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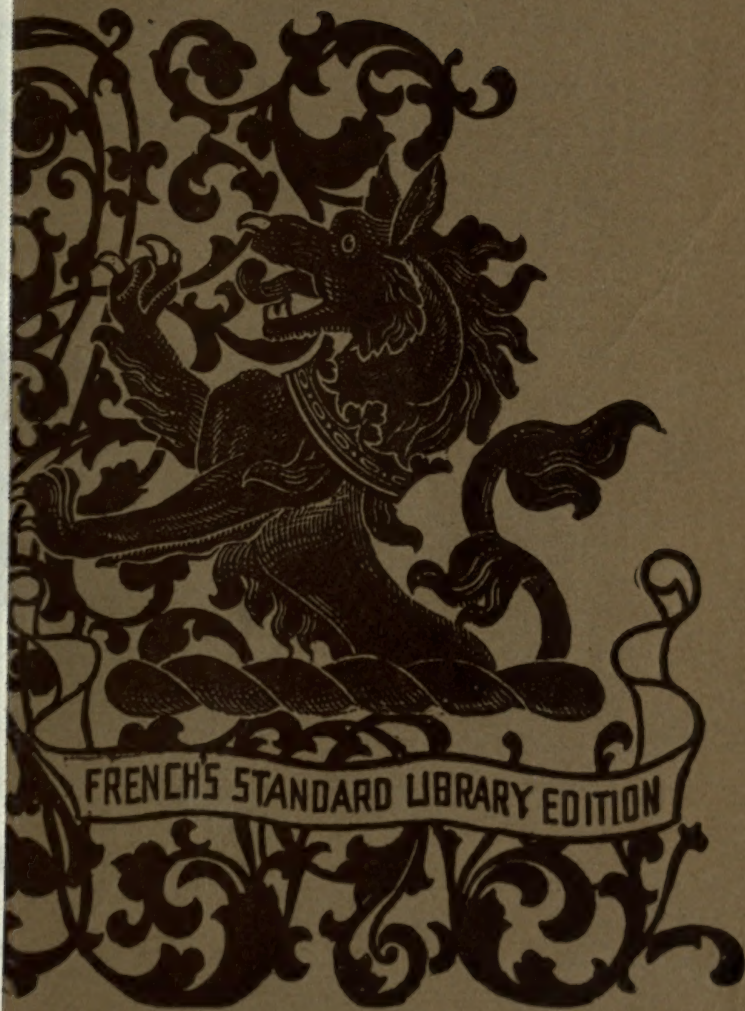


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FOUR ONE-ACT PLAYS



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FOUR ONE-ACT PLAYS

THE CLOD—A GUEST FOR DINNER
LOVE AMONG THE LIONS—BROTHERS

cop. 2

BY
LEWIS BEACH

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FOUR ONE ACT PLAYS

By Lewis Beach

*The Clod—A Guest for Dinner—Love Among the Lions—
Brothers*

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NOTE.—Throughout “right” and “left” are the actor’s
“right” and “left,” not the spectator’s.

THE CLOD

Suggested by *The Least of These*,—a
short-story by DONAL HAMILTON HAINES.

CHARACTERS

THADDEUS TRASK
MARY TRASK
A NORTHERN PRIVATE
A SOUTHERN SERGEANT
A SOUTHERN PRIVATE

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LEWIS BEACH.

Originally staged by The Harvard Dramatic
Club, March 31, 1914.

THE CLOD

SCENE: *The kitchen of a farmhouse on the borderline between the Northern and Southern states. It is ten o'clock in the evening, September, 1863.*

The back wall is broken at stage left by the projection at right angles of a partially enclosed staircase; the four steps leading to the landing cut into the room. Underneath the enclosed part of the stairway, a cubby-hole; in front of it a small table which partially hides the door. To the left of the table a kitchen chair. A door, leading to the yard, is the centre of the unbroken wall, back. To the right of the door, a cupboard; to the left, a small cooking-stove. Two windows in the right wall. Between them a bench on which a pail and a tin dipper stand. Above the bench a towel hanging on a nail, and above the towel a double-barrelled shot-gun suspended on two pegs. Well downstage left, a closed door leading to a second room. In the centre of the kitchen a large table; straight-backed chairs to the right and left of it. A lighted candle on this table.

The moon shines into the room through the windows, but at no time is the kitchen brightly lighted. The characters appear as silhouettes ex-

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cept when they stand near the candle or the lantern, and then the lights throw huge shadows on the roughly plastered walls. When the door, back, is opened one sees a bit of the farmyard, desolate even in the moonlight.

(As the curtain rises, Thaddeus Trask, a man of sixty odd years, short and thick-set, slow in speech and action, yet in perfect health, sits at the left of the centre table. He is pressing tobacco into his corn-cob pipe. He lights it with the candle.)

After a moment, Mary Trask, a tired, emaciated woman, whose years equal her husband's, enters from the yard carrying a heavy pail of water and a lighted lantern. She puts the pail on the bench and hangs the lantern above it; then crosses to the stove.)

MARY. Ain't got wood 'nough fer breakfast, Thad.

THADDEUS. I'm too tired t' go out now. Wait 'til mornin'.

[Pause. Mary lays the fire in the stove.]

THADDEUS. Did I tell yuh that old man Reed saw three Southern troopers pass his house this mornin'?

MARY [takes coffee-pot from stove, crosses to bench, fills pot with water] I wish them soldiers would git out o' the neighborhood. Whenever I see 'em passin', I have t' steady myself 'gainst somethin' or I'd fall. I couldn't hardly breathe yesterday when them Southerners came after fodder. I'd died if they'd spoke t' me.

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THADDEUS. Yuh needn't be afraid o' Northern soldiers.

MARY [*carries coffee-pot to stove*] I hate 'em all,—Union or Southern. I can't make head or tail t' what all this fightin's 'bout. An' I don't care who wins, so long as they git through, an' them soldiers stop stealin' our corn an' potatoes.

THADDEUS. Yuh can't hardly blame 'em if they're hungry, ken yuh?

MARY. It ain't right that they should steal from us poor folk. [*Lifts a huge gunny sack of potatoes from the table, and begins setting the table for breakfast, getting knives, forks, spoons, plates, cups and saucers,—two of each, from the cupboard.*] We have hard 'nough times t' make things meet now. I ain't set down onct today 'cept fer meals. An' when I think o' the work I got t' do t'morrow, I ought t' been in bed hours ago.

THADDEUS. I'd help if I could, but it ain't my fault if the Lord seed fit t' lay me up so I'm always ailin'. [*Rises lazily.*] Yuh better try an' take things easy t'morrow.

MARY. It's well enough t' say, but them apples is got t' be picked an' the rest o' the potatoes sorted. If I could sleep at night it'd be all right, but with them soldiers 'bout, I can't.

THADDEUS [*crosses right; fondly handles his gun*] Jolly, wish I'd see a flock o' birds.

MARY [*nervously*] I'd rather go without than hear yuh fire. I wish yuh didn't keep it loaded.

THADDEUS. Yuh know I ain't got time t' stop an' load when I see the birds. They don't wait fer

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yuh. [*Hangs gun on wall, drops into his chair; dejectedly.*] Them pigs has got t' be butchered.

MARY. Wait 'til I git a chance t' go t' sister's. I can't stand it t' hear 'em squeal.

THADDEUS [*pulling off his boots: grunting meanwhile*] Best go soon then, 'cause they's fat as they'll ever be, an' there ain't no use in wastin' feed on 'em. [*Pause; rises*] Ain't yuh most ready fer bed?

MARY. Go on up.

[*Thaddeus takes the candle in one hand, his boots in the other, and climbs the stairs. Mary speaks when he reaches the landing.*]

MARY. An' Thad, try not t' snore t'night.

THADDEUS. Poke me if I do. [*Disappears.*]

[*Mary fills the kettle with water and puts it on the stove; closes the door, back; takes the lantern from the wall and tries twice before she succeeds in blowing it out. Puts the lantern on the table before the cubby-hole. Slowly drags herself up the stairs, pausing a moment on the top step for breath before she disappears. There is a silence. Then the door, back, is opened a trifle and a man's hand is seen. Cautiously the door is opened wide and a young Northern Private stands silhouetted on the threshold. He wears a dirty uniform, and a bloody bandage is tied about his head. He is wounded, sick, and exhausted. He stands at the door a moment, listening intently; then hastily moves to the centre table looking for food. He bumps against a chair and mutters an oath. Finding nothing on the table, he hurries to the cup-*

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board. Suddenly the galloping of horses is heard in the distance. The Northerner starts. Then rushes to the window nearer the audience. For a moment the sound ceases, then it begins again, growing gradually louder and louder. The Northerner hurries into the room at the left. Horses and voices are heard in the yard, and almost immediately heavy, thundering knocks sound on the door, back. The men at the door grow impatient and push the door open. A large, powerfully built Southern Sergeant, and a smaller, younger Trooper of the same army enter. Thaddeus appears on the stairs, carrying a candle.]

SERGEANT [*to Thaddeus; not unkindly*] Sorry, my friend, but you were so darn slow 'bout openin' the door that we had to walk in. Has there been a Northern soldier round here today?

THADDEUS [*timidly*] I ain't seed one. [*Comes down the stairs.*]

SERGEANT. Have you been here all day?

THADDEUS. I ain't stirred from the place.

SERGEANT. Call the rest of your family down.

THADDEUS. My wife's all there is. [*Goes to foot of stairs, and calls loudly and excitedly*] Mary! Mary! Come down. Right off!

SERGEANT. You better not lie to me or it'll go tough with you.

THADDEUS. I swear I ain't seed no one.

[*Mary comes downstairs slowly. She is all atremble.*]

THADDEUS. Say, Mary, you was here—

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SERGEANT. Keep still, man. I'll do the talkin'.
[*To Mary*] You were here at the house all day?

[*Mary is very frightened and embarrassed, but after a moment manages to nod her head slowly.*]

SERGEANT. You didn't take a trip down to the store?

[*Mary shakes her head slowly.*]

SERGEANT. Haven't you got a tongue?

MARY [*with difficulty*] Y-e-s.

SERGEANT. Then use it. The Northern soldier who came here a while ago was pretty badly wounded, wasn't he?

MARY. I—I—no one's been here.

SERGEANT. Come, come, woman, don't lie.

[*Mary shows a slight sign of anger.*]

SERGEANT. He had a bad cut in his forehead, and you felt sorry for him, and gave him a bite to eat.

MARY [*haltingly*] No one's been near the house t'day.

SERGEANT [*trying a different tone*] We're not going to hurt him, woman. He's a friend of ours. We want to find him, and put him in a hospital, don't we, Dick? [*Turning to his companion.*]

DICK. He's sick and needs to go to bed for a while.

MARY. He ain't here.

SERGEANT. What do you want to lie for?

MARY [*quickly*] I ain't lyin'. I ain't seed no soldier. [*She stands rooted to the spot where she stopped when she came downstairs. Her eyes are still fixed on the Sergeant.*]

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SERGEANT. I reckon you know what'll happen to you if you are hidin' the spy.

THADDEUS. There ain't no one here. We both been here all day, an' there couldn't no one come without our knowin' it. What would they want round here anyway?

SERGEANT. We'll search the place, Dick.

MARY [*quickly*] Yuh ain't got no—

SERGEANT [*sharply*] What's that, woman?

MARY. There ain't no one here, an' yer keepin' us from our sleep.

SERGEANT. Your sleep? This is an affair of life and death. Get us a lantern.

[*Thaddeus moves to the small table and lights the lantern with the candle which he holds in his hand. He gives the lantern to the Sergeant.*]

SERGEANT [*noticing the door to the cubby-hole*] Ha! Tryin' to hide the door, are you, by puttin' a table in front of it? You can't fool me. [*To Thaddeus*] Pull the table away and let's see what's behind the door.

THADDEUS. It's a cubby-hole an' ain't been opened in years.

SERGEANT [*sternly and emphatically*] I said to open the door.

[*Thaddeus sets the candle on the larger table, moves the smaller table to the right, and opens the door to the cubby-hole. Mary is angry. The Sergeant takes a long-barrelled revolver from his belt and peers into the cubby-hole.*]

SERGEANT [*returning his revolver to his belt*]

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We're goin' to tear this place to pieces 'til we find him. You might just as well hand him over now.

MARY. There ain't no one here.

SERGEANT. All right. Now we'll see. Dick, you stand guard at the door.

[*Dick goes to the door, back, and stands gazing out into the night,—his back to the audience.*]

SERGEANT [*to Thaddeus*] Come along, man. I'll have to look at the upstairs. [*To Mary.*] You sit down in that chair. [*Points to chair at right of centre table, and feels for a sufficiently strong threat.*] Don't you stir or I'll—I'll set fire to your house. [*To Thaddeus.*] Go on ahead.

[*Thaddeus and the Sergeant go upstairs. Mary sinks lifelessly into the chair. She is the picture of fear. She sits facing left. Suddenly she leans forward. She opens her eyes wide, and draws her breath sharply. She opens her mouth as though she would scream, but makes no sound. The Northerner has opened the door. He enters slowly and cautiously, his gun pointed at Mary. (Dick cannot see him because of the jog in the wall.) Mary only stares in bewilderment at the Northerner, as he, with eyes fixed appealingly on her, opens the door to the cubby-hole and crawls inside.*]

DICK. Woman!

MARY [*almost with a cry, thinking that Dick has seen the Northerner*] Yes.

DICK. Have you got an apple handy? I'm starved.

