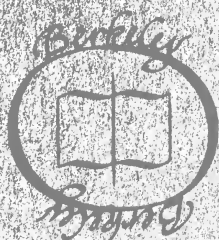
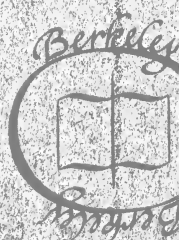
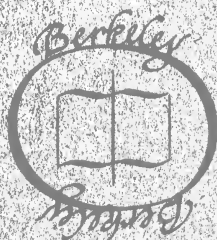
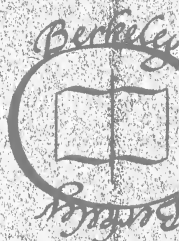
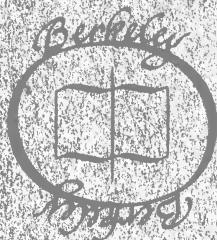
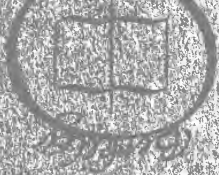
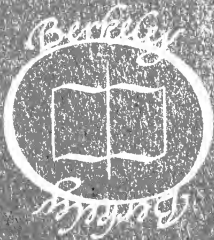
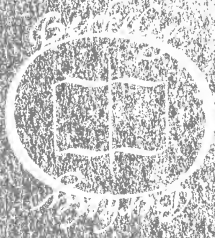
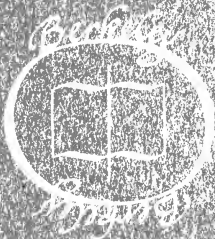
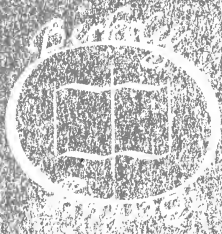


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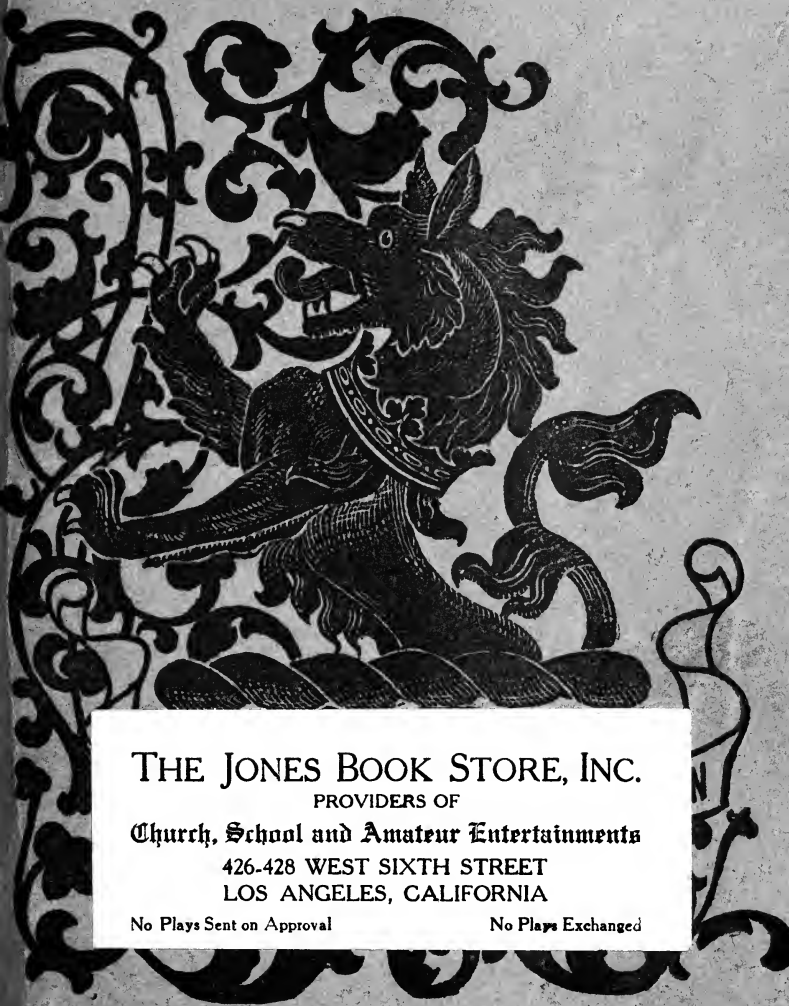






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THE PRINCE CHAP

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY
Henry
EDWARD PEPLE

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THE PRINCE CHAP

CAST.

WILLIAM PEYTON: *An American sculptor. In Act First, a man of twenty-three years of age; slight, dark, with an expression of tenderness combined with the merriment of youth.*

JACK RODNEY: *The Earl of Huntington; an amateur painter. A blond Englishman, with an open, honest and kindly face. Faultless dress and easy bearing. In Act Second, aged twenty years.*

MARCUS RUNION: *An English serving man, of stolid countenance, side whiskers and shaven chin and lip.*

BALLINGTON:

YADDER:

FRITZ:

} *Artists in the studio building.*

TRUCKMAN: *Conventional.*

CLAUDIA: *(Part to be taken by three actresses. In Act First, a child of six. In Act Second, a child of eight years; and in Act Third, a slender, thoughtful girl of eighteen.*

MRS. ARRINGTON: *Claudia's Mother. A former model; a woman of culture and refinement, but thin, pale and poorly clad.*

PHOEBE PUCKERS: *A maid of all work in the studio building. In Act First, a ragged, unkempt "Slavey" of the London lower class; freckled, ugly and careless.*

ALICE TRAVERS: *An American girl of twenty years; handsome, stylish, the fiancee of William Peyton.*

THE PRINCE CHAP

ACT I.

SCENE I:—*Time of action, an evening of the present day.*

Location, apartment in the studio of MR. WILLIAM PEYTON, a youthful sculptor, in London.

Stage equipment as follows:

A large, bare room with modest furnishings, draperies, plaster casts, a sketching easel, busts of clay, etc. Working table at centre, upon which is an unfinished figure covered by a wet cloth. A few chairs, a large lounge at left front, placed diagonally before fire-place. Small side table at right, beyond which is a box. Upon the box is a small oil stove, a few pans, plates, etc. Large window at left rear, above which is a skylight with draw curtains. Adjoining room with closed door at rear centre. Entrances at right and left rear. A few candles are lit, and a fire is burning in grate at left.

DISCOVERED:—RUNION, an English serving man, entering from c. He crosses to L., lays a dressing gown on the sofa and places a pair of slippers before the fire; stirs the fire; a decanter and several glasses on the centre table at rise. RUNION scrapes the dottle from a pipe and replaces it. A knock is heard at the door R.

RUNION. Come. (*He opens the door to admit a TRUCKMAN, who staggers in with a heavy square box on his shoulders, carrying a large receipt book between his teeth. The MAN makes an inarticulate sound in the form of a question. Regarding him with slow disdain*) 'Ope I may die if 'e don't think 'd's talkin'! (*Jerking the receipt book from the TRUCKMAN'S mouth*) Now, then, my man! W'at is it?

TRUCKMAN. (*Sullenly*) This 'ere's a box o' clay from Melville, Varden Company. William Peyton, two and six to pay.

RUNION. (*With contempt*) Two an' six for a box of dirt! It's 'ighway robbery. I wouldn't give you tup'ence ha' penny for all the busts of clay an' gravin' himmages of dirt an' stone between 'ere and Yorkshire.

TRUCKMAN. Look 'ere! This bloomin' box is 'eavy!

RUNION. Then w'y don't you put it down?

TRUCKMAN. (*Grinning*) I'm waitin' for the two an' six.

