# *The Easiest Way* (1908)
## Eugene Walter

THE EASIEST WAY

An American play concerning a peculiar phase of New York life.

In Four Acts and Four Scenes.

By EUGENE WALTER.

CHARACTERS.

LAURA MURDOCK.
ELFIE ST. CLAIR.
ANNIE.
WILLARD BROCKTON.
JOHN MADISON.
JIM WESTON.

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS.

LAURA MURDOCH, twenty-five years of age, is a type not uncommon in the theatrical life of New York, and one which has grown in importance in the profession since the business of giving public entertainments has been so reduced to a commercial basis.

At an early age she came from Australia to San Francisco. She possessed a considerable beauty and an aptitude for theatrical accomplishment which soon raised her to a position of more or less importance in a local stock company playing in that city. A woman of intense superficial emotions, her imagination was without any enduring depths, but for the passing time she could place herself in an attitude of great affection and devotion. Sensually, the woman had marked characteristics, and, with the flattery that surrounded her, she soon became a favourite in the select circles which made such places as "The Poodle Dog" and "Zinkand's" famous. In general dissipation, she was always careful not in any way to indulge in excesses which would jeopardize her physical attractiveness, or for one moment to diminish her sense of keen worldly calculation.

In time she married. It was, of course, a failure. Her vacillating nature was such that she could not be absolutely true to the man to whom she had given her life, and, after several bitter experiences, she had the horror of seeing him kill himself in front of her. There was a momentary spasm of grief, a tidal wave of remorse, and then the peculiar recuperation of spirits, beauty and attractiveness that so marks this type of woman. She was deceived by other men in many various ways, and finally came to that stage of life that is known in theatrical circles as being "wised up."

At nineteen, the attention of a prominent theatrical manager being called to her, she took an important part in a New York production, and immediately gained considerable reputation. The fact that, before reaching the age of womanhood, she had had more escapades than most women have in their entire lives was not generally known in New York, nor was there a mark upon her face or a single coarse mannerism to betray it. She was soft-voiced, very pretty, very girlish. Her keen sense of worldly calculation led her to believe that in order to progress in her theatrical career she must have some influence outside of her art and dramatic accomplishment; so she attempted, with no little success, to infatuate a hard-headed, blunt and supposedly invincible theatrical manager, who, in his cold, stolid way, gave her what love there was in him. This, however, not satisfying her, she played two ends against the middle, and, finding a young man of wealth and position who could give her, in his youth, the exuberance and joy utterly apart from the character of the theatrical manager, she adopted him, and for a while lived with him. Exhausting his money, she cast him aside, always spending a certain part of the time with the theatrical manager. The young man became crazed, and, at a restaurant, tried to murder all of them.

From that time up to the opening of the play, her career was a succession of brilliant coups in gaining the confidence and love, not to say the money, of men of all ages and all walks in life. Her fascination was as undeniable as her insincerity of purpose. She had never made an honest effort to be an honest woman, although she imagined herself always persecuted, the victim of circumstances,--and was always ready to excuse any viciousness of character which led her into her peculiar difficulties. While acknowledged to be a mistress of her business--that of acting--from a purely technical point of view, her lack of sympathy, her abuse of her dramatic temperament in her private affairs, had been such as to make it impossible for her sincerely to impress audiences with real emotional power, and, therefore, despite the influences which she always had at hand, she remained a mediocre artist.

At the time of the opening of our play, she has played a summer engagement with a stock company in Denver, which has just ended. She has met JOHN MADISON, a man of about twenty-seven years of age, whose position is that of a dramatic critic on one of the local papers. LAURA MURDOCH, with her usual wisdom, started to fascinate JOHN MADISON, but has found that, for once in her life, she has met her match.

JOHN MADISON is good to look at, frank, virile, but a man of broad experience, and not to be hoodwinked. For the first time LAURA MURDOCH feels that the shoe is pinching the other foot, and, without any possible indication of reciprocal affection, she has been slowly falling desperately, madly, honestly and decently in love with him. She has for the past two years been the special favourite and mistress of WILLARD BROCKTON. The understanding is one of pure friendship. He is a man who has a varied taste in the selection of his women; is honest in a general way, and perfectly frank about his amours. He has been most generous with LAURA MURDOCK, and his close relations with several very prominent theatrical managers have made it possible for him to secure her desirable engagements, generally in New York. With all her past experiences, tragic and otherwise, LAURA MURDOCH has found nothing equal to this sudden, this swiftly increasing, love for the young Western man. At first she attempted to deceive him. Her baby face, her masterful assumption of innocence and childlike devotion, made no impression upon him. He has let her know in no uncertain way that he knew her record from the day she stepped on American soil in San Francisco to the time when she had come to Denver, but still he liked her.

JOHN MADISON is a peculiar type of the Western man. Up to the time of his meeting LAURA, he had always been employed either in the mines or on a newspaper west of the Mississippi River. He is one of those itinerant reporters; to-day you might find him in Seattle, to-morrow in Butte, the next week in Denver, and then possibly he would make the circuit from Los Angeles to 'Frisco, and then all around again. He drinks his whiskey straight, plays his faro fairly, and is not particular about the women with whom he goes. He started life in the Western country at an early age. His natural talents, both in literature and in general adaptability to all conditions of life, were early exhibited, but his alma mater was the bar-room, and the faculty of that college its bartenders and gamblers and general habitués.

He seldom has social engagements outside of certain disreputable establishments, where a genial personality or an over-burdened pocketbook gives entrée, and the rules of conventionality have never even been whispered. His love affairs, confined to this class of women, have seldom lasted more than a week or ten days. His editors know him as a brilliant genius, irresponsible, unreliable, but at times inestimably valuable. He cares little for personal appearance beyond a certain degree of neatness. He is quick on the trigger, and in a time of over-heated argument can go some distance with his fists; in fact, his whole career is best described as "happy-go-lucky."

He realizes fully his ability to do almost anything fairly well, and some things especially well, but he has never tried to accomplish anything beyond the earning of a comfortable living. Twenty-five or thirty dollars a week was all he needed. With that he could buy his liquor, treat his women, sometimes play a little faro, sit up all night and sleep all day, and in general lead the life of good-natured vagabondage which has always pleased him and which he had chosen as a career.

The objection of safer and saner friends to this form of livelihood was always met by him with a slap on the back and a laugh. "Don't you worry about me, partner; if I'm going to hell I'm going there with bells on," was always his rejoinder; and yet, when called upon to cover some great big news story, or report some vital event, he settled down to his work with a steely determination and a grim joy that resulted in work which classified him as a genius. Any great mental effort of this character, any unusual achievement along these lines, would be immediately followed by a protracted debauch that would upset him physically and mentally for weeks at a time, but he always recovered and landed on his feet, and with the same laugh and smile again went at his work.

If there have been opportunities to meet decent women of good social standing, he has always thrown them aside with the declaration that they bore him to death, and there never had entered into his heart a feeling or idea of real affection until he met LAURA. He fell for a moment under the spell of her fascination, and then, with cold logic, he analyzed her, and found out that, while outwardly she had every sign of girlhood,--ingenuousness, sweetness of character and possibility of affection,--spiritually and mentally she was nothing more than a moral wreck. He observed keenly her efforts to win him and her disappointment at her failure--not that she cared so much for him personally, but that it hurt her vanity not to be successful with this good-for-nothing, good-natured vagabond, when men of wealth and position she made kneel at her feet. He observed her slowly-changing point of view: how from a kittenish ingenuousness she became serious, womanly, really sincere. He knew that he had awakened in her her first decent affection, and he knew that she was awakening in him his first desire to do things and be big and worth while. So together these two began to drift toward a path of decent dealing, decent ambition, decent thought, and decent love, until at last they both find themselves, and acknowledge all the wickedness of what had been, and plan for all the virtue and goodness of what is to be. It is at this point that our first act begins.

ELFIE ST. CLAIR is a type of a Tenderloin grafter in New York, who, after all, has been more sinned against than sinning; who, having been imposed upon, deceived, ill-treated and bulldozed by the type of men who prey on women in New York, has turned the tables, and with her charm and her beauty has gone out to make the same slaughter of the other sex as she suffered with many of her sisters.

She is a woman without a moral conscience, whose entire life is dictated by a small mental operation. Coming to New York as a beautiful girl, she entered the chorus. She became famous for her beauty. On every hand were the stage-door vultures ready to give her anything that a woman's heart could desire, from clothes to horses, carriages, money and what-not; but, with a girl-like instinct, she fell in love with a man connected with the company, and, during all the time she might have profited and become a rich woman by the attentions of these outsiders, she remained true to her love, until finally her fame as the beauty of the city had waned. The years told on her to a certain extent, and there were others coming, as young as she had been and as good to look at; and, where the automobile of the millionaire had once been waiting for her, she found that, through her faithfulness to her lover, it was now there for some one else. Yet she was content with her joys, until finally the man deliberately jilted her and left her alone.

What had gone of her beauty had been replaced by a keen knowledge of human nature and of men, so she determined to give herself up entirely to a life of gain. She knows just how much champagne should be drunk without injuring one's health. She knows just what physical necessities should be indulged in to preserve to the greatest degree her remaining beauty. There is no trick of the hair-dresser, the modiste, the manicurist, or any one of the legion of people who devote their time to aiding the outward fascinations of women, which she does not know. She knows exactly what perfumes to use, what stockings to wear, how she should live, how far she should indulge in any dissipation; and all this she has determined to devote to profit. She knows that as an actress she has no future; that the time of a woman's beauty is limited. Conscious that she has already lost the youthful litheness of figure which had made her so fascinating in the past, she has laid aside every sentiment, physical and spiritual, and has determined to choose a man as her companion who has the biggest bank-roll and the most liberal nature. His age, his station in life, the fact whether she likes or dislikes him, do not enter into this scheme at all. She figures that she has been made a fool of by men, and that there is only one revenge,--the accumulation of a fortune to make her independent of them once and for all. There are, of course, certain likes and dislikes that she enjoys, and in a way she indulges them. There are men whose company she cares for, but their association is practically sexless and has come down to a point of mere good fellowship.

WILLARD BROCKTON, a New York broker, is an honest sensualist, and when one says an honest sensualist, the meaning is--a man who has none of the cad in his character, who takes advantage of no one, and who allows no one to take advantage of him. He honestly detests any man who takes advantage of a pure woman. He detests any man who deceives a woman. He believes that there is only one way to go through life, and that is to be frank with those with whom one deals. He is a master-hand in stock manipulation, and in the questionable practises of Wall Street he has realized that he has to play his cunning and craft against the cunning and craft of others. He is not at all in sympathy with this mode of living, but he thinks it is the only method by which he can succeed in life. He measures success by the accumulation of money, but he considers his business career as a thing apart from his private existence.

He does not associate, to any great extent, with what is known as "society." He keeps in touch with it simply to maintain his business position. There is always an inter-relationship among the

rich in business and private life, and he gives such entertainments as are necessary to the members of New York's exclusive set, simply to make certain his relative position with other successful Wall Street men.

As far as women are concerned, the particular type of actress, such as LAURA MURDOCH and ELFIE ST. CLAIR, appeals to him. He likes their good fellowship. He loves to be with a gay party at night in a café. He likes the rather looseness of living which does not quite reach the disreputable. Behind all this, however, is a certain high sense of honour. He detests and despises the average stage-door Johnny, and he loathes the type of man who seeks to take young girls out of theatrical companies for their ruin.

His women friends are as wise as himself. When they enter into an agreement with him there is no deception. In the first place he wants to like them; in the second place he wants them to like him; and finally, he wants to fix the amount of their living expenses at a definite figure, and have them stand by it. He wants them to understand that he reserves the right, at any time, to withdraw his support, or transfer it to some other woman, and he gives them the same privilege.

He is always ready to help anyone who is unfortunate, and he has always hoped that some of these girls whom he knew would finally come across the right man, marry and settle down; but he insists that such an arrangement can be possible only by the honest admission on the woman's part of what she has done and been, and by the thorough understanding of all these things by the man involved. He is gruff in his manner, determined in his purposes, honest in his point of view. He is a brute, almost a savage, but he is a thoroughly good brute and a pretty decent savage.

At the time of the opening of this play, he and LAURA MURDOCK have been friends for two years. He knows exactly what she is and what she has been, and their relations are those of pals. She has finished her season in Denver, and he has come out there to accompany her home. He has always told her, whenever she felt it inconsistent with her happiness to continue her relations with him, it is her privilege to quit, and he has reserved the same condition.

JIM WESTON, between forty-five and fifty years of age, is the type of the semi-broken-down showman. In the evolution of the theatrical business in America, the old circus and minstrel men have gradually been pushed aside, while younger men, with more advanced methods, have taken their place. The character is best realized by the way it is drawn in the play.

ANNIE. The only particular attention that should be called to the character of the negress, ANNIE, who is the servant of LAURA, is the fact that she must not in any way represent the traditional smiling coloured girl or "mammy" of the South. She is the cunning, crafty, heartless, surly, sullen Northern negress, who, to the number of thousands, are servants of women of easy morals, and who infest a district of New York in which white and black people of the lower classes mingle indiscriminately, and which is one of the most criminal sections of the city. The actress who plays this part must keep in mind its innate and brutal selfishness.

SYNOPSIS.

ACT I. Mrs. Williams' Ranch House or Country Home, perched on the side of Ute Pass, near Colorado Springs, Colorado.
TIME. Late in an August afternoon.

ACT II. Laura Murdock's furnished Room, second story back, New York.
TIME. Six months later.

ACT III. Laura Murdock's Apartments in an expensive Hotel.
TIME. Two months later. In the morning.

ACT IV. Laura Murdock's Apartments. The same as Act III.
TIME. The afternoon of the same day.

THE EASIEST WAY
ACT I.

SCENE. The scene is that of the summer country ranch house of MRS. WILLIAMS, a friend of LAURA MURDOCK'S, and a prominent society woman of Denver, perched on the side of Ute Pass, near Colorado Springs. The house is one of unusual pretentiousness, and, to a person not conversant with conditions as they exist in this part of Colorado, the idea might be that such magnificence could not obtain in such a locality. At the left of stage the house rises in the form of a turret, built of rough stone of a brown hue, two stories high, and projecting a quarter of the way out on the stage. The door leads to a small elliptical terrace built of stone, with heavy benches of Greek design, strewn cushions, while over the top of one part of this terrace is suspended a canopy made from a Navajo blanket. The terrace is supposed to extend almost to the right of stage, and here it stops. The stage must be cut here so that the entrance of JOHN can give the illusion that he is coming up a steep declivity or a long flight of stairs. There are chairs at right and left, and a small table at left. There are trailing vines around the balustrade of the terrace, and the whole setting must convey the idea of quiet wealth. Up stage is supposed to be the part of the terrace overlooking the cañon, a sheer drop of two thousand feet, while over in the distance, as if across the cañon, one can see the rolling foot-hills and lofty peaks of the Rockies, with Pike's Peak in the distance, snow-capped and colossal. It is late in the afternoon, and, as the scene progresses, the quick twilight of a cañon, beautiful in its tints of purple and amber, becomes later pitch black, and the curtain goes down on an absolutely black stage. The cyclorama, or semi-cyclorama, must give the perspective of greater distances, and be so painted that the various tints of twilight may be shown.

AT RISE. LAURA MURDOCK is seen leaning a bit over the balustrade of the porch and shielding her eyes with her hand from the late afternoon sun, as she seemingly looks up the Pass to the left, as if expecting the approach of someone. Her gown is simple, girlish and attractive, and made of summery, filmy stuff. Her hair is done up in the simplest fashion, with a part in the centre, and there is about her every indication of an effort to assume that girlishness of demeanour which has been her greatest asset through life. WILLARD BROCKTON enters; he is a man six feet or more in height, stocky in build, clean-shaven and immaculately dressed. He is smoking a cigar, and upon entering takes one step forward and looks over toward LAURA in a semi-meditative manner.

WILL. Blue?

LAURA. No.

WILL. What's up?

LAURA. Nothing.

WILL. A little preoccupied.

LAURA. Perhaps.

WILL. What's up that way?

LAURA. Which way?

WILL. The way you are looking.

LAURA. The road from Manitou Springs. They call it the trail out here.

WILL. I know that. You know I've done a lot of business west of the Missouri.

LAURA. [With a half-sigh.] No, I didn't know it.

WILL. Oh, yes; south of here in the San Juan country. Spent a couple of years there once.

LAURA. [Still without turning.] That's interesting.

WILL. It was then. I made some money there. It's always interesting when you make money. Still--

LAURA. [Still leaning in an absent-minded attitude.] Still what?

WILL. Can't make out why you have your eyes glued on that road. Someone coming?

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. One of Mrs. Williams' friends, eh? [Will crosses, and sits on seat.

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. Yours too?

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. Man?

LAURA. Yes, a real man.

WILL. [Catches the significance of this speech. He carelessly throws the cigar over the balustrade. He comes down and leans on chair with his back to LAURA. She has not moved more than to place her left hand on a cushion and lean her head rather wearily against it, looking steadfastly up the Pass.] A real man. By that you mean--

LAURA. Just that--a real man.

WILL. Any difference from the many you have known?

LAURA. Yes, from all I have known.

WILL. So that is why you didn't come into Denver to meet me to-day, but left word for me to come out here?

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. I thought that I was pretty decent to take a dusty ride half-way across the continent in order to keep you company on your way back to New York, and welcome you to our home; but maybe I had the wrong idea.

LAURA. Yes, I think you had the wrong idea.

WILL. In love, eh?

LAURA. Yes, just that,--in love.

WILL. A new sensation.

LAURA. No; the first conviction.

WILL. You have had that idea before. Every woman's love is the real one when it comes. [Crosses up to LAURA.] Do you make a distinction in this case, young lady?

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. For instance, what?

LAURA. This man is poor--absolutely broke. He hasn't even got a [Crosses to armchair, leans over and draws with parasol on ground.] good job. You know, Will, all the rest, including yourself, generally had some material inducement.

WILL. What's his business? [Crosses to table and sits looking at magazine.

LAURA. He's a newspaper man.

WILL. H'm-m. Romance?

LAURA. Yes, if you want to call it that,--romance.

WILL. Do I know him?

LAURA. How could you? You only came from New York to-day, and he has never been there.

He regards her with a rather amused, indulgent, almost paternal expression, in contrast to his big, bluff, physical personality, with his iron-gray hair and his bulldog expression. LAURA looks more girlish than ever. This is imperative in order to thoroughly understand the character.

WILL. How old is he?

LAURA. Twenty-seven. You're forty-five.

WILL. No, forty-six.

LAURA. Shall I tell you about him? Huh? [Crosses to WILL, placing parasol on seat.

WILL. That depends.

LAURA. On what?

WILL. Yourself.

LAURA. In what way?

WILL. If it will interfere in the least with the plans I have made for you and for me.

LAURA. And have you made any particular plans for me that have anything particularly to do with you?

WILL. Yes, I have given up the lease of our apartment on West End Avenue, and I've got a house on Riverside Drive. Everything will be quiet and decent, and it'll be more comfortable for you. There's a stable near by, and your horses and car can be kept over there. You'll be your own mistress, and besides I've fixed you up for a new part.

LAURA. A new part! What kind of a part?

WILL. One of Charlie Burgess's shows, translated from some French fellow. It's been running over in Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, and all those places, for a year or more, and appears to be an awful hit. It's going to cost a lot of money. I told Charlie he could put me down for a half interest, and I'd give all the money providing you got an important rôle. Great part, I'm told. Kind of a cross between a musical comedy and an opera. Looks as if it might stay in New York all season. So that's the change of plan. How does it strike you? [LAURA crosses to door, meditating; pauses in thought.

LAURA. I don't know.

WILL. Feel like quitting? [Turns to her.

LAURA. I can't tell.

WILL. It's the newspaper man, eh?

LAURA. That would be the only reason.

WILL. You've been on the square with me this summer, haven't you? [Crosses to table.

LAURA. [Turns, looks at WILL.] What do you mean by "on the square?"

WILL. Don't evade. There's only one meaning when I say that, and you know it. I'm pretty liberal. But you understand where I draw the line. You've not jumped that, have you, Laura?

LAURA. No, this has been such a wonderful summer, such a wonderfully different summer. Can you understand what I mean by that when I say "wonderfully different summer?" [Crossing to WILL.

WILL. Well, he's twenty-seven and broke, and you're twenty-five and pretty; and he evidently, being a newspaper man, has that peculiar gift of gab that we call romantic expression. So I guess I'm not blind, and you both think you've fallen in love. That it?

LAURA. Yes, I think that's about it; only I don't agree to the "gift of gab" and the "romantic" end of it. [Crosses to table.] He's a man and I'm a woman, and we both have had our experiences. I don't think, Will, that there can be much of that element of what some folks call hallucination. [Sits on chair; takes candy-box on lap; selects candy.

WILL. Then the Riverside Drive proposition and Burgess's show is off, eh?

LAURA. I didn't say that.

WILL. And if you go back on the Overland Limited day after to-morrow, you'd just as soon I'd go to-morrow of wait until the day after you leave? [LAURA places candy-box back on table.

LAURA. I didn't say that, either.

WILL. What's the game?

LAURA. I can't tell you now.

WILL. Waiting for him to come. [Crosses, sits on seat.

LAURA. Exactly.

WILL. Think he is going to make a proposition, eh?

LAURA. I know he is.

WILL. Marriage?

LAURA. Possibly.

WILL. You've tried that once, and taken the wrong end. Are you going to play the same game again?

LAURA. Yes, but with a different card. [Picks up magazine off table.

WILL. What's his name?

LAURA. Madison--John Madison. [Slowly turning pages of magazine.

WILL. And his job?

LAURA. Reporter.

WILL. What are you going to live on,--the extra editions?

LAURA. No, we're young, there's plenty of time. I can work in the meantime, and so can he; and then with his ability and my ability it will only be a matter of a year or two when things will shape themselves to make it possible.

WILL. Sounds well--a year off.

LAURA. If I thought you were going to make fun of me, Will, I shouldn't have talked to you. [Throws down magazine, crosses to door of house.

WILL. [Crossing down in front of table.] I don't want to make fun of you, but you must realize that after two years it isn't an easy thing to be dumped with so little ceremony. Maybe you have never given me any credit for possessing the slightest feeling, but even I can receive shocks from other sources than a break in the market.