[*Mary rises and moves to the cupboard. The Sergeant and Thaddeus come downstairs. The*

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Sergeant, seeing that Mary is not where he left her, looks about rapidly and discovers her at the cupboard.]

SERGEANT. Here, what did I tell you I'd do if you moved from that chair?

MARY [*terrified*] Oh, I didn't—I only—he wanted—

DICK. It's all right, Sergeant. I asked her to get me an apple.

SERGEANT. Take this lantern and search the barn.

[Dick takes the lantern from the Sergeant and goes out, back.]

SERGEANT [*to Thaddeus*] Come in here with me.

[The Sergeant picks up the candle. He and Thaddeus move toward the door, left. As though in a stupor, Mary starts to follow.]

SERGEANT. Sit down!

[Mary drops into the chair at the right of the table. The Sergeant and Thaddeus go into the room, left. They can be heard moving furniture about. Mary sees a pin on the floor. She stoops, picks it up, and fastens it in her belt. The Sergeant and Thaddeus return.]

SERGEANT. If I find him now after all the trouble you've given me, you know what'll happen. There's likely to be two dead men and a woman, instead of only the Yankee.

DICK [*bounding into the room*] Sergeant!

SERGEANT. What is it?

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[*Dick hurries to the Sergeant and says something to him in a low voice.*]

SERGEANT [*satisfaction showing on his face*] Now, my good people, how did that horse get here?

THADDEUS. What horse?

DICK. There's a horse in the barn with a saddle on his back. I swear he's been ridden lately.

THADDEUS [*amazed*] There is?

SERGEANT. You know it. [*To Mary*] Come, woman, who drove that horse here?

MARY [*silent for a moment, her eyes on the floor*] I don't know. I didn't hear nothin'.

THADDEUS [*moving toward the door*] Let me go an' see.

SERGEANT [*pushing Thaddeus back*] No, you don't. You two have done enough to justify the harshest measures. Show us the man's hiding place.

THADDEUS. If there's anybody here, he's come in the night without our knowin' it. I tell yuh I didn't see anybody, an' she didn't, an—

SERGEANT [*has been watching Mary*] Where is he?

[*His tone makes Thaddeus jump. There is a pause, during which Mary seems trying to compose herself. Then slowly she lifts her eyes and looks at the Sergeant.*]

MARY. There ain't nobody in the house 'cept us two.

SERGEANT [*to Dick*] Did you search all the out-buildings?

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DICK. Yes. There's not a trace of him except the horse.

SERGEANT [*wiping the perspiration from his face; speaks with apparent deliberation at first, but becomes very emphatic*] He didn't have much of a start of us, and I think he was wounded. A farmer down the road said he heard hoof-beats. The man the other side of you heard nothin', and the horse is in your barn. [*Slowly draws his revolver and points it at Thaddeus.*] There are ways of making people confess.

THADDEUS [*covering his face with his hands*] For God's sake, don't. I know that horse looks bad, but, as I live, I ain't heard a sound, or seen anybody. I'd give the man up in a minute if he was here.

SERGEANT [*lowering his gun*] Yes, I guess you would. You wouldn't want me to hand you and your wife over to our army to be shot down like dogs.

[*Mary shivers.*]

SERGEANT [*swings round sharply and points the gun at Mary*] Your wife knows where he's hid.

MARY [*breaking out in irritating, rasping voice*] I'm sure I wish I did. I'd tell yuh quick an' git yuh out o' here. 'Tain't no fun fer me t' have yuh prowlin' all over my house, trackin' it up with yer dirty boots. Yuh ain't got no right t' torment me like this. Lord knows how I'll git my day's work done, if I can't have my sleep out.

SERGEANT [*has been gazing at her in astonishment; lowers his gun*] Good God! Nothing but her

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own petty existence. [*In different voice to Mary.*] I'll have to ask you to get us some breakfast. We're famished.

[*With relief but showing some anger, Mary turns to the stove. She lights the fire and puts more coffee in the pot.*]

SERGEANT. Come, Dick, we better give our poor horses some water. They're all tired out. [*In lower voice.*] The man isn't here. If he were he couldn't get away while we're in the yard. [*To Thaddeus.*] Get us a pail to give the horses some water in. [*Sees the pails on the bench. Picks one of them up and moves toward the door.*]

MARY. That ain't the horses' pail.

SERGEANT [*to Thaddeus*] Come along. You can help.

MARY [*louder*] That's the drinkin' water pail.

SERGEANT. That's all right.

[*The Sergeant, Thaddeus, and Dick,—carrying the lantern, go out back. Mary needs more wood for the fire, so she follows in a moment. When she has disappeared, the Northerner drags himself from the cubby-hole. Mary returns with an armful of wood.*]

MARY [*sees the Northerner. Shows no sympathy for him in this speech nor during the entire scene*] Yuh git back! Them soldiers'll see yuh.

NORTHERNER. Some water. Quick. [*Falls into chair at left of table.*] It was so hot in there.

MARY [*gives him water in the dipper*] Don't yuh faint here! If them soldiers git yuh, they'll kill me

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an' Thad. Hustle an' git back in that cubby-hole.
[Turns quickly to the stove.]

[The Northerner drinks the water. Puts the dipper on the table. Then, summoning all his strength, rises and crosses to Mary. He touches her on the sleeve. Mary is so startled that she jumps and utters a faint cry.]

NORTHERNER. Be still or they'll hear you. How are you going to get me out of here?

MARY. Yuh git out! Why did yuh come here, a bringin' me all this extra work, an' maybe death?

NORTHERNER. I couldn't go any farther. My horse and I were ready to drop. Won't you help me?

MARY. No, I won't. I don't know who yuh are or nothin' 'bout yuh, 'cept that them men want t' ketch yuh. [In a changed tone of curiosity.] Did yuh steal somethin' from 'em?

NORTHERNER. Don't you understand? Those men belong to the Confederacy, and I'm a Northerner. They've been chasing me all day. [Pulling a bit of crumpled paper from his breast.] They want this paper. If they get it before tomorrow morning it will mean the greatest disaster that's ever come to the Union army.

MARY [with frank curiosity] Was it yuh rode by yesterday?

NORTHERNER. Don't you see what you can do? Get me out of here and away from those men, and you'll have done more than any soldier could do for the country,—for *your* country.

MARY. I ain't got no country. Me an' Thad's

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only got this farm. Thad's ailin', an' I do most the work, an'—

NORTHERNER. The lives of thirty thousand men hang by a thread. I must save them. And you must help me!

MARY. I don't know nothin' 'bout yuh, an' I don't know what yer talkin' 'bout.

NORTHERNER. Only help me get away.

MARY [*angrily*] No one ever helped me or Thad. I lift no finger in this business. Why yuh come here in the first place is beyond me,—sneakin' in our house, spoilin' our well-earned sleep. If them soldiers ketch yuh, they'll kill me an' Thad. Maybe you didn't know that.

NORTHERNER. What's your life and your husband's compared to thirty thousand? I haven't any money or I'd give it to you.

MARY. I don't want yer money.

NORTHERNER. What do you want?

MARY. I want yuh t' git out. I don't care what happens t' yuh. Only git out o' here.

NORTHERNER. I can't with the Southerners in the yard. They'd shoot me like a dog. Besides, I've got to have my horse.

MARY [*with naive curiosity*] What kind o' lookin' horse is it?

NORTHERNER [*dropping into the chair at left of centre table in disgust and despair*] Oh, God! If I'd only turned in at the other farm. I might have found people with red blood. [*Pulls out his gun and hopelessly opens the empty chamber.*]

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MARY [*alarmed*] What yuh goin' t' do with that gun?

NORTHERNER. Don't be afraid. It's not load—

MARY. I'd call 'em if I wasn't—

NORTHERNER [*leaping to the wall, left, and bracing himself against it*] Go call them in. Save your poor skin and your husband's if you can. Call them in. You can't save yourself. [*Laughs hysterically.*] You can't save your miserable skin. 'Cause if they get me, and don't shoot you, *I will.*

MARY [*leaning against the left side of the table for support; in agony*] Oh!

NORTHERNER. You see? You've got to help me whether you want to or not.

MARY [*feeling absolutely caught*] I ain't done nothin'. I don't see why yuh an' them others come here a threatenin' t' shoot me. I don't want nothin'. I don't want t' do nothin'. I jest want yuh all t' git out o' here an' leave me an' Thad t' go t' sleep. Oh, I don't know what t' do. Yuh got me in a corner where I can't move. [*Passes her hand back along the table. Touches the dipper accidentally, and it falls to the floor. Screams at the sound.*]

NORTHERNER [*leaping toward her*] Now you've done it. They'll be here in a minute. You can't give me up. They'll shoot you if you do. They'll shoot. [*Hurries up the stairs and disappears.*]

[*Mary stands beside the table, trembling terribly. The Sergeant, Dick, and Thaddeus come running in.*]

SERGEANT. What did you yell for?

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[*Mary does not answer.*]

SERGEANT [*seizing her by the arm*] Answer!

MARY. I knocked the dipper off the table. It scared me.

SERGEANT [*dropping wearily into chair at left of centre table*] Well, don't drop our breakfast. Put it on the table. We're ready.

MARY [*stands looking at the Sergeant*] It ain't finished.

SERGEANT [*worn out by his day's work and Mary's stupidity, from now on absolutely brutish*] You've had time to cook a dozen meals. What did you do all the time we were in the yard?

MARY. I didn't do nothin'.

SERGEANT. You good-for-nothin'—. Get a move on and give us something fit to eat. Don't try to get rid of any left-overs on us. If you do, you'll suffer for it.

[*Mary stands looking at him.*]

SERGEANT. Don't you know anything, you brainless farm-drudge? *Hurry, I said.*

[*Mary picks up the dipper and turns to the stove. Thaddeus sits in the chair at left of smaller table.*]

DICK. What a night. My stomach's as hollow as these people's heads. [*Takes towel which hangs above the bench, and wipes the barrel of his gun with it.*]

MARY. That's one of my best towels.

DICK. Can't help it.

SERGEANT. 'Tend to the breakfast. That's enough for you to do at one time.

THE CLOD

[*Dick puts his gun on the smaller table, and sits at the right of the larger.*]

SERGEANT [*quietly to Dick*] I don't see how he gave us the slip.

DICK. He knew we were after him, drove his horse in here, and went on afoot. Clever scheme, I must admit.

THADDEUS [*endeavoring to get them into conversation*] Have yuh rid far t'night, Misters?

DICK [*shortly*] Far enough.

THADDEUS. Twenty miles or so?

DICK. Perhaps.

THADDEUS. How long yuh been chasin' the critter?

SERGEANT. Oh, shut up! Don't you see we don't want to talk to you? Take hold and hurry, woman. My patience 's at an end.

[*Mary puts a loaf of bread, some fried eggs, and a coffee-pot on the table.*]

MARY. There! I hope yer satisfied.

[*Dick and the Sergeant pull their chairs up and begin to eat.*]

SERGEANT. Is this all we get? Come, it won't do you any good to be stingy.

MARY. It's all I got.

SERGEANT. It isn't a mouthful for a chickadee! Give us some butter.

MARY. There ain't none.

SERGEANT. No butter on a farm? God, the way you lie.

MARY. I—

SERGEANT. Shut up!

THE CLOD

DICK. Have you got any cider?

SERGEANT. Don't ask. She and the man probably drank themselves stupid on it. [*Throws fork on floor.*] I never struck such a place in my life. Get me another fork. How do you expect me to eat with that bent thing?

[*Mary stoops with difficulty and picks up the fork. Gets another from the cupboard and gives it to the Sergeant.*]

SERGEANT. Now give me some salt. Don't you know that folks eat it on eggs?

[*Mary crosses to the cupboard; mistakes the pepper for the salt and puts it on the table.*]

SERGEANT [*sprinkles pepper on his food*] I said salt, woman! [*Spelling.*] S-a-l-t. Salt! Salt!

[*Mary gets the salt and gives it to the Sergeant. Almost ready to drop, she drags herself to the window nearer the back and leans against it, watching the Southerners like a hunted animal. Thaddeus is nodding in the corner. The Sergeant and Dick go on devouring the food. The former pours the coffee. Puts his cup to his lips, takes one swallow; then, jumping to his feet and upsetting his chair as he does so, he hurls his cup to the floor.*]

SERGEANT [*bellowing and pointing to the fluid trickling on the floor*] Have you tried to poison us, you God damn hag?

[*Mary screams and the faces of the men turn white. It is the cry of an animal goaded beyond endurance.*]

MARY [*screeching*] Break my cup? Call my coffee poison? Call me a hag, will yuh? I'll learn

THE CLOD

yuh! I'm a woman, but yer drivin' me crazy.
[*She has snatched the gun from the wall and pointed it at the Sergeant. Fires.*]

[*The Sergeant falls to the floor. Mary keeps on screeching. Dick rushes for his gun.*]

THADDEUS. Mary! Mary!

MARY [*aiming at Dick and firing*] I ain't a hag. I'm a woman, but yer killin' me.

[*Dick falls just as he reaches his gun. Thaddeus is in the corner with his hands over his ears. The Northerner stands on the stairs. Mary continues to pull the trigger of the empty gun. The Northerner is motionless for a moment; then he goes to Thaddeus and shakes him.*]

NORTHERNER. Go get my horse. Quick!

[*Thaddeus hurries out. The Northerner turns to Mary. She gazes at him but does not understand a word he says.*]

NORTHERNER [*with great fervor*] I'm ashamed of what I said. The whole country will hear of this, and you. [*He takes her hand and presses it to his lips; then turns and hurries out of the house.*]

[*Mary still holds the gun in her hand. She pushes a strand of grey hair back from her face, and begins to pick up the fragments of the broken cup.*]

MARY [*in dead, flat tone*] I'll have t' drink out the tin cup now.