RUNION. (*Crossing to the mantel*) Now, w'at a graspin', mistrustful nature some people 'as. As if a sculptor gentleman didn't always pay for everythink! (*Returning with money, which he takes from the mantel*) Now, then, shall I put it in your mouth, my man? That's where you seem to carry things. (*The MAN grunts and begins putting down the box R. of the table C.*) Easy now! Easy! (*The box drops heavily. Small cast falls*) Is that w'at you calls puttin' a thing down easy—liable to smash and mash Mr. Peyton's plarster figgers and expensive busts of clay?

TRUCKMAN. Beg pardon, but my 'ands is cold—Lord they's froze.

RUNION. An' if Mr. Peyton was 'ere, 'e'd thaw

you out, an' no mistake. 'Ere's your money. Anythink to sign?

TRUCKMAN. (*Handing receipt book*) Nothink but the receipt.

RUNION. (*Signing the book and returning it*) There you are. Good-night, my man. (*Starts to mantel L. As the TRUCKMAN sees decanter on table c., he lingers*) Well——?

TRUCKMAN. Anythink for my trouble?

RUNION. 'Ardly, w'en you comes in like a elefant from the 'ippodrome. Nex' time,—perhaps.

TRUCKMAN. That 'ere's a 'eavy box, ain't it? (*RUNION nods*) An' it's a cold night, ain't it? (*Nod*) An' three flights o' bally stairs an' me abuttin' of me 'ead on every landin', ain't it? (*Nod*) An' me workin' overtime, an' a wife and four children . . . an' that's sperrits on that table over there, ain't it? (*Nod*) Well? (*Starts for the liquor on table c.*)

RUNION. (*Bus., intercepts him; crossing to the table*) Touch not, taste not, 'andle not, is a good motter, my man; but if you wants to gobble fiery liquids in this worl', and waller in brimstone in the nex', w'y, it's no affair of Runion's! (*L. of table, takes up decanter and glass*)

TRUCKMAN. (*With a grin*) I'll take the chances an'— (*RUNION pours very little in glass*) —an' 'arf a glass. (*RUNION gives him a look*) Your 'ealth, sir. (*Drinks*) Thank you, sir, good-night. (*Crossing to R.*) Brimstone wouldn't be 'arf bad in weather like this 'ere. Thank'e, sir, good-night. (*Exit at the door R.*)

RUNION. (*Wiping the glass carefully, then pouring out another portion*) 'Is 'abits will be a judgment on 'im jus' as sure as sin is sin. (*He takes a sip*) Strange ways some people has; strange ways . . . an' Mr. Peyton acatchin' of 'em every day. (*Shaking his head sadly*) 'E's amakin' of gravin' himmages with 'is 'ands, an' pays good

money for a box o' dirt to make 'em with. (*Topping the box*) Now, this 'ere is a box of dirt. . . . 'E calls it clay an' it cost 'im two an' six. At 'ome 'e could have a ton of it for the arskin'. 'E means well, Mr. Peyton does (*Sighing*) but them artist gentlemen is awful simple-minded creeters—pitiful!—pitiful! (*Lifting his glass*) Well, 'ere's 'opin' 'e'll give up messin' about with mud an' marry some'ne as will take care of 'im. (*He tilts his head back and drinks, but nearly chokes himself as the door at the right flies open suddenly and violently*)

(*Enter PHOEBE PUCKERS, a small, ragged, unkempt servant girl, with side plats looped and tied with white string; her skirt is dingy and short, disclosing loose, striped stockings and run-down shoes. She has a coal-scuttle in one hand, a brick tied to a string in the other. She drops the scuttle with a bang, darts across the room, jumps over the sofa and crouches before the fire.*)

PUCKERS. (*At fire-place; shivering and pulling the hearth rug around her shoulders*) OO—oo—oo! But it's cold down the cellar! The Hartic regions is just stoves beside that cellar!

RUNION. (*Sternly*) Puck-ers!

PUCKERS. An' it's a mercy of 'Eaven w'en the hartists an' sculptures 'ollers for a pail of coals, an' lets me warm the icicles off'n my nose an' toes.

RUNION. (*Down R. C., sternly*) Puckers! I am speakin'! W'at d'ye mean by abustin' in 'ere like—like a railroad 'orror—afrightenin' a gentleman out of 'is seven wits?

PUCKERS. Come to bring the coals. Ho, Lud, can't you see the pail?

RUNION. I didn't call for no coals!

PUCKERS. Didn't you, now? Thought I 'eard

you call me—twiced. Any'ow, if you knowed 'ow froze I was, you wouldn't a 'ad the 'eart not to.

RUNION. Well, I didn't!

PUCKERS. Then it must a bin the woices of the angels an' I thought 'twas you. (*She hooks her string on a nail in the mantel and twirls the brick in front of the fire*)

RUNION. (*Crosses to L. of the table*) You're a flatterin' tongued little 'uzzy, Puckers. W'at are you adoin' with that brick?

PUCKERS. Gettin' of it 'ot.

RUNION. Umph! W'at for?

PUCKERS. I takes it down the cellar an' sets on it. (*Rises with back to grate*) Nex' to the 'Oly Gospil, Mr. Runion, a 'ot brick in a cold cellar is the most comfortin' thing in life. It's 'eavenly!

RUNION. (*Sits L. at table c.*) 'Uman ideas of 'eavenly comforts differs, Puckers; an' mine don't run to 'ot bricks.

PUCKERS. It would, if you lived with me, down at the butt end of a zero. Heverlastin' punishments 'as no fears for Phoebe. Let 'em turn on their wolcanoes an' their flamin' brimstones, an' I'll smile as sweet, an' say: "Thank you, Mr. Devil. Thank you kindly, sir."

RUNION. *Puckers.* I'm 'orrified.

PUCKERS. A . . you'll be there to 'ear me say it, Mr. Runion. (*Shaking her head*)

RUNION. (*Sharply*) Look a 'ere, I've 'arf a mind to send you back down stairs; you an' your 'ot brick with you. An' I will, too, for a cracked farthin'.

PUCKERS. A farthin', is it! (*Sets on floor, end of sofa. She laughs*) The coin of hartists an' sculptures. (*Sighing reflectively*) Ah, Mr. Runion, a hartist's life is mostly made hup of rosy 'opes and no wages.

RUNION. (*Solemnly*) That's the truest thing you ever pronounced.

PUCKERS. Mr. Peyton says as 'ow the ravens feeds 'em; but I ain't never seen no ravens 'round this 'ere stodio buildin'. I uster think the grocer man and the butcher man was ravens; but they ain't. They's wulchers!

RUNION. (*Busy around L. of table, nodding*) Right, Puckers! But looka 'ere, now. . . . W'at do you know about artists an' the ways concernin' of 'em?

PUCKERS. (*Laughing, crosses to scuttle of coals R.*) Me? Ho, Lud! Ain't I carried 'em coals for two blessed years? (*Picks up pail*) Ain't there twenty-nine of 'em in this 'ere very buildin', an' one w'at pisened hissself last week 'cause he couldn't put up with hissself no longer? Ain't I on friendly terms with all of 'em, asweepin' up their dirt an' gettin' a tuppence here an' a thank you there, an' all the time alearnin' everythink about their noble callin'! (*Hurriedly*) That is, w'en they ain't drunk. (*Drops pail*) W'en they does that, I retires to the Hartic cellar . . . and sits alone with me own pure thoughts. (*Sits on box of clay*) Heh! W'at Phoebe Puckers don't know about hart and hartists is a pinch in a mug o' ale. Say! I'm studyin' to be a sculpture's model.

RUNION. (*Laughing derisively—remains L. of table*) You! Lor' love ye, Puckers, they ain't amakin' of gravin' himmages for Comic papers. You're a nice lookin' thing to be a artist's model, now, ain't you! Oh, Lor'! Oh, Lor'! (*He laughs*)

PUCKERS. (*Rises from box*) Ho, you can laugh if you wants to, but you can't discourage Phoebe. An' posin' ain't so 'ard w'en you knows 'ow. Look at this? (*Standing up on the box of clay*) I 'olds me two 'ands so—modest like. . . . The Wenus de Medicine. (*On floor*) Then I sets down so, an' crosses me legs an' takes down me golden 'air an' 'angs sea weeds, in it, an' plays on a

'arp. That's—er—w'at's—er name—Ho, yes, a Nymph! A she-thing w'at sings to a gent an' gets 'im down in the water an' drowns 'im dead.