LAURA. [Crosses to WILL.] It isn't easy for me to do this. You've been awfully kind, awfully considerate, but when I went to you it was just with the understanding that we were to be pals. You reserved the right then to quit me whenever you felt like it, and you gave me the same privilege. Now, if some girl came along who really captivated you in the right way, and you wanted to marry, it would hurt me a little,--maybe a lot,--but I should never forget that agreement we made, a sort of two weeks' notice clause, like people have in contracts.

WILL. [Is evidently very much moved. Walks up stage to right end of seat, looks over the cañon. LAURA looks after him. WILL has his back to the audience. Long pause.] I'm not hedging, Laura. If that's the way you want it to be, I'll stand by just exactly what I said [Turns to LAURA.], but I'm fond of you, a damn sight fonder than I thought I was, now that I find you slipping away; but if this young fellow is on the square [LAURA crosses to WILL, taking his right hand.] and he has youth and ability, and you've been on the square with him, why, all right. Your life hasn't had much in it to help you get a diploma from any celestial college, and if you can start out now and be a good girl, have a good husband, and maybe some day good children [LAURA sighs.], why, I'm not going to stand in the way. Only I don't want you to make any of those mistakes that you made before.

LAURA. I know, but somehow I feel that this time the real thing has come, and with it the real man. I can't tell you, Will, how much different it is, but everything I felt before seems so sort of earthly--and somehow this love that I have for this man is so different. It's made me want to be truthful and sincere and humble for the first time in my life. The only other thing I ever had that I cared the least bit about, now that I look back, was your friendship. We have been good pals, haven't we? [Puts arms about WILL.

WILL. Yes, it's been a mighty good two years for me. I was always proud to take you around, because I think you one of the prettiest things in New York [LAURA crosses and girlishly jumps into armchair.], and that helps some, and you're always jolly, and you never complained. You always spent a lot of money, but it was a pleasure to see you spend it; and then you never offended me. Most women offend men by coming around looking untidy and sort of unkempt, but somehow you always knew the value of your beauty, and you always dressed up. I always thought that maybe some day the fellow would come along, grab you, and make you happy in a nice way, but I thought that he'd have to have a lot of money. You know you've lived a rather

extravagant life for five years, Laura. It won't be an easy job to come down to cases and suffer for the little dainty necessities you've been used to.

LAURA. I've thought all about that, and I think I understand. [Facing audience; leaning elbows on lap.

WILL. You know if you were working without anybody's help, Laura, you might have a hard time getting a position. As an actress you're only fair.

LAURA. You needn't remind me of that. That part of my life is my own. [Crosses up to seat.] I don't want you to start now and make it harder for me to do the right thing. It isn't fair; it isn't square; and it isn't right. You've got to let me go my own way. [Crosses to WILL; puts right hand on his shoulder.] I'm sorry to leave you, in a way, but I want you to know that if I go with John it changes the spelling of the word comradeship into love, and mistress into wife. Now please don't talk any more. [Crosses to post; takes scarf off chair.

WILL. Just a word. Is it settled?

LAURA. [Impatiently.] I said I didn't know. I would know to-day--that's what I'm waiting for. Oh, I don't see why he doesn't come.

[WILL turns up to seat looking over Pass.

WILL. [Pointing up the Pass.] Is that the fellow coming up here?

LAURA. [Quickly running toward the balustrade of seat, saying as she goes:] Where? [Kneels on seat.

WILL. [Pointing.] Up the road there. On that yellow horse.

LAURA. [Looking.] Yes, that's John. [She waves her handkerchief, and putting one hand to her mouth cries:] Hello!

JOHN. [Off stage with the effect as if he was on the road winding up toward the house.] Hello yourself!

LAURA. [Same effect.] Hurry up, you're late.

JOHN. [Same effect, a little louder.] Better late than never.

LAURA. [Same effect.] Hurry up.

JOHN. [Little louder.] Not with this horse.

LAURA. [To WILL, with enthusiastic expression.] Now, Will, does he look like a yellow reporter?

WILL. [With a sort of sad smile.] He is a good-looking chap.

LAURA. [Looking down again at JOHN.] Oh, he's just simply more than that. [Turns quickly to WILL.] Where's Mrs. Williams?

WILL. [Motioning with thumb toward left side of ranch house.] Inside, I guess, up to her neck in bridge.

LAURA. [Goes hurriedly over to door.] Mrs. Williams! Oh, Mrs. Williams!

MRS. WILLIAMS. [Heard off stage.] What is it, my dear?

LAURA. Mr. Madison is coming up the path.

MRS. WILLIAMS. [Off stage.] That's good.

LAURA. Sha'n't you come and see him?

MRS. WILLIAMS. [Same.] Lord, no! I'm six dollars and twenty cents out now, and up against an awful streak of luck.

LAURA. Shall I give him some tea?

MRS. WILLIAMS. [Same.] Yes, do, dear; and tell him to cross his fingers when he thinks of me.

[In the meantime WILL has leaned over the balustrade, evidently surveying the young man, who is supposed to be coming up the, path, with a great deal of interest. Underneath his stolid, businesslike demeanour of squareness, there is undoubtedly within his heart a very great affection for LAURA. He realizes that during her whole career he has been the only one who has influenced her absolutely. Since the time they lived together, he has always dominated, and he has always endeavoured to lead her along a path that meant the better things of a Bohemian existence. His coming all the way from New York to Denver to accompany LAURA home was simply another example of his keen interest in the woman, and he suddenly finds that she has drifted away from him in a manner to which he could not in the least object, and that she had been absolutely fair and square in her agreement with him. WILL is a man who, while rough and rugged in many ways, possesses many of the finer instincts of refinement, latent though they may be, and his meeting with JOHN ought, therefore, to show much significance, because on his impressions of the young man depend the entire justification of his attitude in the play.]

LAURA. [Turning toward WILL and going to him, slipping her hand involuntarily through his arm, and looking eagerly with him over the balustrade in almost girlish enthusiasm.] Do you like him?

WILL. [Smiling.] I don't know him.

LAURA. Well, do you think you'll like him?

WILL. Well, I hope I'll like him.

LAURA. Well, if you hope you'll like him you ought to think you like him. He'll turn the corner of that rock in just a minute and then you can see him. Do you want to see him?

WILL. [Almost amused at her girlish manner.] Why, yes--do you?

LAURA. Do I? Why, I haven't seen him since last night! There he is. [Waves her hand.] Hello, John! [Gets candy-box, throws pieces of candy at JOHN.

JOHN. [His voice very close now.] Hello, girlie! How's everything?

LAURA. Fine! Do hurry.

JOHN. Just make this horse for a minute. Hurry is not in his dictionary.

LAURA. I'm coming down to meet you.

JOHN. All--right.

LAURA. [Turns quickly to WILL.] You don't care. You'll wait, won't you?

WILL. Surely.

[LAURA hurriedly exits. WILL goes down centre of the stage. After a short interval LAURA comes in, more like a sixteen-year-old girl than anything else, pulling JOHN after her. He is a tall, finely built type of Western manhood, a frank face, a quick, nervous energy, a mind that works like lightning, a prepossessing smile, and a personality that is wholly captivating. His clothes are a bit dusty from the ride, but are not in the least pretentious, and his leggings are of canvas and spurs of brass, such as are used in the Army. His hat is off, and he is pulled on to the stage, more like a great big boy than a man. His hair is a bit tumbled, and he shows every indication of having had a rather long and hard ride.]

LAURA. Hello, John!

JOHN. Hello, girlie!

[Then she suddenly recovers herself and realizes the position she is in. Both men measure each other for a moment in silence, neither flinching the least bit. The smile has faded from JOHN'S face, and the mouth droops into an expression of firm determination. LAURA for a moment loses her ingenuousness. She is the least bit frightened at finally placing the two men face to face, and in a voice that trembles slightly from apprehension:]

LAURA. Oh, I beg your pardon! Mr. Madison, this is Mr. Brockton, a friend of mine from New York. You've often heard me speak of him; he came out here to keep me company when I go home.

JOHN. [Comes forward, extends a hand, looking WILL right in the eye.] I am very glad to know you, Mr. Brockton.

WILL. Thank you.

JOHN. I've heard a great deal about you and your kindness to Miss Murdock. Anything that you have done for her in a spirit of friendliness I am sure all her friends must deeply appreciate, and I count myself in as one.

WILL. [In an easy manner that rather disarms the antagonistic attitude of JOHN.] Then we have a good deal in common, Mr. Madison, for I also count Miss Murdock a friend, and when two

friends of a friend have the pleasure of meeting, I dare say that's a pretty good foundation for them to become friends too.

JOHN. Possibly. Whatever my opinion may have been of you, Mr. Brockton, before you arrived, now I have seen you--and I'm a man who forms his conclusions right off the bat--I don't mind telling you that you've agreeably surprised me. That's just a first impression, but they run kind o' strong with me.

WILL. Well, young man, I size up a fellow in pretty short order, and all things being equal, I think you'll do.

LAURA. [Radiantly.] Shall I get the tea?

JOHN. Tea!

LAURA. Yes, tea. You know it must be tea--nothing stronger. [Crosses to door.

JOHN. [Looking at WILL rather comically.] How strong are you for that tea, Mr. Brockton?

WILL. I'll pass; it's your deal, Mr. Madison.

JOHN. Mine! No, deal me out this hand.

LAURA. I don't think you're at all pleasant, but I'll tell you one thing--it's tea this deal or no game. [Crosses up stage to seat, picks up magazine, turns pages.

WILL. No game then [Crosses to door.], and I'm going to help Mrs. Williams; maybe she's lost nearly seven dollars by this time, and I'm an awful dub when it comes to bridge.

[Exit.

LAURA. [Tossing magazine on to seat, crosses quickly to JOHN, throws her arms around his neck in the most loving manner.] John!

[As the Act progresses the shadows cross the Pass, and golden light streams across the lower hills and tops the snow-clad peaks. It becomes darker and darker, the lights fade to beautiful opalescent hues, until, when the curtain falls on the act, with JOHN and WILL on the scene, it is pitch dark, a faint glow coming out of the door. Nothing else can be seen but the glow of the ash on the end of each man's cigar as he puffs it in silent meditation on their conversation.]

JOHN. Well, dear?

LAURA. Are you going to be cross with me?

JOHN. Why?

LAURA. Because he came?

JOHN. Brockton?

LAURA. Yes.

JOHN. You didn't know, did you?

LAURA. Yes, I did.

JOHN. That he was coming?

LAURA. He wired me when he reached Kansas City.

JOHN. Does he know?

LAURA. About us?

JOHN. Yes.

LAURA. I've told him.

JOHN. When?

LAURA. To-day.

JOHN. Here?

LAURA. Yes.

JOHN. With what result?

LAURA. I think it hurt him.

JOHN. Naturally.

LAURA. More than I had any idea it would.

JOHN. I'm sorry. [Sits in armchair.

LAURA. He cautioned me to be very careful and to be sure I knew my way.

JOHN. That was right.

LAURA gets a cushion in each hand off seat; crosses down to left of armchair, throws one cushion on ground, then the other on top of it, and kneels beside his chair. Piano in house playing a Chopin Nocturne.

LAURA. John.

JOHN. Yes.

LAURA. We've been very happy all summer.

JOHN. Very.

LAURA. [Rises, sits on left arm of chair, her arm over back.] And this thing has gradually been growing on us?

JOHN. That's true.

LAURA. I didn't think that, when I came out here to Denver to play in a little stock company, it was going to bring me all this happiness, but it has, hasn't it?

JOHN. Yes.

LAURA. [Changing her position, sits on his lap, arms around his neck.] And now the season's over and there is nothing to keep me in Colorado, and I've got to go back to New York to work.

JOHN. I know; I've been awake all night thinking about it.

LAURA. Well?

JOHN. Well?

LAURA. What are we going to do?

JOHN. Why, you've got to go, I suppose.

LAURA. Is it good-bye?

JOHN. For a while, I suppose--it's good-bye.

LAURA. What do you mean by a while?

[LAURA turns JOHN'S face to her, looks at him searchingly.

JOHN. Until [Piano plays crescendo, then softens down.] I get money enough together, and am making enough to support you, then come and take you out of the show business and make you Mrs. Madison.

LAURA tightens her arm around his neck, her cheek goes close to his own, and all the wealth of affection the woman is capable of at times is shown. She seems more like a dainty little kitten purring close to its master. Her whole thought and idea seem to be centred on the man whom she professes to love.

LAURA. John, that is what I want above everything else.

JOHN. But, Laura, we must come to some distinct understanding before we start to make our plans. We're not children.

LAURA. No, we're not.

JOHN. Now in the first place [LAURA rises, crosses to centre.] we'll discuss you, and in the second place we'll discuss me. We'll keep nothing from each other [LAURA picks up cushions, places them on seat.], and we'll start out on this campaign [LAURA turns back to centre, facing

audience.] of decency and honour, fully understanding its responsibilities, without a chance of a come-back on either side.

LAURA. [Becoming very serious.] You mean that we should tell each other all about each other, so, no matter what's ever said about us by other people, we'll know it first?

JOHN. [Rising.] That's precisely what I'm trying to get at.

LAURA. Well, John, there are so many things I don't want to speak of even to you. It isn't easy for a woman to go back and dig up a lot of ugly memories and try to excuse them. [Crosses to front of table, picks up magazine, places it on table.

JOHN. I've known everything from the first; how you came to San Francisco as a kid and got into the show business, and how you went wrong, and then how you married, still a kid, and how your husband didn't treat you exactly right, and then how, in a fit of drunkenness, he came home and shot himself. [LAURA buries her head in her hands, making exclamations of horror. JOHN crosses to her as if sorry for hurting her; touches her on shoulder.] But that's all past now, and we can forget that. And I know how you were up against it after that, how tough it was for you to get along. Then finally how you've lived, and--and that you and this man Brockton have been--well--never mind. I've known it all for months, and I've watched you. Now, Laura, the habit of life is a hard thing to get away from. You've lived in this way for a long time. If I ask you to be my wife you'll have to give it up; you'll have to go back to New York and struggle on your own hook until I get enough to come for you. I don't know how long that will be, but it will be. Do you love me enough to stick out for the right thing?

LAURA crosses to him, puts her arms around him, kisses him once very affectionately, looks at him very earnestly.

LAURA. Yes. I think this is my one great chance. I do love you and I want to do just what you said.

JOHN. I think you will. I'm going to make the same promise. Your life, dear girl, has been an angel's compared with mine. I've drank whiskey, played bank, and raised hell ever since the time I could develop a thirst; and ever since I've been able to earn my own living I've abused every natural gift God gave me. The women I've associated with aren't good enough to touch the hem of your skirt, but they liked me, and [JOHN crosses to armchair, turns up stage, then faces her.] well--I must have liked them. My life hasn't been exactly loose, it's been all in pieces. I've never done anything dishonest. I've always gone wrong just for the fun of it, until I met you. [Crosses to her, takes her in his arms.] Somehow then I began to feel that I was making an awful waste of myself.

LAURA. John!

JOHN. Some lovers place a woman on a pedestal and say, "She never has made a mistake." [Taking her by each arm he playfully shakes her.] Well, we don't need any pedestals. I just know you never will make a mistake.

LAURA. [Kissing him.] John, I'll never make you take those words back. [Arms around his neck.

JOHN. That goes double. You're going to cut out the cabs and cafés, and I'm going to cut out the whiskey and all-night sessions [LAURA releases him; he backs slightly away.]; and you're

going to be somebody and I'm going to be somebody, and if my hunch is worth the powder to blow it up, we're going to show folks things they never thought were in us. Come on now, kiss me.

She kisses him; tears are in her eyes. He looks into her face with a quaint smile.

JOHN. You're on, ain't you, dear?

LAURA. Yes, I'm on.

JOHN. Then [Points toward door with his left arm over her shoulder.] call him.

LAURA. Brockton?

JOHN. Yes, and tell him you go back to New York without any travelling companion this season.

LAURA. Now?

JOHN. Sure.

LAURA. You want to hear me tell him?

JOHN. [With a smile.] We're partners, aren't we? I ought to be in on any important transaction like that, but it's just as you say.

LAURA. I think it would be right you should. I'll call him now.

JOHN. All right. [Crossing to stairway. LAURA crosses to door; twilight is becoming very much more pronounced.

LAURA. [At door.] Mr. Brockton! Oh, Mr. Brockton!

WILL. [Off stage.] Yes.

LAURA. Can you spare a moment to come out here?

WILL. Just a moment.

LAURA. You must come now.

WILL. All right. [She waits for him and after a reasonable interval he appears at door.] Laura, it's a shame to lure me away from that mad speculation in there. I thought I might make my fare back to New York if I played until next summer. What's up?

LAURA. Mr. Madison wants to talk to you, or rather I do, and I want him to listen.

WILL. [His manner changing to one of cold, stolid calculation.] Very well. [Comes down off step of house.

LAURA. Will.

WILL. Yes?

LAURA. I'm going home day after to-morrow on the Overland Limited.

WILL. I know.

LAURA. It's awfully kind of you to come out here, but under the circumstances I'd rather you'd take an earlier or a later train.

WILL. And may I ask what circumstances you refer to?

LAURA. Mr. Madison and I are going to be married. [Pause.] He [Will looks inquiringly at JOHN.] knows of your former friendship for me, and he has the idea that it must end.

WILL. Then the Riverside Drive proposition, with Burgess's show thrown in, is declared off, eh?

LAURA. Yes; everything is absolutely declared off.

WILL. Can't even be friends any more, eh?

JOHN crosses, and, taking LAURA'S arm, passes her over to seat; his back is partly to audience.

JOHN. You could hardly expect Miss Murdock to be friendly with you under the circumstances. You could hardly expect me to [LAURA puts scarf across her shoulders.] sanction any such friendship.

WILL. I think I understand your position, young man, and I perfectly agree with you, that is--if your plans come out successfully.

JOHN. Thank you.

LAURA. Then everything is settled [Crossing in front of JOHN and facing WILL, back to audience.] just the way it ought to be--frankly and aboveboard?

WILL. Why, I guess so. If I was perfectly confident that this new arrangement was going to result happily for you both, I think it would be great, only I'm somewhat doubtful, for when people become serious and then fail, I know how hard those things hit, having been hit once myself.

JOHN. So you think we're making a wrong move and there isn't a chance of success!

WILL. No, I don't make any such gloomy prophecy. If you make Laura a good husband, and she makes you a good wife, and together you win out, I'll be mighty glad. As far as I am concerned I shall absolutely forget every thought of Laura's friendship for me.

LAURA. I thought you'd be just that way. [Crosses to WILL, shakes hands.

WILL. [Rising.] And now I must be off. [Takes her by both hands and shakes them.] Good-bye, girlie! Madison, good luck. [Crosses to JOHN. Shakes JOHN'S hands; looks into his eyes.] I think you've got the stuff in you to succeed if your foot don't slip.

JOHN. What do you mean by my foot slipping, Mr. Brockton?

WILL. You want me to tell you?

JOHN. I sure do.

WILL. [Turns to Laura.] Laura, run into the house and see if Mrs. Williams has won another quarter. [LAURA sinks fearfully into chair.] Madison and I are going to smoke a cigar and have a friendly chat, and when we get through I think we'll both be better off.

LAURA. You are sure that everything will be all right?

WILL. Sure.

LAURA looks at JOHN for assurance, and exits; he nods reassuringly.

WILL. Have a cigar?

[SERVANT places lamp on table inside house.

JOHN. No, I'll smoke my own. [Crosses down right; sits in armchair.

WILL. What is your business? [Crosses up to seat centre; sits.

JOHN. What's yours?

WILL. I'm a broker.

JOHN. I'm a reporter, so I've got something on you.

WILL. What kind?

JOHN. General utility, dramatic critic on Sunday nights.

WILL. Pay you well?

JOHN. [Turns, looking at WILL.] That's pretty fresh. What's the idea?

WILL. I'm interested. I'm a plain man, Mr. Madison, and I do business in a plain way. Now, if I ask you a few questions and discuss this matter with you in a frank way, don't get it in your head that I'm jealous or sore, but simply I don't want either of you people to make a move that's going to cost you a lot of pain and trouble. If you want me to talk sense to you, all right. If you don't we'll drop it now. What's the answer?

JOHN. I'll take a chance, but before you start I want to tell you that the class of people that you belong to I have no use for--they don't speak my language. You are what they call a manipulator of stocks; that means that you're living on the weaknesses of other people, and it almost means that you get your daily bread, yes, and your cake and your wine, too, from the production of others. You're a "gambler under cover." Show me a man who's dealing bank, and he's free and

aboveboard. You can figure the percentage against you, and then, if you buck the tiger and get stung, you do it with your eyes open. With your financiers the game is crooked twelve months of the year, and, from a business point of view, I think you are a crook. Now I guess we understand each other. If you've got anything to say, why, spill it.

WILL rises, comes down toward JOHN, showing anger in his tones.

WILL. We are not talking business now, but women. How much money do you earn?

[Crosses to chair left of table; gets it.

JOHN. Understand I don't think it is any of your damn business, but I'm going through with you on this proposition, just to see how the land lays. But take my tip, you be mighty careful how you speak about the girl if you're not looking for trouble.

WILL. All right, but how much did you say you made? [Crosses over to centre of stage, carrying chair; sits.

JOHN. Thirty dollars a week.

WILL. Do you know how much Laura could make if she just took a job on her own merits?

JOHN. As I don't intend to share in her salary, I never took the trouble to inquire.

WILL. She'd get about forty dollars.

JOHN. That laps me ten.

WILL. How are you going to support her? Her cabs cost more than your salary, and she pays her week's salary for an every-day walking-hat. She's always had a maid; her simplest gown flirts with a hundred-dollar note; her manicurist and her hair-dresser will eat up as much as you pay for your board. She never walks when it's stormy, and every afternoon there's her ride in the park. She dines at the best places in New York, and one meal costs her more than you make in a day. Do you imagine for a moment that she's going to sacrifice these luxuries for any great length of time?

JOHN. I intend to give them to her.

WILL. On thirty dollars a week?

JOHN. I propose to go out and make a lot of money.

WILL. How?

JOHN. I haven't decided yet, but you can bet your sweet life that if I ever try and make up my mind that it's got to be, it's got to be.

WILL. Never have made it, have you?

JOHN. I have never tried.

WILL. Then how do you know you can?

JOHN. Well, I'm honest and energetic. If you can get great wealth the way you go along, I don't see why I can't earn a little.