[*The hoof-beats of the Northerner's horse are heard.*]

CURTAIN

A GUEST FOR DINNER

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM GRANT
GILBERT GRANT
COURTLEIGH VANBRUGH
ENRIGHT

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LEWIS BEACH.

First acted at The Playhouse, Lake Forest,
August, 1916.

A GUEST FOR DINNER

SCENE: *A large, cold, and formal room done in pale green with mauve portières and upholstery. The decorator chose furnishings with care and taste, but he neglected the most important feature: the room is as cheerful as a mausoleum.*

At the back, to the right, a row of windows overlooking the street. On the left, well upstage, a wide, arched opening leading to the hall. Downstage right an empty fireplace. Above it a doorway; above the doorway, a screen. Hidden from view behind the screen a small scroll-saw. In the centre of the room stands a round table; straight-backed chairs to left and right of it. A third chair downstage left, and a fourth at the back near the screen. A davenport before the fireplace. Bell-ropes at back to the left. A small table near it which the butler uses as a serving table. Two heavy candlesticks,—about three feet tall, on either side of the fireplace. A clock, and framed photographs of Gilbert and the late Mrs. Grant on the mantel-piece. On the centre table a vase of Candidum lilies. The one bright, inharmonious thing in the room is a navajo blanket which lies over the back of the davenport.

The light of a late, sunless afternoon in April comes through the windows.

A GUEST FOR DINNER

The curtain rises on an empty stage. Presently a youngish man enters from the hall. He is tall and slender, handsome and distingué. Beggars never dare approach him. He wears a cutaway and silk hat, and has a gardenia for boutonnière. His eyes immediately discover the navajo. He frowns; then moves to the bell-rope and pulls it. Coming downstage he seats himself in the chair at the left of the table. He is obviously much annoyed but he does not drop his long-practiced posing.

The butler enters right. He's sparse and tall; and although well in his fifties, he has never acquired a sense of humor. He has not expected to see the youngish man, and even a slight expression of surprise crosses his face. But he draws himself up and immediately becomes a proper property of the house.

THE YOUNGISH MAN [*pointing to the navajo with his stick; does not turn his head*] Enright, who put that barbaric atrocity there?

ENRIGHT [*moving to the navajo*] Yes, sir.

THE YOUNGISH MAN. Why does Father insist on spoiling this room?

ENRIGHT [*puts the navajo on his arm as though he were in the habit of taking things away at the young man's command*] I do my best, Mr. Gilbert.

GILBERT. Take it away. It absolutely ruins the effect.

ENRIGHT. Often the best of people seem to be born with no taste, sir.

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GILBERT. Wrap it up and send it to one of the pseudos in Greenwich Village. It'll be appreciated there.

ENRIGHT [*feeling it his cue to laugh*] Excellent, sir. Mr. Grant— [*momentary pause; the mention of Grant, Senior, brings some thought to his mind*—perhaps, sir,—will you be so good as to choose a blanket of the right colour?

GILBERT. Any blanket would be out of place here.

ENRIGHT. Quite right, sir. [*Timidly*] But, sir, Mr. Grant likes something to cover himself with.

GILBERT [*showing a slight interest; up to this time his manner has been marked by complete boredom*] Does Father nap here?

ENRIGHT. Yes, sir. I suppose he should nap in his bed; but—

GILBERT [*cutting in*] This isn't a bedroom.

ENRIGHT. Very good, sir. [*Crosses and lights the chandelier.*]

GILBERT. It may be necessary to remove the davenport.

[*Enright busies himself with anything which will provide an excuse for lingering.*]

ENRIGHT. Mr. Grant will be so pleased that you're to dine with him.

GILBERT [*very bored*] But I'm not.

[*Enright's face falls.*]

GILBERT. I trotted in to tell you to send me round a few bottles of Father's burgundy. He never uses it, I suppose?

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ENRIGHT. No, sir. He will be disappointed that you're not to dine with him. [*An idea comes to him: if he tells Gilbert his trouble the son will put an end to it. He speaks with a meaning sigh.*] I suppose he'll send me to the Park for some one.

GILBERT [*astounded; even turns abruptly and looks at Enright*] What?

ENRIGHT [*very solemnly*] Yes, sir. Almost every night for three weeks now.

GILBERT [*horrified*] My father dines with tramps?

ENRIGHT [*still in tragic voice*] That night he went with you to the theatre. Seems something in the play put the idea in his head.

GILBERT. This comes of taking him to the theatre. [*Gilbert will never take him again.*]

ENRIGHT [*his tone conveys that he does not understand Grant's distaste*] He says he can't bear to dine alone.

GILBERT. Tramps off the street. How many—since I was here last?

ENRIGHT [*thinking*] That was three weeks ago.

GILBERT [*forgetting himself for a moment*] So long? [*Checking himself*] How do you remember?

ENRIGHT. You came to go over the accounts, sir.

GILBERT. Why, this is awful!

ENRIGHT. Isn't it a tragedy, sir?

GILBERT. I don't understand him.

ENRIGHT [*as though no one could*] No, sir.

GILBERT. And do these—these rotters—come to the front door?

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ENRIGHT. Once I tried to bring one of them in at the service entrance. But Mr. Grant objected. He was quite unreasonable about it, sir.

GILBERT [*evidently planning to give his father a lecture*] I think I'll stay for dinner tonight.

ENRIGHT [*relieved and delighted*] Oh splendid!

GILBERT. No, I can't. Tonight is Reggie Schofield's bachelor farewell.

ENRIGHT [*giving way completely*] I don't know what to do, sir,—butlering to tramps.

GILBERT. I'll run in soon. I can't have my father dining with tramps. It'd ruin me. You tell him—

ENRIGHT [*cutting in*] Oh, no. I couldn't, sir. Beg pardon, sir, but could you wait?

GILBERT. I'm late now. I've only time to dress. [*Rises and moves rather hurriedly toward the hall. Stops left lower as:*]

[*William Grant enters from the hall. He's a small, undersized man of sixty-seven, but he looks even older and his hair is snow-white. His voice is light and just a bit childish. There is a certain timid embarrassment in his manner. He wears a dark overcoat. In one hand he holds his top-hat; in the other, a bunch of bright red tulips. In all, a pathetic figure; but he beams when he sees Gilbert and goes eagerly to him with outstretched hand.*]

GRANT. Oh Gilbert, I'm so glad to see you. How are you? How are you?

GILBERT. Oh, so so. I've been waiting for you for some time.

GRANT. I'm so sorry to have kept you. But

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sit down, sit down. Enright, take Mr. Gilbert's hat.

GILBERT. I'm just off.

GRANT. Oh, no. You haven't dined with me in twenty-one nights.

GILBERT. I've really not a moment. I must see a sick friend.

GRANT. Well, if you're going to cheer some one up, I'll have to excuse you. But do come soon. [*Timidly*] It's lonesome.

GILBERT. Why don't you dine at the Club?

GRANT. I feel out of place. There never seems to be any one there I know.

GILBERT. I'll come soon. There's something I must talk to you about.

GRANT [*brightens*] What?

GILBERT. Don't you know?

[*Grant shakes his head.*]

GILBERT. I haven't a moment now. The hospital will be closed to visitors. [*Moves out into the hall.*] Au revoir.

[*Grant stands looking after him. Enright puts the navajo behind a pillow. Crosses to Grant and helps him out of his coat; takes his hat. Grant moves to the table; takes the lilies from the vase and puts the tulips in their place.*]

ENRIGHT [*with a slight restraining gesture*] Ah,—the colour, sir.

GRANT. Colour? Oh, yes. [*Removes the tulips, puts the lilies back in the vase.*] Gilbert knows best. [*Hands the tulips to Enright.*]

A GUEST FOR DINNER

ENRIGHT. Will you have your dinner in here tonight, sir?

GRANT. I think it's more cheerful than the dining room.

ENRIGHT. Yes, sir.

[*Grant sits on the davenport. Enright puts the tulips on the small table; takes coat and hat into the hall. Grant sighs. Enright reenters. Grant speaks immediately.*]

GRANT. Enright, do you know what day this is?

ENRIGHT. No, sir. What, sir?

GRANT. My sixty-seventh birthday.

ENRIGHT. No, sir? Not really, sir? May I congratulate?

GRANT. Thank you, Enright. [*Not bitterly*] One usually doesn't mention his own birthday, but no one remembered, so I had to tell.

ENRIGHT [*apologizing for Gilbert*] I'm sure, sir, if Mr. Gilbert'd—

GRANT [*cutting in; excusing Gilbert from obligation*] I didn't expect him to. Why should children remember their parents' birthdays? [*With a twinkle in his eye*] They weren't present at our christenings, were they, Enright?

ENRIGHT [*not seeing Grant's poor little joke*] Ah no, sir.

[*Enright picks up the tulips and goes out right. After a moment of doing nothing, and as though trying to brace up, Grant takes a puzzle,—a couple of nails bent together, from his pocket, and tries to*

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separate them. Enright enters with a tray holding dinner service.]

ENRIGHT. A new puzzle, sir?

GRANT [*separating the nails*] Yes. It's too easy.

ENRIGHT [*begins laying the table*] You're so clever with them.

GRANT. They're all alike.

ENRIGHT. Did you win at Canfield today, sir, or did Canfield beat you?

GRANT. Why,—I can't remember. I guess I've got in the habit of just laying out the cards. I wish I knew a new game.

ENRIGHT. I'll ask my mother. She knows one she says Napoleon played to keep himself from going insane.

GRANT. Oh, do. [*Thoughtfully; almost shivers*] "From going—." [*Quickly*] Take your mother some of my jig-saw puzzles.

ENRIGHT [*non-enthusiastically*] Thank you, sir.

GRANT. What else does she do to keep herself busy?

ENRIGHT. Oh, she has a real smart time living with sister. The neighbors are always dropping in to borrow something.

GRANT. It is different with a woman. An old man— [*Pauses*].

ENRIGHT. Shall I serve dinner, sir?

GRANT. I'm not hungry.

ENRIGHT. Oh, but you must eat, sir. Cook gets so cross.

[*Grant rises and moves to the table as though*

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he were performing an unpleasant duty. Enright holds the chair at the right of the table for him. Grant is about to sit when an idea pops into his head. He speaks eagerly and tries to be persuasive.]

GRANT. Enright, you have dinner with me tonight.

ENRIGHT [*shaking his head; he has evidently refused more than once*] No, sir.

GRANT. Just for tonight. My birthday.

ENRIGHT. I couldn't and keep my dignity, sir.

[*Grant sits. Enright pushes his chair up to the table. He unfolds the napkin and gives it to Grant; goes out. Grant smells the lilies; shudders slightly. Enright enters. He is the perfect, silent butler now. He carries a small tray; puts it on the table near Grant; goes out. Grant takes the pill from the tray, looks at it for a moment, then swallows it and drinks a few drops of water. Enright enters; serves Grant with an hors d'oeuvre; picks up the tray and goes out. Grant looks at the hors d'oeuvre; shoves the plate forward a little. The ticking of the clock is the only sound. Enright enters with a dish of celery and olives; puts it on the table. He looks down at the hors d'oeuvre. Grant shakes his head. Enright picks up the plate and moves toward the door. Grant speaks.]*

GRANT. Do you remember that tall man who was here?

ENRIGHT [*his face shows that he is alarmed, but he speaks quietly*] Yes, sir.

GRANT. He told me that he and his wife and

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five children live together in two rooms. How jolly they must be!

[*Enright goes out; reenters with the soup. Grant is looking off into space. Enright notices the chair which seems to mark the empty place opposite Grant; he quickly sets it against the wall; exit. Enters with the crackers; leaves. Deadly, deadly silence follows. Grant thinks aloud.*]

GRANT. "Napoleon from—."

[*He breaks off quickly, frightened. He clinches his hands and shakes his head as though trying to throw off the mood. But the silence, the coldness only impress themselves upon him the more. The clock marks the time monotonously. Desperately, Grant picks up a spoon, starts to taste the soup. But he drops the spoon and bursts out*]

GRANT. I can't stand it! I can't. [*Rises*]
Enright! Enright!

[*Enright enters. He knows what is to happen.*]

GRANT. You must get me some one. [*He goes rapidly to the windows. Already he feels better.*]
Look! Quick!

[*Enright approaches the windows.*]

ENRIGHT. Which one, sir?

GRANT. Any one. Ask him if he won't please come.

[*Enright goes to the table to remove the soup.*]

GRANT. Never mind. The man first. Hurry, hurry.

[*Enright moves toward the hall. Grant hurries up to him.*]

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GRANT. Give me the keys. That wine Gilbert had me buy. We'll celebrate my birthday.

[Enright hands Grant the keys; goes out left distastefully and as slowly as he dares. Grant eagerly crosses the room. As he passes the table he realizes that his guest will know the meal had been commenced. Carefully, yet hurriedly, folds his napkin, picks up the soup-plate and goes out right.]

Enright enters left with the man following. The latter is almost as old as Grant but he appears much younger. His hair and full beard are still very dark, without the least touch of grey. He is tall and powerfully built but he drags his feet lazily. He suit is shabby but quite spotless.

Enright loses no time in lowering the window shades.]

ENRIGHT [*coldly and disdainfully*] Please understand, he's not crazy.

THE MAN [*his voice is heavy in sharp contrast to Grant's*] Then why did you—?

ENRIGHT [*cutting in*] His guests disappointed him, and he's kind-hearted, and thought you looked hungry.