RUNION. Um—yes. I 'ear tell of 'er.

PUCKERS. (*Standing again on the box*) Then you cuts hoff me arms an' strips me to the waist, an' I'm the Wenus de Mile-O.

RUNION. Puckers!

PUCKERS. Then I peels hoff the rest of me clothes, looks down, shy, an' sticks out me toes. . . . Me loidy at 'er barth!

RUNION. Phoebe Puckers, I'm ashamed of you.

PUCKERS. Ho, that don't make no difference. (*Jumps down*) Don't nothin' make no differ'nce w'en you'se got a hartist's temper'ment.

RUNION. W'at!

PUCKERS. (*Sits on box again*) Mr. Ballington—the gent w'at lives hup stairs—'e says as 'ow I've got it. Phoebe, 'e says "you can live on nothin', and don't care three 'oops in 'ell." (*RUNION drops a tin cup, astonished*) An' that, 'e says, is the key-note, Phoebe, of professional success. (*Bus. off stage of tramping feet coming up stairs. Jumping up from the box*) Ho, Lud! Mr. Peyton is a-comin'! (*She darts to the fire-place, snatches at the brick, picks up her scuttle. Enter WM. PEYTON. He has on a great coat and muffler. PUCKERS up stage R.*)

PEYTON. B-r-r-r! but it's cold outside. (*Rubbing his hands and crossing to the fire*) This London weather seems to go right down to a fellow's marrow.

(*As RUNION advances with the decanter.*)

RUNION. Little whiskey, sir?

PEYTON. No, thank you. Make me a large cup of coffee, will you—strong and hot. Where are my— (*Picking up slippers. RUNION goes to oil*)

stove R. and arranges for coffee, lights gas, etc.)
 Ah, here we are. (*Sits himself on the lounge L. fire-place and begins taking off his shoes*) By Jove, I do believe my toes are frozen solid.

PUCKERS. (*Advances to R. c.*) Ho, Lud! Don't I know how they feels? (*Scuttle on arm, brick in scuttle*)

PEYTON. (*Looking up*) Hullo, Puckers! What are you doing up here?

PUCKERS. Jus' meltin' of mesself hout, sir. You said 'as 'ow I could come hup w'en I was cold, sir.

PEYTON. That's right. Whenever the thermometer goes down *YOU* come up. It is a cold night, isn't it?

PUCKERS. Yes, sir. (*Advancing and holding out the brick*) You can 'ave me brick if yer wants to. It'll toast you hup in no time if you sets on it.

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) Thank you, no; but I *do* admire your—um—perspicacity and—er—concentration of purpose.

PUCKERS. (*Blankly*) 'Ow's that, sir?

PEYTON. I say you seem to go right at the seat of the trouble, so to speak. (*PUCKERS moves R.*) By the way, where do you sleep at night?

PUCKERS. (*Swinging scuttle*) Cellar, sir. Cubby hole under the stairs.

PEYTON. (*Warming a slipper*) Hum! Not very luxurious quarters, I imagine. By yourself?

PUCKERS. Me an' the rats, sir. (*As PEYTON starts*) But, ho, Lud! I don't mind 'em! They ain't never bit me but wunst. (*Moves to c., pin bus.*)

PEYTON. (*Aside*) The poor little lonely devil! (*Turning*) What do you cover up with?

PUCKERS. A old petti-coat, sir, an' a hartist's smokin' jacket, but I wish the hartist 'ad been a bigger man, sir. (*RUNION goes up stage c.*)

PEYTON. (*Rising, crosses to c.*) Look here, this won't do. Never in the world! (*Pausing in*

his walk. Takes blanket from couch up L.) Here, you take this blanket down to your cubby hole to-night—(Returns c.) roll up in it—and then perhaps— (Puts it on her shoulders. Taps brick she holds in left hand)

RUNION. (*Indignantly, crosses to L. and down*) Beg pardon, sir, but you'll need that blanket yourself on a night like this, an'—

PEYTON. That's all right. I have my overcoat. (*Placing the blanket over PHOEBE'S shoulder*) There; run along now. . . . I'll speak to the care-taker in the morning, and see if we can find you a sleeping place with more heat and fewer rats. Good-night.

PUCKERS. (*In bewildered unbelief*) Is you alendin' of this 'ere helligant blanket to—to me?

PEYTON. (*Smiling*) Why not?

PUCKERS. (*Holding the door open with her foot, and sobbing*) Ho, Mr. Peyton, sir—it—it makes a body cry . . . w'en folks is good to me . . . like you is. (*Exit sobbing*)

(*PEYTON crosses to fire, facing it, hands outstretched.*)

RUNION. Will you 'ave your dressin' gown, sir? (*Comes down with gown*)

PEYTON. No, thank you. I shall do some work this evening! (*RUNION puts gown up stage, then crosses to R. stove*) When you've put the coffee on, get my blouse, will you? (*After pause*)

RUNION. Yes, sir.

PEYTON. Jove, it's fine to have a fire like this, isn't it? It looks so good I could almost bathe in it.

RUNION. (*Fussing with oil stove R. Solemnly*) You'd find it rather 'ot, sir.

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) Yes, I dare say. (*Seriously*) I tell you what, Runion, wouldn't it be a

fine thing if we could give a fire like this to all the poor wretches in London who haven't any? (*Bus.* RUNION, *turning*) I think I would rather warm them up . . . just once . . . than make the finest statue that ever was carved.

RUNION. (*In astonishment*) All of 'em, sir? That's rather a large contrack.

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) Well, not exactly! (*Sits up*) We have a big enough contract in taking care of ourselves. And by the way, Runion. . . If that wolf of ours keeps hanging around the door, why, just catch him by the tail, will you, pull him in, and we'll eat him.

RUNION. (R. C.) For supper, sir?

PEYTON. (L., *smiling*) Hurry with that blouse. (*A noisy clatter of falling objects is heard outside R.*) Good Lord! What's that?

RUNION. (*Solemnly*) It's Puckers, sir. She's gone down stairs.

PEYTON. (*Impatiently*) Well, run down—quick—and see if the child is hurt.

RUNION. (*Grinning*) Oh, she ain't 'urt, sir. She's only 'appy. She allers goes down like that w'en she's 'appy. (*Goes to door R., opens it, and song is heard. PUCKERS sings snatch of "'Art was true to Poll."*) I can 'ear 'er asingin' of a ribald song, sir. (*Closes door and gets blouse from up L. Bus. of getting into blouse*)

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) What a wonderful child she is. She must have been born on some glorious holiday like the fourth of July. Eh, Runion?

RUNION. Yes, sir, very likely, sir.

PEYTON. Oh! You don't understand that 4th of July business, do you?

RUNION. Can't say as I do, sir.

PEYTON. (*Taking cloth from statue*) Well, some day, when I have plenty of time, I'll tell you all about it. (*He steps from the table, folds the wet cloth, then walks around the statue regarding*

it critically. The figure represents a life-sized woman in very scanty draperies) Isn't she a bouncer, Runion?

RUNION. (*Down R.*) Yes, sir; I think she *might* be called—um—a bouncer, sir, an' *no* mistake.

PEYTON. Fine girl, Runion! Fine girl! What do you think of her—eh?

RUNION. (*Hesitating*) I'd—er—I'd rawther not say, sir.

PEYTON. Come, come, man, don't be afraid! Honestly now, honestly.

RUNION. Beggin' your pardon before, I should say 'er attitood is—er—is a bit brazen, sir.