WILL. There's where you make a mistake. Money-getting doesn't always come with brilliancy. I know a lot of fellows in New York who can paint a great picture, write a good play, and, when it comes to oratory, they've got me lashed to a pole; but they're always in debt. They never get anything for what they do. In other words, young man, they are like a sky-rocket without a stick,--plenty of brilliancy, but no direction, and they blow up and fizzle all over the ground.

JOHN. That's New York. I'm in Colorado, and I guess you know there is a difference.

WILL. I hope you'll make your money, because I tell you frankly that's the only way you can hold this girl. She's full of heroics now, self-sacrifice, and all the things that go to make up the third act of a play, but the minute she comes to darn her stockings, wash out her own handkerchiefs and dry them on the window, and send out for a pail of coffee and a sandwich for lunch, take it from me it will go Blah! [Rises, crosses to front of table with chair, places it with back to him, braces his back on it, facing JOHN.] You're in Colorado writing her letters once a day with no checks in them. That may be all right for some girl who hasn't tasted the joy of easy living, full of the good things of life, but one who for ten years has been doing very well in the way these women do is not going to let up for any great length of time. So take my advice if you want to hold her. Get that money quick, and don't be so damned particular how you get it either.

JOHN'S patience is evidently severely tried. He approaches WILL, who remains impassive.

JOHN. Of course you know you've got the best of me.

WILL. How?

JOHN. We're guests.

WILL. No one's listening.

JOHN. 'Tisn't that. If it was anywhere but here, if there was any way to avoid all the nasty scandal, I'd come a shootin' for you, and you know it.

WILL. Gun-fighter, eh?

JOHN. Perhaps. Let me tell you this. I don't know how you make your money, but I know what you do with it. You buy yourself a small circle of sycophants; you pay them well for feeding your vanity; and then you pose,--pose with a certain frank admission of vice and degradation. And those who aren't quite as brazen as you call it manhood. Manhood? [Crossing slowly to armchair, sits.] Why, you don't know what the word means. It's the attitude of a pup and a cur.

WILL. [Angrily.] Wait a minute [Crosses to JOHN.], young man, or I'll--

JOHN rises quickly. Both men stand confronting each other for a moment with fists clenched. They are on the very verge of a personal encounter. Both seem to realize that they have gone too far.

JOHN. You'll what?

WILL. Lose my temper and make a damn fool of myself. That's something I've not done for--let me see--why, it must be nearly twenty years--oh, yes, fully that.

[He smiles; JOHN relaxes and takes one step back.

JOHN. Possibly it's been about that length of time since you were human, eh?

WILL. Possibly--but you see, Mr. Madison, after all, you're at fault.

JOHN. Yes?

WILL. Yes, the very first thing you did was to lose your temper. Now people who always lose their temper will never make a lot of money, and you admit that that is a great necessity--I mean now--to you.

JOHN. I can't stand for the brutal way you talk. [Crosses up to seat, picks up newspaper, slams it down angrily on seat, and sits with elbow on balustrade.

WILL. But you have got to stand it. The truth is never gentle. [Crosses up and sits left of JOHN.] Most conditions in life are unpleasant, and, if you want to meet them squarely, you have got to realize the unpleasant point of view. That's the only way you can fight them and win.

JOHN [Turns to WILL.] Still, I believe Laura means what she says, in spite of all you say and the disagreeable logic of it. I think she loves me. If she should ever want to go back to the old way of getting along, I think she'd tell me so. So you see, Brockton, all your talk is wasted, and we'll drop the subject. [Crosses down and sits in armchair.

WILL. And if she should ever go back and come to me, I am going to insist that she let you know all about it. It'll be hard enough to lose her, caring for her the way you do, but it would hurt a lot more to be double-crossed.

JOHN. [Sarcastically.] That's very kind. Thanks!

WILL. Don't get sore. It's common sense and it goes, does it not?

JOHN. [Turns to WILL.] Just what goes?

WILL. If she leaves you first, you are to tell me, and if she comes to me I'll make her let you know just when and why.

JOHN is leaning on arm, facing WILL; his hand shoots out in a gesture of warning to WILL.

JOHN. Look out!

WILL. I said common sense.

JOHN. All right.

WILL. Agreed? [A pause.

JOHN. You're on.

By this time the stage is black and all that can be seen is the glow of the two cigars. Piano in the next room is heard. JOHN crosses slowly and deliberately to door, looks in, throws cigar away over the terrace, exits into house, closes doors, and, as WILL is seated on terrace, puffing cigar, the red coal of which is alone visible, a slow curtain.

CURTAIN.

## ACT II.

SCENE. Six months have elapsed. The furnished room of LAURA MURDOCK, second story back of an ordinary, cheap theatrical lodging-house in the theatre district of New York. The house is evidently of a type of the old-fashioned brown-stone front, with high ceilings, dingy walls, and long, rather insecure windows. The woodwork is depressingly dark. The ceiling is cracked, the paper is old and spotted and in places loose. There is a door leading to the hallway. There is a large old-fashioned wardrobe in which are hung a few old clothes, most of them a good deal worn and shabby, showing that the owner—LAURA MURDOCK--has had a rather hard time of it since leaving Colorado in the first act. The doors of this wardrobe must be equipped with springs so they will open outward, and also furnished with wires so they can be controlled from the back. This is absolutely necessary, owing to "business" which is done during the progress of the act. The drawer in the bottom of the wardrobe is open at rise. This is filled with a lot of rumpled, tissue-paper and other rubbish. An old pair of shoes is seen at the upper end of the wardrobe on the floor. There is an armchair over which is thrown an ordinary kimono, and on top of the wardrobe are a number of magazines and old books, and an unused parasol wrapped up in tissue paper.

The dresser, which is upstage, against the wall, is in keeping with the general meanness, and its adornment consists of old postcards stuck in between the mirror and its frame, with some well-worn veils and ribbons hung on the side. On the dresser is a pincushion, a bottle of cheap perfume, purple in colour and nearly empty; a common crockery match-holder, containing matches, which must be practicable; a handkerchief-box, powder-box and puff, rouge-box and rouge paw, hand mirror, small alcohol curling-iron heater, which must also be practicable, as it is used in the "business" of the act; scissors, curling-tongs, hair comb and brush, and a small cheap picture of JOHN MADISON; a small work-box containing a thimble and thread,--and stuck in the pincushion are a couple of needles, threaded. Directly to the left of the bureau, with the door to the outside closet intervening, is a broken-down washstand, on which is a basin half full of water, a bottle of tooth-powder, tooth brushes and holder, soap and soap-dish, and other cheap toilet articles, and a small drinking-glass. Hung on the corner of the washstand is a soiled towel. Hung on the rack across the top of the washstand one can see a pair of stockings. On the floor in front of the washstand is a pitcher half full of water; also a large waste-water jar of the cheapest type.

Below the washstand, and with the head against the wall, is a three-quarter old wooden bed, also showing the general decay of the entire room. Tacked on the head of this bed is a large photo of JOHN MADISON, with a small bow of dainty blue ribbon at the top, covering the tack. Under the photo are arranged half a dozen cheap, artificial violets, in pitiful recognition of the girl's love for her absent sweetheart.

Under the mattress at the head of the bed is a heavy cardboard box, about thirty inches long, seven inches wide and four inches deep, containing about one hundred and twenty-five letters and eighty telegrams, tied in about eight bundles with dainty ribbon. One bundle must contain all practical letters of several closely written pages each, each letter having been opened. They must be written upon business paper and envelopes, such as are used in newspaper offices and by business men.

Under the pillow at the head of the bed is carelessly thrown a woman's night-dress. On the bed is an old book, open, with face downward, and beside it is an apple which some one has been nibbling. Across the foot of the bed is a soiled quilt, untidily folded. The pillows are hollow in the centre, as if having been used lately. At the foot of the bed is a small table, with soiled and ink-stained cover, upon which are a cheap pitcher, containing some withered carnations, and a desk-pad, with paper, pen, ink, and envelopes scattered around.

Against the wall below the bed is an old mantel-piece and fireplace with iron grate, such as are used in houses of this type. On the mantel-piece are photos of actors and actresses, an old mantel clock in the centre, in front of which is a box of cheap peppermint candy in large pieces, and a plate with two apples upon it; some cheap pieces of bric-à-brac and a little vase containing joss-sticks, such as one might burn to improve the atmosphere of these dingy, damp houses. Below the mantel-piece is a thirty-six inch theatre trunk, with theatre labels on it, in the tray of which are articles of clothing, a small box of thread, and a bundle of eight pawn tickets. Behind the trunk is a large cardboard box. Hanging from the ceiling directly over the table is a single arm gas-jet, from which is hung a turkey wish-bone. On the jet is a little wire arrangement to hold small articles for heating. Beside the table is a chair. Under the bed are a pair of bedroom slippers and a box. Between the bed and the mantel is a small tabourette on which are a book and a candle-stick with the candle half burned. On the floor in front of the door is a slipper,--also another in front of the dresser,--as if they had been thrown carelessly down. On the wardrobe door, on the down-stage side, is tacked another photo of JOHN MADISON.

In an alcove off left is a table on which is a small oil stove, two cups, saucers and plates, a box of matches, tin coffee-box, and a small Japanese teapot. On a projection outside the window is a pint milk bottle, half filled with milk, and an empty benzine bottle, which is labelled. Both are covered with snow.

The backing shows a street snow-covered. In arranging the properties it must be remembered that in the wardrobe is a box of Uneeda biscuits, with one end torn open. There is a door down right, opening inward, leading into the hallway. The window is at back, running from floor nearly to the ceiling. This window does not rise, but opens in the manner of the French or door window.

On the outside of the window covering the same is an iron guard such as is used in New York on the lower back windows. The rods running up and down are about four inches apart. There is a projection outside the window such as would be formed by a storm door in the basement; running the full length of the window and about thirty inches wide, raised about a foot from the floor in front and about nine inches in the back, there is opening inward a door at left back, leading into a small alcove, as has been mentioned before. The door is half glass, the glass part being the upper half, and is ajar when the curtain rises. A projection at fireplace such as would be made for a chimney is in the wall which runs from left centre diagonally to left first entrance.

AT RISE the stage is empty. After a pause LAURA enters, passes the dresser, places umbrella at the right, end of it against wall, crosses to back of armchair, removes gloves, lays them over back

of chair, takes off coat and hat, hangs hat on end of wardrobe, and puts coat inside; notices old slipper in front of dresser and one on the extreme right, and with impatience picks them up and puts them in the wardrobe drawer. Then crosses to dresser, gets needle and thread off pincushion, and mends small rip in glove, after which she puts gloves in top drawer of dresser, crosses to extreme end of dresser, and gets handkerchief out of box, takes up bottle containing purple perfume, holds it up so she can see there is only a small quantity left, sprinkles a drop on handkerchief carefully, so as not to use too much, looks at bottle again to see how much is left, places it on dresser; goes to up-stage side of bed, kneels on head of the bed and looks lovingly at photo of JOHN MADISON, and finally pulls up the mattress, takes out box of letters, and opens it. She then sits down in Oriental fashion, with her feet under her, selects a bundle of letters, unties the ribbon, and takes out a letter such as has been hereinbefore described, glances it over, puts it down in her lap, and again takes a long look at the picture of JOHN MADISON. ANNIE is heard coming upstairs. LAURA looks quickly towards the door, puts the letters back in box, and hurriedly places box under mattress, and replaces pillow. ANNIE knocks on door. LAURA rises and crosses to door.

LAURA. Come in.

> ANNIE, a chocolate-colored negress, enters. She is slovenly in appearance, but must not in any way denote the "mammy." She is the type one encounters in cheap theatrical lodging-houses. She has a letter in her hand,--also a clean towel folded,--and approaches LAURA.

LAURA. Hello, Annie.

ANNIE. Heah's yo' mail, Miss Laura.

LAURA. [Taking letter.] Thank you! [She looks at the address and does not open it.

ANNIE. One like dat comes every mornin', don't it? Used to all be postmahked Denver. Must 'a' moved. [Trying to look over LAURA'S shoulder; LAURA turns and sees her; ANNIE looks away.] Where is dat place called Goldfield, Miss Laura?

LAURA. In Nevada.

ANNIE. In Nevada?

LAURA. Yes, Nevada.

ANNIE. [Draws her jacket closer around her as if chilly.] Must be mighty smaht to write yuh every day. De pos'man brings it 'leven o'clock mos' always, sometimes twelve, and again sometimes tehn; but it comes every day, don't it?

LAURA. I know.

ANNIE. [Crosses to right of armchair, brushes it off and makes an effort to read letter, leaning across chair.] Guess must be from yo' husban', ain't it?

LAURA. No, I haven't any.

ANNIE. [Crossing to centre triumphantly.] Dat's what Ah tole Mis' Farley when she was down talkin' about you dis morning. She said if he all was yo' husband he might do somethin' to help you out. Ah told her Ah didn't think you had any husban'. Den she says you ought to have one, you're so pretty.

LAURA. Oh, Annie!

ANNIE. [Sees door open; goes and bangs it shut.] Der ain't a decent door in dis old house. Mis' Farley said yo' might have mos' any man you [Hangs clean towel on washstand.] wanted just for de askin', but Ah said yuh [Takes newspaper and books off bed, and places them on table.] was too particular about the man yo' 'd want. Den she did a heap o' talking.

LAURA. About what? [Places letter open on table, looks at hem of skirt, discovers a rip, rises, crosses up to dresser, gets needle, crosses down to trunk; opens and takes thimble out; closes lid of tray, sits on it, and sews skirt during scene.

ANNIE. [At bed, fussing around, folds nightgown and places it under pillow.] Well, you know, Mis' Farley she's been havin' so much trouble wid her roomers. Yestuhday dat young lady on de second flo' dront, she lef'. She's goin' wiv some troupe on the road. She owed her room for three weeks and jus' had to leave her trunk. [Crosses and fusses over table.] My! how Mis' Farley did scold her. Mis' Farley let on she could have paid dat money if she wanted to, but somehow Ah guess she couldn't-- [Reads letter on table.

LAURA. [Sees her, angrily exclaims.] Annie!

ANNIE. [In confusion, brushing off table.]--for if she could she wouldn't have left her trunk, would she, Miss Laura? [Crosses to armchair, and picks up kimono off back.

LAURA. No, I suppose not. What did Mrs. Farley say about me?

ANNIE. Oh! nothin' much. [Crosses left and stands.

LAURA. Well, what?

ANNIE. She kinder say somethin' 'bout yo' being three weeks behind in yo' room rent, and she said she t'ought it was 'bout time yuh handed her somethin', seein' as how yuh must o' had some stylish friends when yuh come here.

LAURA. Who, for instance?

ANNIE. Ah don't know. Mis' Farley said some of 'em might slip yo' enough jest to help yuh out. [Pause.] Ain't yo' got nobody to take care of you at all, Miss Laura?

[Hangs kimono over back of armchair.

LAURA. No! No one.

ANNIE. Dat's too bad.

LAURA. Why?

ANNIE. [Crossing again.] Mis' Farley says yuh wouldn't have no trouble at all gettin' any man to take care of yuh if yuh wanted to.

LAURA. [With sorrowful shudder.] Please [Doors of wardrobe open very slowly.] don't, Annie.

ANNIE. Dere's a gemman [Playing with corner of tablecloth.] dat calls on one of de ladies from the Hippodrome, in de big front room downstairs. He's mighty nice, and he's been askin' 'bout you.

LAURA. [Exasperated.] Oh, shut up!

ANNIE. [Sees doors of wardrobe have swung open; she crosses, slams them shut, turns to LAURA.] Mis' Farley says--[Doors have swung open again; they hit her in the back. She turns and bangs them to with all her strength.] Damn dat door! [Crosses to washstand, grabs basin which is half full of water, empties same into waste-jar, puts basin on washstand, and wipes it out with soiled towel.] Mis' Farley says if she don't get someone in the house dat has reg'lar money soon, she'll have to shut up and go to the po'house.

LAURA. I'm sorry; I'll try again to-day. [Rises, crosses up to mantel, gets desk-pad, &c., crosses to right of table, sits.

ANNIE. [Crosses to back of bed, wiping basin with towel.] Ain't yo' got any job at all?

LAURA. No.

ANNIE. When yuh come here yuh had lots of money and yo' was mighty good to me. You know Mr. Weston?

LAURA. Jim Weston?

ANNIE. Yassum, Mr. Weston what goes ahead o' shows and lives on the top floor back; he says nobody's got jobs now. Dey're so many actors and actoresses out o' work. Mis' Farley says she don't know how she's goin' to live. She said you'd been mighty nice up until three weeks ago, but yuh ain't got much left, have you, Miss Laura?

LAURA. [Rising and going to the bureau.] No. It's all gone.

ANNIE. Mah sakes! All dem rings and things? You ain't done sold them? [Sinks on bed.

LAURA. They're pawned. What did Mrs. Farley say she was going to do?

ANNIE. Guess maybe Ah'd better not tell. [Crosses to door hurriedly, carrying soiled towel.

LAURA. Please do. [Crosses to chair, left side.

ANNIE. Yuh been so good to me, Miss Laura. Never was nobody in dis house what give me so much, and Ah ain't been gettin' much lately. And when Mis' Farley said yuh must either pay yo' rent or she would ask yuh for your room, Ah jest set right down on de back kitchen stairs and cried. Besides, Mis' Farley don't like me very well since you've ben havin' yo' breakfasts and dinners brought up here.

LAURA. Why not? [Takes kimono of chair-back, crosses up to dresser, puts kimono in drawer, takes out purse.

ANNIE. She has a rule in dis house dat nobody can use huh chiny or fo'ks or spoons who ain't boa'ding heah, and de odder day when yuh asked me to bring up a knife and fo'k she ketched me coming upstairs, and she says, "Where yuh goin' wid all dose things, Annie?" Ah said, "Ah'm just goin' up to Miss Laura's room with dat knife and fo'k." Ah said, "Ah'm goin' up for nothin' at all, Mis' Farley, she jest wants to look at them, Ah guess." She said, "She wants to eat huh dinner wid 'em, Ah guess." Ah got real mad, and Ah told her if she'd give me mah pay Ah'd brush right out o' here; dat's what Ah'd do, Ah'd brush right out o' here. [Violently shaking out towel.

LAURA. I'm sorry, Annie, if I've caused you any trouble. Never mind, I'll be able to pay the rent to-morrow or next day anyway. [She fumbles in purse, takes out a quarter, and turns to ANNIE.] Here!

ANNIE. No, ma'am, Ah don' want dat. [Making a show of reluctance.

LAURA. Please take it.

ANNIE. No, ma'am, Ah don' want it. You need dat. Dat's breakfast money for yuh, Miss Laura.

LAURA. Please take it, Annie. I might just as well get rid of this as anything else.

ANNIE. [Takes it rather reluctantly.] Yuh always was so good, Miss Laura. Sho' yuh don' want dis?

LAURA. Sure.

ANNIE. Sho' yo' goin' to get planty mo'?

LAURA. Sure.

MRS. FARLEY'S VOICE. [Downstairs.] Annie! Annie!

ANNIE. [Going to door, opens it.] Dat's Mis' Farley. [To MRS. FARLEY.] Yassum, Mis' Farley.

SAME VOICE. Is Miss Murdock up there?

ANNIE. Yassum, Mis' Farley, yassum!

MRS. FARLEY. Anything doin'?

ANNIE. Huh?

MRS. FARLEY. Anything doin'?

ANNIE. [At door.] Ah--Ah--hain't asked, Missy Farley.

MRS. FARLEY. Then do it.

LAURA. [Coming to the rescue at the door. To ANNIE.] I'll answer her. [Out of door to MRS. FARLEY.] What is it, Mrs. Farley?

MRS. FARLEY. [Her voice softened.] Did ye have any luck this morning, dearie?

LAURA. No; but I promise you faithfully to help you out this afternoon or to-morrow.

MRS. FARLEY. Sure? Are you certain?

LAURA. Absolutely.

MRS. FARLEY. Well, I must say these people expect me to keep—

[Door closed.

LAURA quietly closes the door, and MRS. FARLEY'S rather strident voice is heard indistinctly. LAURA sighs and walks toward table; sits. ANNIE looks after her, and then slowly opens the door.

ANNIE. Yo' sho' dere ain't nothin' I can do fo' yuh, Miss Laura?

LAURA. Nothing.

ANNIE exits. LAURA sits down and looks at letter, opening it. It consists of several pages closely written. She reads some of them hurriedly, skims through the rest, and then turns to the last page without reading; glances at it; lays it on table; rises.

LAURA. Hope, just nothing but hope.

She crosses to bed, falls face down upon it, burying her face in her hands. Her despondency is palpable. As she lies there a hurdy-gurdy in the street starts to play a popular air. This arouses her and she rises, crosses to wardrobe, takes out box of crackers, opens window, gets bottle of milk off sill outside, places them on table, gets glass off washstand, at the same time humming the tune of the hurdy-gurdy, when a knock comes; she crosses quickly to dresser; powders her nose. The knock is timidly repeated.

LAURA. [Without turning, and in a rather tired tone of voice.] Come in.

JIM WESTON, a rather shabby theatrical advance-agent of the old school, enters timidly, halting at the door and holding the knob in his hand. He is a man of about forty years old, dressed in an ordinary manner, of medium height, and in fact has the appearance of a once prosperous clerk who has been in hard luck. His relations with LAURA are those of pure friendship. They both live in the same lodging-place, and, both having been out of employment, they have naturally become acquainted.

JIM. Can I come in?

LAURA. [Without turning.] Hello, Jim Weston. [He closes door and enters.] Any luck?

JIM. Lots of it.

LAURA. That's good. Tell me.

JIM. It's bad luck. Guess you don't want to hear.

LAURA. I'm sorry. Where have you been?

JIM. I kind o' felt around up at Burgess's office. I thought I might get a job there, but he put me off until to-morrow. Somehow those fellows always do business to-morrow. [Hurdy-gurdy dies out.

LAURA. Yes, and there's always to-day to look after.

JIM. I'm ready to give up. I've tramped Broadway for nine weeks until every piece of flagstone gives me the laugh when it sees my feet coming. Got a letter from the missis this morning. The kids got to have some clothes, there's measles in the town, and mumps in the next village. I've just got to raise some money or get some work, or the first thing you'll know I'll be hanging around Central Park on a dark night with a club.

LAURA. I know just how you feel. Sit down, Jim. [JIM crosses and sits in chair right of table.] It's pretty tough for me [Offers JIM glass of milk; he refuses; takes crackers.], but it must be a whole lot worse for you with a wife and kids.

