstairs*) It would have to have been someone who knew just the –

(*MRS PETERS sits down. The two women sit there not looking at*

one another, but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back. When they talk now it is in the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they can not help saying it.)

MRS HALE: She liked the bird. She was going to bury it in that pretty box.

MRS PETERS: (*in a whisper*) When I was a girl – my kitten – there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes – and before I could get there – (*covers her face an instant*) If they hadn't held me back I would have – (*catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly*) – hurt him.

MRS HALE: (*with a slow look around her*) I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around, (*pause*) No, Wright wouldn't like the bird – a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that, too.

MRS PETERS: (*moving uneasily*) We don't know who killed the bird.

MRS HALE: I knew John Wright.

MRS PETERS: It was an awful thing was done in this house that night, Mrs Hale. Killing a man while he slept, slipping a rope around his neck that choked the life out of him.

MRS HALE: His neck. Choked the life out of him.

(*Her hand goes out and rests on the bird-cage.*)

MRS PETERS: (*with rising voice*) We don't know who killed him. We don't know.

MRS HALE: (*her own feeling not interrupted*) If there'd been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful—still, after the bird was still.

MRS PETERS: (*something within her speaking*) I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died – after he was two years old, and me with no other then –

MRS HALE: (*moving*) How soon do you suppose they'll be through, looking for the evidence?

MRS PETERS: I know what stillness is. (*pulling herself back*) The law has got to punish crime, Mrs Hale.

MRS HALE: (*not as if answering that*) I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang. (*a look around the room*) Oh, I wish I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?

MRS PETERS: (*looking upstairs*) We mustn't – take on.

MRS HALE: I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be – for women. I tell you, it's queer, Mrs Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things – it's all just a different kind of the same thing, (*brushes her eyes, noticing the bottle of fruit, reaches out for it*) If I was you, I wouldn't tell her her fruit was gone. Tell her it ain't. Tell her it's all right. Take this in to prove it to her. She – she may never know whether it was broke or not.

MRS PETERS: (*takes the bottle, looks about for something to wrap it in; takes petticoat from the clothes brought from the other room, very nervously begins winding this around the bottle. In a false voice*) My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a – dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with – with – wouldn't they *laugh*!

(*The men are heard coming down stairs.*)

MRS HALE: (*under her breath*) Maybe they would – maybe they wouldn't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: No, Peters, it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to women. If there was some definite thing. Something to show—something to make a story about—a thing that would connect up with this strange way of doing it—

(*The women's eyes meet for an instant.*  
*Enter HALE from outer door.*)

HALE: Well, I've got the team around. Pretty cold out there.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: I'm going to stay here a while by myself, (*to the SHERIFF*) You can send Frank out for me, can't you? I want to go over everything. I'm not satisfied that we can't do better.

SHERIFF: Do you want to see what Mrs Peters is going to take in?



*(The LAWYER goes to the table, picks up the apron, laughs.)*

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out. *(Moves a few things about, disturbing the quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back)* No, Mrs Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it that way, Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS: Not – just that way.

SHERIFF: *(chuckling)* Married to the law. *(moves toward the other room)* I just want you to come in here a minute, George. We ought to take a look at these windows.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: *(scoffingly)* Oh, windows!

SHERIFF: We'll be right out, Mr Hale.

*(HALE goes outside. The SHERIFF follows the COUNTY ATTORNEY into the other room. Then MRS HALE rises, hands tight together, looking intensely at MRS PETERS, whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting MRS HALE's. A moment MRS HALE holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly MRS PETERS throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room. MRS HALE snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat. Enter COUNTY ATTORNEY and SHERIFF.)*

COUNTY ATTORNEY: *(facetiously)* Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to – what is it you call it, ladies?

MRS HALE: *(her hand against her pocket)* We call it – knot it, Mr Henderson.

*(CURTAIN)*

**Susan Keating Glaspell** (July 1, 1876 – July 28, 1948) was an American Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, novelist, journalist and actress. With her husband George Cram Cook she founded the Provincetown Players, the first modern American theater company. During the Great Depression she served in the Works Progress

Administration as Midwest Bureau Director of the Federal Theater Project.

A prolific writer, Glaspell is known to have composed nine novels, fifteen plays, over fifty short stories and one biography. Often set in her native Midwest, these semi-autobiographical tales frequently address contemporary social issues, such as gender, ethics and dissent, while featuring deep, sympathetic characters who make principled stands.

## 74. The Wood-pile by Robert Frost

*Published: 1912*

OUT walking in the frozen swamp one grey day  
I paused and said, "I will turn back from here.  
No, I will go on farther—and we shall see."  
The hard snow held me, save where now and then  
One foot went down. The view was all in lines  
Straight up and down of tall slim trees  
Too much alike to mark or name a place by  
So as to say for certain I was here  
Or somewhere else: I was just far from home.  
A small bird flew before me. He was careful  
To put a tree between us when he lighted,  
And say no word to tell me who he was  
Who was so foolish as to think what he thought.  
He thought that I was after him for a feather—  
The white one in his tail; like one who takes  
Everything said as personal to himself.  
One flight out sideways would have undeceived him.  
And then there was a pile of wood for which  
I forgot him and let his little fear  
Carry him off the way I might have gone,  
Without so much as wishing him good-night.  
He went behind it to make his last stand.  
It was a cord of maple, cut and split  
And piled—and measured, four by four by eight.  
And not another like it could I see.  
No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.  
And it was older sure than this year's cutting,  
Or even last year's or the year's before.

The wood was grey and the bark warping off it  
And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis  
Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.  
What held it though on one side was a tree  
Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,  
These latter about to fall. I thought that only  
Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks  
Could so forget his handiwork on which  
He spent himself, the labour of his axe,  
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace  
To warm the frozen swamp as best it could  
With the slow smokeless burning of decay.

# 75. When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer by Walt Whitman

*Published:* 1865

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,  
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,  
When I was shown the charts, the diagrams, to add, divide,  
and measure them,  
When I sitting heard the learned astronomer where he lectured  
with much applause in the lecture room,  
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,  
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,  
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

**Walter “Walt” Whitman** (May 31, 1819 – March 26, 1892) was an American poet, essayist, and journalist. A humanist, he was a part of the transition between transcendentalism and realism, incorporating both views in his works. Whitman is among the most influential poets in the American canon, often called the father of free verse. His work was very controversial in its time, particularly his poetry collection *Leaves of Grass*.

Born in Huntington on Long Island, Whitman worked as a journalist, a teacher, a government clerk, and—in addition to publishing his poetry—was a volunteer nurse during the American Civil War. Early in his career, he also produced a temperance novel, *Franklin Evans* (1842). Whitman's major work, *Leaves of Grass*, was first published in 1855 with his own money. The work was an attempt at reaching out to the common person with an American epic. He continued expanding and revising it until his death in 1892.