PEYTON. Good! The lady's name was Circe, and she possessed—in a marked degree—the rakish attribute you call to mind. (*To R. of statue, begins work*)

(RUNION *crosses to R., placing the coffee pot before the fire.*)

RUNION. 'Ere's a box w'at come for you this evenin'. (*Starts to pick it up*)

PEYTON. Oh, that! Yes—box of clay. Well, leave it where it is. We'll open it to-morrow. Any letters?

RUNION. Only bills, sir.

PEYTON. (*Busy with his work*) Bills, eh? They do have a way of coming, don't they? By the way, how much wages do I owe you now?

RUNION. Three months and eleven days, sir; arskin' your pardon for mentionin' the exac' figgers, sir—

PEYTON. (*Working*) That's all right. I *admire* your accuracy. (*After pause*) I think I got an order to-day . . . and if it turns out as I hope you will lose nothing by waiting so long and patiently.

RUNION. Thank you, sir. (*Turns toward R. again*)

PEYTON. Any callers?

RUNION. One, sir. She was 'ere three times, sir.

PEYTON. (*Looking up from work*) Well, why didn't you tell me before?

RUNION. Arskin' your pardon, sir, I didn't wish to trouble you. It was only Mrs. Arrington, sir.

PEYTON. (*Carelessly. Resuming work*) Oh, what did *she* want?

RUNION. To see you, sir; but I thinks as 'ow she was beggin', so I didn't 'old no encouragements, sir.

PEYTON. Begging, eh? I thought she'd come to it sooner or later. . . It's the same old story, Runion, the same old story. (*Making several delicate touches, then stepping back to note the effect*) Do you know that woman used to be one of the handsomest models in London. And a good woman, too—save the mark—but a fool. She married a brute who spent her savings, thrashed her periodically, drank himself to death, and left her with nothing in God's world but a baby . . . and the memory of a life's blunder. What's the result? (*Shrugging*) Health gone—beauty and figure with it—no work. (*After working a moment in silence*) What made you think she was begging?

RUNION. She awsked me for some bread for 'er baby, sir.

PEYTON. (*Dropping his wooden tool with an exclamation of pain and wheeling on RUNION*) What! And you gave her no encouragement. . . Runion, I'm ashamed of you. (*Stripping off his blouse and tossing it at RUNION who puts it on table R.*) Here—get my overcoat—hurry! What address did she give? (*He kicks off his slippers and begins putting on his shoes, tugging at the lace strings savagely at fire-place L.*)

RUNION. I—I didn't awsk for 'er address, sir—but—

PEYTON. Oh, of course not! Get my hat! Get my hat!

RUNION. (*Getting the hat, putting it on table c., then holding the overcoat*) Won't—er—won't you 'ave your coffee, sir, before you starts? It—

PEYTON. (*Shortly*) No! You can drink that yourself.

RUNION. Awskin' your pardon, sir, she said as 'ow she was a comin' back, sir, if—if she could.

PEYTON. (*Looking up from fastening shoes*) What d'ye mean by that?

RUNION. (*Meekly*) Well sir, she was a-lookin' rawther ill and—and broke-uppish, sir, and—

PEYTON. (*Angrily*) Confound you, Runion, I've tried to be patient with you but I swear I feel like kicking you down stairs!

RUNION. (*L. by table, faltering*) Yes, sir, thank you, sir! I—I gave 'er the bread, sir, an—

PEYTON. Oh, you did, did you? Well, I'm going out to find her. (*Starts across to R. door. Turning and speaking with ironical contempt*) Now, you sit by the nice warm fire, Runion, and make yourself comfortable, and happy. The decanter is over there on the table and—and for mercy's sake, don't—catch—cold! (*He pulls his hat down firmly on his head and starts for the door, when a TIMID KNOCK is heard. RUNION starts forward, but PEYTON checks him, still speaking ironically*) Oh, don't trouble yourself, I beg you. (*Sharply. Throws blouse at RUNION, which he picks up from table R.*) Get out. You fool, get out. (*RUNION picks up blouse from the floor and goes up centre. PEYTON opens the door to discover MRS. ARRINGTON leaning weakly against the frame. She is thinly clad, ghastly pale, and walks unsteadily as she comes forward, breathing laboriously*) Why, Mrs. Arrington! I was just going

out to look for you. (MRS. ARRINGTON *lifts her head in an effort to speak, staggers and falls forward into PEYTON'S arms*) Here, Runion—push that sofa closer to the fire. (*Placing her down gently*) The cushion for her head! There! Now get the whiskey. (*Taking a glass of spirits from RUNION, raising her head and placing it to her lips*) Take a good swallow of this. Don't be afraid. It won't hurt you. Please!

MRS. ARRINGTON. (*Weakly*) Thank you—(*She drinks a small quantity*)

PEYTON. You'll be all right in a little while. (*Bus.*) There—I know all about it. Don't try to talk. (*Turning*) Now, Runion, get something hot—and hurry. (*Once more placing the glass to MRS. ARRINGTON'S lips*) Once more—please. (*Gently*) You should have sent me word. You know that I would have been only too glad to help you, even though it was a mite.

MRS. ARRINGTON. Yes, yes, I know; but I was ashamed to ask so often. You—you've been too good to me already. Of all my old friends, you have been the most generous— (*Catching PEYTON'S hand as he raises it in a gesture of dissent*) No, don't deny it. Let me keep the memory to the last. You tried to make me feel that it was not a gift—not charity—but I know . . . and may God give it back to you tenfold, Mr. Peyton.

PEYTON. We won't speak of that. (*Turns R.*)

MRS. ARRINGTON. (*Intensely*) But I must . . . I must ask the greatest charity of all.

PEYTON. There, now, you are nervous and excited. Come, we'll have something to eat and then talk it over quietly. (*Turning*) How are you getting on, Runion?

RUNION. (*At the oil stove*) In a minute, sir.

MRS. ARRINGTON. (*Half pleading, half impatient*) I must speak with you—alone—Send your man away! Please!

PEYTON. (*Crossing to RUNION*) Step out and get a doctor as soon as you can!

RUNION. Very good, sir. (*Takes hat and coat from peg above door and hurries out at R.*)

PEYTON. (*Returning to sofa*) Now, Mrs. Arrington, tell me what is troubling you. (*Sits in chair which he brings from L. of table*) I will help you if I can.

MRS. ARRINGTON. You don't know what you are promising— (*After a pause, in a calmer tone*) I've told you I was ill—but it's worse—I'm dying. (*As PEYTON starts, then turns with a reassuring smile*)

PEYTON. Lie down. I beg of you. (*Bus. Puts chair up stage*) I've sent Runion for a doctor.

MRS. ARRINGTON. (*Checking him*) No. . . It's gone too far for that. I've reached the end. (*Looking into his eyes*) I'm not afraid for myself—but my baby—my baby—

PEYTON. (*After pause*) And you come to me? To ask—me to—

MRS. ARRINGTON. No, not to ask. To beg—to implore—you—*take* my baby when I have gone— (*PEYTON starts*) the one shaft of God's sunlight that has pierced the hell of my misfortune. My baby—my little one—for whom I have fought despair—for whom I have given life itself . . . and given it in vain! (*Sinks back on sofa*)

PEYTON. There, there, you are not going to die. Your baby needs you and you've got to live for it!

MRS. ARRINGTON. (*Passionately. Sitting up again*) Oh, how can I make you understand? (*Reaching for his hand, rises slowly facing him*) But, you'll take my little one when I can no longer care for her—? Yes—yes—For the love of *our* own mother—for the love of the woman who will some day be your wife—promise! Promise! (*Holding his hand in both of hers*)

PEYTON. (*Restlessly*) There, there, my friend. It's easy enough to make a promise but I won't deceive you. (*Removes hand*) What you ask is impossible. (MRS. ARRINGTON *cries out, buries her face in her hands, falls face downward in the pillows, but is checked by a fit of coughing*) You ask me to take your baby. (*Crosses to c.*) What under heaven should I do with it? (*Turns*) I'm a young fellow—poor as a church mouse—struggling to make both ends meet. And they *don't* sometimes. Besides, this is no place to bring up a child. (*Returning to her*) How old is it?