JIM. Oh, if a man's alone he can generally get along--turn his hand to anything; but a woman--

LAURA. Worse, you think?

JIM. I was just thinking about you and what Burgess said?

LAURA. What was that? [Crosses to bed; sits on up-stage side, sipping milk.

JIM. You know Burgess and I used to be in the circus business together. He took care of the grafters when I was boss canvas man. I never could see any good in shaking down the rubes for all the money they had and then taking part of it. He used to run the privilege car, you know.

LAURA. Privilege car?

JIM. Had charge of all the pickpockets,--dips we called 'em--sure-thing gamblers, and the like. Made him rich. I kept sort o' on the level and I'm broke. Guess it don't pay to be honest--

LAURA. [Turns to him and in a significant voice:] You don't really think that?

JIM. No, maybe not. Ever since I married the missis and the first kid come, we figured the only good money was the kind folks worked for and earned; but when you can't get hold of that, it's tough.

LAURA. I know.

JIM. Burgess don't seem to be losing sleep over the tricks he's turned. He's happy and prosperous, but I guess he ain't any better now than he was then.

LAURA. Maybe not. I've been trying to get an engagement from him. There are half a dozen parts in his new attractions that I could do, but he has never absolutely said "no," but yet somehow he's never said "yes."

JIM. He spoke about you.

LAURA. In what way? [Rising, stands behind JIM'S chair.

JIM. I gave him my address and he seen it was yours, too. Asked if I lived in the same place.

LAURA. Was that all?

JIM. Wanted to know how you was getting on. I let him know you needed work, but I didn't tip my hand you was flat broke. He said something about you being a damned fool.

LAURA. [Suddenly and interested.] How? [She crosses.

JIM. Well, Johnny Ensworth--you know he used to do the fights on the Evening Journal; now he's press-agent for Burgess; nice fellow and way on the inside--he told me where you were in wrong.

LAURA. What have I done? [Sits in armchair.

JIM. Burgess don't put up the money for any of them musical comedies--he just trails. Of course he's got a lot of influence, and he's always Johnny-on-the-Spot to turn any dirty trick that they want. There are four or five rich men in town who are there with the bank-roll, providing he engages women who ain't so very particular about the location of their residence, and who don't hear a curfew ring at 11:30 every night.

LAURA. And he thinks I am too particular?

JIM. That's what was slipped me. Seems that one of the richest men that is in on Mr. Burgess's address-book is a fellow named Brockton from downtown some place. He's got more money than the Shoe and Leather National Bank. He likes to play show business.

LAURA. [Rises quickly.] Oh! [Crosses to wardrobe, gets hat; crosses to dresser, gets scissors with intention of curling feathers.

JIM. I thought you knew him. I thought it was just as well to tell you where he and Burgess stand. They're pals.

LAURA. [Coming over to JIM and with emphasis crosses to down-stage side of bed; puts hat and scissors on bed.] I don't want you to talk about him or any of them. I just want you to know that I'm trying to do everything in my power to go through this season without any more trouble. I've pawned everything I've got; I've cut every friend I knew. But where am I going to end? That's what I want to know—where am I going to end? [To bed and sits.] Every place I look for a position something interferes. It's almost as if I were blacklisted. I know I could get jobs all right if I wanted to pay the price, but I won't. I just want to tell you, I won't. No! [Rises, crosses to mantel, rests elbow.

JIM. That's the way to talk. [Rises.] I don't know you very well, but I've watched you close. I'm just a common, ordinary showman who never had much money, and I'm going out o' date. I've spent most of my time with nigger-minstrel shows and circuses, but I've been on the square. That's why I'm broke. [Rather sadly.] Once I thought the missis would have to go back and do her acrobatic act, but she couldn't do that, she's grown so damn fat. [Crosses to LAURA.] Just you don't mind. It'll all come out right.

LAURA. It's an awful tough game, isn't it?

JIM. [During this speech LAURA gets cup, pours milk back into bottle, closes biscuit-box, puts milk on shed outside, and biscuits into wardrobe, cup in alcove.] It's hell forty ways from the Jack. It's tough for me, but for a pretty woman with a lot o' rich fools jumping out o' their automobiles and hanging around stage doors, it must be something awful. I ain't blaming the women. They say "self-preservation is the first law of nature," and I guess that's right; but sometimes when the show is over and I see them fellows with their hair plastered back, smoking cigarettes in a [LAURA crosses to chair right of table and leans over back.] holder long enough to reach from here to Harlem, and a bank-roll that would bust my pocket and turn my head, I feel as if I'd like to get a gun and go a-shooting around this old town.

LAURA. Jim!

JIM. Yes, I do--you bet.

LAURA. That wouldn't pay, would it?

JIM. No, they're not worth the job of sitting on that throne in Sing Sing, and I'm too poor to go to Matteawan. But all them fellows under nineteen and over fifty-nine ain't much use to themselves or anyone else.

LAURA. [Rather meditatively.] Perhaps all of them are not so bad.

JIM. [Sits on bed.] Yes, they are,--angels and all. Last season I had one of them shows where a rich fellow backed it on account of a girl. We lost money and he lost his girl; then we got stuck in Texas. I telegraphed: "Must have a thousand, or can't move." He just answered: "Don't move." We didn't.

LAURA. But that was business.

JIM. Bad business. It took a year for some of them folks to get back to Broadway. Some of the girls never did, and I guess never will.

LAURA. Maybe they're better off, Jim. [Sits right of table.

JIM. Couldn't be worse. They're still in Texas. [To himself.] Wish I knew how to do something else, being a plumber or a walking delegate; they always have jobs.

LAURA. Well, I wish I could do something else too, but I can't, and we've got to make the best of it.

JIM. I guess so. I'll see you this evening. I hope you'll have good news by that time. [Starts to exit, about to open door; then retreats a step, with hand on door-knob, crosses and in a voice

meant to be kindly] If you'd like to go to the theatre to-night, and take some other woman in the house, maybe I can get a couple of tickets for some of the shows. I know a lot of fellows who are working.

LAURA. No, thanks. I haven't anything to wear to the theatre, and I don't--

JIM. [With a smile crosses to LAURA, puts arm around her.] Now you just cheer up! Something's sure to turn up. It always has for me, and I'm a lot older than you, both in years and in this business. There's always a break in hard luck sometime--that's sure.

LAURA. [Smiling through her tears.] I hope so. But things are looking pretty hopeless now, aren't they?

JIM. I'll go down and give Mrs. F. a line o' talk and try to square you for a couple of days more anyway. But I guess she's laying pretty close to the cushion herself, poor woman.

LAURA. Annie says a lot of people owe her.

JIM. Well, you can't pay what you haven't got. And even if money was growing on trees, it's winter now. [JIM goes towards door.] I'm off. Maybe to-day is lucky day. So long!

LAURA. Good-bye.

JIM. Keep your nerve.

[Exit

LAURA. I will. [She sits for a moment in deep thought, picks up the letter received, as if to read it, and then throws it down in anger. She buries her head in hands.] I can't stand it--I just simply can't stand it.

MRS. FARLEY'S VOICE. [Off stage.] Miss Murdock--Miss Murdock.

LAURA. [Brushing away tears, rises, goes to door, and opens it.] What is it?

SAME VOICE. There's a lady down here to see you.

ELFIE'S VOICE. [Off stage.] Hello, dearie, can I come up?

LAURA. Is that you, Elfie?

ELFIE. Yes; shall I come up?

LAURA. Why, certainly.

She waits at the door for a moment, and ELFIE ST. CLAIR appears. She is gorgeously gowned in the rather extreme style affected by the usual New York woman who is cared for by a gentleman of wealth and who has not gone through the formality of matrimonial alliance. Her conduct is always exaggerated and her attitude vigorous. Her gown is of the latest design, and in every detail of dress she shows evidence of most extravagant expenditure. She carries a hand-bag of gold, upon which are attached such trifles as a

gold cigarette-case, a gold powder-box, pencils, and the like. ELFIE throws her arms around LAURA, and both exchange kisses.

ELFIE. Laura, you old dear [Crossing to table.], I've just found out where you've been hiding, and came around to see you.

LAURA. [Who is much brightened by ELFIE'S appearance.] Elfie, you're looking bully. How are you, dear?

ELFIE. Fine.

LAURA. Come in and sit down. I haven't much to offer, but--

ELFIE. Oh, never mind. It's such a grand day outside, and I've come around in my car to take you out. [Sits right of table.] You know I've got a new one, and it can go some.

LAURA. [Sits on arm of chair.] I am sorry, but I can't go out this afternoon, Elfie.

ELFIE. What's the matter?

LAURA. You see I'm staying home a good deal nowadays. I haven't been feeling very well and I don't go out much.

ELFIE. I should think not. I haven't seen you in Rector's or Martin's since you come back from Denver. Got a glimpse of you one day trailing up Broadway, but couldn't get to you--you dived into some office or other. [For the first time she surveys the room, rises, looks around critically, crossing to mantel.] Gee! Whatever made you come into a dump like this? It's the limit.

LAURA. [Crossing and standing back of the table.] Oh, I know it isn't pleasant, but it's my home, and after all--a home's a home.

ELFIE. Looks more like a prison. [Takes candy from mantel; spits it out on floor.] Makes me think of the old days of Child's sinkers and a hall bedroom.

LAURA. It's comfortable. [Leaning hands on table.

ELFIE. Not! [Sits on bed, trying bed with comedy effect. Say, is this here for an effect, or do you sleep on it?

LAURA. I sleep on it.

ELFIE. No wonder you look tired. Say, listen, dearie. What else is the matter with you anyway?

LAURA. Nothing.

ELFIE. Yes, there is. What happened between you and Brockton? [Notices faded flowers in vase on table; takes them out, tosses them into fireplace, replaces them with gardenias which she wears.] He's not broke, because I saw him the other day.

LAURA. Where?

ELFIE. In the park. Asked me out to luncheon, but I couldn't go. You know, dearie, I've got to be so careful. Jerry's so awful jealous—the old fool.

LAURA. Do you see much of Jerry nowadays, Elfie?

ELFIE. Not any more than I can help and be nice. He gets on my nerves. Of course, I've heard about your quitting Brockton.

LAURA. Then why do you ask? [Crosses around chair right of table; stands.

ELFIE. Just wanted to hear from your own dear lips what the trouble was. Now tell me all about it. Can I smoke here? [Takes cigarette-case up, opens it, selecting cigarette.

LAURA. Surely. [Gets matches off bureau, puts them on table.

ELFIE. Have one? [Offers case.

LAURA. No, thank you. [Sits in chair right of table, facing ELFIE.

ELFIE. H'm-m, h'm-m, hah! [Lights cigarette.] Now go ahead. Tell me all the scandal. I'm just crazy to know.

LAURA. There's nothing to tell. I haven't been able to find work, that is all, and I'm short of money. You can't live in hotels, you know, with cabs and all that sort of thing, when you're not working.

ELFIE. Yes, you can. I haven't worked in a year.

LAURA. But you don't understand, dear. I--I--Well, you know I--well, you know--I can't say what I want.

ELFIE. Oh, yes, you can. You can say anything to me--everybody else does. We've been pals. I know you got along a little faster in the business than I did. The chorus was my limit, and you went into the legitimate thing. But we got our living just the same way. I didn't suppose there was any secret between you and me about that.

LAURA. I know there wasn't then, Elfie, but I tell you I'm different now. I don't want to do that sort of thing, and I've been very unlucky. This has been a terribly hard season for me. I simply haven't been able to get an engagement.

ELFIE. Well, you can't get on this way. Won't [Pauses, knocking ashes off cigarette to cover hesitation.] Brockton help you out?

LAURA. What's the use of talking to you [Rises and crosses to fireplace.], Elfie; you don't understand.

ELFIE. [Puffing deliberately on cigarette and crossing her legs in almost a masculine attitude.] No? Why don't I understand?

LAURA. Because you can't; you've never felt as I have.

ELFIE. How do you know?

LAURA. [Turning impatiently.] Oh, what's the use of explaining?

ELFIE. You know, Laura, I'm not much on giving advice, but you make me sick. I thought you'd grown wise. A young girl just butting into this business might possibly make a fool of herself, but you ought to be on to the game and make the best of it.

LAURA. [Going over to her angrily.] If you came up here, Elfie, to talk that sort of stuff to me, please don't. I was West this summer. I met someone, a real man, who did me a whole lot of good,--a man who opened my eyes to a different way of going along--a man who--Oh, well, what's the use? You don't know--you don't know. [Sits on bed.

ELFIE. [Throws cigarette into fireplace.] I don't know, don't I? I don't know, I suppose, that when I came to this town from up state,--a little burg named Oswego,--and joined a chorus, that I didn't fall in love with just such a man. I suppose I don't know that then I was the best-looking girl in New York, and everybody talked about me? I suppose I don't know that there were men, all ages and with all kinds of money, ready to give me anything for the mere privilege of taking me out to supper? And I didn't do it, did I? For three years I stuck by this good man who was to lead me in a good way toward a good life. And all the time I was getting older, never quite so pretty one day as I had been the day before. I never knew then what it was to be tinkered with by hair-dressers and manicures or a hundred and one of those other people who make you look good. I didn't have to have them then. [Rises, crosses to right of table, facing LAURA.] Well, you know, Laura, what happened.

LAURA. Wasn't it partly your fault, Elfie?

ELFIE. [Speaking across table angrily.] Was it my fault that time made me older and I took on a lot of flesh? Was it my fault that the work and the life took out the colour, and left the make-up? Was it my fault that other pretty young girls came along, just as I'd come, and were chased after, just as I was? Was it my fault the cabs weren't waiting any more and people didn't talk about how pretty I was? And was it my fault when he finally had me alone, and just because no one else wanted me, he got tired and threw me flat--cold flat [Brings hand down on table.]--and I'd been on the dead level with him! [With almost a sob, crosses up to bureau, powders nose, comes down back of table.] It almost broke my heart. Then I made up my mind to get even and get all I could out of the game. Jerry came along. He was a has-been and I was on the road to be. He wanted to be good to me, and I let him. That's all.

LAURA. Still, I don't see how you can live that way. [Lies on bed.

ELFIE. Well, you did, and you didn't kick.

LAURA. Yes, but things are different with me now. You'd be the same way if you were in my place.

ELFIE. No. I've had all the romance I want, and I'll stake you to all your love affairs. [Crosses back of bed, touches picture over bed.] I am out to gather in as much coin as I can in my own way, so when the old rainy day comes along I'll have a little change to buy myself an umbrella.

LAURA. [Rising and angrily crossing to armchair.] What did you come here for? Why can't you leave me alone when I'm trying to get along?

ELFIE. Because I want to help you.

LAURA. [During speech crosses to up-stage side of bed, angrily tosses quilt to floor and sits on bed in tears.] You can't help me. I'm all right--I tell you I am. What do you care anyway?

ELFIE. [Sits on bed, crosses down stage to lower left side of bed, sits facing LAURA.] But I do care. I know how you feel with an old cat for a landlady and living up here on a side street with a lot of cheap burlesque people. Why, the room's cold [LAURA rises, crosses to window.], and there's no hot water, and you're beginning to look shabby. You haven't got a job--chances are you won't have one. What does [Indicating picture on bed with thumb.] this fellow out there do for you? Send you long letters of condolences? That's what I used to get. When I wanted to buy a new pair of shoes or a silk petticoat, he told me how much he loved me; so I had the other ones re-soled and turned the old petticoat. And look at you, you're beginning to show it. [She surveys her carefully.] I do believe there are lines coming in your face [LAURA crosses to dresser quickly, picks up hand mirror, and looks at herself.], and you hide in the house because you've nothing new to wear.

LAURA. [Puts down mirror, crossing down to back of bed.] But I've got what you haven't got. I may have to hide my clothes, but I don't have to hide my face. And you with that man--he's old enough to be your father--a toddling dote hanging on your apron-strings. I don't see how you dare show your face to a decent woman.

ELFIE. [Rises.] You don't!--but you did once and I never caught you hanging your head. You say he's old. I know he's old, but he's good to me. He's making what's left of my life pleasant. You think I like him. I don't,--sometimes I hate him,--but he understands; and you can bet your life his check is in my mail every Saturday night or there's a new lock on the door Sunday morning. [Crossing to fireplace.

LAURA. How can you say such things to me?

ELFIE. [Crosses to left end of table.] Because I want you to be square with yourself. You've lost all that precious virtue women gab about. When you've got the name, I say get the game.

LAURA. You can go now, Elfie, and don't come back.

ELFIE. [Gathering up muff, &c.] All right, if that's the way you want it to be, I'm sorry. [A knock on the door.

LAURA. [Controlling herself after a moment's hesitation.] Come in.

ANNIE enters with a note, crosses, and hands it to LAURA.

ANNIE. Mis' Farley sent dis, Miss Laura.

[LAURA takes the note and reads it. She is palpably annoyed.

LAURA. There's no answer.

ANNIE. She tol' me not to leave until Ah got an answah.

LAURA. You must ask her to wait.

ANNIE. She wants an answah.

LAURA. Tell her I'll be right down--that it will be all right.

ANNIE. But, Miss Laura, she tol' me to get an answah.

[Exit reluctantly.

LAURA. [Half to herself and half to ELFIE.] She's taking advantage of your being here. [Standing near door.

ELFIE. How?

LAURA. She wants money--three weeks' room-rent. I presume she thought you'd give it to me.

ELFIE. Huh! [Moves to left.

LAURA. [Crossing to table.] Elfie, I've been a little cross; I didn't mean it.

ELFIE. Well?

LAURA. Could--could you lend me thirty-five dollars until I get to work?

ELFIE. Me?

LAURA. Yes.

ELFIE. Lend you thirty-five dollars?

LAURA. Yes; you've got plenty of money to spare.

ELFIE. Well, you certainly have got a nerve.

LAURA. You might give it to me. I haven't a dollar in the world, and you pretend to be such a friend to me!

ELFIE. [Turning and angrily speaking across table.] So that's the kind of woman you are, eh? A moment ago you were going to kick me out of the place because I wasn't decent enough to associate with you. You know how I live. You know how I get my money--the same way you got most of yours. And now that you've got this spasm of goodness I'm not fit to be in your room; but you'll take my money to pay your debts. You'll let me go out and do this sort of thing for your benefit, while you try to play the grand lady. I've got your number now, Laura. Where in hell is your virtue anyway? You can go to the devil--rich, poor, or any other way. I'm off!

ELFIE rushes toward door; for a moment LAURA stands speechless, then bursts into hysterics.

LAURA. Elfie! Elfie! Don't go now! Don't leave me now! [ELFIE hesitates with hand on door-knob.] I can't stand it. I can't be alone. Don't go, please; don't go.

LAURA falls into ELFIE'S arms, sobbing. In a moment ELFIE'S whole demeanour changes and she melts into the tenderest womanly sympathy, trying her best to express herself in her crude way.

ELFIE. There, old girl, don't cry, don't cry. You just sit down here and let me put my arms around you. [ELFIE leads LAURA over to armchair, places muff, &c., in chair, and sits LAURA down in chair. ELFIE sits on right arm of chair with her left arm behind LAURA; hugs LAURA to her. LAURA in tears and sobbing during scene.] I'm awful sorry--on the level, I am. I shouldn't have said it. I know that. But I've got feelings too, even if folks don't give me credit for it.

LAURA. I know, Elfie. I've gone through about all I can stand.

ELFIE. Well, I should say you have--and more than I would. Anyway a good cry never hurts any woman. I have one myself, sometimes—under cover.

LAURA. [More seriously, recovering herself.] Perhaps what you said was true.

ELFIE. We won't talk about it. [Wiping LAURA'S eyes and kissing her.

LAURA. [With persistence.] But perhaps it was true, and, Elfie--

ELFIE. Yes.

LAURA. I think I've stood this just as long as I can. Every day is a living horror.

ELFIE. [Looking around room.] It's the limit.

LAURA. I've got to have money to pay the rent. I've pawned everything I have, except the clothes on my back.

ELFIE. I'll give you all the money you need, dearie. Great heavens, don't worry about that. Don't you care if I got sore and--and lost my head.

LAURA. No; I can't let you do that. [Rises; crosses to table.] You may have been mad,--awfully mad,--but what you said was the truth. I can't take your money. [Sits right of table.

ELFIE. Oh, forget that. [Rises, crosses to centre.

LAURA. Maybe--maybe if he knew all about it--the suffering—he wouldn't blame me.

ELFIE. Who--the good man who wanted to lead you to the good life without even a bread-basket for an advance-agent? Huh!

LAURA. Still he doesn't know how desperately poor I am.

ELFIE. He knows you're out of work, don't he?

LAURA. [Turning to ELFIE.] Not exactly. I've let him think that I'm getting along all right.

ELFIE. Then you're a chump. Hasn't he sent you anything?

LAURA. He hasn't anything to send.

ELFIE. Well, what does he think you're going to live on?—asphalt croquettes with conversation sauce?

LAURA. I don't know--I don't know. [Sobbing.

ELFIE. [Crosses to LAURA, puts arms around her.] Don't be foolish, dearie. You know there is somebody waiting for you--somebody who'll be good to you and get you out of this mess.

LAURA. You mean Will Brockton? [Looking up.

ELFIE. Yes.

LAURA. Do you know where he is?

ELFIE. Yes.

LAURA. Well?

ELFIE. You won't get sore again if I tell you, will you?

LAURA. No--why? [Rises.

ELFIE. He's downstairs--waiting in the car. I promised to tell him what you said.

LAURA. Then it was all planned, and--and--

ELFIE. Now, dearie, I knew you were up against it, and I wanted to bring you two together. He's got half of the Burgess shows, and if you'll only see him everything will be fixed.

LAURA. When does he want to see me?

ELFIE. Now.

LAURA. Here?

ELFIE. Yes. Shall I tell him to come up?

LAURA. [After a long pause, crossing around to bed, down-stage side.] Yes.

ELFIE. [Suddenly becomes animated.] Now you're a sensible dear. I'll bet he's half frozen down there. [Goes to door.] I'll send him up. Look at you, Laura, you're a sight. [Crosses to LAURA, takes her by hand, leads her up to washstand, takes towel and wipes LAURA'S eyes.] It'll never do to have him see you looking like this; come over here and let me fix your eyes. Now, Laura, I want you to promise me you won't do any more crying. [Leads LAURA over to dresser, takes powder-puff and powders LAURA'S face.] Come over here and let me powder your nose. Now when he comes up you tell him he has got to blow us all off to a dinner to-night at Martin's, seven-thirty. Let me look at you. Now you're all right. [After daubing LAURA'S face with the

rouge paw, ELFIE takes LAURA'S face in her hands and kisses her.] Make it strong now, seven-thirty, don't forget. I'll be there. [Crosses to armchair, gathers up muff, &c.] So long.