THE MAN. He thought right. [*Sits left lower; puts his felt hat in the chair, takes a small brush from his pocket, and begins to freshen his suit and shoes. He whistles contentedly.*]

[After a disgusted glance at the man, Enright goes out right hurriedly; returns almost immediately and lays another place at table.]

THE MAN. What's my host's name?

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ENRIGHT [*proudly*] Mr. William Grant.

THE MAN. Bill Grant? [*Starts; looks up for a moment; then puts the brush in his pocket and goes on whistling.*]

[*Enright goes out right as Grant enters.*]

GRANT [*embarrassed; advances toward his guest*] How do you do, sir? I'm so glad you've come.

THE MAN [*rises and holds out his hand. He's perfectly at his ease, and seems to recognize Grant*] Exceedingly kind of you to ask me to dine with you.

GRANT [*surprised*] It's very good of you to come.

THE MAN. Too bad your other guests disappointed you.

GRANT. I had no other guests. I invited you because I wished company.

THE MAN. Oh, I see—[*Laughs*]—the butler—

GRANT [*surprised*] You're not like the—[*Collects himself as he sees Enright who has entered and stands waiting at the table*] Ah, won't you sit there? [*Motions to place at left of table.*]

THE MAN. Thank you.

[*Enright pushes Grant's chair to the table. The man sits. Enright goes out. There is a pause. The man waits for Grant to speak.*]

THE MAN [*finally making conversation*] Splendid spring, isn't it?

GRANT. Yes.

THE MAN. Think the rains are over?

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GRANT. I do. Do you?

[*Enright enters with the soup; serves them; exit.*]

[*The man begins to eat eagerly. Grant watches him.*]

THE MAN. It's a long time since I had dinner with you.

GRANT. Dinner with me?

THE MAN. Yes.

GRANT. But—?

THE MAN. Don't you recognize me?

GRANT. No.

THE MAN. I'm Courtleigh Vanbrugh.

GRANT. Courtleigh Vanbrugh—why, it can't be!

VANBRUGH. Why not?

GRANT. The man in my class of '72?

VANBRUGH. The same. Courtleigh Vanbrugh, poet, philosopher, naturalist.

GRANT. But we expected—[*Pauses*].

VANBRUGH. Big things? I've done them.

GRANT [*greatly pleased*] Why, I can't believe—it doesn't seem possible—I've not seen you in over forty years.

VANBRUGH [*enjoying his soup tremendously*] A long time for lots to happen.

GRANT. Not many of us alive now.

VANBRUGH. Suppose not.

[*Enright enters; serves the next course and the wine; exit.*]

GRANT [*with tears in his eyes*] Why, this is wonderful,—to dine with a classmate.

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[*Vanbrugh is paying more attention to his food than to Grant's conversation.*]

GRANT. I didn't know many of them intimately at college, but as I think of them now, they seem like boon companions. I feel I know them better than most any one in the world.

VANBRUGH. You haven't seen me in over forty years.

GRANT. Just think of that!

VANBRUGH. Haven't you something to tell me?

GRANT. I?

VANBRUGH. Yes. You feel you know me so well.

GRANT. About what?

VANBRUGH. Yourself.

GRANT [*slight pause*] Why,—I was married in '78. My wife died eight years later.

VANBRUGH [*insistently*] Tell me what's brought you to this.

GRANT. Father left me quite a sum and the business. Now Gilbert's taken it over.

VANBRUGH. What was your business?

GRANT. Wholesale millinery. I wish you could have known my wife. Elise was such a wonderful woman.

VANBRUGH [*almost gruffly*] I want to know what's brought you to the position where you have to call people off the street to dine with you.

GRANT. I don't exactly know. My wife and I were so happy. I spent all my time when I wasn't working with her and the baby. Then she died, and Gilbert and I were alone. Then he went to

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prep school and college—and, well,—when he came back we didn't seem to know each other as we used to. It's strange but I guess it always happens.

VANBRUGH. Where does he live?

GRANT. At his club. You know, a house isn't a home unless there's a mother there. When I married, I got out of the habit of clubs and such things. Devoting all my time to my family, I lost track of friends,—and somehow I couldn't get started again. I was too old. So I just live here alone.

VANBRUGH. Why didn't you marry again?

GRANT. Oh, no! There was just one little woman and she died thirty years ago.

[*Vanbrugh stretches his hand along the table and pats Grant's affectionately as he might a child's.*]

GRANT I retired five years ago. I didn't want to, but Gilbert said it wasn't right for a man of my age and position to work. He said it didn't look well. Since then things have been worse. I haven't anything to do, and—sometimes—it gets so lonesome—that I—well, it seems I can't stand it. Then one night Gilbert took me to the theatre. A man in the play used to invite people in. He wasn't lonesome, but—

VANBRUGH. Well, I'm not surprised you do. [*Looks about; shivers*] This room is enough to give anyone the creeps.

GRANT. Gilbert designed it. He say it's quite correct, and he's an aesthete.

VANBRUGH. Aesthete be damned! It's as cor-

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rect and beautiful as a winter landscape. But who in hell wants to sit in the snow!

GRANT. I'm so sorry. What can I do?

VANBRUGH [*rising*] Why, get some colour and life here. [*Calling*] Here, man. [*To Grant*] What's your butler's name?

GRANT [*bewildered*] Enright.

VANBRUGH [*calling*] Enright! Enright!
[*Snatches the lilies from the vase.*]

[*Enright enters.*]

VANBRUGH. Take these funeral flowers out of here. Get me some bright ones. [*Goes to fireplace.*] Bring some good, big logs and build a fire.

ENRIGHT [*to Grant*] You're cold, sir?

VANBRUGH. Yes, in body and soul.

[*Enright goes out right with the lilies. Grant has risen. Vanbrugh goes to the davenport; turns it round; picks up a pillow.*]

VANBRUGH. Baah! [*discovers the navajo*] Ha, who let this in?

GRANT [*timidly*] I snooze in it.

VANBRUGH. Don't. Live in it. [*Picks up the screen; sees scroll-saw.*] What in the devil's this?

GRANT. My scroll-saw. I cut jig-saw puzzles.

[*Vanbrugh, whistling a lively tune, moves the screen down in back of the table, making a sort of wall with it, and fastens the navajo over the screen. Grant watches, helpless and amazed.*]

VANBRUGH. Say, what is your son? A collector of melancholia paraphernalia? He must be like the people who voted for prohibition.

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[*Enright enters with a basket of wood and the red tulips.*]

VANBRUGH [*taking the flowers*] Ah, tulips! Who could be sad with tulips near?

[*Enright kindles the fire. Vanbrugh, still whistling, gently puts the flowers in the vase. He takes the candlesticks from the fireplace; puts them close to the table; lights one candle. Grant manages to light the second. The flames of the fire spring up. Vanbrugh turns out the electric lights. The table, with the navajo screen in back of it, looks as though it were set in a cozy little dining room.*]

VANBRUGH. Now, Bill Grant, let's sit down. And, man, bring on the next course and another bottle.

[*Enright goes out. Grant and Vanbrugh sit. The latter drains his glass.*]

GRANT. Isn't it cozy?

VANBRUGH. More like. Excellent burgundy, Bill, excellent.

[*Enright enters with the next course and a second bottle. Grant's face beams; he begins to eat. Vanbrugh continues. Enright goes out.*]

VANBRUGH. Do you remember the night of our freshman dinner?

[*Both laugh heartily.*]

VANBRUGH. Will you ever forget Tom Jordan, drunk as a lord, swearing that every one was his brother? And 'member how he looked when he came to the Chinaman?

[*Again they laugh.*]

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GRANT. And Skee Williams doing a *pas seul* on the end of the table. I can see his green shirt to this day.

[*They are in the best of humor.*]

VANBRUGH. And Dickie Leonard,—that was the night we found out he could sing when pickled.

[*Vanbrugh begins to sing For He's a Jolly Good Fellow. Grant joins in. They both rise. There's nothing left of their singing voices, which break and flat frequently, but they manage to carry the song through to the end. The effect is pathos, not burlesque. When they finish both are breathless. They sit. Vanbrugh empties his glass.*]

GRANT. Oh dear, such good times. But so, so long ago.

VANBRUGH. It was only the beginning of my good times.

GRANT. Won't you tell me about yourself?

VANBRUGH. You want to know how I live?

GRANT. Please.

VANBRUGH. Well, perhaps you better. My life's been so different from yours. I know how to live. [*Drains glass.*] When I got my degree, I went to work in a publishing house. For two years I led the life of a slave. Drudging, sweating, nothing but grind. I couldn't even go out at night and enjoy myself: I'd always be thinking of getting up to the grind in the morning. I said to myself: "If I ever get out of here, I'll know what to do." Well, my luck came: the Old Man died and left me about five hundred a year. The day

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I got that bit of news the sun dawned for me. I hadn't seen it for two years. I threw up my job on the spot. "No more work; now I'll live," said I. And I meant it. God never intended us to work. If He had, why did He give us flowers and trees, and shady nooks and pattering streams? He meant us to *live*; and you can't really live and work. [*Fills his glass and drains it.*]

GRANT [*filled with amazement and interest*] But what have you done?

VANBRUGH. I haven't done a stroke of work since. I've lived, I tell you. Oh, I'm what the Ignorant would call a tramp. I walk about, and spend my days in the parks, where I can see the children playing, and the birds singing and mating, and the flowers shoot forth and blossom in all their loveliness. [*Confidentially*] You know, Bill, I sometimes compare myself to a flower. When I worked I was in the clay. Then I sprang forth into God's world.

GRANT. Well, well! But where do you live? Where's your home?

VANBRUGH. My home is in the sunshine.

GRANT. But where do you sleep?

VANBRUGH. Wherever it's handy.

GRANT. I remember at college you never kept a room of your own.

VANBRUGH. What was the use of wasting money? Everyone had an extra couch. I used to go the rounds.

GRANT. And now, in the winter?

VANBRUGH. I go south.

A GUEST FOR DINNER

GRANT. But you're getting old.

VANBRUGH. In years, perhaps.

GRANT. You don't sleep out of doors this time of year, do you?

VANBRUGH. Unless it turns cold.

GRANT [*shaking his head*] I'm afraid I couldn't stand it.

VANBRUGH. Oh, yes you could.

GRANT [*musings*] Sleeping on park benches. [*His face lights up*] Courtleigh, you're all alone. So'm I. Come and live with me.

[*Vanbrugh only raises his head a trifle.*]

GRANT. Yes, yes, do. I've lots of room.

VANBRUGH. Too much.

GRANT [*eagerly*] You can go to the parks in the daytime. We'll travel. We'll go to Europe and South America,—around the world if you wish.

[*Vanbrugh is thinking.*]

GRANT. We'll pass the last of our days together. You'll have no worry about money, and I'll always have some one to talk to. We'll get another house if you don't like this one,—nearer the Park.

VANBRUGH. No, I couldn't.

GRANT. You haven't a wife?

VANBRUGH. No. There's no use in a man marrying unless he wants some one to look after his house. I never did.

GRANT. But you need a home. Oh come, just try staying here for a while.

VANBRUGH. No, thanks, old man.

GRANT. You can leave if you get tired of it.

A GUEST FOR DINNER

VANBRUGH. It's impossible.

GRANT. Why?

VANBRUGH. I couldn't stand the restraint.

GRANT. There wouldn't be any.

VANBRUGH. Yes, there would. I'd be tied down.

[*Grant starts to speak.*]

VANBRUGH. Yes, I would. I'd have to show up. I'd lose my liberty. Mighty nice of you, Bill, but I prefer my own life. [*Drinks.*]

GRANT [*keenly disappointed*] You'd have been such a comfort.

VANBRUGH. You won't try it with me?

GRANT. What?

VANBRUGH. Come along with me.

GRANT. Oh I—[*laughing very slightly and timidly*] I couldn't.

VANBRUGH. Of course, you could. It'd be a damn fine thing for you.

GRANT. But I—

VANBRUGH [*fascinatingly; leaning over the table*] Why, you'd love it,—it's just like that book *Lavengro*. All joy and sunshine. You're never lonesome, because there are always people about to talk to. People who have lived and have a story to tell,—stories like *Arabian Nights*. Sunshine and clear air, moonlight and still waters, golden sunsets and singing birds.

GRANT. I couldn't leave my son.

VANBRUGH. Shucks! Don't you see that he's left you?

GRANT. Don't say that.

A GUEST FOR DINNER

VANBRUGH. Sorry, Bill, but it's the truth.

GRANT. It was too quiet for him here.

VANBRUGH. And so it is for you. Come along. This is the beginning of summer. Make it the beginning of your summer.

GRANT. You think I could?

VANBRUGH. Why, certainly. Of course you understand it won't be any gain to me. You'll be more or less a drag on my hands. But I don't want to be selfish. And I always like to help people. I'll take you out and show you the real glories of this world,—no worries, no cares, no loneliness. Why, if you don't come with me you'll just go on living here till you die.

[*Grant shivers.*]

VANBRUGH. My life's the thing for you. It couldn't be worse than what you're doing now. Golden sunsets and singing birds. [*Leaning way over the table*] Will you come?

[*A brief pause. Then Grant speaks hurriedly, reaching desperately for the one way which will end his present situation.*]

GRANT [*with something like terror in his voice*] Yes, Courtleigh, I'll come.

VANBRUGH [*leaning back*] That's the stuff. I wasn't sure you had it in you. [*Holding up his glass*] To the new life.

[*They drink. Vanbrugh pulls out his Ingersoll.*]

VANBRUGH. It's getting late. Time we were off.

GRANT. Sha'n't we wait until morning?