MRS. ARRINGTON. (*Hopefully sits up*) Six—but bright—intelligent—

PEYTON. (*Interrupting*) There, you see? Six years! A mere tot—dependent upon someone every minute of the day or night. I don't mean to be selfish, but—but—Good Lord!—I don't know an earthly thing about babies,—not a thing! (*Pause*) Is it a boy or a girl?

MRS. ARRINGTON. A girl. Her name is Claudia, and—(*Again she is checked by a fit of coughing*)

PEYTON. (*Striding rapidly and rubbing his hands nervously*) A girl! H'u'm. That's bad. . . . (*Pausing and turning*)

MRS. ARRINGTON. (*Then hopefully*) But she would give you little trouble. (*Sits end of sofa*)

PEYTON. But, have you no relatives—yours or your husbands?

MRS. ARRINGTON. (*Shaking her head slowly and sadly*) There is no one in the whole world to whom I can turn. But with you I could trust her. You are good—generous—a man! (*Raising her eyes to him*) I have given all for her—all but honor. . . .

PEYTON. (L. C.) Oh! It makes me feel like a brute to refuse you; but think! I'm engaged to be married—(*Turning appealingly*) You can see my position, Mrs. Arrington, how utterly impos—

(He looks into her suffering face and pauses abruptly)

MRS. ARRINGTON. You may think differently when you see her. I left her below with the caretaker, because I did not wish her to hear—to know. *(Facing him, frightened, trembling)* Only let me bring her to you? *(Gets to her feet, starts across to c. PEYTON is silent. MRS. ARRINGTON watches him a moment in hope and fear, then turns weakly toward the door, but PEYTON takes her arm, striving to restrain her gently)*

PEYTON. *(Stops her gently—puts arms around her to support her)* No, my friend. It wouldn't do any good. We must think up some other plan—some institute in which—

MRS. ARRINGTON. *(Wrenching away from him, crosses to r.)* Stop! Stop!—in pity's name!

PEYTON. But listen—

MRS. ARRINGTON. I feared it! The work-house for my baby—and then—*Oh, God, the streets of London! The shame—the horror—* *(Sinks on bench in front of model with face buried in arms on table)*

PEYTON. *(Striving to calm her)* Listen at least to reason.

MRS. ARRINGTON. Reason! No! I must find some place. *(Rises abruptly; she laughs bitterly)* Don't stop me now. *(As she starts for door, PEYTON gently, with arms around her, leads her back to sofa where she sinks)*

PEYTON. I'm not the brute you think me—only—it's impossible—try to control yourself—the doctor will be here presently and then—

MRS. ARRINGTON. *(Slips off sofa to her knees with arms outstretched)* Oh, sir, promise me—in Christ's name, promise that you'll not desert her—that you will love her . . . as . . . your own. *(She stretches out her arms to him in a mute but pitiful appeal. PEYTON stands irresolute, while a light of*

understanding grows slowly upon his features. His hands are clenched. He looks away into nothingness, then back at MRS. ARRINGTON)

PEYTON. (*Lifting his head*) I promise on my honor. . . . (*Puts out hands and gently raises her to her feet*)

MRS. ARRINGTON. Oh, God bless you,—God bless you. (*She collapses in his arms and catching her he quickly lays her on sofa, head on pillows. He snatches glass of whiskey on table and starts to give her some. As he puts glass to her lips he glances at her eyes, then slowly drops glass on floor, while the lights go slowly out*)

END OF SCENE FIRST.

(*Intermezzo between scenes—short wait.*)

SCENE II:—*One hour later.*

Arrangement of the stage the same as in Scene First. The curtain being drawn to obviate the necessity of the death of MRS. ARRINGTON on the stage and her removal from the room.

DISCOVERED:—RUNION, *sweeping up glass from floor. A KNOCK is heard at door at right. BALLINGTON enters as RUNION rises.*

BALLING. (*Advances to c.*) Hello, Runion. Peyton back yet?

RUNION. (*Rises, as BALLINGTON enters*) No, sir; not yet, sir.

BALLING. H'u'm! Well—we'll see him later. I suppose he's having no end of red tape with the coroner and—and that sort of thing. Deuced unfortunate! Dead? They took her away? (*RUNION nods*) A gentlewoman to her fingertips—best model I ever had—(*Sighing as he crosses R.*) Oh, well! It's all on the canvas, my boy, but she might have a better hanging. (*Crosses to RUN-*

ION. *Speaking bashfully*) Wish you'd say to Peyton that—er—that I'd take it as a favor if he'd call on me in any way to—he'll understand.

RUNION. (*By table c.*) Yes, sir. Very good, sir.

BALLING. (*R. from doorway*) And by the way, Runion—that little girl of Mrs. Arrington's, she's down stairs with the care-taker. Bright little monkey! Think I'd better send her up? (*Starts to exit. RUNION hesitates*)

RUNION. Beg pardon, sir, but I wouldn't do that. She doesn't know about her mother as yet. You'd better wait till Mr. Peyton gets back, sir.

BALLING. Um—yes, I dare say you are right (*Turning to RUNION*) Tell Billy we are up stairs, if he needs us for anything, won't you. (*He passes out R.*)

(*RUNION stands same attitude that BALLINGTON left him in.*)

RUNION. Generous chaps these artist gentlemen. It's a pity their pocketbooks ain't as big as their hearts.

(*After a moment or two PEYTON enters from R. and RUNION crosses, helping him off with his overcoat.*)

RUNION. (*Removes PEYTON's coat at c., hangs it up L.*) Did you get it over, sir?

PEYTON. Yes; most of it. She will be buried quietly to-morrow.

RUNION. You've done a great deal in an hour, sir.

PEYTON. (*Crossing to the fire*) I wish we weren't so confoundedly poor. I'd like to see it done better——

RUNION. Beg pardon, sir, but Mr. Ballington

was 'ere jus' now—quite sober, sir. He says—as 'ow—you might call on 'im in any way—

PEYTON. (*Impatiently*) Yes, yes, thank you.

RUNION. Yes, sir, thank you, sir. (*Exits at R.*)

PEYTON. (*Looking into fire*) Poor woman! . . . Poor woman! . . . But what have I promised her. . . . What? What in the name of common sense . . . shall I do with the little one? I was a fool to promise. . . . (*Crosses to c.*) And yet—It made the mother's death less hard. (*Sits on bench in front of table c.*) Though hard enough, God knows. (*Face in hands. He lapses into silence*)

(*Presently the door at right opens quietly and CLAUDIA enters. She wears a short skirt, barely reaching her knees, and a velvet cloak, worn and threadbare. For a moment she looks curiously about her, then tiptoes across the room, and stands gazing at PEYTON. She waits for him to look up, but he does not see her.*)

CLAUDIA. (R. C.) I want my mamma!

PEYTON. (*Springing up, down c.*) Why—why, good gracious me! I didn't know—

CLAUDIA. Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you.

PEYTON. (*With his hands in his pockets, looking down at her in amused surprise*) Well—I'll be—um—who are you?

CLAUDIA. Claudia.

PEYTON. (*Starting*) Why, of course. I might have known. How stupid of me.

CLAUDIA. I got a lot more names, though.

PEYTON. Have you, dearie? What are they?

CLAUDIA. Piggy and Granny—and Brat. But I don't like that one.

PEYTON. Well, I shouldn't think you would! Who calls you such—er—disrespectful names? (*Sits on box facing her*)

CLAUDIA. The boys.

PEYTON. (*Smiling*) Oh, indeed! Well, we won't have them doing that!

CLAUDIA. (*Pointing at statue*) They make dollies—just like yours.

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) Oho! I see! You mean the professional boys. Your mamma takes you with her to her sittings—is that it?