[Exit.

After ELFIE'S exit LAURA crosses slowly to wardrobe, pulls off picture of JOHN; crosses to dresser, takes picture of JOHN from there; carries both pictures over to bed; kneels on bed, pulls down picture at head of bed; places all three pictures under pillow. WILL is heard coming upstairs, and knocks.

LAURA. Come in.

WILL enters. His dress is that of a man of business, the time being about February. He is well groomed and brings with him the impression of easy luxury.

WILL. [As he enters.] Hello, Laura.

There is an obvious embarrassment on the part of each of them. She rises, goes to him and extends her hand.

LAURA. I'm--I'm glad to see you, Will.

WILL. Thank you.

LAURA. Won't you sit down?

WILL. [Regaining his ease of manner.] Thank you again. [Puts hat and cane at end of wardrobe; removes overcoat and places it on back of armchair; sits in armchair.

LAURA. [Sits right of table.] It's rather cold out, isn't it?

WILL. Just a bit sharp.

LAURA. You came with Elfie in the car?

WILL. She picked me up at Martin's; we lunched there.

LAURA. By appointment?

WILL. I'd asked her.

LAURA. Well?

WILL. Well, Laura.

LAURA. She told you?

WILL. Not a great deal. What do you want to tell me?

LAURA. [Very simply, and avoiding his glance.] Will, I'm ready to come back.

WILL. [With an effort concealing his sense of triumph and satisfaction. Rises, crosses to LAURA.] I'm mighty glad of that, Laura. I've missed you like the very devil.

LAURA. Do we--do we have to talk it over much? [Crosses to left of table in front of bed.

WILL. Not at all unless you want to. I understand--in fact, I always have.

LAURA. [Wearily.] Yes, I guess you always did. I didn't. [Crosses and sits right of table.

WILL. It will be just the same as it was before, you know.

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. I didn't think it was possible for me to miss anyone the way I have you. I've been lonely.

LAURA. That's nice in you to say that.

WILL. You'll have to move out of here right away. [Crossing to back of table, surveying room.] This place is enough to give one the colly-wabbles. If you'll be ready to-morrow I'll send my man over to help you take care of the luggage.

LAURA. To-morrow will be all right, thank you.

WILL. And you'll need some money in the meantime. I'll leave this here.

[He takes a roll of bills and places it on the bureau.

LAURA. You seem to have come prepared. Did Elfie and you plan this all out?

WILL. Not planned--just hoped. I think you'd better go to some nice hotel now. Later we can arrange. [Sits on up-stage side of bed.

LAURA. Will, we'll always be frank. I said I was ready to go. It's up to you--when and where.

WILL. The hotel scheme is the best, but, Laura--

LAURA. Yes?

WILL. You're quite sure this is in earnest. You don't want to change? You've time enough now.

LAURA. I've quite made up my mind. It's final.

WILL. If you want to work, Burgess has a nice part for you. I'll telephone and arrange if you say so.

LAURA. Thanks. Say I'll see him in the morning.

WILL. And, Laura, you know when we were in Denver, and--

LAURA. [Rises hurriedly; crosses right.] Please, please, don't speak of it.

WILL. I'm sorry, but I've got to. I told [Rises, and crosses to left.] Madison [LAURA turns her head.]--pardon me, but I must do this--that if this time ever came I'd have you write him the truth. Before we go any further I'd like you to do that now.

LAURA. Say good-bye? [Turns to WILL.

WILL. Just that.

LAURA. I wouldn't know how to begin. It will hurt him awfully deeply.

WILL. It'll be worse if you don't. He'll like you for telling him. It would be honest, and that is what he expects.

LAURA. Must I--now?

WILL. I think you should.

LAURA. [Goes to table and sits down.] How shall I begin, Will?

WILL. [Standing back of table.] You mean you don't know what to say?

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. Then I'll dictate.

LAURA. I'll do just as you say. You're the one to tell me now.

WILL. Address it the way you want to. [She complies.] I'm going to be pretty brutal. In the long run I think that is best, don't you?

LAURA. It's up to you.

WILL. Ready?

LAURA. Begin.

WILL. [Dictating.] "All I have to say can be expressed in one word, 'good-bye.' I shall not tell you where I've gone, but remind you of what Brockton told you the last time he saw you. He is here now [Pause.], dictating this letter. What I am doing is voluntary—my own suggestion. Don't grieve. Be happy and successful. I do not love you"-- [She puts pen down; looks at him.

LAURA. Will--please.

WILL. It has got to go just that way--"I do not love you." Sign it "Laura." [She does it.] Fold it, put it in an envelope—seal it--address it. Now shall I mail it?

LAURA. No. If you don't mind I'd sooner. It's a sort of a last—last message.

WILL. [Crosses to armchair; gets coat, puts it on.] All right. You're a little upset now, and I'm going. We are all to dine at Martin's to-night at seven-thirty. There'll be a party. Of course you'll come. [Gets hat and cane.

LAURA. I don't think I can. You see--

WILL. I know. I guess there's enough there [Indicating money.] for your immediate needs. Later you can straighten things up. Shall I send the car?

LAURA. Yes, please.

WILL. Good. It will be the first happy evening I've had in a long, long time. You'll be ready? [Approaches and bends over her as if to caress her.

LAURA. [Shrinking away.] Please don't. Remember we don't dine until seven-thirty.

WILL. All right.

[Exit.

For a moment LAURA sits silent, and then angrily rises, crosses up to dresser, gets alcohol lamp, crosses to table with lamp, lights same, and starts back to dresser. Knock at door.

LAURA. Come in. [ANNIE enters, and stops.] That you, Annie?

ANNIE. Yassum.

LAURA. Mrs. Farley wants her rent. There is some money. [Tosses money on to table.] Take it to her.

ANNIE goes to the table, examines the roll of bills and is palpably surprised.

ANNIE. Dey ain't nothin' heah, Miss Laura, but five great big one hunderd dollah bills.

LAURA. Take two. And look in that upper drawer. You'll find some pawn tickets there.

[ANNIE complies.

ANNIE. Yassum. [Aside.] Dat's real money--dem's yellow-backs sure.

LAURA. Take the two top ones and go get my lace gown and one of the hats. The ticket is for a hundred and ten dollars. Keep ten for yourself, and hurry.

ANNIE. [Aside.] Ten for myself--I never see so much money. [To LAURA, her astonishment nearly overcoming her.] Yassum, Miss Laura, yassum. [She goes toward door, and then turns to LAURA.] Ah'm so mighty glad yo' out all yo' trouble, Miss Laura. I says to Mis' Farley now--

LAURA. [Snapping her off.] Don't--don't. Go do as I tell you and mind your business. [ANNIE turns sullenly and walks toward the door. At that moment LAURA sees the letter, which she has thrown on the table.] Wait a minute. I want you to mail a letter. [By this time her hair is half down, hanging loosely over her shoulders. Her waist is open at the throat, collar off, and she has the appearance of a woman's untidiness when she is at that particular stage of her toilet. Hands letter to ANNIE, but snatches it away as ANNIE turns to go. She glances at the letter long and wistfully, and her nerve fails her.] Never mind.

ANNIE exits. Slowly LAURA puts the letter over the flame of the alcohol lamp and it ignites. As it burns she holds it in her fingers, and when half consumed throws it into waste-jar, sits on side of bed watching letter burn, then lies down across bed on her elbows, her chin in her hands, facing audience. As the last flicker is seen the curtain slowly descends.

CURTAIN.

## ACT III.

SCENE. Two months have elapsed. The scene is at BROCKTON'S apartment in a hotel such as is not over particular concerning the relations of its tenants. There are a number of these hotels throughout the theatre district of New York, and, as a rule, one will find them usually of the same type. The room in which this scene is placed is that of the general living-room in one of the handsomest apartments in the building. The prevailing colour is green, and there is nothing particularly gaudy about the general furnishings. They are in good taste, but without the variety of arrangement and ornamentation which would naturally obtain in a room occupied by people a bit more particular concerning their surroundings. Down stage is a table about three feet square which can be used not only as a general centre-table, but also for service while the occupants are eating. There is a breakfast service on this table, and also a tray and stand behind it. There is a chair at either side of the table, and at right coming up stage, the room turns at a sharp angle of thirty-five degrees, and this space is largely taken up by a large doorway. This is equipped with sliding-doors and hung with green portières, which are handsome and in harmony with the general scheme of the furnishings of the room. This entrance is to the sleeping-room of the apartments.

At the back of the stage is a large window or alcove. The window is on the ordinary plan, and the view through it shows the back of another building of New York, presumably a hotel of about the same character. Green portières are also hung on the windows. Down left is the entrance to the corridor of the hotel, and this must be so arranged that it works with a latch-key and opens upon a small hallway, which separates the apartment from the main hallway. This is necessary as the action calls for the slamming of a door, and later the opening of the direct and intimate door of the apartment with a latch-key. Left of centre is a sofa, and there is a general arrangement of chairs without over-crowding the apartment. Just below, where the right portière is hung, is a long, full-length mirror, such as women dress by. Against wall is a lady's fancy dresser.

To the immediate left of the sliding-doors, which go into the sleeping-apartment, is a lady's small writing-desk, with a drawer on the right-hand side, in which is a pearl-handled 32-calibre revolver. The front of the desk is open at rise. On top of the desk is a desk lamp and a large box of candy; inside the desk is writing material, &c. In pigeon-hole left there is a small photo and frame, which ANNIE places on the table when she removes the breakfast set. In front of centre window in alcove is a small table on which is a parlour lamp, and some newspapers, including the "New York Sun." On the floor running between the desk and table is a large fur rug. In front of the table is a small gilt chair; in front of desk there is also a small gilt chair; there is a pianola piano, on top of which is a bundle of music-rolls. In place, ready to play, is a roll of a negro tune called "Bon-Bon Buddie, My Chocolate Drop." On top of the piano, in addition to the music-rolls, are a fancy lamp, a large basket of chrysanthemums, and two photos in frames, at the upper corner. Standing on the floor is a large piano lamp. On the sofa are cushions, and thrown over its back is a lady's opera-coat. On the sofa are also a fan and some small dinner favours.

On the dresser are a lady's silver toilet set, including powder boxes, rouge boxes, manicuring implements, and a small plush black cat that might have been a favour at some time. Two little dolls hang on the side of the glass of the dresser, which also might have been favours. These are used later in the action, and are necessary.

AT RISE. When the curtain rises on this scene it is noticeable that the occupants of the room must have returned rather late at night, after having dined, not wisely, but too well. In the alcove is a man's dress-coat and vest thrown on the cushions in a most careless manner; a silk hat badly rumpled is near it. Over the top of sofa is an opera-cloak, and hung on the mirror is a huge hat, of the evening type, such as women would pay handsomely for. A pair of gloves is thrown on top of the pier-glass. The curtains in the bay-window are half drawn, and the light shades are half drawn down the windows, so that when the curtain goes up the place is in a rather dim light. On the table are the remains of a breakfast, which is served in a box-like tray such as is used in hotels. LAURA is discovered sitting at right of table, her hair a bit untidy. She has on a very expensive negligée gown. WILL, in a business suit, is at the other side of the table, and both have evidently just about concluded their breakfast and are reading the newspapers while they sip their coffee. LAURA is intent in the scanning of her "Morning Telegraph," while WILL is deep in the market reports of the "Journal of Commerce," and in each instance these things must be made apparent. WILL throws down the paper rather impatiently.

WILL. Have you seen the Sun, Laura?

LAURA. No.

WILL. Where is it?

LAURA. I don't know.

WILL. [In a loud voice.] Annie, Annie! [A pause.] Annie! [In an undertone, half directed to LAURA.] Where the devil is that nigger?

LAURA. Why, I suppose she's at breakfast.

WILL. Well, she ought to be here.

LAURA. Did it ever occur to you that she has got to eat just the same as you have?

WILL. She's your servant, isn't she?

LAURA. My maid.

WILL. Well, what have you got her for,--to eat or to wait on you? Annie!

LAURA. Don't be so cross. What do you want?

WILL. I want the Sun.

[BROCKTON pours out one half glass of water from bottle.

LAURA. I will get it for you.

Rather wearily she gets up and goes to the table, where there are other morning papers; she takes the "Sun," hands it to him, goes back to her seat, re-opens the "Morning Telegraph." There is a pause. ANNIE enters from the sleeping-room.

ANNIE. Do yuh want me, suh?

WILL. Yes, I did want you, but don't now. When I'm at home I have a man to look after me, and I get what I want.

LAURA. For heaven's sake, Will, have a little patience. If you like your man so well, you had better live at home, but don't come around here with a grouch and bulldoze everybody.

WILL. Don't think for a moment that there's much to come around here for. Annie, this room's stuffy.

ANNIE. Yassuh.

WILL. Draw those portières. Let those curtains up. [ANNIE lets up curtain.] Let's have a little light. Take away these clothes and hide them. Don't you know that a man doesn't want to see the next morning anything to remind him of the night before. Make the place look a little respectable.

> In the meantime ANNIE scurries around, picking up the coat and vest, opera-cloak, &c., as rapidly as possible, and throwing them over her arm without any idea of order. It is very apparent that she is rather fearful of the anger of WILL while he is in this mood.

WILL. [Looking at her.] Be careful. You're not taking the wash off the line.

ANNIE. Yassuh. [Exit in confusion.

LAURA. [Laying down paper and looking at WILL.] Well, I must say you're rather amiable this morning.

WILL. I feel like hell.

LAURA. Market unsatisfactory?

WILL. No; head too big. [He lights a cigar; as he takes a puff he makes an awful face.] Tastes like punk. [Puts cigar into cup.

LAURA. You drank a lot.

WILL. We'll have to cut out those parties. I can't do those things any more. I'm not as young as I was, and in the morning it makes me sick. How do you feel?

LAURA. A little tired, that's all. [Rises, and crosses to bureau.

WILL. You didn't touch anything?

LAURA. No.

WILL. I guess you're on the safe side. It was a great old party, though, wasn't it?

LAURA. Did you think so?

WILL. Oh, for that sort of a blow-out. Not too rough, but just a little easy. I like them at night and I hate them in the morning. [He picks up the paper and commences to glance it over in a casual manner, not interrupting his conversation.] Were you bored?

LAURA. Yes; always at things like that.

WILL. Well, you don't have to go.

LAURA. You asked me.

WILL. Still, you could say no. [LAURA picks up paper, puts it on table and crosses back to bureau.

LAURA. But you asked me.

WILL. What did you go for if you didn't want to?

LAURA. You wanted me to.

WILL. I don't quite get you.

LAURA. Well, Will, you have all my time when I'm not in the theatre, and you can do with it just what you please. You pay for it. I'm working for you.

WILL. Is that all I've got,--just your time?

LAURA. [Wearily.] That and the rest. [LAURA crosses up to desk, gets "part," crosses to sofa, turning pages of "part."] I guess you know. [Crosses to sofa and sits.

WILL. [Looking at her curiously.] Down in the mouth, eh? I'm sorry.

LAURA. No, only if you want me to be frank, I'm a little tired. You may not believe it, but I work awfully hard over at the theatre. Burgess will tell you that. I know I'm not so very good as an actress, but I try to be. [LAURA lies down on sofa.] I'd like to succeed, myself. They're very patient with me. Of course they've got to be,--that's another thing you're paying for, but I don't seem to get along except this way.

WILL. Oh, don't get sentimental. If you're going to bring up that sort of talk, Laura, do it sometime when I haven't got a hang-over, and then don't forget talk never does count for much.

LAURA crosses up to mirror, picks up hat from box, puts it on, looks in mirror. She turns around and looks at him steadfastly for a minute. During this entire scene, from the time the curtain rises, she must in a way indicate a premonition of an approaching catastrophe, a feeling, vague but nevertheless palpable, that something is going to happen. She must hold this before her audience so that she can show to them, without showing to him, the disgust she feels. LAURA has tasted of the privations of self-sacrifice during her struggle, and she has weakly surrendered and is unable to go back, but that brief period of self-abnegation has shown to her

most clearly the rottenness of the other sort of living. There are enough sentimentality and emotion in her character to make it impossible for her to accept this manner of existence as ELFIE does. Hers is not a nature of careless candour, but of dreamy ideals and better living, warped, handicapped, disillusioned, and destroyed by a weakness that finds its principal force in vanity. WILL resumes his newspaper in a more attentive way. The girl looks at him and expresses in pantomime, by the slightest gesture or shrug of the shoulders, her growing distaste for him and his way of living. In the meantime WILL is reading the paper rather carefully. He stops suddenly and then looks at his watch.

LAURA. What time is it?

WILL. After ten.

LAURA. Oh.

> WILL at this moment particularly reads some part of the paper, turns to her with a keen glance of suspicion and inquiry, and then for a very short moment evidently settles in his mind a cross-examination. He has read in this paper a despatch from Chicago, which speaks of JOHN MADISON having arrived there as a representative of a big Western mining syndicate which is going to open large operations in the Nevada gold-fields, and representing MR. MADISON as being on his way to New York with sufficient capital to enlist more, and showing him to be now a man of means. The attitude of LAURA and the coincidence of the despatch bring back to WILL the scene in Denver, and later in New York, and with that subtle intuition of the man of the world he connects the two.

WILL. I don't suppose, Laura, that you'd be interested now in knowing anything about that young fellow out in Colorado? What was his name--Madison?

LAURA. Do you know anything?

WILL. No, nothing particularly. I've been rather curious to know how he came out. He was a pretty fresh young man and did an awful lot of talking. I wonder how he's doing and how he's getting along. I don't suppose by any chance you have ever heard from him?

LAURA. No, no; I've never heard. [Crosses to bureau.

WILL. I presume he never replied to that letter you wrote?

LAURA. No.

WILL. It would be rather queer, eh, if this young fellow should [Looks at paper.] happen to come across a lot of money--not that I think he ever could, but it would be funny, wouldn't it?

LAURA. Yes, yes; it would be unexpected. I hope he does. It might make him happy.

WILL. Think he might take a trip East and see you act. You know you've got quite a part now.

LAURA. [Impatiently.] I wish you wouldn't discuss this. Why do you mention it now? [Crossing to right of table.] Is it because you were drinking last night and lost your sense of delicacy? You once had some consideration for me. What I've done I've done. I'm giving you all that I can.

Please, please, don't hurt me any more than you can help. That's all I ask. [Crossing up to mirror. Crosses back to right of table; sits.

WILL. Well, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that, Laura. I guess I am feeling a little bad to-day. Really, I don't want to hurt your feelings, my dear.

He gets up, goes to her, puts his hands on her shoulders, and his cheek close to the back of her head. She bends forward and shudders a little bit. It is very easy to see that the life she is leading is becoming intolerable to her.

WILL. You know, dearie, I do a lot for you because you've always been on the level with me. I'm sorry I hurt you, but there was too much wine last night and I'm all upset. Forgive me.

LAURA, in order to avoid his caresses, has leaned forward; her hands are clasped between her knees, and she is looking straight outward with a cold, impassive expression. WILL regards her silently for a moment. Really in the man's heart there is an affection, and really he wants to try to comfort her; but he seems to realize that she has slipped away from the old environment and conditions, and that he simply bought her back; that he hasn't any of her affection, even with his money; that she evinces toward him none of the old camaraderie; and it hurts him, as those things always hurt a selfish man, inclining him to be brutal and inconsiderate. WILL crosses to centre, and stands reading paper; bell rings; a pause and second bell. WILL seizes upon this excuse to go up-stage and over towards the door.

WILL. [After second bell.] Damn that bell.

He continues on his way; he opens the door, leaves it open, and passes on to the outer door, which he opens. LAURA remains immovable and impassive, with the same cold, hard expression on her face. He comes in, slamming the outer door with effect, which one must have at this point of the play, because it is essential to a situation coming later. Enters the room, closes the door, and holds in his hand a telegram. Looks from newspaper to telegram.

WILL. A wire.

LAURA. For me?

WILL. Yes.

LAURA. From whom, I wonder. Perhaps Elfie with a luncheon engagement.

WILL. [Handing telegram to her.] I don't know. Here.

Pause; he faces her, looking at her. She opens it quickly. She reads it and, as she does, gasps quickly with an exclamation of fear and surprise. This is what the despatch says (it is dated at Buffalo and addressed to LAURA): "I will be in New York before noon. I'm coming to marry you and I'm coming with a bank-roll. I wanted to keep it secret and have a big surprise for you, but I can't hold it any longer, because I feel just like a kid with a new top. Don't go out, and be ready for the big matrimonial thing. All my love. John."

WILL. No bad news, I hope?

LAURA. [Walking up stage rather hurriedly.] No, no--not bad news.

WILL. I thought you were startled.

LAURA. No, not at all.

WILL. [Looking at paper about where he had left off.] From Elfie? [Crosses to, and sits in armchair.

LAURA. No, just a friend.

WILL. Oh!

He makes himself rather comfortable in the chair, and LAURA regards him for a moment from up stage as if trying to figure out how to get rid of him.

LAURA. Won't you be rather late getting down town, Will?

WILL. Doesn't make any difference. I don't feel much like the office now. Thought I might order the car and take a spin through the park. The cold air will do me a lot of good. Like to go?

LAURA. No, not to-day. I thought your business was important; you said so last night. [Crosses to sofa, and stands.

WILL. No hurry. Do you--er--want to get rid of me?

LAURA. Why should I?

WILL. Expecting someone?

LAURA. No--not exactly. [Crosses up to window.

WILL. If you don't mind, I'll stay here. [Lets curtain fly up.

LAURA. Just as you please. [A pause. Crosses to piano; plays.] Will?

WILL. Yes.

LAURA. How long does it take to come from Buffalo?

WILL. Depends on the train you take.

LAURA. About how long?

WILL. Between eight and ten hours, I think. Some one coming?

LAURA. Do you know anything about the trains?

WILL. Not much. Why don't you find out for yourself? Have Annie get the time-table?

LAURA. I will. Annie! Annie! [Rises from piano. ANNIE appears at doorway.

ANNIE. Yassum!

LAURA. Go ask one of the hall-boys to bring me a New York Central time-table.

ANNIE. Yassum!

Crosses the stage and exits through door. LAURA sits on left arm of sofa.

WILL. Then you do expect someone, eh?