A GUEST FOR DINNER

VANBRUGH. I'd have the nightmare if I slept in this house.

GRANT. I'll do as you say. [*Rises, crosses to bell-rope and pulls it.*]

VANBRUGH. Better put some money in your sock.

GRANT. I always carry my check-book.

VANBRUGH. Cash's better. Checks are difficult. [*Enright enters.*]

GRANT [*excitedly*] My overcoat, Enright.

ENRIGHT. You're going out, sir?

VANBRUGH [*the effect of the wine becoming even more evident, but Grant, in his excitement, does not notice it until later*] He doesn't wear his overcoat in the house, does he?

[*Enright goes into the hall. Grant moves to the fireplace; looks up at his wife's photograph as though she were giving her approval. Vanbrugh selects a tulip for his button-hole.*]

VANBRUGH. Always did fancy red. The colour of life blood.

[*Enright enters with Grant's coat and silk hat.*]

VANBRUGH. Not that hat, Bill. It's too la-di-da.

GRANT. A derby, Enright. And pack a small bag.

VANBRUGH. Good Lord, no bag. Toothbrush. Too much to carry.

ENRIGHT. Shall I call a taxi, sir?

GRANT [*undecided*] Why—

VANBRUGH. We're going to walk!

[*Enright starts; puts coat and hat on chair,*

A GUEST FOR DINNER

right upper; hurriedly goes out right. Vanbrugh still sits, soporifically, at the table; he fills his glass and drinks. Grant is too excited to be much surprised by Enright's hurried exit before helping him with his coat; he gets into it himself as Vanbrugh sings.]

VANBRUGH [*singing*]

“The noble Duke of York,
He had ten thousand men,
He led them up to the top of the hill,
And he led them down again.”

GRANT [*enraptured*] Oh, Courtleigh, never to be alone again.

[*Enright enters, right.*]

ENRIGHT [*lying, haltingly*] Beg pardon, sir, but Mr. Gilbert just 'phoned—he—said he'd drop in tonight—. He—he suddenly remembered your birthday, sir.

[*Grant smiles pitifully. Enright watches him closely.*]

VANBRUGH [*drunk*] I never could stand it to work. “No, no,” I said, “I never was meant for work.” Always hated work. Too damn much trouble. [*Laughs.*] Bill, I used to let the rooms where I was staying at college grow cold rather than mend the fire.

[*Grant starts to take off his overcoat. Enright hurries to help him.*]

VANBRUGH. Honest to God, I did. [*Laughs; rises,—is not too steady on his feet.*] Bill, maybe we'll go to Af-ri-ca. Always wanted to go to

A GUEST FOR DINNER

Af-ri-ca, and just reach up and grab a banana when I got hungry.

[*Grant drops into the chair at right of table.*]

VANBRUGH. And hear the birds sing, lovely birds, green birds and red birds. What say, Bill, shall we go to Af-ri-ca?

GRANT. I guess not, Courtleigh.

[*Much relieved, Enright goes out right with the coat and hat on his arm.*]

VANBRUGH. Don't want to go to Af-ri-ca? All right. I don't care. Always agreeable. But come along. Get a move on. Golden sunsets and singing birds. [*Moves toward chair, left-lower.*]

GRANT [*slowly*] I think I won't go, Courtleigh.

VANBRUGH [*stops*] Not go? Why not go?

GRANT. No. I can't leave.

VANBRUGH. All right. Guess I'll move along. Too weak. You'd been a nuisance. I wouldn't a had my liberty. [*Reaching for his hat.*] But God, you'll die here. [*Moves toward Grant*] 'Night, Bill.

GRANT [*rises; crosses to Vanbrugh*] Courtleigh, there aren't many of us old ones left now. If ever I can help you, let me know. Do you understand?

VANBRUGH. Sure understand.

GRANT. I mean it.

[*Vanbrugh is silent.*]

GRANT. Is there something now?

VANBRUGH. Well—

GRANT. What is it?

VANBRUGH. Got devilish thirsty one night. Met a bootlegger.

A GUEST FOR DINNER

[*Grant pulls out his wallet; starts to take money from it.*]

VANBRUGH. If you don't mind,—'course you understand I shouldn't have offered if you hadn't asked,—you might—

[*Grant gives him several bills.*]

VANBRUGH. You're too good. That's trouble with you. [*Puts the money in his pocket.*] Damn prohibition!

GRANT [*now seems to notice Vanbrugh's condition for the first time; stretches out his hand as though to steady him*] You better stay all night.

VANBRUGH [*taking Grant's hand*] No, thanks. Don't like nightmare.

GRANT. Sha'n't I call a taxi?

VANBRUGH [*whispering in Grant's ear*] Need a walk.

[*Vanbrugh moves into the hall. Grant follows him.*]

VANBRUGH. Thanks for a fine evening. Fine dinner. I'll come again. Great burgundy, Bill. [*His voice grows fainter as he trails off into the night.*] Best I ever had. Goodnight. Pleasant dreams. Green birds and red birds—

GRANT [*calling after him*] Goodnight, Courtleigh.

[*Enright enters rather timidly from the right; starts to put the room in order. Grant comes from the hall; for a moment he stands looking about; then he notices Enright.*]

GRANT. Oh, you go to bed, Enright. [*Hands Enright the tulips*] I'll wait up for Mr. Gilbert.

A GUEST FOR DINNER

ENRIGHT. But, sir,—he might be detained, sir.

GRANT. Oh, no. He'll come. [*He goes to the fireplace, looks up at Gilbert's photograph, smiles and shakes his head with pleasure.*]

ENRIGHT. Anything I can do for you, sir?

GRANT. No, thanks. [*Sits on the davenport*]
Goodnight.

ENRIGHT. Goodnight, sir. [*Moves toward door, right.*]

GRANT. Oh, Enright do ask your mother about that game Napoleon played.

ENRIGHT. Certainly, sir. [*Exit.*]

[*Grant sits waiting for Gilbert. The stage grows dark. The clock strikes twelve. In a moment the stage is lighted again. Grant has fallen asleep. The candles have nearly burned out. Grant wakes with a start. He looks at his watch; compares it with the clock. Rises. He stands looking toward Gilbert's photograph for a moment. Then he turns, moves to the table, and blows out the candles. The light in the hall shines into the room. Grant goes slowly into the hall. He is heard climbing the stairs.*]

CURTAIN

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

A FARCE

CHARACTERS

HONORE LAZENBY-BOMMARITO

RICCARDO BOMMARITO

CLARA

THE PHOTOGRAPHER

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LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

SCENE: *A gaudily furnished room in a New York apartment house. One enters the hall through a door upstage left. Below the door a davenport; in back of the davenport a small table holding a lamp. At the back, to the right, a row of windows and a window-box of cyclamen. A door, leading to Riccardo's study, left back. Between this door and the windows a Victrola. Upstage left, a third door. Madame's grand piano is at the left of the room, so placed that the key-board cannot be seen by the audience. A small, low table in the centre of the room, and a console table downstage left. A chair to the right of the centre table, one near the windows, and a third in the curve of the piano. Photographs of musical celebrities adorn the walls. Bric-a-brac wherever there is room for it.*

(When the curtain rises, Honore, wearing a very elaborate negligee, is seated before a breakfast tray. She is a tall and distinguished looking American of about thirty-five years of age. Her low eye-brows give her face a frowning expression, and she appears to be cold and austere. But she possesses a great deal of magnetism. In an adjoining room, Riccardo is singing the Addio alla madre from Cavalleria Rusticana. Honore is quite indifferent to his singing. She has finished her break-

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

fast and is dreamily smoking a long Russian cigarette. A heap of letters lie on the table beside the tray.

Almost immediately her maid, Clara, bursts into the room. She carries a newspaper.)

CLARA [*excitedly*] Oh, Madame, did you see what the paper says of Signor?

HONORE [*suddenly very alert*] Quick! The review of my recital.

CLARA. I haven't seen it yet.

HONORE. Beast!

CLARA [*reading*] "Signor Bommarito was superb. For once we saw a Cavaradossi for whom Tosca might truly have committed murder. And he sang—"

HONORE. Stop! Find my notice. [*Snatches the paper from Clara.*]

CLARA [*thrilled*] Like a god! Oh, Signor is such a success. Even Caruso—

HONORE. I can't find my criticism.

CLARA. Shall I?

[*Honore throws the paper at Clara; paces back and forth.*]

HONORE. Quick! Or I'll die of heart-failure.

CLARA. I find nothing, Madame.

HONORE. You dare to say that the great Lazenby played last night and the filthy paper doesn't give her a column? L'âme noire.

CLARA. The war, Madame, takes so much space.

HONORE. The war? What is the war? Lazenby played last night and there is no notice.

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

[*Turns and faces door leading to room in which Riccardo is singing*] Stop it, stop it!

CLARA. Ah, here it is.

HONORE [*turning*] Trickster. You would have me die. [*Sits*] Well read, why don't you read?

CLARA [*reading*] "Honore Lazenby-Bommarito, wife of Riccardo Bommarito—"

HONORE [*explodes*] Oh! It writes of me so? Huh! They mean Riccardo is the husband of Honore Lazenby.

CLARA. But that's the same thing, Madame.

HONORE. It is not!

CLARA [*reading*] "The house was not as large as it should have been."

HONORE. Oh! How dare he notice that? If he did how dare he print it?

CLARA. Shall I read any more?

HONORE. Of course, you fool.

CLARA [*reading*] "Honore Lazenby-Bom—Bom—ahem—gave one of her charming piano recitals in Carnegie Hall last evening."

HONORE. "Charming." Too mild a word. "Epoch-making" were better.

CLARA [*reading*] "Her program included compositions by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Ornstein, Debussy—"

HONORE. I know what I played,—only the moderns. Read on.

CLARA. But that's all there is.

HONORE. I'll slap you.

CLARA [*drawing back*] It's true.

HONORE [*rises with queenly dignity*] What?

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

CLARA. It does not tell how you played; only what you played.

[*Furiously Honore grabs the paper and reads. Riccardo begins the Siciliana. Clara is immediately enraptured.*]

HONORE. How dare you bring this paper into the house?

[*Looks up; notices Clara's expression.*]

CLARA. Sh! He's singing divinely.

HONORE. You "sh" me?

[*With an exclamation, Honore crumples the paper and flings it across the room, rushes to the piano and wildly pounds out Paderewski's Polonaise Militaire, almost drowning Riccardo's voice. Clara covers her ears with her hands. Truly the duet is most unpleasant. Honore listens with one ear, expecting that Riccardo will stop immediately. But he sings on. Clara is ready to weep; she picks up the paper and smooths it. Failing to stop Riccardo, Honore rises. She's even more angry than when she sat down.*]

HONORE. What are you doing with that paper, *bête noire*?

CLARA [*timidly*] I thought Signor would like to see it.

HONORE. Mon Dieu! Signor! Signor! Always Signor. No one thinks of me. [*She appears to be about to weep.*]

CLARA [*puts paper on table*] Shall I get the rest of the morning papers?

HONORE [*now far from tears*] I wouldn't look at another for Paderewski's scalp.

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

[*Honore goes to the Victrola, finds a record, and starts the machine. The record is Caruso's singing of the Siciliana. Like a round is the duet by Caruso and Riccardo. Clara is aghast when she realizes what Honore has done; she picks up the breakfast tray and flees. Honore takes the letters, sits, and feigns to read. But she is listening intently, expecting Riccardo to stop singing immediately. She hasn't long to wait. He enters, from the back, in a terrible rage; rushes to the Victrola and stops it. He is a tall, beautifully built animal in his early thirties, with little strength or intelligence showing in his face.*

RICCARDO. You—you— [*pauses, catches his breath*]—you 'ave insult me!

[*Prentending to pay no heed to him, Honore hums the Siciliana.*]

RICCARDO. You play det box ven I re'earse.

HONORE. Just a little coaching from a real tenor.

RICCARDO. Real tenor! [*Laughs artificially*] Dio mio! [*Tragically*] You are my vife an' you treat me so.

[*Honore rises as though bored, sits at the piano and plays Busoni's transcription of Bach's choral, Rejoice, Beloved Christians.*]

RICCARDO [*almost in tears*] Last night ven I leave opera-'ouse I learn dat I mus' seeng again tonight,—in Cavalleria, an' I 'ave not seeng Turridu in vone year. [*Wildly*] I tell you I must re'earse—you—you make me vild. Stop! Stop!

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

[*Honore plays on. Riccardo rushes to the piano and closes the key-board. Honore rises.*]

HONORE. You stop me, me the great Lazenby?

RICCARDO. O Dio! It is all right for you to make stop to me seenging, but I must leesten to you pound all day. Are you crazy dat you no on'erstan' vat I am? Last night all de vomens stan' on feets ven I feenish *E lucevan le stelle*. Today my vife she drown my voice. Santa Madonna! Can you say nodings?

HONORE. I can't waste my strength.

RICCARDO [*blazing*] You must save it to pound, pound dat damn piano. Last night, I ready to die,—so perfect. Even dos cute leetle ballerinas—

HONORE. Aha! I suspected as much. Unfaithful behind my back.

RICCARDO. Dey vorship artist in me.

HONORE. I should not have allowed you to sing the same night I was playing. I should have been back-stage to watch you. I knew things would go wrong if ever I wasn't there when you sang.

RICCARDO. Not nodings vent vrong. Last night I 'ad my greatest success.

HONORE [*with contempt*] Carrying on with that red-headed member of the corp de ballet.

RICCARDO. She vas cute last night. In Act 1 she vas acolyte. Dio, vat a shape!