CLAUDIA. (*Still R. C. After a thoughtful pause, nodding*) Um'hum! but she don't go any more. She stays at home . . . and coughs.

PEYTON. (*Tenderly*) Yes, dear, I know. (*Smiling*) But, when she used to take you I suppose you learned all about mud dollies, didn't you?

CLAUDIA. Oh, yes. (*Pointing to statue, regarding it solemnly*) I like that one. She's—she's a beautiful dolly.

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) Well, upon my word! (*With a bow*) Thank you, Granny—thank you. Well, you *do* know something of art, don't you?

CLAUDIA. (*Soberly*) Where's her clothes? (*Looking around*) But you've got a good fire . . . to keep her warm.

PEYTON. Um Yes. That's it, exactly. (*Mounting the platform from L. and adjusting the cloth*) Let's put a cloak on her and—and change the subject. (*With a final touch*) There! That ought to make her snug and comfortable.

CLAUDIA. What's her name?

PEYTON. (*Still standing on the platform—stand between chair and table*) Her name is Circe. I'll tell you her story some day!

CLAUDIA. Can you tell stories?

PEYTON. Oh, lots of 'em! (*He steps down from the platform*)

CLAUDIA. (*With a catch in her breath*) I—I wish my mamma had *bringed* me before. What's your name?

PEYTON. (*Solemnly*) William Musgrave Baker-

ville Peyton—late of America—land of Dixie—at your service.

CLAUDIA. Goodness! Haven't you got a shorter one?

PEYTON. Ha! That's a question (*Steps down*) and we'll have to talk it over—you and I—and pick out the one that suits you best. (*Picks her up and stands her on bench in front of table c.*) Now, suppose I take off your hat and coat and make you more comfortable. (*Takes things off*) There, that's better. (*Sits her on bench. She starts to ask about her mother, he stops her and gets an apple from mantel which he gives her*)

CLAUDIA. (*After taking the apple*) I like you.

PEYTON. (*Smiling*) Do you? I'm glad of that. (*She bites apple*) And I like you—well—*this* much. (*He gives her a hug, she drops apple, he picks it up for her and keeps his arm about her*)

CLAUDIA. (*Laughing*) That's what mamma does. (*Looking up at him soberly*) Where is mamma?

PEYTON. (*Takes her hand in his and is silent for a moment*) Piggy dear, that's another thing I want to talk to you about, and ask you to help me. To help *me* and to help mamma. You'd like that, wouldn't you? (*As CLAUDIA nods*) Good! You know how ill she's been—how she coughs at night—and how it hurts her? (*CLAUDIA nods, bites into apple again*) Well . . . we want her to go away . . . to a place where she won't feel the hurt any more . . . where her poor, tired hands can rest, Piggy, and never work again.

CLAUDIA. Will—will she take me with her?

PEYTON. No, dear, not just yet, and I'll tell you why. Little girls have to be washed and dressed and—and have a lot of things done for 'em. Then there are pins and combs and shoe-strings and—Good gracious me, Piggy! get right down to it, there must be a million of 'em.

CLAUDIA. And the Catechism, too?

PEYTON. *Catechism!* Why— Oh, yes, yes—of course! We'll go for the catechism like—like blazes.

CLAUDIA. Like blazes! (*Laughing*) That's a funny way—how do you do it?

PEYTON. Um—well, I don't know exactly, right at the—er—the jump, but we'll do it somehow. But now we want your mamma to rest and sleep—

CLAUDIA. Is she asleep now?

PEYTON. (*Pressing her close to him*) Yes, Piggy . . . she's asleep. (*After a short pause*) And if we want her to rest and be happy, you must stay here with me. Just think, Claudia, I haven't any little girl. I'm here all by myself, with only Runion. (*CLAUDIA looks up inquiringly*) He's my servant, dear. (*Gently*) And it's frightfully lonesome. I need a little girl like you—to take care of me and help me make my big mud dollies. You'd like that, wouldn't you?

CLAUDIA. (*After thoughtful pause*) Rather. Would—would that make you be my Daddy?

PEYTON. H'u'm! . . . In a way—yes. You—er—you might call me that—if you choose.

CLAUDIA. And will you let me make mud dollies, too?

PEYTON. A thousand of 'em, if you like.

CLAUDIA. Oh, jolly,—jolly!—jolly! (*Claps hands*) And I can tell you when it's supper time?

PEYTON. Yes. Any old time is supper time.

CLAUDIA. I'm—I'm hungry now.

PEYTON. (*Striking his palm with his fist. Down c., as he speaks*) Lord! What a dunderhead I am! My dear, we'll have that supper in just three shakes of a sheep's tail. (*Crosses to table r.*)

CLAUDIA. Can I help, Daddy? (*Puts apple down on table c.*)

PEYTON. (*Aside*) Daddy! (*Turning*) Why,

of course you may, my dear. Do you see that pile of books over there—(*Points up R.*) Put three of 'em on the floor by that box. Now sit down on 'em! That's your chair and table. (*CLAUDIA seats herself beside the box of clay, while PEYTON crosses and tears a sketch from his easel, laying it on the box*) That's your table cloth. How's that? (*CLAUDIA, clapping her hands*) Here's a plate—a fat little cup—a great big carvum knife. Know the song about that knife? (*Waves knife in the air and sings. On one knee very close to her*)

Three blind mice!
See how they run!

(*CLAUDIA sings with him.*)

They all ran after the farmer's wife;
She cut off their tails with a carvum knife;
Did you ever see such a sight in your life—
As three blind mice?

PEYTON. Ha, ha, ha, ha! How's that, Piggy?

CLAUDIA. It's—it's—it's just rippin'!

PEYTON. Always did like that song. (*Turning to cooking*) There! (*Apologetically*) You see, my dear, for rush orders such as yours, the bill of fare is like this:

Bread and jam and milk,
And milk and jam and bread,
And jam and bread and milk.

(*Checking off on his fingers. Seats himself on the bench opposite her, and hugging his knees*) Now, little one, go for it! (*CLAUDIA hesitates*) Well—?

CLAUDIA. It—it ain't polite to eat with—with just a knife.

PEYTON. (*Springing up*) I beg your pardon. Here's the family spoon? (*Crossing with large spoon*) How's that?

CLAUDIA. (*Turning the spoon over in her hand*) You haven't got a pusher, have you?

PEYTON. A what?

CLAUDIA. A pusher.

PEYTON. A pusher? (*Looks around helplessly*) Well—er—well, no, Piggy, I—I really don't believe I have. Oh, by the way, I think I'll do your head while you are having your supper. (*Crossing and returning with a small lump of clay which he begins kneading with his hands*) I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the sand-man came to see us soon.

CLAUDIA. The sand-man?

PEYTON. (*Smiling*) He's a nice old fellow who puts things in little girls' eyes and makes 'em sleepy, you know. By the way, Claudia, what do you sleep in at night?

CLAUDIA. (*Staring at him*) I—I sleep in a bed.

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) Yes—of course, of course! But what I mean is—er—don't have—um—some sort of a little night-shirt or something?

CLAUDIA. (*Thoughtfully*) I—I used to, but—but it wored out.

PEYTON. Oh, I see. That's bad! Well, we'll have to fix you up somehow. (*PUCKERS enters with scuttle; slams door*) You must not burst in like that! This isn't Balaklava or the Vale of the Thousand Bricks!

PUCKERS. (*Holding up her brick, R.*) I come to fix the fire, sir.

PEYTON. (*R. c.*) Well, go ahead and fix it and try to be a little more maidenly and a little less hip-popotamussy. Am I clear?

CLAUDIA. You'll wake my mamma up if you make so much noise.

PUCKERS. 'Ello! (*Wheeling sharply, advancing and laughing*) Lorsy me! You is so little I ain't even seen yer. (*Turning to PEYTON*) Yours?

PEYTON. (*Up R. c., then crosses to fire-place L.*) Yes, she's mine.