LAURA. Only one of the girls who used to be in the same company with me. But I'm not sure that she's coming here.

WILL. Then the wire was from her?

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. Did she say what train she was coming on?

LAURA. No.

WILL. Well, there are a lot of trains. About what time did you expect her in?

LAURA. She didn't say.

WILL. Do I know her?

LAURA. I think not. I met her while I worked in 'Frisco.

WILL. Oh! [Resumes his paper.

ANNIE reënters with a time-table and hands it to LAURA.

LAURA. Thanks; take those breakfast things away, Annie. [Sits on sofa.

ANNIE complies; takes them across stage, opens the door leading to the corridor, exits. LAURA in the meantime is studying the time-table.

LAURA. I can't make this out.

WILL. Give it here; maybe I can help you.

LAURA crosses to right of table, sits opposite WILL, and hands him the time-table. He takes it and handles it as if he were familiar with it.

WILL. Where is she coming from?

LAURA. The West; the telegram was from Buffalo. I suppose she was on her way when she sent it.

WILL. There's a train comes in here at 9:30--that's the Twentieth

Century,--that doesn't carry passengers from Buffalo; then there's one at 11:41; one at 1:49; another at 3:45; another at 5:40; and another at 5:48--that's the Lake Shore Limited, a fast train; and all pass through Buffalo. Did you think of meeting her?

LAURA. No. She'll come here when she arrives.

WILL. Knows where you live?

LAURA. She has the address.

WILL. Ever been to New York before?

LAURA. I think not.

WILL. [Passing her the time-table.] Well, that's the best I can do for you.

LAURA. Thank you. [Crosses and puts time-table in desk.

WILL. [Takes up the paper again. LAURA looks at clock.] By George, this is funny.

LAURA. What?

WILL. Speak of the devil, you know.

LAURA. Who?

WILL. Your old friend Madison.

LAURA. [Utters a slight exclamation and makes an effort to control herself.] What--what about him?

WILL. He's been in Chicago.

LAURA. How do you know?

WILL. Here's a despatch about him.

LAURA. [Coming quickly over to him, looks over his shoulder.] What--where--what's it about?

WILL. Well, I'm damned if he hasn't done what he said he'd do--see! [Holds the paper so that she can see. LAURA takes paper.] He's been in Chicago, and is on his way to New York. He's struck it rich in Nevada and is coming with a lot of money. Queer, isn't it? [LAURA puts paper on table.] Did you know anything about it? [Lights cigarette.

LAURA. No, no; nothing at all. [Crosses to bureau.

WILL. Lucky for him, eh?

LAURA. Yes, yes; it's very nice.

WILL. Too bad he couldn't get this a little sooner, eh, Laura?

LAURA. Oh, I don't know--I don't think it's too bad. What makes you ask?

WILL. Oh, nothing. I suppose he ought to be here to-day. Are you going to see him if he looks you up?

LAURA. No, no; I don't want to see him. You know that, don't you, that I don't want to see him? What makes you ask these questions? [Crosses to sofa and sits.

WILL. Just thought you might meet him, that's all. Don't get sore about it.

LAURA. I'm not.

She holds the telegram crumpled in one hand. WILL lays down the paper, and regards LAURA curiously. She sees the expression on his face and averts her head in order not to meet his eye.

LAURA. What are you looking at me that way for?

WILL. I wasn't conscious that I was looking at you in any particular way--why?

LAURA. Oh, nothing. I guess I'm nervous, too. [Lies on sofa.

WILL. I dare say you are. [A pause.

LAURA. Yes, I am.

[WILL crosses to LAURA.

WILL. You know I don't want to delve into a lot of past history at this time, but I've got to talk to you for a moment.

LAURA. Why don't you do it some other time? I don't want to be talked to now. [Rises and crosses a little to left.

WILL. But I've got to do it just the same.

LAURA. [Trying to affect an attitude of resigned patience and resignation.] Well, what is it? [Resuming seat on sofa.

WILL. You've always been on the square with me, Laura. That's why I've liked you a lot better than the other women.

LAURA. Are you going into all that again now, this morning? I thought we understood each other.

WILL. So did I, but somehow I think that maybe we don't quite understand each other.

LAURA. In what way? [Turns to WILL.

WILL. [Looking her straight in the eye.] That letter I dictated to you the day that you came back to me, and left it for you to mail—did you mail it?

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. You're quite sure?

LAURA. Yes, I'm quite sure. I wouldn't say so if I wasn't.

WILL. And you didn't know Madison was coming East until you read about it in that newspaper?

LAURA. No--no, I didn't know.

WILL. Have you heard from him?

LAURA. No--no--I haven't heard from him. Don't talk to me about this thing. Why can't you leave me alone? I'm miserable enough as it is. [Crossing to extreme right.

WILL. [Crossing to table.] But I've got to talk to you. Laura, you're lying to me.

LAURA. What! [She makes a valiant effort to become angry.

WILL. You're lying to me, and you've been lying to me, and I've trusted you. Show me that telegram!

LAURA. No.

WILL. [Going over towards her.] Show me that telegram!

[LAURA crosses up to doors leading into bedroom.

LAURA. [Tears telegram in half.] You've no right to ask me.

WILL. Are you going to make me take it away [LAURA crosses to window.] from you? I've [Crosses to sofa.] never laid my hands on you yet.

LAURA. It's my business. [Crossing to left of sofa, around it on down-stage side.

WILL. Yes, and it's mine.

During scene. Backing away from WILL, who is following her, LAURA backs against bureau. WILL grabs her and attempts to take telegram from her. She has put it in the front of her waist. She slowly draws it out.

WILL. That telegram's from Madison. Give it here!

LAURA. No.

WILL. I'm going to find out where I stand. Give me that telegram, or I'll take it away from you.

LAURA. No.

WILL. Come on!

LAURA. I'll give it to you. [Takes telegram out of waist, and hands it to him.

He takes it slowly, looking her squarely in the eye. WILL crosses to centre, and does not glance away while he slowly smoothes it out so that it can be read; when he finally takes it in both hands to read it she staggers back a step or two weakly.

WILL. [Reads the telegram aloud.] "I will be in New York before noon. I'm coming to marry you, and I'm coming with a bank-roll. I wanted to keep it a secret and have a big surprise for you, but I can't hold it any longer, because I feel just like a kid with a new top. Don't go out, and be ready for the big matrimonial thing. All my love. John." Then you knew?

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. But you didn't know he was coming until this arrived?

LAURA. No.

WILL. And you didn't mail the letter [Tossing telegram on table], did you?

LAURA. No.

WILL. What did you do with it?

LAURA. I--I burned it.

WILL. Why?

[LAURA is completely overcome and unable to answer.

WILL. Why?

LAURA. I--I couldn't help it--I simply couldn't help it.

WILL. So you've been corresponding all this time.

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. And he doesn't know [With a gesture around the room, indicating the condition in which they live.] about us?

LAURA. No.

WILL. [Taking a step towards her.] By God, I never beat a woman in my life, but I feel as though I could wring your neck.

LAURA. Why don't you? You've done everything else. Why don't you?

WILL. Don't you know that I gave Madison my word that if you came back to me I'd let him know? Don't you know that I like that young fellow, and I wanted to protect him, and did

everything I could to help him? And do you know what you've done to me? You've made me out a liar--you've made me lie to a man--a man--you understand. What are you going to do now? Tell me--what are you going to do now? Don't stand there as if you've lost your voice--how are you going to square me?

LAURA. I'm not thinking about squaring you. What am I going to do for him?

WILL. Not what you are going to do for him--what am I going to do for him. Why, I couldn't have that young fellow think that I tricked him into this thing for you or all the rest of the women of your kind on earth. God! I might have known that you, and the others like you, couldn't be square. [The girl looks at him dumbly. He glances at his watch, walks up stage, looks out of the window, comes down again, goes to the table, and looks at her across it.] You've made a nice mess of it, haven't you?

LAURA. [Weakly.] There isn't any mess. Please go away. He'll be here soon. Please let me see him--please do that.

WILL. No, I'll wait. This time I'm going to tell him myself, and I don't care how tough it is.

LAURA. [Immediately regaining all her vitality.] No, you mustn't do that. [Crossing back of table to centre.] Oh, Will, I'm not offering any excuse. I'm not saying anything, but I'm telling you the truth. I couldn't give him up--I couldn't do it. I love him.

WILL. Huh. [Grins; crosses to front of sofa.

LAURA. Don't you think so? I know you can't see what I see, but I do. And why can't you go away? Why can't you leave me this? It's all I ever had. He doesn't know. No one will ever tell him. I'll take him away. It's the best for him--it's the best for me. Please go.

WILL. Why--do you think that I'm going to let you trip him the way you tripped me? [Crosses and sits in armchair.] No. I'm going to stay right here until that young man arrives, and I'm going to tell him that it wasn't my fault. You were to blame.

LAURA. Then you are going to let him know. You're not going to give me a single, solitary chance?

WILL. I'll give you every chance that you deserve when he knows. Then he can do as he pleases, but there must be no more deception, that's flat.

[LAURA crosses and kneels beside WILL'S chair.

LAURA. Then you must let me tell him--[WILL turns away impatiently.]--yes, you must. If I didn't tell him before, I'll do it now. You must go. If you ever had any regard for me--if you ever had any affection--if you ever had any friendship, please let me do this now. I want you to go--you can come back. Then you'll see--you'll know--only I want to try to make him understand that--that maybe if I am weak I'm not vicious. I want to let him know that I didn't want to do it, but I couldn't help it. Just give me the chance to be as good as I can be. [WILL gives her a look.] Oh, I promise you, I will tell him, and then--then I don't care what happens--only he must learn everything from me--please--please--let me do this--it's the last favour I shall ever--ever ask of you. Won't you? [LAURA breaks down and weeps.

WILL. [Rising, looks at her a moment as if mentally debating the best thing to do. Crosses in front of table; stands facing her with back to audience.] All right, I won't be unkind. I'll be back early this afternoon, and just remember, this is the time you'll have to go right through to the end. Understand?

LAURA. Yes, I'll do it,--all of it. Won't you please go--now? [Crosses; sits in armchair.

WILL. All right. [He exits into the bedroom and immediately enters again with overcoat on his arm and hat in hand; he goes centre, and turns.] I am sorry for you, Laura, but remember you've got to tell the truth.

LAURA. [Who is sitting in a chair looking straight in front of her with a set expression.] Please go.

[WILL exits.

LAURA sits in a chair in a state of almost stupefaction, holding this attitude as long as possible. ANNIE enters, and in a characteristic manner begins her task of tidying up the room; LAURA, without changing her attitude, and staring straight in front of her, her elbows between her knees and her chin on her hands.

LAURA. Annie!

ANNIE. Yassum.

LAURA. Do you remember in the boarding-house--when we finally packed up--what you did with everything?

ANNIE. Yassum.

LAURA. You remember that I used to keep a pistol?

ANNIE. Yo' all mean dat one yo' say dat gemman out West gave yuh once?

LAURA. Yes.

ANNIE. Yassum, Ah 'membuh it.

LAURA. Where is it now?

ANNIE. [Crosses to writing-desk.] Last Ah saw of it was in dis heah draw' in de writin'-desk. [This speech takes her across to desk; she opens the drawer, fumbles among a lot of old papers, letters, &c., and finally produces a small thirty-two calibre, and gingerly crosses to LAURA.] Is dis it?

LAURA. [Slowly turns around and looks at it.] Yes. Put it back. I thought perhaps it was lost. [ANNIE complies, when the bell rings. LAURA starts suddenly, involuntarily gathering her negligée gown closer to her figure, and at once she is under a great stress of emotion, and sways upon her feet to such an extent that she is obliged to put one hand out on to the table to maintain her balance. When she speaks, it is with a certain difficulty of articulation.] See--who--that is--and let me know.

ANNIE. [Turning.] Yassum. [Crosses, opens the first door, and afterwards opens the second door.

ELFIE'S VOICE. [Off stage.] Hello, Annie,--folks home?

ANNIE. Yassum, she's in.

LAURA immediately evinces her tremendous relief, and ELFIE, without waiting for a reply, has shoved ANNIE aside and enters, ANNIE following and closing the door. ELFIE is beautifully gowned in a morning dress with an overabundance of fur trimmings and all the furbelows that would accompany the extravagant raiment generally affected by a woman of that type. ELFIE approaching effusively.

ELFIE. Hello, dearie.

LAURA. Hello, Elfie.

LAURA crosses and sits on sofa. ELFIE puts muff, &c., on table.

ELFIE. It's a bully day out. [Crossing to bureau, looking in mirror.] I've been shopping all morning long; just blew myself until I'm broke, that's all. My goodness, don't you ever get dressed? Listen. [Crosses left of table to centre.] Talk about cinches. I copped out a gown, all ready made, and fits me like the paper on the wall, for $37.80. Looks like it might have cost $200. Anyway I had them charge $200 on the bill, and I kept the change. There are two or three more down town there, and I want you to go down and look them over. Models, you know, being sold out. I don't blame you for not getting up earlier. [She sits at the table, not noticing LAURA.] That was some party last night. I know you didn't drink a great deal, but gee! what an awful tide Will had on. How do you feel? [Looks at her critically.] What's the matter, are you sick? You look all in. What you want to do is this--put on your duds and go out for an hour. It's a perfectly grand day out. My Gaud! how the sun does shine! Clear and cold. [A pause.] Well, much obliged for the conversation. Don't I get a "Good-morning," or a "How-dy-do," or a something of that sort?

LAURA. I'm tired, Elfie, and blue--terribly blue.

ELFIE. [Rises; crosses to LAURA.] Well now, you just brace up and cut out all that emotional stuff. I came down to take you for a drive. You'd like it; just through the park. Will you go?

LAURA. [Going up stage.] Not this morning, dear; I'm expecting somebody.

ELFIE. A man?

LAURA. [Finding it almost impossible to suppress a smile.] No, a gentleman.

ELFIE. Same thing. Do I know him?

LAURA. You've heard of him. [At desk, looking at clock.

ELFIE. Well, don't be so mysterious. Who is he?

LAURA. What is your time, Elfie?

ELFIE. [Looks at her watch.] Five minutes past eleven.

LAURA. Oh, I'm slow. I didn't know it was so late. Just excuse me, won't you, while I get some clothes on. He may be here any moment. Annie! [She goes up stage towards portières.

ELFIE. Who?

LAURA. I'll tell you when I get dressed. Make yourself at home, won't you, dear?

ELFIE. I'd sooner hear. What is the scandal anyway?

LAURA. [As she goes out.] I'll tell you in a moment. Just as soon as Annie gets through with me. [Exit.

ELFIE. [Gets candy-box off desk, crosses, sits on arm of sofa, selecting candy. In a louder voice.] Do you know, Laura, I think I'll go back on the stage.

LAURA. [Off stage.] Yes?

ELFIE. Yes, I'm afraid I'll have to. I think I need a sort of a boost to my popularity.

LAURA. How a boost, Elfie?

ELFIE. I think Jerry is getting cold feet. He's seeing a little too much of me [Places candy-box on sofa.] nowadays.

LAURA. What makes you think that?

ELFIE. I think he is getting a relapse of that front-row habit. There's no use in talking, Laura, it's a great thing for a girl's credit when a man like Jerry can take two or three friends to the theatre, and when you make your entrance delicately point to you with his forefinger and say, "The third one from the front on the left belongs to muh." The old fool's hanging around some of these musical comedies lately, and I'm getting a little nervous every time rent day comes.

LAURA. Oh, I guess you'll get along all right, Elfie.

ELFIE. [With serene self-satisfaction.] Oh, that's a cinch [Rises; crosses to table, looking in dresser mirror at herself, and giving her hat and hair little touches.], but I like to leave well enough alone, and if I had to make a change right now it would require a whole lot of thought and attention, to say nothing of the inconvenience, and I'm so nicely settled in my flat. [She sees the pianola.] Say, dearie, when did you get the piano-player? I got one of them phonographs [Crosses to pianola, tries the levers, &c.], but this has got that beat a city block. How does it work? What did it cost?

LAURA. I don't know.

ELFIE. Well, Jerry's got to stake me to one of these. [Looks over the rolls on top. Mumbles to herself.] "Tannhauser, William Tell, Chopin." [Then louder.] Listen, dear. Ain't you got anything else except all this high-brow stuff?

LAURA. What do you want?

ELFIE. Oh, something with a regular tune to it [Looks at empty box on pianola.]. Oh, here's one; just watch me tear this off. [The roll is the tune of "Bon-Bon Buddie, My Chocolate Drop." She starts to play and moves the lever marked "Swell" wide open, increases the tempo, and is pumping with all the delight and enthusiasm of a child.] Ain't it grand?

LAURA. Gracious, Elfie, don't play so loud. What's the matter?

ELFIE. I shoved over that thing marked "Swell." [Stops and turns. Rises; crosses to centre and stands.] I sure will have to speak to Jerry about this. I'm stuck on that swell thing. Hurry up. [LAURA appears.] Gee! you look pale. [And then in a tone of sympathy:] I'll just bet you and Will have had a fight, and he always gets the best of you, doesn't he, dearie? [LAURA crosses to dresser, and busies herself.] Listen. Don't you think you can ever get him trained? I almost threw Jerry down the stairs the other night and he came right back with a lot of American beauties and a check. I told him if he didn't look out I'd throw him down-stairs every night. He's getting too damned independent and it's got me nervous. Oh, dear, I s'pose I will have to go back on the stage. [Sits in armchair.

LAURA. In the chorus?

ELFIE. Well, I should say not. I'm going to give up my musical career. Charlie Burgess is putting on a new play, and he says he has a part in it for me if I want to go back. It isn't much, but very important,--sort of a pantomime part. A lot of people talk about me, and just at the right time I walk across the stage and make an awful hit. I told Jerry that if I went [LAURA crosses to sofa, picks up candy-box, puts it upon desk, gets telegram from table, crosses to centre.] on he'd have to come across with one of those Irish crochet lace gowns. He fell for it. Do you know, dearie, I think he'd sell out his business just to have me back on the stage for a couple of weeks, just to give box-parties every night for my en-trance and ex-its.

LAURA. [Seriously.] Elfie! [LAURA takes ELFIE by the hand, and leads her over to sofa. LAURA sits, ELFIE standing.

ELFIE. Yes, dear.

LAURA. Come over here and sit down.

ELFIE. What's up?

LAURA. Do you know what I'm going to ask of you?

ELFIE. If it's a touch, you'll have to wait until next week. [Sits opposite LAURA.

LAURA. No: just a little advice.

ELFIE. [With a smile.] Well, that's cheap, and Lord knows you need it. What's happened?

> LAURA takes the crumpled and torn telegram that WILL has left on the table and hands it to ELFIE. The latter puts the two pieces together, reads it very carefully, looks up at LAURA about middle of telegram, and lays it down.

ELFIE. Well?

LAURA. Will suspected. There was something in the paper about Mr. Madison--the telegram came--then we had a row.

ELFIE. Serious?

LAURA. Yes. Do you remember what I told you about that letter--the one Will made me write--I mean to John--telling him what I had done?

ELFIE. Yes, you burned it.

LAURA. I tried to lie to Will--he wouldn't have it that way. He seemed to know. He was furious.

ELFIE. Did he hit you?

LAURA. No; he made me admit that John didn't know, and then he said he'd stay here and tell himself that I'd made him lie, and then he said something about liking the other man and wanting to save him.

ELFIE. Save--shucks! He's jealous.

LAURA. I told him if he'd only go I'd--tell John myself when he came, and now you see I'm waiting--and I've got to tell--and--and I don't know how to begin--and--and I thought you could help me--you seem so sort of resourceful, and it means--it means so much to me. If John turned on me now I couldn't go back to Will, and, Elfie,--I don't think I'd care to--stay here any more.

ELFIE. What! [In an awestruck tone, taking LAURA in her arms impulsively.] Dearie, get that nonsense out of your head and be sensible. I'd just like to see any two men who could make me think about--well--what you seem to have in your mind.

LAURA. But I don't know; don't you see, Elfie, I don't know. If I don't tell him, Will will come back and he'll tell him, and I know John and maybe--Elfie, do you know, I think John would kill him.

ELFIE. Well, don't you think anything about that. Now let's get [Rises, crosses to armchair, draws it over a little, sits on left arm.] down to cases, and we haven't much time. Business is business, and love is love. You're long on love and I'm long on business, and between the two of us we ought to straighten this thing out. Now, evidently John is coming on here to marry you.

LAURA. Yes.

ELFIE. And you love him?

LAURA. Yes.

ELFIE. And as far as you know the moment that he comes in here it's quick to the Justice and a big matrimonial thing.

LAURA. Yes, but you see how impossible it is--

ELFIE. I don't see anything impossible. From all you've said to me about this fellow there is only one thing to do.

LAURA. One thing?

ELFIE. Yes--get married quick. You say he has the money and you have the love, and you're sick of Brockton, and you want to switch and do it in the decent, respectable, conventional way, and he's going to take you away. Haven't you got sense enough to know that, once you're married to Mr. Madison, Will Brockton wouldn't dare go to him, and if he did Madison wouldn't believe him? A man will believe a whole lot about his girl, but nothing about his wife.

LAURA. [Turns and looks at her. There is a long pause.] Elfie [Rises; crosses to right of table.]--I--I don't think I could do like that to John. I don't think--I could deceive him.

ELFIE. You make me sick. The thing to do is to lie to all men. [Rises; pushes chair to table.]--they all lie to you. Protect yourself. You seem to think that your happiness depends on this. Now do it. Listen. [Touches LAURA to make her sit down; LAURA sits right of table; ELFIE sits on right arm of chair left of table, with elbows on table.] Don't you realize that you and me, and all the girls that are shoved into this life, are practically the common prey of any man who happens to come along? Don't you know that they've got about as much consideration for us as they have for any pet animal around the house, and the only way that we've got it on the animal is that we've got brains? This is a game, Laura, not a sentiment. Do you suppose this Madison [LAURA turns to ELFIE.]--now don't get sore--hasn't turned these tricks himself before he met you, and I'll gamble he's done it since! A man's natural trade is a heartbreaking business. Don't tell me about women breaking men's hearts. The only thing they can ever break is their bank roll. And besides, this is not Will's business; he has no right to interfere. You've been with him--yes, and he's been nice to you; but I don't think that he's given you any the best of it. Now if you want to leave and go your own way and marry any Tom, Dick, or Harry that you want, it's nobody's affair but yours.