HONORE. And you tell me that right to my face?

RICCARDO. I admire only as artist.

HONORE. Never again shall you sing when I am not there.

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

RICCARDO. You make vone gran' meestake. Nevare again you come back-stage ven I seeng. It is arranged.

HONORE. What?

RICCARDO. De door-man 'e vas given 'is orders: Madame Bommarito vill not be admitted, by order de impresario.

HONORE. I shall see the impresario myself this morning.

RICCARDO [*frightened*] No, no.

HONORE. The order, if there is an order, shall be revoked.

RICCARDO. I vill not let you go to 'im. It is my Christian duty.

HONORE. Two years ago you were begging me hourly to see him, to persuade him to give you a chance.

RICCARDO. Dat vas in dem days past. Now I am de great tenor. You vill drive me insane!

HONORE. You must be put in your place.

RICCARDO. O, O. An' I 'ave got to seeng to-night. [*Begins to hum the Siciliana.*]

[*Honore moves toward the piano.*]

RICCARDO. Don't you dare play. [*Hurries to the piano and sits on the key-board so she mayn't.*]

[*Honore rings the bell.*]

RICCARDO. Vat you do?

HONORE. I'm going out.

RICCARDO. Bene! Den I can practice. [*Alarmed*] Don't you go near opera-'ouse.

[*Clara enters.*]

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HONORE. I wish to dress. My most becoming suit.

RICCARDO. You are not to go see 'im!

[*Honore moves, left.*]

CLARA. Oh, Signor, did you see your wonderful notice this morning?

RICCARDO [*completely forgetting Honore*] No. Ver is 'e?

[*Clara runs to the table, gets paper, gives it to Riccardo.*]

CLARA. It's the finest write-up you've had yet.

[*Riccardo takes the paper and reads. He is delighted.*]

CLARA. And how you sang! I was in the gallery. Oh, Signor, when you stood there in the second act, so big, so brave, defying that terrible Scarpio, I wanted to fall at your feet.

RICCARDO. Si, Chiara, at my feet.

HONORE [*explodes*] You, you—lied to me.

CLARA [*frightened*] Oh, Madame, I forgot you were here.

HONORE. You deserted me. When I went to my dressing-room you were not there to powder my back.

CLARA. I—I—

HONORE. You told me you had a fever. And you went off to hear my beastly husband sing. Oh, why did I ever marry a tenor?

RICCARDO. Chiara, it is bee-cautiful. [*Kisses paper.*] Vat 'e says: "Nevare 'ave ve 'eard *E lucevan le stelle* more bee-cautifully sung." An'

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Chiara, Chiara, [*takes her hands and whirls her round*] Caruso sang *E lucevan le stelle* last veek.

HONORE. How much did that notice cost you?

RICCARDO. I pay for it vid my blood. From my 'eart I seeng.

CLARA. And tonight you sing *Turridu*?

RICCARDO. Si, leetle Chiara. [*Suddenly very matter of fact*] My God, I must practice.

CLARA. Oh, Signor, it's—grand. If only the paper hadn't neglected Madame.

HONORE. Sh!

RICCARDO. Neglected?

CLARA. I don't think the man ever went to the recital.

[*Riccardo is looking through the paper. Honore grabs Clara by the skirt and is pulling her, left.*]

RICCARDO [*bursting into laughter*] "Small 'ouse." De compositions. [*Laughs*] "De great Lazenby." It look like she vas a dead vone. An' she tell me vone million times der is no pianist like 'Onore Lazenby. [*Roars with laughter.*]

HONORE [*has tried in vain to control herself*] Oh, oh! That it should come to this. My husband, a miserable Dago tenor, whom I raised to stardom, laughs, shrieks with mirth when I'm neglected. Oh, oh!

CLARA. But Madame, you're not neglected.

HONORE. What?

CLARA. The other papers extoll you to the sky.

HONORE. You wicked girl. Why haven't you brought them to me?

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

CLARA. You said you wouldn't look at another for Paderewski's scalp.

HONORE [*gives Clara a shove*] Get them or I'll choke you.

[*Clara hurries out, right.*]

RICCARDO [*continues to strut*] O, I tol' you. I tol' you not to play dem silly modern composers. You laugh at gran' Italian opera. But you see: "de tenor of de age," me, Riccardo Bommarito, vat used to be a vaiter an' serve de spaghetti. [*With a gesture.*]

HONORE. You never told me that.

RICCARDO. I vas afraid to. But now you can no 'urt me if you tell de vide world 'ow, ven I vas t'inking of my so gran' voice, I spill de spaghet vid tomat' sauce.

HONORE. Oh why, why did I ever marry you?

RICCARDO. I am vone of de vonders of de world.

HONORE. Puh! An Italian tenor.

RICCARDO. No. An Italian tenor vid a vaist line,—so [*gesture*].

[*Clara enters with the papers.*]

CLARA. They're all opened, Madame, to your notice.

HONORE [*snatches a paper; reads*] Oho! Aha! Half a column. "Superb." "Fire and passion." "Like rain-drops on a bed of mignonette."

[*Riccardo is horribly jealous.*]

CLARA. This one says you are unquestionably the greatest woman pianist.

RICCARDO [*imploringly*] Chiara, Chiara!

HONORE [*reads from another paper*] "She has

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the intellectuality of Von Bülow, the technical brilliancy of Liszt."

RICCARDO [*tragically*] Chiara, vat does dat paper say of me?

CLARA. Just a moment, Signor—oh here—"Bommarito sang Cavaradossi in his usual excellent fashion."

RICCARDO [*smiles*] Si. Vat else?

CLARA. Nothing.

[*Riccardo holds his head.*]

HONORE [*looking at another paper*] Glorious. They say of me what Scudo said of Thalberg: "Her scales were like perfectly strung pearls falling on scarlet velvet."

[*Overjoyed, Honore tosses the paper into the air, moves to the piano and plays Rachmaninoff's Prelude in G minor.*]

[*As she plays*] "When Bommarito sings the critics haven't time to go to Madama Lazenby's recital." So? "The greatest woman pianist." "Like pearls falling on scarlet velvet."—Liszt, Von Bülow—Ah! [*Gives herself up completely to the music.*]

[*Slight pause.*]

RICCARDO. But, Chiara, I vas vonderful?

CLARA. You were heavenly. [*Turns and goes out.*]

RICCARDO [*satisfied*] 'Eavenly. [*Walks back and forth thinking only of himself. Soon bursts into the Siciliana again.*]

HONORE [*enraged; stops playing*] You dare sing that cheap Italian ditty when I play?

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RICCARDO. I mus' re'earse. [*Sings.*]

HONORE. When I play no man shall even whisper.

RICCARDO [*furiously*] It no matter if you play ven I vork like dem dogs, but I must be a statue ven you sit at de damn mechanical pianoforte all day an' night.

HONORE. It's an insult too great to bear.

RICCARDO. You t'ink you are de vone person to be considered. You make beeg meestake. I am 'ere an' I am maestro.

HONORE. Maestro. Spaghetti.

RICCARDO. You make of my life inferno.

HONORE. And you, what do you do to me?

RICCARDO. Of my peccadilloes you make de great crimes. I vid soul an' voice of supreme artist must shut up for a technician on a music box.

HONORE. I married you, whom I found singing at moving pictures, and I made you a tenor in the greatest opera house in the world. And for that,—you bellow when I play.

RICCARDO. I become de great artist an' you get so jealous you vish me back in dot spaghetti business.

HONORE. I do, I do.

RICCARDO. O!

HONORE. Then my life was perfect. Every one knelt to me. Now there's nothing but singing off-key.

RICCARDO. I nevere seeng off-key!

HONORE. Flattering, bellowing, face as red as a lobster when you hold a high note.

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RICCARDO. Stop it, stop it.

HONORE. I must listen to that. But when I sit down to play one little bijou by Rachmaninoff you make the noise of a parrot. This my thanks for making you a tenor.

RICCARDO. You 'ave de tenor of de age for 'usband.

HONORE. A body with a head on top of it.

RICCARDO. Vell, dat is for vat you marry me.

HONORE. I married you because—why did I marry you, I wonder.

RICCARDO. You marry me because I am Apollo. An' everybody 'e know it. [*In despair*] O, 'Onore, 'Onore, an' I must seeng tonight.

HONORE. I don't care whether you ever "seeng" again.

RICCARDO. If you keep dis up my voice 'e die in my t'roat.

HONORE. Did you speak to that red-haired dancer last night?

RICCARDO. Vid my soul I speak to all dem vomens, an' dey give me der 'earts. Ver are my mails, my letters? [*Sees letters, picks them up.*] You 'ave opened my letters. [*Reads*] "Dear Signor, I cannot sleep until I vrite an' tell you dat I vas in 'eaven tonight. I love you, Signor, I love you." Fifty vomens a day love me.

HONORE. Women who write such letters should be tarred and feathered.

RICCARDO. I had many letters like dem from you.

HONORE. Even in a restaurant you sit and

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

make eyes, such eyes, at the girl at the next table.

RICCARDO. I did not make dem eyes. I only smile,—so [*smiles*]. An' you, so jealous, ve must leave vid all de eaters laughing. I 'ear t'ree lovely vomens say: poor 'usband.

HONORE. Do you think there are no men ready to drop on the pavement so I can walk over them?

RICCARDO. You vould, you vould! Because I vill not lie in dot gutter, you pound dot box wen I seeng *Bianca come fior de spino*.

HONORE. This settles it. I can't live with you another day.

RICCARDO. You t'ink dot make me 'urt? Ven you go I am in paradiso.

HONORE. I shall go where I am appreciated.

RICCARDO. An' my soul 'e vill not tear every five meenutes.

HONORE. My heart is lacerated.

RICCARDO. My 'eart 'e is like vone tombstone.

HONORE. Marble; or better, sandstone.

RICCARDO. Vy, dat leetle, bee-eautiful ballerina—

HONORE. Oh! Separation! Divorce!

RICCARDO. Si. An' den—o paradiso! [*He almost sings the O Paradiso phrase from the aria in Africana.*]

[*Honore has picked up a theatrical sheet which Clara brought in with the newspapers. Absent-mindedly she has been turning the pages. Suddenly she starts; reads intently for a moment, then explodes.*]

HONORE. Oh, the beast!

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

RICCARDO. Vot is dat?

HONORE. Infamy. To print such a lie.

RICCARDO. Tell me vat is it.

[*Honore hands the paper to Riccardo. He reads. Honore paces back and forth, muttering.*]

HONORE. Rogues, beasts, demons incarnate.

[*Riccardo does not grasp what he's reading. Reads again aloud.*]

RICCARDO. "Judging from indications a celebrated tenor an' 'is no less talented wife are not living in de greatest 'armony." Dio mio. "Recently dey 'ave quarrelled in public. If rumor be true, musical America vill soon enjoy a spicy divorce scandal, t'ough de vriter 'as not been able to learn if it is de Madame or de Signor dat is starting proceedings. Ve vonder vill de pianist also drop the ridiculous name she acquired vid her marriage?" Vat is funny in Bommarito?

HONORE [*giving vent to a furious*] Oh!

RICCARDO. Vy, dis is devils, I say dey are devils.

HONORE. Go at once and horsewhip the writer.

RICCARDO. I vill. Dey make a story vile of our quiet 'ome—

HONORE. They shall be strung up for printing such lies.

RICCARDO. Dat is too good. Dragged t'rough de streets—

HONORE. Vulgarians speaking so of a great tenor and—

RICCARDO. Madame Lazenby-Bommarito, de foremost voman pianist.

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

HONORE. Lies, lies, we have not quarrelled in public.

RICCARDO. My 'eart 'e is in pieces.

HONORE. As though we were bareback-circus-riders,—depending on press stories.

RICCARDO. An' always ve 'ave lived vone quiet leetle life. I nevare even tol' my representative dot vonce I dish spaghetti.

HONORE. They shall suffer for this.

RICCARDO. Ver is my 'at? I buy vone 'orse-vip an' two stiletto. Den dey know not to break 'earts of two great artists.

HONORE. Wait. We may just as well have a more satisfying revenge.

RICCARDO. Vat you mean?

HONORE. If you kill the writer it means nothing to him.

RICCARDO. To kill, dat is only revenge for a tenor.

HONORE. He and his paper must suffer. Do you know when Americans suffer the most?

RICCARDO. Vat?

HONORE. When money is taken from them.

RICCARDO. Money? 'Ow, 'ow, 'Onore?

HONORE. Seventy-five thousand dollars.

RICCARDO. So much? Can ve?

HONORE. I've my eye on a new string of pearls.

RICCARDO. So much our 'earts dey 'ave been damaged.

HONORE. Send for the lawyer at once. We'll sue them for seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of pain.

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

RICCARDO [*rushing to the door, calling*] Chiara, Chiara, qveeck.

HONORE. When we give every moment of our lives to make people happy with our music they wound us so.

RICCARDO. I vas to seeng Turridu tonight. Now I cannot seeng.

HONORE. My poor Riccardo.

RICCARDO. Dat paper 'e 'as deprived my great public vone evening of paradiso. A fat under-study vill take my place.

[*Clara enters.*]

HONORE. Call my lawyer. He must come at once. I am dying.

CLARA. Oh, you haven't really quarrelled?

RICCARDO. Quarrelled?

HONORE. We never quarrel!

RICCARDO. An' call opera-'ouse. I am indisposed. I cannot seeng Turridu.

CLARA. But I've bought my seat!

HONORE. Serves you right.

[*Clara goes out, right.*]

RICCARDO. Because of dat paper I must disappoint leetle Chiara. Maybe she sue too?