PUCKERS. (*c., hands on knee; to CLAUDIA*) Wotcher name?

PEYTON. (*Pointing a muddy finger at her*) Her name is Miss Claudia. Miss Claudia. Understand? (*To RUNION, who enters from door R.; hangs up hat, etc.*) And you, too, Runion. This is my ward—Miss Claudia—she has come to take care of us.

RUNION. (*Coming down R., checking his wonder and answering promptly*) Very good, sir.

CLAUDIA. (*PUCKERS crosses to fire-place L., hangs up brick as before. Nodding her head*) I'm going to stay till my mamma comes back.

RUNION. (*Starting*) Lor', Miss—your mamma—

PEYTON. Steady, steady, Runion!

RUNION. (*Crossing to CLAUDIA*) —will—er—will be 'appy to 'ave you here, Miss; I 'opes you'll be 'appy too, Miss.

PEYTON. Thank you, Runion. Just run down stairs, will you, and ask the care-taker if she will lend you a little—er—night-shirt.

RUNION. Wot! For me, sir? (*As PEYTON points to CLAUDIA*) O—h! (*Exit*)

PEYTON. (*Sits L. of table, smiling; to CLAUDIA*) Now, Piggy, sit still a moment, will you—just as you are. (*Modeling*) Chin up! Ah, that's it! Now smile!

PUCKERS. (*L., looking over his shoulder*) Dearie me! You'se a-makin' of 'er burst, ain't yer? (*As PEYTON nods*) Say! I wish't you'd do me sometime. I can repose for a statue easy.

PEYTON. Is that so? (*Smiling*) Well, when I want to make an imp I'll send for you.

PUCKERS. (*Moves L. Thoughtfully*) Did you say . . . a imp . . . or a Nymp?

PEYTON. (*Turning*) I said an *imp* . . . a smutty-faced little *imp*!

PUCKERS. Me? Ho, Lud, yes! I can repose for anythink—from the weepin' Handrumiky right smack down to Hapollo.

PEYTON. Can you, now? Well, as it happens Apollo wasn't a girl.

PUCKERS. Wasn't she, now?—O-h! (*She turns up c.*)

PEYTON. (*Crosses to L. c. and sits on bench front of table*) My! What dirty hands! Here, Runion; bring me a basin of water. Puckers, get a towel and some soap.

(*As he lifts CLAUDIA into his lap, RUNION crosses and stands on one R. side of him with the basin of water, with PUCKERS on the L., holding the towel and soap.*)

PEYTON. First we'll take *this* grimy little fist. (*He washes it, and drys it on a corner of the towel*)

PUCKERS. H'm! She ain't dirty much. Look at me.

PEYTON. Um—yes. What you need, Puckers, is a large piece of good coarse sand-paper and a short visit to a *Turkish Bath*. (*To CLAUDIA*) There, Piggy. Now, give me the other one.

CLAUDIA. (*Looking up at him*) Daddy . . . are you somebody's mamma, with—with trousers on?

PEYTON. (*Smiling*) Why, what a question. What makes you say that?

CLAUDIA. 'Cause—'cause you know how.

PEYTON. Good! And now I think we'll have a pass or two at this wise little face of yours.

(*PUCKERS hands him the towel and goes around table to c. He begins washing her face with a corner of the towel.*)

CLAUDIA. O-u-c-h!

PUCKERS. (*c., bursting into a laugh*) Ho, Lud! I knowed 'e wasn't nobody's mammer.

PEYTON. (*Sympathetically*) A—h! Did I hurt you, Piggy? Well, never mind. It's all done. It's all done. (RUNION and PUCKERS *down R. laugh heartily together until, stopped by indignant PEYTON, they stop suddenly*) Runion, you may be excused.

RUNION. (*Bowing and retreating with the basin*) Thank you. (*Puts basin up stage*).

PEYTON. (*Calling*) Oh, I say—Runion! Better get some milk before you leave. She might wake up in the night and—

CLAUDIA. (*With flouted dignity*) I don't drink milk at night. *Babies* do that.

PEYTON. (*Laughing foolishly. Looking at RUNION*) Oh, babies do that! (*Turning to RUNION with a grin*) Better make it a hand glass and a box of rouge.

RUNION. (*Solemnly*) Very good, sir. (*Starts away*)

PEYTON. Man alive—that's a joke. (*Impatiently*)

RUNION. Is it, sir? Very good, sir. Good-night.

PUCKERS. Say! 'E's a awful fool . . . ain't 'e?

PEYTON. (*Smiling*) Puckers . . . there are certain axioms to which a reference is garish and impolite. (*With a bow*) And now—if you will pardon me—I suggest that the nymph retire to her coral couch in the limpid depth of her subterranean bower.

PUCKERS. Sir?

PEYTON. Oh—in other words—will you please get out?

PUCKERS. O—h! (*She crosses in front, demurely, to fire-place and unhooks her brick, keeps her back to PEYTON for bus. Sits on floor, warms hands*)

PEYTON. (*To CLAUDIA, as he sets her on feet*) Now, dear, we'll get undressed. (*Business of look-*

ing at front and sides of dress for buttons. He looks nonplussed, then towards PUCKERS, as if to ask her; business; then finally speaks to CLAUDIA)

CLAUDIA. It buttons in the back.

PEYTON. Ah! I thought so. How stupid of me. *(He begins unfastening her dress)*

PUCKERS. *(Crossing behind table to R. C.)*
Good-night, Miss Claudy.

CLAUDIA. Good-night, Puckers. Come back in the mornin', won't you?

PUCKERS. I will, Miss. Yes'm. *(To PEYTON, with a grin)* Good-night, Mr. Mommer with trousers on! *(She laughs and exits noisily)*

PEYTON. *(Calling loudly)* Here, you! *(Smiling)* Poor little motherless rat! *(To CLAUDIA)* Now, Piggy! *(He unfastens her dress, leaving her in low-necked underbody and a skimpy, ragged petticoat. He then unties the bundle which RUNION has brought, shakes out a tiny little nightgown and holds it up admiringly)* See that gown? That's a wishing-gown, just like a wishing cap in the fairy book.

CLAUDIA. Is it?

PEYTON. *(Nodding)* Um-hum. You just put it on, *(Bus.)* and wish yourself asleep, and in a little while, why—why, there you are. See? *(She looks at him wonderingly. He puts the gown over her head, then unfastens her underclothing from beneath)*

CLAUDIA. *(Kicking to free herself from the tangle of clothes)* Will you tell me a story now?

PEYTON. *(Taking her into his lap and pulling off her shoes and stockings)* The very nicest one I know. But let's get ready first. We can't go to bed with our shoes and stockings on. *(Holding up one much-worn shoe and shaking his head)* Um! We'll have to see about some bran' new hoffies soon. Gracious! and stockings, too! These five little pink rascals are peeping out of jail. Oh! did you ever

hear that little story about the five little pink rascals?

This little pig went to market,
 This little pig stayed home,
 This little pig got roast beef,
 And this little pig got none,
 And this little pig said wee-wee-wee all the way
 home.

(*Laughing. Rising and placing her in his chair L. of table, she takes up the apple again from table*)
 Now, sit right there while I warm your nest. (*He crosses to the fire-place, holding his dressing-gown before the blaze*)

CLAUDIA. (*Climbing from the chair*) I—I haven't kissed mamma good-night, yet. (*Starts toward rear by c.*)

PEYTON. (*Nervously, as he intercepts her*) Well—we—well, you know I said mamma was resting, dear—and—come, let me wrap you up. (*CLAUDIA puts her fingers in her mouth and backs away distrustfully. PEYTON looks at her a moment in silence, then speaks tenderly, caressingly, as he kneels with the dressing-gown in his hands*) Claudia . . . would you disturb mamma . . . when she needs her rest? She told me to kiss you for her, darling. . . . (*CLAUDIA goes to him L.*) She whispered it before she went to sleep.