LAURA. But you don't understand--it's John. I can't lie to him.

ELFIE. Well, that's too bad about you. I used to have that truthful habit myself, and the best I ever got was the worst of it. All this talk about love and loyalty and constancy is fine and dandy in a book, but when a girl has to look out for herself, take it from me, whenever you've got that trump card up your sleeve just play it and rake in the pot. [Takes LAURA'S hand affectionately.] You know, dearie, you're just about the only one in the world I love.

LAURA. Elfie!

ELFIE. Since I broke away from the folks up state and they've heard things, there ain't any more letters coming to me with an Oswego postmark. Ma's gone, and the rest don't care. You're all I've got in the world, Laura, and what I'm asking you to do is because I want to see you happy. I was afraid this thing was coming off, and the thing to do now is to grab your happiness, no matter how you get it nor where it comes from. There ain't a whole lot of joy in this world for you and me and the others we know, and what little you get you've got to take when you're young, because, when those gray hairs begin to come, and the make-up isn't going to hide the wrinkles, unless you're well fixed, it's going to be hell. You know what a fellow doesn't know doesn't hurt him, and he'll love you just the same and you'll love him. As for Brockton, let him get another girl; there're plenty 'round. Why, if this chance came to me I'd tie a can to Jerry so

quick that you could hear it rattle all the way down Broadway. [Rises, crosses back of table to LAURA, leans over back of chair, and puts arms around her neck very tenderly.] Dearie, promise me that you won't be a damn fool.

[The bell rings; both start.

LAURA. [Rises.] Maybe that's John.

[ELFIE brushes a tear quickly from her eye.

ELFIE. Oh! And you'll promise me, Laura?

LAURA. I'll try. [ANNIE enters up stage from the adjoining room and crosses to the door.] If that's Mr. Madison, Annie, tell him to come in.

LAURA stands near the table, almost rigid. Instinctively ELFIE goes to the mirror and re-arranges her gown and hair as ANNIE exits. ELFIE turns to LAURA.

ELFIE. If I think he's the fellow when I see him, watch me and I'll tip you the wink. [Kisses LAURA; up stage puts on coat.

She goes up stage to centre; LAURA remains in her position. The doors are heard to open, and in a moment JOHN enters. He is dressed very neatly in a business suit, and his face is tanned and weather-beaten. After he enters, he stands still for a moment. The emotion that both he and LAURA go through is such that each is trying to control it, LAURA from the agony of her position, and JOHN from the mere hurt of his affection. He sees ELFIE and forces a smile.

JOHN. [Quietly.] Hello, Laura! I'm on time.

LAURA smiles, quickly crosses the stage, and holds out her hand.

LAURA. Oh, John, I'm so glad--so glad to see you. [They hold this position for a moment, looking into each other's eyes. ELFIE moves so as to take JOHN in from head to toe and is obviously very much pleased with his appearance. She coughs slightly. LAURA takes a step back with a smile.] Oh, pardon me, John--one of my dearest friends, Miss Sinclair; she's heard a lot about you.

ELFIE, with a slight gush, in her most captivating manner, goes over and holds out her gloved hand laden with bracelets, and with her sweetest smile crosses to centre.

ELFIE. How do you do?

MADISON. I'm glad to meet you, I'm sure.

ELFIE. [Still holding JOHN'S hand.] Yes, I'm sure you are--particularly just at this time. [To LAURA.] You know that old stuff about two's company and three [LAURA smiles.] is a crowd. Here's where I vamoose. [Crosses to door.

LAURA. [As ELFIE goes toward door.] Don't hurry, dear.

ELFIE. [With a grin.] No, I suppose not; just fall down stairs and get out of the way, that's all. [Crosses to JOHN.] Anyway, Mr. Madison, I'm awfully glad to have met you, and I want to congratulate you. They tell me you're rich.

JOHN. Oh, no; not rich.

ELFIE. Well, I don't believe you--anyway I'm going. Ta-ta, dearie. Good-bye, Mr. Madison.

JOHN. Good-bye. [JOHN crosses up to back of sofa; removes coat, puts it on sofa.

ELFIE. [Goes to the door, opens it and turns. JOHN'S back is partly toward her and she gives a long wink at LAURA, snapping fingers to attract LAURA'S attention.] I must say, Laura, that when it comes to picking live ones, you certainly can go some.

[After this remark both turn toward her and both smile.

[Exit.

After ELFIE exits, JOHN turns to LAURA with a pleasant smile, and jerks his head towards the door where ELFIE has gone out.

JOHN. I bet she's a character.

LAURA. She's a dear.

JOHN. I can see that all right. [Crossing to centre.

LAURA. She's been a very great friend to me.

JOHN. That's good, but don't I get a "how-dy-do," or a handshake, or a little kiss? You know I've come a long way.

LAURA goes to him and places herself in his arms; he kisses her affectionately. During all this scene between them the tenderness of the man is very apparent. As she releases herself from his embrace he takes her face in his hands and holds it up towards his.

JOHN. I'm not much on the love-making business, Laura, but I never thought I'd be as happy as I am now. [JOHN and LAURA cross to centre. LAURA kneels in armchair with back to audience, JOHN stands left of her.] I've been counting mile-posts ever since I left Chicago, and it seemed like as if I had to go 'round the world before I got here.

LAURA. You never told me about your good fortune. If you hadn't telegraphed I wouldn't even have known you were coming.

JOHN. I didn't want you to. I'd made up my mind to sort of drop in here and give you a great big surprise,--a happy one, I knew,--but the papers made such a fuss in Chicago that I thought you might have read about it--did you?

LAURA. No.

JOHN. Gee! fixed up kind o' scrumptious, ain't you? [Crosses in front of sofa, around behind it, surveying rooms.] Maybe you've been almost as prosperous as I have.

LAURA. You can get a lot of gilt and cushions in New York at half price, and besides, I've got a pretty good part now.

JOHN. Of course I know that, but I didn't think it would make you quite so comfortable. Great, ain't it?

LAURA. Yes.

JOHN. [Standing beside her chair, with a smile.] Well, are you ready?

LAURA. For what, dear? [Looking up at him.

JOHN. You know what I said in the telegram?

LAURA. Yes. [Leans her head affectionately on his shoulder.

JOHN. Well, I meant it.

LAURA. I know.

JOHN. I've got to get back [JOHN looks around; crosses behind table to chair right of table, and sits facing her across it.], Laura, just as soon as ever I can. There's a lot of work to be done out in Nevada and I stole away to come to New York. I want to take you back. Can you go?

LAURA. Yes--when?

JOHN. This afternoon. We'll take the eighteen-hour train to Chicago, late this afternoon, and connect at Chicago with the Overland, and I'll soon have you in a home. [Pause.] And here's another secret.

LAURA. What, dear?

JOHN. I've got that home all bought and furnished, and while you couldn't call it a Fifth Avenue residence, still it has got something on any other one in town.

LAURA. But, John, you've been so mysterious. In all your letters you haven't told me a single, solitary thing about your good luck.

JOHN. I've planned to take you out and show you all that.

LAURA. You should have told me,--I've been so anxious.

JOHN. I waited until it was a dead-sure thing. You know it's been pretty tough sledding out there in the mining country, and it did look as if I never would make a strike; but your spirit was with me and luck was with me, and I knew if I could only hold out that something would come my way. I had two pals, both of them miners,--they had the knowledge and I had the luck,--and one day, clearing away a little snow to build a fire, I poked my toe into the dirt, and there was somethin' there, dearie, that looked suspicious. I called Jim,--that's one of the men,--and in less

time than it takes to tell you there were three maniacs scratching away at old mother earth for all there was in it. We staked our claims in two weeks, and I came to Reno to raise enough money for me to come East. Now things are all fixed and it's just a matter of time. [Taking LAURA'S hand.

LAURA. So you're very, very rich, dear?

JOHN. Oh, not rich [Releasing her hand, he leans back in his chair.], just heeled. I'm not going down to the Wall Street bargain counter and buy the Union Pacific, or anything like that; but we won't have to take the trip on tourists' tickets, and there's enough money to make us comfortable all the rest of our lives.

LAURA. How hard you must have worked and suffered.

JOHN. Nobody else ever accused me of that, but I sure will have to plead guilty to you. [Rises; stands at upper side of table.] Why, dear, since the day you came into my life, hell-raising took a sneak out the back door and God poked His toe in the front, and ever since then I think He's been coming a little closer to me. [Crossing over.] I used to be a fellow without much faith, and kidded everybody who had it, and I used to say to those who prayed and believed, "You may be right, but show me a message." You came along and you brought that little document in your sweet face and your dear love. Laura, you turned the trick for me, and I think I'm almost a regular man now.

LAURA turns away in pain; the realization of all she is to JOHN weighs heavily upon her. She almost loses her nerve, and is on the verge of not going through with her determination to get her happiness at any price.

LAURA. John, please, don't. I'm not worth it. [Rises, crosses to right.

JOHN. [With a light air.] Not worth it? Why, you're worth [Crossing behind table, stands behind LAURA.] that and a whole lot more. And see how you've got on! Brockton told me you never could get along in your profession, but I knew you could. [Crosses back of LAURA, takes her by the shoulders, shakes her playfully.] I knew what you had in you, and here you are. You see, if my foot hadn't slipped on the right ground and kicked up pay-dirt, you'd been all right. You succeeded and I succeeded, but I'm going to take you away; and after a while, when things sort of smooth out, and it's all clear where the money's [Crosses to sofa and sits.] coming from, we're going to move back here, and go to Europe, and just have a great time, like a couple of good pals.

LAURA. [Slowly crosses to JOHN.] But if I hadn't succeeded and if things--things weren't just as they seem--would it make any difference to you, John?

JOHN. Not the least in the world. [He takes her in his arms and kisses her, drawing her on to sofa beside him.] Now don't you get blue. I should not have surprised you this way. It's taken you off your feet. [He looks at his watch, rises, crosses behind sofa, gets overcoat.] But we've not any time to lose. How soon can you get ready?

LAURA. [Kneeling on sofa, leaning over back.] You mean to go?

JOHN. Nothing else.

LAURA. Take all my things?

JOHN. All your duds.

LAURA. Why, dear, I can get ready most any time.

JOHN. [Looking off into bedroom.] That your maid?

LAURA. Yes,--Annie.

JOHN. Well, you and she can pack everything you want to take; the rest can follow later. [Puts coat on.] I planned it all out. There's a couple of the boys working down town,--newspaper men on Park Row. Telephoned them when I got in and they're waiting for me. I'll just get down there as soon as I can. I won't be gone long.

LAURA. How long?

JOHN. I don't know just how long, but we'll make that train. I'll get the license. We'll be married and we'll be off on our honeymoon this afternoon. Can you do it?

LAURA goes up to him, puts her hands in his, and they confront each other.

LAURA. Yes, dear, I could do anything for you.

He takes her in his arms and kisses her again. Looks at her tenderly.

JOHN. That's good. Hurry now. I won't be long. Good-bye.

LAURA. Hurry back, John.

JOHN. Yes. I won't be long. [Exit.

LAURA. [Stands for a moment looking after him; then she suddenly recovers herself and walks rapidly over to the dresser, picks up large jewel-case, takes doll that is hanging on dresser, puts them on her left arm, takes black cat in her right hand and uses it in emphasizing her words in talking to ANNIE. Places them all on table.] Annie, Annie, come here!

ANNIE. Yassum. [She appears at the door.

LAURA. Annie, I'm going away, and I've got to hurry.

ANNIE. Goin' away?

LAURA. Yes. I want you to bring both my trunks out here,--I'll help you,--and start to pack. We can't take everything.

[ANNIE throws fur rug from across doorway into bedroom.], but bring all the clothes out and we'll hurry as fast as we can. Come on.

Exit LAURA with ANNIE. In a very short interval she re-appears, and both are carrying a large trunk between them. They put it down, pushing sofa back.

ANNIE. Look out for your toes, Miss Laura.

LAURA. I can take two.

ANNIE. Golly, such excitement. [Crosses to table; pushes it over further, also armchair.] Wheah yuh goin', Miss Laura?

LAURA. Never mind where I'm going. I haven't any time to waste now talking. I'll tell you later. This is one time, Annie, that you've got to move. Hurry up.

LAURA pushes her in front of her. Exeunt the same way and re-appear with a smaller trunk.

ANNIE. Look out fo' your dress, Miss Laura.

These trunks are of the same type as those in Act II. When the trunks are put down LAURA opens one and commences to throw things out. ANNIE stands watching her. LAURA kneels in front of trunk, working and humming "Bon-Bon Buddie."

ANNIE. Ah nevah see you so happy, Miss Laura.

LAURA. I never was so happy. For heaven's sake, go get something. Don't stand there looking at me. I want you to hurry.

ANNIE. I'll bring out all de fluffy ones first.

LAURA. Yes, everything. [ANNIE enters with armful of dresses and hat-box of tissue-paper; dumps tissue-paper on floor, puts dresses in trunk.

ANNIE. [Goes out again. Outside.] You goin' to take dat opera-cloak? [Enters with more dresses, puts them on sofa, takes opera-cloak, spreads it on top of dresses on trunk.] My, but dat's a beauty. I jest love dat crushed rosey one. [Exit.

LAURA. Annie, you put the best dresses on the foot of the bed and I'll get them myself. You heard what I said?

ANNIE. [Off stage.] Yassum.

ANNIE hangs dresses across bed in alcove. LAURA continues busily arranging the contents of the trunk, placing some garments here and some there, as if she were sorting them out. WILL quietly enters and stands at the door, looking at her. He holds this position as long as possible, and when he speaks it is in a very quiet tone.

WILL. Going away?

LAURA. [Starts, rises, and confronts him.] Yes.

WILL. In somewhat of a hurry, I should say.

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. What's the plan?

LAURA. I'm just going, that's all.

WILL. Madison been here?

LAURA. He's just left.

WILL. Of course you are going with him?

LAURA. Yes.

WILL. West?

LAURA. To Nevada.

WILL. Going--er--to get married?

LAURA. Yes, this afternoon.

WILL. So he didn't care then?

LAURA. What do you mean when you say "he didn't care"?

WILL. Of course you told him about the letter, and how it was burned up, and all that sort of thing, didn't you?

LAURA. Why, yes.

WILL. And he said it didn't make any difference?

LAURA. He--he didn't say anything. We're just going to be married, that's all.

WILL. Did you mention my name and say that we'd been rather companionable for the last two months?

LAURA. I told him you'd been a very good friend to me.

During this scene LAURA answers WILL with difficulty, and to a man of the world it is quite apparent that she is not telling the truth. WILL looks over toward her in an almost threatening way.

WILL. How soon do you expect him back? [Crossing to centre.

LAURA. Quite soon. I don't know just exactly how long he'll be.

WILL. And you mean to tell me that you kept your promise and told him the truth? [Crossing to trunk.

LAURA. I--I--[Then with defiance.] What business have you got to ask me that? What business have you got to interfere anyway? [Crossing up to bed in alcove, gets dresses off foot, and puts them on sofa.

WILL. [Quietly.] Then you've lied again. You lied to him, and you just tried to lie to me now. I must say, Laura, that you're not particularly clever at it, although I don't doubt but that you've had considerable practice.

Gives her a searching look and slowly walks over to the chair at the table and sits down, still holding his hat in his hand and without removing his overcoat. LAURA sees BROCKTON sitting, stops and turns on him, laying dresses down.

LAURA. What are you going to do?

WILL. Sit down here and rest a few moments; maybe longer.

LAURA. You can't do that.

WILL. I don't see why not. This is my own place.

LAURA. But don't you see that he'll come back here soon and find you here?

WILL. That's just exactly what I want him to do.

LAURA. [With suppressed emotion, almost on the verge of hysteria.] I want to tell you this. If you do this thing you'll ruin my life. You've done enough to it already. Now I want you to go. You've got to go. I don't think you've got any right to come here now, in this way, and take this happiness from me. I've given you everything I've got, and now I want to live right and decent, and he wants me to, and we love each other. Now, Will Brockton, it's come to this. You've got to leave this place, do you hear? You've got to leave this place. Please get out. [Crossing to trunk.

WILL. [Rises and comes to her.] Do you think I'm going to let a woman make a liar out of me? I'm going to stay right here. I like that boy, and I'm not going to let you put him to the bad.

LAURA. I want you to go. [Slams trunk lid down, crosses to dresser, opens drawer to get stuff out.

WILL. And I tell you I won't go. I'm going to show you up. I'm going to tell him the truth. It isn't you I care for--he's got to know.

LAURA. [Slams drawer shut, loses her temper, and is almost tiger-like in her anger.] You don't care for me?

WILL. No.

LAURA. It isn't me you're thinking of?

WILL. No.

LAURA. Who's the liar now?

WILL. Liar?

LAURA. Yes, liar. You are. You don't care for this man, and you know it.

WILL. You're foolish.

LAURA. Yes, I am foolish and I've been foolish all my life, but I'm getting a little sense now. [Kneels in armchair, facing WILL; her voice is shaky with anger and tears.] All my life, since the day you first took me away, you've planned and planned and planned to keep me, and to trick me and bring me down with you. When you came to me I was happy. I didn't have much, just a little salary and some hard work.

WILL. But like all the rest you found that wouldn't keep you, didn't you?

LAURA. You say I'm bad, but who's made me so? Who took me out night after night? Who showed me what these luxuries were? Who put me in the habit of buying something I couldn't afford? You did.

WILL. Well, you liked it, didn't you?

LAURA. Who got me in debt, and then, when I wouldn't do what you wanted me to, who had me discharged from the company, so I had no means of living? Who followed me from one place to another? Who, always entreating, tried to trap me into this life, and I didn't know any better?

WILL. You didn't know any better?

LAURA. I knew it was wrong--yes; but you told me everybody in this business did that sort of thing, and I was just as good as anyone else. Finally you got me and you kept me. Then, when I went away to Denver, and for the first time found a gleam of happiness, for the first time in my life--

WILL. You're crazy.

LAURA. Yes, I am crazy. [Rises angrily, crosses and sweeps table-cover off table; crosses to dresser, knocks bottles, &c., off upper end; turns, faces him, almost screaming.] You've made me crazy. You followed me to Denver, and then when I got back you bribed me again. You pulled me down, and you did the same old thing until this happened. Now I want you to get out, you understand? I want you to get out.

WILL. Laura, you can't do this. [Starts to sit on trunk.

LAURA. [Screaming, crossing to WILL; she attempts to push him.] No, you won't; you won't stay here. You're not going to do this thing again. I tell you I'm going to be happy. I tell you I'm going to be married. [He doesn't resist her very strongly. Her anger and her rage are entirely new to him. He is surprised and cannot understand.] You won't see him; I tell you, you won't tell him. You've got no business to. I hate you. I've hated you for months. I hate the sight of your face. I've wanted to go, and now I'm going. You've got to go, do you hear? You've got to get out--get out. [Pushes him again.

WILL. [Throwing her off; LAURA staggers to armchair, rises, crosses left.] What the hell is the use of fussing with a woman.

[Exit.

LAURA. [Hysterically.] I want to be happy, I'm going to be married, I'm going to be happy.

[Sinks down in exhausted state in front of trunk.

CURTAIN, SLOW.

ACT IV.

SCENE. The same scene as Act III. It is about two o'clock in the afternoon.

AT RISE. When the curtain rises, there are two big trunks and one small one up stage. These are marked in the usual theatrical fashion. There are grips packed, umbrellas, and the usual paraphernalia that accompanies a woman when she is making a permanent departure from her place of living. All the bric-à-brac, &c., has been removed from dresser. On down-stage end of dresser is a small alligator bag containing night-dress, toilet articles, and bunch of keys. The dresser drawers are some of them half open, and old pieces of tissue-paper and ribbons are hanging out. The writing-desk has had all materials removed and is open, showing scraps of torn-up letters, and in one pigeon-hole is a New York Central time-table; between desk and bay-window is a lady's hat-trunk containing huge picture hat. It is closed. Behind table is a suit-case with which ANNIE is working when curtain rises. Under desk are two old millinery boxes, around which are scattered old tissue-paper, a pair of old slippers, a woman's shabby hat, old ribbon, &c. In front of window at end of pianola is thrown a lot of old empty boxes, such as are used for stocking and shirtwaist boxes. The picture-frame and basket of flowers have been removed from pianola. The stool is on top of pianola, upside down. There is an empty White Rock bottle, with glass turned over it, standing between the legs of the stool. The big trunk is in front of sofa, and packed, and it has a swing tray under which is packed a fancy evening gown; the lid is down. On top of lid are an umbrella, lady's travelling-coat, hat and gloves. On left end of sofa are a large Gladstone bag, packed and fastened, a smaller trunk (thirty-four inch), tray with lid. In tray are articles of wearing apparel. In end of tray is revolver wrapped in tissue-paper. Trunk is closed, and supposed to be locked. Tossed across left arm of armchair are couple of violet cords. Down stage centre is a large piece of wide tan ribbon. The room has the general appearance of having been stripped of all personal belongings. There are old magazines and tissue-paper all over the place. A bearskin rug is thrown up against table in low window, the furniture is all on stage as used in Act III. At rise LAURA is sitting on trunk with clock in hand. ANNIE is on floor behind table, fastening suit-case. LAURA is pale and perturbed.

ANNIE. Ain't yuh goin' to let me come to yuh at all, Miss Laura?

LAURA. I don't know yet, Annie. I don't even know what the place is like that we're going to. Mr. Madison hasn't said much. There hasn't been time.

ANNIE. Why, Ah've done ma best for yuh, Miss Laura, yes, Ah have. Ah jest been with yuh ev'ry moment of ma time, an' [Places suit-case on table; crosses to centre.] Ah worked for yuh an' Ah loved yuh, an' Ah doan' wan' to be left 'ere all alone in dis town 'ere New York. [LAURA turns to door; ANNIE stoops, grabs up ribbon, hides it behind her back.] Ah ain't the kind of

cullud lady knows many people. Can't yuh take me along wid yuh, Miss Laura?--yuh all been so good to me.

LAURA. Why, I told you to [Crosses to door, looks out, returns disappointed.] stay here and get your things together [ANNIE hides ribbon in front of her waist.], and then Mr. Brockton will probably want you to do something. Later, I think he'll have you pack up, just as soon as he finds I'm gone. I've got the address that you gave me. I'll let you know if you can come on.

ANNIE. [Suddenly.] Ain't yuh goin' to give me anything at all jes' to remembuh yuh by? Ah've been so honest--

LAURA. Honest?