HONORE [*moving right*] When the public learns that we are suing because our sacred home life has been disparaged your salary will go up two hundred dollars a night. [*Opens door and calls*] Clara.

CLARA [*off-stage*] Yes, Madame.

HONORE. Send for the photographer too.

RICCARDO. Pictures? [*Already posing.*]

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

HONORE [*closes door*] Yes. Only this morning I had a letter from the *Theatre Magazine* asking for pictures of our home life.

RICCARDO. Bene! Capito!

HONORE. The magazine goes to press in four days. We will have the pictures taken and every one shall see how the paper lied.

RICCARDO. Shall I pose as Turridu?

HONORE. Stupid. Our home life. Like those intimate family affairs in the *Victor Supplement*.

RICCARDO [*putting his arm around her*] 'Onore, you are vonderful.

HONORE. My dear Dicky. We must rehearse the photographs. Come to the piano.

[*They go to the piano. Honore sits, Riccardo stands beside her.*]

HONORE. First we'll have a picture which says: Madame plays her husband's accompaniments.

RICCARDO. But you don't.

HONORE. But the people must think I do if we're to get that seventy-five thousand. Stand there so you can find inspiration in my eyes when you sing.

RICCARDO. As I look at Mimi ven I seeng [*sings the phrase*] *Che gelida manima?*

HONORE. Under the picture shall be written: Madame is Signor's real Mimi.

RICCARDO. Si, si.

[*Honore rises; takes music from the piano and Riccardo by the hand.*]

HONORE. Come.

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

[*She leads Riccardo to the davenport. They sit. Honore opens the music on their laps.*]

HONORE. Put your arm around me.

[*Riccardo obeys.*]

HONORE. This one shall be called: the artists study a new rôle together.

RICCARDO. Shall I be keesing you?

HONORE. That would smack too much of pleasure. This much seem to be work, real work.

RICCARDO. O, you are vonderful, vonderful. Vat else?

HONORE. If we only had a child.

RICCARDO. But you—

HONORE. The public believes no harm of artists with children. We *must* have a child. In the picture we'll be sitting on the floor, the three of us, playing with the toys.

RICCARDO. Der is not time.

HONORE. We'll adopt one. Think: seventy-five thousand dollars.

RICCARDO. O, ve go to orp'an-'ouse?

HONORE. We'll borrow one for the pictures. The janitor has six.

RICCARDO. But he von't give—

HONORE. No one will know the difference. We borrow his for today. Some day next week we adopt one.

RICCARDO. You are superb.

HONORE. We will get that seventy-five thousand.

RICCARDO. Maybe ve buy dem pearls to-morrow.

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

HONORE. Now call Clara and have her bring up one of the children.

RICCARDO [*goes toward door, right*] A little giovanetto.

HONORE. No.

[*Riccardo stops.*]

HONORE. A girl.

RICCARDO. I vant a boy.

HONORE. It must be a girl.

[*The storm commences.*]

RICCARDO. I say it must be a boy. I vill make 'im great tenor.

HONORE. I won't have a noisy boy around here.

RICCARDO. A girl vill cry all day. I von't 'ave a child unless 'e is a boy.

HONORE. Don't drive me mad again. Who's manag'ing this? Who's doing the work? Who's planning everything? I say it shall be a girl!

RICCARDO. You vill not 'ave your vay. You vould make of me vone slave.

HONORE. A dirty-faced, sticky boy. Never. One male in this apartment is too many.

RICCARDO. I t'ought so. You vould be rid of me.

HONORE. Other men would—

RICCARDO. Just because you play de box—

HONORE. You have no sympathy.

RICCARDO. I vill 'ave my vay, me vid my voice.

HONORE. You sha'n't. It must be a girl.

RICCARDO. Den I 'ave no children.

HONORE. But we must—for the pictures.

LOVE AMONG THE LIONS

RICCARDO. Dis picture business make me seeck.
I vill not pose.

[*Clara enters.*]

CLARA. The photographer is here.

RICCARDO. Send 'im away.

HONORE. No.

RICCARDO. Den it is to be a boy?

HONORE. Clara, go bring the janitor's baby.

RICCARDO. Is dat baby vone boy or vone girl?

CLARA. I don't know, Signor.

HONORE. Ah, get her,—it, I mean. Send the
photographer in.

[*Clara goes out, right.*]

RICCARDO. [*threateningly*] I bet dat janitor's
baby 'e is a girl. If it is vone girl you don't get
dem pearls.

HONORE. Sh! He's coming. Quick.

[*Honore takes his hand and hurries Riccardo to
the piano. She sits and begins to play the
Siciliana. Riccardo sings, looking into her eyes.
Clara enters with the photographer.*]

PHOTOGRAPHER. Good morn—

CLARA [*putting her hand over the photog-
rapher's mouth*] Sh!

[*Momentary pause. Honore and Riccardo feign
to be oblivious to the others.*]

PHOTOGRAPHER. I'll take that picture.

CLARA. Sh!

PHOTOGRAPHER [*irrepressible*] Is this the way
they practice?

CLARA. This is love among the lions.

CURTAIN

BROTHERS

A SARDONIC COMEDY

CHARACTERS

SETH

LON

PA

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LEWIS BEACH.

Originally produced by
The Provincetown Players, December, 1920.

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SCENE: *A very small room in a tar-papered shanty, reeking poverty. The entrance is centre-back,—a few boards nailed together for a door. A similar door, opening into the bedroom of the shack, upstage right. Downstage left, a broken window. Left centre, a rusty cooking stove. Above it, a series of shelves holding a few dishes and cooking utensils. Rough board table in the centre of the room. A kitchen chair at the right of the table. A large wooden rocker near the stove; rope and wire hold it together. An arm-chair, below the door, right, is full of newspapers. Several heterogeneous coloured prints, culled from out-of-date newspapers and calendars, are tacked on the rain-stained walls. When the entrance door is open we see a cleared, sandy spot with a background of scrub oaks and jack pines.*

The curtain rises on the late afternoon of a spring day.

(A man of forty enters, leaving the bedroom door open behind him. His small head and childish face, on a tall, thin, and extremely erect body, resemble those of a species of putty-like rubber doll whose head may be reshaped by the hand. He wears a winter cap, blue flannel shirt, well-worn trousers with suspenders, and sneakers that were

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once white. Outside shirt sleeves are rolled to the elbow; undershirt sleeves are not. His shoes make no noise; nevertheless, he comes on tip-toe, his eyes fixed on the shelves. For a moment he stops and glances into the room he has just quitted. Satisfied, he squats before the shelves. He hesitates, then quickly lifts from a lower shelf an inverted cooking vessel, and grasps a small tin box which was hidden under it. He inspects the box, trying to decide whether he can pry open its lock.)

THE VOICE OF AN OLD, INFIRM MAN IN THE ADJOINING ROOM. Seth?

SETH [*alarmed; starts to return the box to the shelf*] Yes, Pa? [*His voice is pitched high.*]

PA [*querulously*] What yuh doin'?

SETH. Jest settin'.

PA. Don't yuh go near my tin box 'til I'm dead.

[*Seth makes no answer.*]

PA. D'yuh hear?

SETH. I hear.

PA. I won't hev no one know nothin' 'bout my last will an' testament 'til I'm dead.

[*There is a pause. Seth is regarding the box intently.*]

PA. Seth?

SETH [*peevishly*] What d'yuh want?

PA. Bring me a drink.

SETH. There ain't no more water in the pail.

PA. There's lots in the well this spring.

[*A pause. Seth continues his scrutiny of the lock.*]

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PA. My throat's burnin' up.

SETH. Wall maybe I kin find a drop. [*Putz the box on the shelf and re-covers it; in doing so makes a slight noise.*]

PA. What's that noise?

SETH. I'm gettin' yuh a drink.

[*Seth strolls to the stove, lifts the top from the kettle, and looks inside. He finds a tin cup and fills it with water. Looking into the kettle again, he sees there is little water left. Why make a trip to the pump necessary? Back into the kettle goes some of the water. Cup in hand, he moves toward the bedroom. He reaches the door when a sagging-bellied man enters from the yard. It is Lon, the elder, shorter brother. His face has become moulded into an expressionless stare, and his every movement seems to be made with an effort. An abused man, Lon, the most ill-treated fellow in the world. At least, so he is ever at pains to have all understand. He wears an old felt hat, cotton shirt, badly patched trousers, suspenders attached to the buttons of his trousers with string, and shoes that are almost soleless. His shirt, stained with sweat, is opened at the throat, revealing red flannel underwear. When Seth sees Lon he immediately closes the bedroom door, silently turns the key in the lock, and puts the key in his pocket. For a moment the men stand looking at each other, reminding one of two roosters. Then Seth strolls to the stove, pours the water into the kettle, and planks himself down in the rocker. Lon glances once or twice at the bedroom door, but moves not*

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to it. *He watches Seth suspiciously. Finally he speaks.*]

LON [*in an expressionless drawl*] I hear Pa's dyin'.

SETH. Yuh hear right.

LON [*with a motion of his head toward the bedroom*] Is he in there?

SETH. Yes.

[*Lon hesitates, then moves slowly towards Pa's room. An idea strikes Seth suddenly and he interrupts Lon's progress.*]

SETH. He's asleep.

[*Lon stops. Seth fills his pipe and lights it. Lon takes his corncob from his pocket and coughs meaningly. Seth looks at Lon, sees what he wants, but does not offer him tobacco. Lon puts his pipe back into his pocket, moves to the table, sits and sighs. He crosses his right foot so Seth sees what was once the sole of his shoe.*]

SETH. What did yuh come here fur?

LON. 'Cause Pa's dyin'.

SETH. Yuh never come when he was about.

LON. Wall, no one ever seed yuh settin' here much.

SETH [*fleeringly*] Suppose yuh want t' know what he's left yuh.

LON. Wall, —— it warn't comfortable comin' three miles an' a quarter on a day like this un.

SETH [*cackles*] Sand's hot on yer bare naked feet, ain't it?

LON [*moves his feet*] Yuh kin talk 'bout my

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holey boots. If I didn't hev no mouths but my own t' feed I guess I could buy new ones too. So there, Seth Polland!

SETH. Jacobs offered yuh a job at the fisheries same as me.

LON. It's too fur t' hoof it twict a day.

SETH. Yuh could sleep at the fisheries.

LON. I got t' look after my kids.

SETH [*grins*] 'Tain't my fault yuh've kids.

LON [*threateningly*] Don't yuh talk 'bout that!

[*Pause.*] Yer woman had t' leave yuh. [*Laughs.*] Yuh didn't give her 'nough t' eat.

SETH [*indifferently*] She warn't no good.

LON. She had t' leave yuh same as Ma left Pa twenty years ago. Pa's dyin' fur sure?

SETH. Who told yuh?

LON. Ma.

SETH [*greatly surprised*] Ma? [*Suspiciously*] What yuh got t' do with her?

LON. I was passin' her place this mornin'. Furst time I spoke t' her in a year.

SETH. I ain't in two.

LON [*in despair*] Seth, she's cut twenty cords of wood t' sell.

SETH [*shaking his head*] An' me without a roof o' my own.

LON. Me an' the kids wonder sometimes where our next meal's comin' from.

SETH [*as though there were something better in store for him*] Oh, wall.

LON [*pricks up his ears; coughs*] If I had this house I could work at the fisheries.

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SETH. But yuh ain't a goin' t' git it.

LON [*alarmed*] Pa ain't gone an' left it t' yuh?

SETH. Pa deeded this t' Doc last winter.

LON [*amazed and angered*] He did?

SETH. Doc said he could live here 'til he died.
But it's Doc's.

LON. It warn't right.

SETH. Wall, he had t' pay fur his physics some way. He told me yuh wouldn't help him out.

LON. And Pa told me yuh wouldn't. An' yuh ain't got two kids t' feed. [*Pause.*] There's Pa's old shanty down the road. If I had that I could work at the fisheries.

[*Seth's smile is his only response.*]

LON. Pa still owns it, don't he?

SETH. There warn't no call fur him t' make his last will an' testament if he don't.

LON [*brightens*] He's left his last will an' testament?

SETH. Yes. I'm figgerin' on sellin' the place t' Doc.

LON [*emphatically*] Pa ain't a left it t' yuh!

SETH. Doc'll want it.

LON [*forcefully*] Where's the will an' testament?

SETH [*with a gesture*] In the tin box under that there kittle.

[*Lon hurries to the shelves, picks up the dish, and grasps the box.*]

LON [*disappointed*] It's locked.

SETH. An' the key's round Pa's neck.

LON. Let's git it.

SETH. Pa won't give it t' us.

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LON. Yuh said he was sleepin'.

SETH. I mean—he might wake up.

[*Lon inspects the box further.*]

LON. I think I could open it.

SETH. Pa might ask t' see it.

LON. Hell. [*Puts the box back on the shelf.*]

SETH. Doc'll want the place seein' as how it's right next t' this un.

[*Lon is very nervous.*]

SETH. Yuh might jest as wall go home.

LON. No, yuh don't! Yuh can't make me believe Pa's left it t' yuh. [*Takes off his hat and mops his brow with his sleeve. The top of his head is very bald.*]

SETH. Then what yuh gittin' so excited 'bout?

LON. I ain't excited. [*Puts his hat on.*] It jest makes me mad 'cause yuh say Pa left it t' yuh, an' I know he ain't. See? There warn't no call fur him t' hev willed an' testamented it t' yuh. Yuh've only yerself t' look after an' I've two motherless kids.

SETH. Everyone knows how much Pa thought o' them.

LON. It warn't my fault if they thumbed their noses at him.