ANNIE. Honest, Ah have.

LAURA. You've been about as honest as most coloured [Crosses to table; gets suit-case; crosses to sofa end puts suit-case on it.] girls are who work for women in the position that I am in. You haven't stolen enough to make me discharge you, but I've seen what you've taken. [Sits on end of sofa facing left.

ANNIE. Now, Miss Laura.

LAURA. Don't try to fool me. What you've got you're welcome to, but for heaven's sake don't prate around here about loyalty and honesty. I'm sick of it.

ANNIE. Ain't yuh goin' to give me no recommendation?

LAURA. [Impatiently looking around the room.] What good would my recommendation do? You can always go and get another position with people who've lived the way I've lived, and my recommendation to the other kind wouldn't amount to much.

ANNIE. [Sits on trunk.] Ah can just see whah Ah'm goin',--back to dat boa'din'-house in 38th Street fo' me. [Crying.

LAURA. Now shut your noise. I don't want to hear any more. I've given you twenty-five dollars for a present. I think that's enough.

[ANNIE assumes a most aggrieved appearance.

ANNIE. Ah know, but twenty-five dollars ain't a home, and I'm [Rises, crosses to rubbish heap, picks up old slippers and hat, puts hat on head as she goes out, looks into pier-glass.] losin' my home. Dat's jest my luck--every time I save enough money to buy my weddin' clothes to get married I lose my job.

[Exit.

LAURA. I wonder where John is. We'll never be able to make that train. [She crosses to window, then to desk, takes out time-table, crosses to armchair and spreads time-table on back, studies it, crosses impatiently to trunk, and sits nervously kicking her feet. After a few seconds' pause the bell rings. She jumps up excitedly.] That must be he,--Annie--go quick. [ANNIE crosses and opens the door in the usual manner.

JIM'S VOICE. [Outside.] Is Miss Murdock in?

ANNIE. Yassuh, she's in.

LAURA is up stage and turns to receive visitor. JIM enters. He is nicely dressed in black and has an appearance of prosperity about him, but in other respects he retains the old drollness of enunciation and manner. He crosses to LAURA in a cordial way and holds out his hand. ANNIE crosses, after closing the door, and exits through the portières into the sleeping-apartment.

JIM. How-dy-do, Miss Laura?

LAURA. Jim Western, I'm mighty glad to see you.

JIM. Looks like as if you were going to move?

LAURA. Yes, I am going to move, and a long ways, too. How well you're looking,--as fit as a fiddle.

JIM. Yes; I am feelin' fine. Where yer goin'? Troupin'?

LAURA. No, indeed.

JIM. [Surveying the baggage.] Thought not. What's comin' off now? [Takes off coat, puts coat and hat on trunk.

LAURA. [Very simply.] I'm going to be married this afternoon.

JIM. Married?

LAURA. And then I'm going West.

JIM. [Leaving the trunk, walking toward her and holding out his hands.] Now I'm just glad to hear that. Ye know when I heard how—how things was breakin' for ye--well, I ain't knockin' or anythin' like that, but me and the missis have talked ye over a lot. I never did think this feller was goin' to do the right thing by yer. Brockton never looked to me like a fellow would marry anybody, but now that he's goin' through just to make you a nice, respectable wife, I guess everything must have happened for the best. [LAURA averts her eyes. Both sit on trunk, JIM left of LAURA.] Y' see I wanted to thank you for what you did a couple of weeks ago. Burgess wrote me a letter and told me I could go ahead of one of his big shows if I wanted to come back, and offering me considerable money. He mentioned your name, Miss Laura, and I talked it over with the missis, and--well, I can tell ye now when I couldn't if ye weren't to be hooked up--we decided that I wouldn't take that job, comin' as it did from you [Slowly.] and the way I knew it was framed up.

LAURA. Why not?

JIM. [Embarrassed.] Well, ye see, there are three kids and they're all growing up, all of them in school, and the missis, she's just about forgot show business and she's playing a star part in the kitchen, juggling dishes and doing flip-flaps with pancakes; and we figgered that as we'd always

gone along kinder clean-like, it wouldn't be good for the kids to take a job comin' from Brockton because you--you--well--you--

LAURA. I know. [Rises; sits on left arm of chair.] You thought it wasn't decent. Is that it?

JIM. Oh, not exactly, only--well, you see I'm gettin' along pretty [Rises; crosses to LAURA.] good now. I got a little one-night-stand theatre out in Ohio--manager of it, too. The town is called Gallipolis. [With a smile.

LAURA. Gallipolis?

JIM. Oh, that ain't a disease. It is the name of a town. Maybe you don't know much about Gallipolis, or where it is.

LAURA. No.

JIM. Well, it looks just like it sounds. We got a little house, and the old lady is happy, and I feel so good that I can even stand her cookin'. Of course we ain't makin' much money, but I guess I'm gettin' a little old-fashioned around theatres anyway. The fellows from newspapers and colleges have got it on me. Last time I asked a man for a job he asked me what I knew about the Greek drama, and when I told him I didn't know the Greeks had a theatre in New York he slipped me a laugh and told me to come in again on some rainy Tuesday. Then Gallipolis showed on the map, and I beat it for the West. [JIM notices by this time the pain he has caused LAURA, and is embarrassed.] Sorry if I hurt ye--didn't mean to; and now that yer goin' to be Mrs. Brockton, well, I take back all I said, and, while I don't think I want to change my position, I wouldn't turn it down for--for that other reason, that's all.

LAURA. [With a tone of defiance in her voice.] But, Mr. Weston, I'm not going to be Mrs. Brockton.

JIM. No? [Crosses left a little.

LAURA. No.

JIM. Oh--oh--

LAURA. I'm going to marry another man, and a good man.

JIM. The hell you are!

[LAURA rises and puts hand on JIM'S shoulder.

LAURA. And it's going to be altogether different. I know what you meant when you said about the missis and the kids, and that's what I want--just a little home, just a little peace, just a little comfort, and--and the man has come who's going to give it to me. You don't want me to say any more, do you? [Crosses to door, opens it, and looks out; closes it and crosses to JIM.

JIM. [Emphatically, and with a tone of hearty approval.] No, I don't, and now I'm just going to put my mit out and shake yours and be real glad. I want to tell ye it's the only way to go along. I ain't never been a rival to Rockefeller, nor I ain't never made Morgan jealous, but since the day my old woman took her make-up off for the last time, and walked out of that stage-door to give

me a little help and bring my kids into the world, I knew that was the way to go along; and if you're goin' to take that road, by Jiminy, I'm glad of it, for you sure do deserve it. I wish yer luck.

LAURA. Thank you.

JIM. I'm mighty glad you side-stepped Brockton. You're young [LAURA sits on trunk.], and you're pretty, and you're sweet, and if you've got the right kind of a feller there ain't no reason on earth why you shouldn't jest forgit the whole business and see nothin' but laughs and a good time comin' to you, and the sun sort o' shinin' every twenty-four hours in the day. You know the missis feels just as if she knew you, after I told her about them hard times we had at Farley's boarding-house, so I feel that it's paid me to come to New York [Picks up pin; puts it in lapel of coat.] even if I didn't book anything but "East Lynne" and "Uncle Tom's Cabin." [Goes over to her.] Now I'm goin'. Don't forget Gallipolis's [LAURA helps him on with his coat.] the name, and sometimes the mail does get there. I'd be awful glad if you wrote the missis a little note tellin' us how you're gettin' along, and if you ever have to ride on the Kanawha and Michigan, just look out of the window when the train passes our town, because that is about the best you'll get.

LAURA. Why?

JIM. They only stop there on signal. And make up your mind that the Weston family is with you forty ways from the Jack day and night. Good-bye, and God bless you.

LAURA. Good-bye, Jim. I'm so glad to know you're happy, for it is good to be happy. [Kisses him.

JIM. You bet. [Moves toward the door. She follows him after they have shaken hands.] Never mind, I can get out all right. [Opens the door, and at the door:] Good-bye again.

LAURA. [Very softly.] Good-bye. [Exit JIM and closes the door. She stands motionless until she hears the outer door slam.] I wonder why he doesn't come. [She goes up and looks out of the window and turns down stage, crosses right, counting trunks; as she counts suitcase on table, bell rings; she crosses hurriedly to trunk centre.] Hurry, Annie, and see who that is.

ANNIE enters, crosses, opens door, exits, and opens the outer door.

ANNIE'S VOICE. She's waitin' for yer, Mr. Madison.

> LAURA hurries down to the centre of stage. JOHN enters, hat in hand and his overcoat on arm, followed by ANNIE. He stops just as he enters and looks at LAURA long and searchingly. LAURA instinctively feels that something has happened. She shudders and remains firm. ANNIE crosses and exits. Closes doors.

LAURA. [With a little effort. JOHN places hat and coat on trunk.] Aren't you a little late, dear?

JOHN. I--I was detained down town a few minutes. I think that we can carry out our plan all right.

LAURA. [After a pause.] Has anything happened?

JOHN. I've made all the arrangements. The men will be here in a few minutes for your trunks. [Crosses to coat; feels in pocket.] I've got the railroad tickets and everything else, but--

LAURA. But what, John?

He goes over to her. She intuitively understands that she is about to go through an ordeal. She seems to feel that JOHN has become acquainted with something which might interfere with their plan. He looks at her long and searchingly. Evidently he too is much wrought up, but when he speaks to her it is with a calm dignity and force which show the character of the man.

JOHN. Laura.

LAURA. Yes?

JOHN. You know when I went down town I said I was going to call on two or three of my friends in Park Row.

LAURA. I know.

JOHN. I told them who I was going to marry.

LAURA. Well?

JOHN. They said something about you and Brockton, and I found that they'd said too much, but not quite enough.

LAURA. What did they say?

JOHN. Just that--too much and not quite enough. There's a minister waiting for us over on Madison Avenue. You see, then you'll be my wife. That's pretty serious business, and all I want now from you is the truth.

LAURA. Well?

JOHN. Just tell me that what they said was just an echo of the past--that it came from what had been going on before that wonderful day out in Colorado. Tell me that you've been on the level. I don't want their word, Laura--I just want yours.

LAURA summons all her courage, looks up into his loving eyes, shrinks a moment before his anxious face, and speaks as simply as she can.

LAURA. Yes, John, I have been on the level.

JOHN. [Very tenderly.] I knew that, dear, I knew it. [He takes her in his arms and kisses her. She clings to him in pitiful helplessness. His manner is changed to one of almost boyish happiness.] Well, now everything's all ready, let's get on the job. We haven't a great deal of time. Get your duds on.

LAURA. When do we go?

JOHN. Right away. The great idea is to get away.

LAURA. All right. [Gets hat off trunk, crosses to bureau, puts it on.

JOHN. Laura, you've got trunks enough, haven't you? One might think we're moving a whole colony. [Turns to her with a smile.] And, by the way, to me you are a whole colony--anyway you're the only one I ever wanted to settle with.

LAURA. That's good. [Takes bag off bureau, crosses to trunk, gets purse, coat, umbrella, as if ready to leave. She hurriedly gathers her things together, adjusting her hat and the like, and almost to herself in a low tone:] I'm so excited. [Continues preparations.] Come on.

> In the meantime JOHN crosses by to get his hat and coat, and while the preparations are about to be completed and LAURA has said "Come on," she is transfixed by the noise of the slamming of the outer door. She stops as if she had been tremendously shocked, and a moment later the rattling of a latch-key in the inner door also stops JOHN from going any further. His coat is half on. LAURA looks toward the door, paralyzed with fright, and JOHN looks at her with an expression of great apprehension. Slowly the door opens, and BROCKTON enters with coat and hat on. As he turns to close the door after him, LAURA, pitifully and terribly afraid, retreats two or three steps, and lays coat, bag, purse and umbrella down in armchair, standing dazed.
>
> BROCKTON enters leisurely, paying no attention to anyone, while JOHN becomes as rigid as a statue, and follows with his eyes every move BROCKTON makes. The latter walks leisurely across the stage, and afterwards into the rooms through the portières. There is a wait of a second. No one moves. BROCKTON finally reënters with coat and hat off, and throws back the portières in such a manner as to reveal the bed and his intimate familiarity with the outer room. He goes down stage in the same leisurely manner and sits in a chair opposite JOHN, crossing his legs.

WILL. Hello, Madison, when did you get in?

Slowly JOHN seems to recover himself. His right hand starts up toward the lapel of his coat and slowly he pulls his Colt revolver from the holster under his armpit. There is a deadly determination and deliberation in every movement that he makes. WILL jumps to his feet and looks at him. The revolver is uplifted in the air, as a Western man handles a gun, so that when it is snapped down with a jerk the deadly shot can be fired. LAURA is terror-stricken, but before the shot is fired she takes a step forward and extends one hand in a gesture of entreaty.

LAURA. [In a husky voice that is almost a whisper.] Don't shoot.

The gun remains uplifted for a moment. JOHN is evidently wavering in his determination to kill. Slowly his whole frame relaxes. He lowers the pistol in his hand in a manner which clearly indicates that he is not going to shoot. He quietly puts it back in the holster, and WILL is obviously relieved, although he stood his ground like a man.

JOHN. [Slowly.] Thank you. You said that just in time. [A pause.

WILL. [Recovering and in a light tone.] Well, you see, Madison, that what I said when I was--

JOHN. [Threateningly.] Look out, Brockton, I don't want to talk to you. [The men confront.

WILL. All right.

JOHN. [To LAURA.] Now get that man out of here.

LAURA. John, I--

JOHN. Get him out. Get him out before I lose my temper or they'll take him out without his help.

LAURA. [To WILL.] Go--go. Please go.

WILL. [Deliberately.] If that's the way you want it, I'm willing.

> Exit WILL into the sleeping-apartment. LAURA and JOHN stand facing each other. He enters again with hat and coat on, and passes over toward the door. LAURA and JOHN do not move. When he gets just a little to the left of the centre of the stage LAURA steps forward and stops him with her speech.

LAURA. Now before you go, and to you both, I want to tell you how I've learned to despise him. John, I know you don't believe me, but it's true--it's true. I don't love anyone in the world but just you. I know you don't think that it can be explained--maybe there isn't any explanation. I couldn't help it. I was so poor, and I had to live, and he wouldn't let me work, and he's only let me live one way, and I was hungry. Do you know what that means? I was hungry and didn't have clothes to keep me warm, and I tried, oh, John, I tried so hard to do the other thing,--the right thing,--but I couldn't.

JOHN. I--I know I couldn't help much, and perhaps I could have forgiven you if you hadn't lied to me. That's what hurt. [Turning to WILL and approaching until he can look him in the eyes.] I expected you to lie, you're that kind of a man. You left me with a shake of the hand, and you gave me your word, and you didn't keep it. Why should you keep it? Why should anything make any difference with you? Why, you pup, you've no right to live in the same world with decent folks. Now you make yourself scarce, or take it from me, I'll just kill you, that's all.

WILL. I'll leave, Madison, but I'm not going to let you think that I didn't do the right thing with you. She came to me voluntarily. She said she wanted to come back. I told you that, when I was in Colorado, and you didn't believe me, and I told you that when she did this sort of thing I'd let you know. I dictated a letter to her to send to you, and I left it sealed and stamped in her hands to mail. She didn't do it. If there's been a lie, she told it. I didn't.

> JOHN turns to her. She hangs her head and averts her eyes in a mute acknowledgment of guilt. The revelation hits JOHN so hard that he sinks on the trunk centre, his head fallen to his breast. He is utterly limp and whipped. There is a moment's silence.

WILL. [Crosses to JOHN.] You see! Why, my boy, whatever you think of me or the life I lead, I wouldn't have had this come to you for anything in the world. [JOHN makes an impatient gesture.] No, I wouldn't. My women don't mean a whole lot to me because I don't take them seriously. I wish I had the faith and the youth to feel the way you do. You're all in and broken up, but I wish I could be broken up just once. I did what I thought was best for you because I didn't think she could ever go through the way you wanted her to. I'm sorry it's all turned out bad. [Pause.] Good-bye.

He looks at JOHN for a moment as if he was going to speak. JOHN remains motionless. The blow has hit him harder than he thought.

WILL exits. The first door closes. In a moment the second door is slammed. JOHN and LAURA look at each other for a moment. He gives her no chance to speak. The hurt in his heart and his accusation are shown by his broken manner. A great grief has come into his life and he doesn't quite understand it. He seems to be feeling around for something to say, some way to get out. His head turns toward the door. With a pitiful gesture of the hand he looks at her in all his sorrow.

JOHN. Well? [Rises.

LAURA. John, I--[Takes off hat and places it on table.

JOHN. I'd be careful what I said. Don't try to make excuses. I understand.

LAURA. It's not excuses. I want to tell you what's in my heart, but I can't; it won't speak, and you don't believe my voice.

JOHN. You'd better leave it unsaid.

LAURA. But I must tell. I can't let you go like this. [She goes over to him and makes a weak attempt to put her arms around him. He takes her arms and puts them back to her side.] I love you. I--how can I tell you--but I do, I do, and you won't believe me.

> He remains silent for a moment and then takes her by the hand, leads her over to the chair and places her in it.

JOHN. I think you do as far as you are able; but, Laura, I guess you don't know what a decent sentiment is. [He gathers himself together. His tone is very gentle and very firm, but it carries a tremendous conviction, even with his grief ringing through his speech.] Laura, you're not immoral, you're just unmoral, kind o' all out of shape, and I'm afraid there isn't a particle of hope for you. When we met neither of us had any reason to be proud, but I thought that you thought that it was the chance of salvation which sometimes comes to a man and a woman fixed as we were then. What had been had been. It was all in the great to-be for us, and now, how you've kept your word! What little that promise meant, when I thought you handed me a new lease of life!

LAURA. [In a voice that is changed and metallic. She is literally being nailed to the cross.] You're killing me--killing me.

JOHN. Don't make such a mistake. In a month you'll recover. There will be days when you will think of me, just for a moment, and then it will be all over. With you it is the easy way, and it always will be. You'll go on and on until you're finally left a wreck, just the type of the common woman. And you'll sink until you're down to the very bed-rock of depravity. I pity you.

LAURA. [Still in the same metallic tone of voice.] You'll never leave me to do that. I'll kill myself.

JOHN. Perhaps that's the only thing left for you to do, but you'll not do it. It's easier to live. [Crosses, gets hat and coat, turns and looks at her, LAURA rising at the same time.

LAURA. John, I said I'd kill myself, and I mean it. If it's the only thing to do, I'll do it, and I'll do it before your very eyes. [She crosses quickly, gets keys out of satchel, opens trunk, takes gun out

of trunk, stands facing JOHN--waiting a moment.] You understand that when your hand touches that door I'm going to shoot myself. I will, so help me God!

JOHN. [Stops and looks at her.] Kill yourself? [Pause.] Before me? [Pause.] All right. [Raising his voice.] Annie, Annie!

ANNIE. [Enters.] Yes, sir.

JOHN. [LAURA looks at JOHN in bewilderment.] You see your mistress there has a pistol in her hand?

ANNIE. [Frightened.] Yassuh--

JOHN. She wants to kill herself. I just called you to witness that the act is entirely voluntary on her part. Now, Laura, go ahead.

LAURA. [Nearly collapsing, drops the pistol to the floor.] John, I--can't--

JOHN. Annie, she's evidently changed her mind. You may go.

ANNIE. But, Miss Laura, Ah--

JOHN. [Peremptorily.] You may go. [Bewildered and not understanding, ANNIE exits through the portières. In that same gentle tone, but carrying with it an almost frigid conviction.] You didn't have the nerve. I knew you wouldn't. For a moment you thought the only decent thing for you to do was to die, and yet you couldn't go through. I am sorry for you,--more sorry than I can tell. [He takes a step towards the door.

LAURA. You're going--you're going?

JOHN. Yes.

LAURA. And--and--you never thought that perhaps I'm frail, and weak, and a woman, and that now, maybe, I need your strength, and you might give it to me, and it might be better. I want to lean on you,--lean on you, John. I know I need someone. Aren't you going to let me? Won't you give me another chance?

JOHN. I gave you your chance, Laura.

LAURA. [Throws arms around his neck.] Give me another.

JOHN. But you leaned the wrong way. Good-bye.

[He pulls away and goes out, slamming both doors.

LAURA. [Screaming.] John--John--I--[She sits on trunk, weeping in loud and tearful manner; rises in a dazed fashion, starts to cross, sees gun, utters loud cry of mingled despair and anger, grabs up gun, crossing to bureau, opens up-stage drawer, throws gun in, slams drawer shut, calling:] Annie! Annie!

ANNIE. [Appears through the portières.] Ain't yuh goin' away, Miss Laura?

LAURA. [Suddenly arousing herself, and with a defiant voice.] No, I'm not. I'm going to stay right here. [ANNIE crosses and opens trunk, takes out handsome dress, hangs it over back of armchair, crosses up to hat-trunk, takes out hat. LAURA takes it from her, crosses to trunk left, starts to unpack it.] Open these trunks, take out those clothes, get me my prettiest dress. Hurry up. [She goes before the mirror.] Get my new hat, dress up my body and paint up my face. It's all they've left of me. [To herself.] They've taken my soul away with them.

ANNIE. [In a happy voice.] Yassum, yassum.

LAURA. [Who is arranging her hair.] Doll me up, Annie.

ANNIE. Yuh goin' out, Miss Laura?

LAURA. Yes. I'm going to Rector's to make a hit, and to hell with the rest!

At this moment the hurdy-gurdy in the street, presumably immediately under her window, begins to play the tune of "Bon-Bon Buddie, My Chocolate Drop." There is something in this ragtime melody which is particularly and peculiarly suggestive of the low life, the criminality and prostitution that constitute the night excitement of that section of New York City known as the Tenderloin. The tune,--its association,--is like spreading before LAURA'S eyes a panorama of the inevitable depravity that awaits her. She is torn from every ideal that she so weakly endeavoured to grasp, and is thrown into the mire and slime at the very moment when her emancipation seems to be assured. The woman, with her flashy dress in one arm and her equally exaggerated type of picture hat in the other, is nearly prostrated by the tune and the realization of the future as it is terrifically conveyed to her. The negress, in the happiness of serving LAURA in her questionable career, picks up the melody and hums it as she unpacks the finery that has been put away in the trunk.

LAURA. [With infinite grief, resignation, and hopelessness.] O God--O my God. [She turns and totters toward the bedroom. The hurdy-gurdy continues, with the negress accompanying it.

A SLOW CURTAIN.

END OF THE PLAY.