SETH. Yuh could o' basted 'em.

LON. They's like their Ma. Bastin' never done her no good, God rest her soul. All the same, Pa knowd how hard it is fur me t' keep their bellies full. Why, when we hev bread Alexander never wants less than half the loaf! An' all the work I

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git t' do is what the city folks who come t' the Beach in the summer gives me.

SETH. Huh! Jest as though I didn't know 'bout yuh. Mr. Breckenridge told me yuh wouldn't even contract t' chop his wood fur him. An' there yuh sets all winter long in that God-fursaken shanty o' yourn, with trees all round yuh; an' yuh won't put an axe t' one 'til yer own fire dies out.

LON. My back ain't never been strong. Chop-pin' puts the kinks in it. Yuh kin talk, yuh kin, Seth Polland, with a soft job at the fisheries an' three squares a day which yuh don't hev t' cook yourself. 'Nothin' t' do all winter but walk round them cottages an' see that no one broke in. An' I'm the one who knows how often yuh walk round them cottages. I wish I had yer snap. [*Sits.*] But I ain't never had no luck.

SETH [*defending himself*] I walk round them cottages jest as often as I needs t' walk round them cottages.

LON. Huh! I could tell a tale. Who was it set with his feet in the oven last winter, an' let Jack Tompkins break into them cottages,—*with keys?* [*Seth does not answer.*] I could tell, I could. But I ain't goin' t' 'til they put me on the witness-stand. [*Pause.*] But the furst initials of his name is Seth Polland.

SETH [*rising instantly*] Lon Polland, yuh ever tell an' I'll skin yuh alive.

LON. Huh!

SETH. Skin yuh like a pole-cat.

LON. Huh!

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[*Seth turns, knocks the ashes from his pipe into the stove. Lon rises; takes Seth's chair and rocks vigorously.*]

SETH. Yuh know what I got on yuh.

[*Lon's bravado is short-lived. He rocks less strenuously.*]

SETH. Yuh thought I didn't see yuh, but I was right on the spot when yuh set fire t' Mr. Rogers' bath-house.

[*Lon stops rocking.*]

SETH. Right behind a jack pine I was an' seen yuh do it. An' yuh done it 'cause Mr. Rogers leaved Jessup paint the house when you thought yuh ought t' had the job.

LON [*rises*] I got t' be a gittin home a fore dark an' tend t' my stock.

SETH. Stock? [*Cackles. Pulls out his tobacco-pouch and fills his pipe.*]

[*Lon shows his pipe again.*]

SETH. A blind mare an' a rooster. [*Drops pouch on the table as he lights his pipe.*]

LON. Rooster's dead. [*Moves stealthily toward the table.*]

SETH. What of?

LON. Pip.

SETH. Starvation.

LON. I would a killed him this long time, but Victoria howled so when I threatened. The fowl used t' wake me in winter same as summer with his crowin'.

[*As Lon finishes his speech he reaches for the pouch. But Seth's hand is quicker. Seth moves*

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to the rocker and sits, dangling the pouch temptingly by one finger. Lon puts his pipe in his pocket.]

SETH. Should think you'd want t' set round 'til Pa dies, 'bein' as yer so sure he's left yuh his property.

LON. He ought a left it t' me.

SETH. Wall, I'm a tellin' yuh it's mine.

LON. Yuh ain't got no right t' it. [*Mops his head again.*] Pa begged yuh t' come an' live with him, offered yuh this fine roof over yer head, an' yuh was too cussed even t' do that fur him. An' now yuh expect he's made yuh his heir.

SETH. I've treated him righter 'an yuh.

LON. Yuh ain't.

[*Suddenly something seems to snap in Seth's brain. He looks as though he were in intense pain.*]

SETH [*gasping*] Maybe he's left it t' the two of us!

LON. *What?*

SETH. Maybe he's divided the place a 'tween us.

LON [*shakes his head*] Oh, he wouldn't be so unhuman as that.

SETH. He would. He was always settin' one agin t' other.

LON. He used t' tell me I had t' figger how t' git the best o' yuh or he'd baste me.

SETH. He was all the time whettin' us on when we was kids.

LON. It was him showed me how t' shake my

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old clock so it'd run fur five minutes, an' then you'd swop that pail yuh found fur it.

SETH. Huh! He give him his gum t' stop up the hole in that pail. Yuh wouldn't know it leaked an' we could laugh at yuh when you had t' carry water in it.

LON [*pathetically*] There warn't never more 'an a pint left when I got t' the house. An' Pa always had sech a thirst.

SETH. He'd like t' laugh at us in his grave.

LON. It jest tickled him t' raise hell a 'tween us.

SETH [*rises*] I'll take my oath he's divided the old shanty an' the two acres a 'tween us. [*Drops into his chair like a condemned man.*] An' I figured I'd be sellin' them t' Doc t'morrow.

LON. Me an' the kids was a goin t' hev a garden on the cleared spot.

SETH. A garden in that sand?

LON. Radishes an' rutabagas.

SETH [*persuasively; his manner becomes kind*] Lon, what yuh need is the shanty.

LON [*droning*] The shanty ain't no good t' me without I hev the ground fur it t' set on.

SETH. Yuh kin tear it down an' use the lumber t' mend yer old leaky one.

LON. I want the shanty t' live in so I kin git a soft job at the fisheries. [*Sympathetically*] Yuh ought t' hev a shanty, Seth. Supposin' yuh was t' take sick. They wouldn't keep yuh at the fisheries then. Yuh take my place an' give me Pa's.

SETH [*flashing into anger*] I want the two acres t' sell Doc. Yer old place leaks like a net! [*Then,*

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fearing he has been too disparaging:] But yuh could make it real comfortable with the lumber in—

LON [*cutting in*] I'll make a bargain. I'll leave yuh a bedstead an' a table if yuh'll take my place.

SETH. I don't want it! I want Pa's old place.

LON. An' I want it. I'm older 'an yuh.

SETH. I got the best claim t' it.

LON. Yuh ain't. Me with three mouths t' feed. Yer a swindler, yuh are. Yuh always tried t' cheat me.

SETH. No one kin say that t' me. I'm an honest man. But I'm a goin' t' hev the two acres if I hev t' go t' law.

LON. Wall, yuh ain't a goin' t' wreck me.

SETH [*calmly; philanthropic again*] Maybe yer right, Lon, when yuh say I ought t' hev a roof. I'll tell yuh what I'll do, secin' as how yer my brother. Yuh give me the ground an' the house on it, an' I'll make yuh a present o' twenty-five dollars.

LON. That's a lie! Yuh ain't got twenty-five dollars t' yer name.

SETH. Yuh think so.

LON. Every one in these parts knows yuh owes Hawkins forty-three dollars an' twenty-nine cents he kin't collect. Give me the house an' ground, an' I'll give yuh my own house an' my note fur twenty-five dollars.

SETH. Yer note! I'm a goin' t' hev Pa's old place.

LON. An' I say that yuh or no swindler like yuh is a goin' t' cheat me out o' it.

SETH. I ain't a swindler, yuh wall-eyed son—

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LON [*advancing*] Take it back. Don't yuh call me dissipated names.

SETH. I'll never take it back.

[*Lon doubles his fists and strikes. But the blow lands in the air as Seth grabs Lon. They fight furiously and in dead earnest, though there is no ethics to the struggle. The rickety furniture trembles as they advance and retreat. Seth is quicker and lighter and less easily winded; but Lon's bulk is not readily moved, and, despite his "weak back," he can still wield his arm. It looks like a fight to the finish. But suddenly Pa's voice is heard, calling wildly to Seth. The men do not move: the voice seems to have paralyzed their muscles. For a moment they stand dazed. Then consciousness comes to them; they realize that the waiting is over. They tear to the bedroom. A silence follows. They must be fascinated by the ghost of the old man.*]

SETH [*in the bedroom; quietly*] He's gone, Lon.

LON [*in the bedroom*] Yer right, Seth.

[*Then their voices rise in dispute.*]

LON. Don't yuh take it.

SETH. I've got it!

LON. It's mine!

SETH. It ain't!

LON. Yuh kin't—

SETH. Shut up!

[*They rush into the kitchen, Seth in advance, Lon close on his heels. Seth throws the cooking-dish to the floor, grabs the box and hurries to the table. As though they were about to discover a*

BROTHERS

world's secret, they unlock the box, each as near to it as possible, his arms tense, fingers itching, ready to ward off a blow or seize the treasure. From the box, Seth takes an old tobacco-pouch, a jack-knife, a bit of heavy cord, and a couple of letters. These are contemptuously thrown on the table. The will lies at the bottom of the box. Lon snatches it. Seth would take it from him.]

LON. Hold off! I'm jest goin' t' read it.

[Seth curbs his impatience. Lon opens the document and reads, slowly and haltingly.]

LON. "I, Nathaniel Polland, o' Sandy Point in the County o' Rhodes an' State o' Michigan, bein' o' sound mind an' memory, do make, publish, an' declare this t' be my last Will an' Testament, in manner followin', viz—" What does "viz" mean?

[Unable to bear the suspense longer, Seth seizes the paper. He scans it until his eyes catch the all-important paragraph.]

SETH. "—Bequeath all my earthly possessions to my wife, Jennie Polland."

[They stand like two men suddenly deprived of thought and motion. Medusa's victims could not have been more pitiable. Then Seth's voice comes to him, and sufficient strength to drop into a chair.]

SETH. The damned old critter.

LON. I'll be swaned.

SETH *[blazing out]* That's gratitude.

LON. After all we done fur him.

SETH *[pathetically]* An' me a plannin' these last five years on gettin' that house an' ground.

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LON. My kids are packin' our furniture this afternoon, gettin' ready t' move in.

SETH [*with supreme disgust*] Leavin' it t' Ma.

LON. Her who he ain't hardly spoke t' in twenty years.

SETH. Jest as though yuh an' me wasn't alive.

LON. We'd given him our last pipeful.

SETH. His own flesh an' blood.

LON. Why, he told me more 'an a thousand times he hated Ma.

SETH. She don't need it.

LON. She's ready for the grave-yard.

SETH. She's that stingy, cuttin' an' choppin' wood, sellin' it t' the city folks. We might a knowd.

LON. An' me a comin' all the three miles an' a quarter t' see him a fore he died.

SETH. I been settin' here two days a waitin'.

LON. An' then t' treat us like that. [*Wipes his mouth.*] Why, the hull place ain't worth a damn!

SETH. A cavin'-in shanty an' two acres yuh couldn't grow weeds on.

LON. A pile o' sand.

SETH [*rising; bursting into fire like an apparently dead rocket*] She ain't a goin' t' hev it!

LON. What?

SETH. I won't let Ma hev it!

LON. But how yuh goin' t' stop her? 'T won't do no good t' tear up the will an' testament. It's rec'-ord-ed.

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SETH. Don't make no difference. She ain't a goin' t' hev that place.

LON [*eagerly*] But how yuh goin'—?

SETH. I don't know. But I'm goin' t'.

LON. It ain't hers by rights.

SETH. Didn't she leave him twenty years ago?

LON. Why, she ain't even expectin' it!

SETH. She'll never miss it if she don't git it.

LON [*shaking his head*] Me an' the kids packed up, ready t' move in.

[*There is a silence. Lon, deep in his disappointment; Seth, making his brain work as it has never worked before. And he is rewarded for his diligence. A suggestion of his sneering smile comes to his face.*]

SETH. Lon?

LON. Yes?

SETH [*looks about, making sure that only his brother is listening*] Yuh 'member what yuh done t' Rogers when he didn't leave yuh paint his bath-house?

LON [*his eyes open wide*] Burn it?

SETH. Sh!

LON. Oh, no!

SETH. Yuh don't want Ma t' hev it, does yuh?

LON. When I burned that bath-house I didn't sleep good fur a couple o' nights. I dreamed o' the sheriff.

SETH. Nobody knows but me. An' nobody'll know yuh an' me set fire t' Pa's old place.

LON. Yuh swear yuh won't never tell?

SETH [*raising his right hand*] I swear.

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LON. Yuh won't never try an' make out I done it next time we run agin each other fur district school-inspector?

SETH [*raising his hand again*] I swear. 'Cause if I kin't hev Pa's old place, no one kin.

LON. Got matches?

SETH. Yes. An' Pa's kerosene-can's got 'bout a pint in it. [*Takes the can from the bottom shelf.*]

LON. I may as wall take these papers along with me. [*Picks up the newspapers.*]

[*Seth moves to the table. Begins to fill his pipe. Lon takes his corncob from his pocket and coughs. Seth looks at Lon, meditates, then speaks.*]

SETH. Hev a smoke, Lon?

LON. Maybe I will.

[*Lon fills his pipe. Seth strikes a match, lights his own pipe first, then hands the match to Lon.*]

SETH. We're brothers.

LON. The same flesh an' blood has got t' treat each other right.

[*Lon starts to put Seth's tobacco-pouch in his pocket but Seth stops him.*]

SETH. An' we wouldn't be treatin' each other right if we let Pa's property come into Ma's hands.

[*Seth carries the kerosene; Lon, the papers. They go out the back door and disappear. Then Seth's voice is heard.*]

SETH [*in the yard*] Wait a minute, Lon. [*Seth returns. He picks up Pa's tobacco-pouch, knife and scissors, glances toward the door to see that*

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Lon isn't watching, and sticks them into his pocket.]

LON [*in the yard*] What yuh doin', Seth? [*Appears at the door.*]

SETH. I thought I left somethin' valuable. But I ain't. [*He leaves.*]

[*Lon and Seth pass out of sight.*]

CURTAIN



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