(*CLAUDIA sighs, then places one hand in his confidentially.*)

CLAUDIA. And we won't wake her up will we?

(*PEYTON shakes his head, then in silence he wraps her in the dressing-gown, seats himself and holds her in his arms.*)

PEYTON. (*Sits on couch in the firelight*) Now, suppose we have that story. Which shall it be, a true story—or a make-believe story?

CLAUDIA. Oh, a true one—with a Prince in it—just like *you*.

PEYTON. Just like me? All right. Um. . . . Once upon a time there was a poor, young chap,—

CLAUDIA. Is a Prince a chap?

PEYTON. Well, yes—sometimes. This one was, anyway. Once upon a time there was a poor, young chap and he lived in a bully old city named New York.

CLAUDIA. What does “bully” mean?

PEYTON. Bully? Oh! great and splendid—fine. But the Chap wasn't much of a Prince, after all, for he hadn't any money, Piggy and he just had to scratch for a living.

CLAUDIA. Like a chicken?

PEYTON. (*Nodding*) Um-hum! That's it—exactly. . . . And he made little figures out of clay; but the people wouldn't buy 'em—and then—to make it worse—he met a Princess.

CLAUDIA. A real Princess?

PEYTON. (*Dreamily*) Yes, dear. . . . She was beautiful and good . . . with great brown glorious eyes that looked into the Prince Chap's soul . . . and made him hungry . . . for her love.

CLAUDIA. (*After pause*) What was the Princess' name?

PEYTON. (*Tenderly*) Princess Alice.

CLAUDIA. And did she like the Prince?

PEYTON. Yes, dear; she liked him so much that—that she cried when he went away.

CLAUDIA. Why did he have to go away?

PEYTON. To seek his fortune, Claudia. . . . He went in a big, big ship . . . and left her watching . . . on the shore. . . And when he had sailed for

miles and miles, he came to land . . . and began his work again. . . And it was hard, Piggy . . . for the critics laughed . . . and the people passed him, one by one, and wouldn't buy. . . He was hungry . . . and alone. . . But when at night he would lie in his little dark room, to think, and think, and think, why, then, he would remember Princess Alice—He'd see her watching on the shore—watching for *him*—and somehow . . . it made him *strong* again and then—

CLAUDIA. Did the Prince Chap go home?

PEYTON. (*Gently*) No, Piggy, for the story isn't finished yet—not yet.

CLAUDIA. (*Nestling closer in his arms*) And will you tell it to me . . . when it is?

PEYTON. (*Sadly*) Yes, darling. I'll tell it to you . . . when it is. (*With a change of tone*) Now, suppose we whisper to that wish-gown, and go fast asleep?

CLAUDIA. (*Slipping from his lap*) But—I haven't said my prayers yet.

PEYTON. Why—er—oh, yes—yes, of course. I—I had forgotten about the prayers.

CLAUDIA. Don't you say prayers to—to keep things from catchin' you?

PEYTON. (*Nervously*) Well—er—you see—it's *this* way. There are lots of different *kinds* of prayers, and—er—and I dare say mine are—um—sort of different. How do yours begin?

CLAUDIA. Why, don't you know? Now I lay me—Prayers *always* begin like that.

PEYTON. Ah! Of course they do! Used to say 'em that way myself when I was a little shaver. Well, come on, Piggy, and we'll see if we can sort of work 'em out together. (*He takes the apple from her and puts it beside him; she notes position. As CLAUDIA kneels before him, bowing her head upon his knee*) You go ahead and I'll—and I'll listen.

CLAUDIA. (*Looking up*) Oh, but you have to help.

PEYTON. (*Cheerfully*) All right. Now I lay me—

CLAUDIA. Now I lay me down to sleep.

PEYTON. I pray the Lord—

CLAUDIA. My soul to keep.

PEYTON. If I—

CLAUDIA. If I—

PEYTON. If I should—

CLAUDIA. If I should die before I wake,

PEYTON. I pray—

CLAUDIA. The Lord my soul to take.

PEYTON. (*With prompt finality*) Amen!

CLAUDIA. (*Looking up*) Oh, no, it isn't amen yet. It's some more to it. And pray God bless mamma, and make her well and strong . . . and stop her coughin' . . . and make me a good little girl . . . with clean hands . . . and a clean face . . . and a clean heart. . . (*Pause*)

PEYTON. (*Gently*) Yes, dear go on.

CLAUDIA. (*Looking up*) And God bless Daddy and the Prince Chap?

PEYTON. (*Biting his lips*) Yes, little one. . . . I think we might put that in . . . it wouldn't hurt.

CLAUDIA. And God bless Princess Alice. . . . (*PEYTON looks down on her a moment, bows his head, then silently folds her in his arms*) I think that's all. Amen! (*Reaches for her apple and holds it to her breast. He lifts her into his lap and lays her head against his shoulder, tucking the dressing-gown carefully about her. She puts her arms around his neck and kisses him, and settles herself with a sleepy sigh. There is a silence. The apple rolls from CLAUDIA'S grasp—the noise of its falling arouses her. Stirring, then speaking slowly, sleepily*) Daddy . . . that was a . . . bully good prayer . . . wasn't it?

(*Her eyes close again; her arm drops slowly to her side. PEYTON looks before him, speaking in a half-conscious whisper.*)

PEYTON. Yes, darling I think it was the bulliest prayer . . . I ever heard.

CURTAIN.

—
ACT II.

SCENE:—*Five days before Christmas Day.*

Two years after close of Act First. Studio as before, with the exception of the furnishings, which are much finer. A large rug covers the floor and the statue is removed from the table. An air of prosperity pervades the room. CLAUDIA, with a huge broom, is sweeping before the fire-place and hums a song as she works.

PEYTON enters from c.

PEYTON. (*Up c.*) Hullo, little woman. Why—(*Stopping and laughing*) What are you doing?

CLAUDIA. (*At fire-place*) Sweepin'.

PEYTON. (*Comes down c.*) Humph! Don't know which is the biggest, the contract or the broom. What is the cause of this—this sudden industry?

CLAUDIA. (*To L. c.*) You see . . . when Santa Claus comes down the chimney . . . and finds everything nice and clean and sweet, maybe—maybe he'll put in a few more things.

PEYTON. (*Laughing and pointing his finger*) Bribery, Piggy. Rank bribery! If you want him to bring you lots of things, you ought to keep the room sweet all the time. Not just once or twice,

but all the time. (*Looks over mail on table c.*)
You see that, don't you?

(CLAUDIA rests on her broom, in thought.)

CLAUDIA. Daddy, how many days till Christmas, now?

PEYTON. Five more, Piggy.

CLAUDIA. (*Sighing*) I—I wish it was only three.

PEYTON. (*Looking up with a smile*) Wait until day after to-morrow, and it *will* be only three—and then— Larks! Come! (*She drops her broom and runs toward him. He regards the broom fixedly until she turns, places it in a corner and comes to him*)

PEYTON. Ah, that's better. Jump! (*Swings her into lap. Frowning*) Um—what were those things we wanted old Santa to bring us?

CLAUDIA. The muff and the box of dominoes——

PEYTON. Yes.

CLAUDIA. The sewing basket and the roller skates.

PEYTON. Of course.

CLAUDIA. And the wax doll that when you squeeze her in the stomach she says Wa-n-n-h!

PEYTON. Er—Claudia, aren't you getting too old for dolls? Suppose we cut it out?

CLAUDIA. Just one more, Daddy. Just one more.

PEYTON. All right—all right. Anything more?

CLAUDIA. (*Nodding*) Lots! There's the slippers and things for Runion, a new dress for Puckers, and pipe and a hatrack, and oh! a secret, and nobody knows anything about it but Runion and me. You won't ask him, will you? He'd tell all about it, 'cause he's such a—such a dunderhead.

PEYTON. (*Reprovingly*) Claudia! You mustn't use such words. It's naughty!

CLAUDIA. But *you* say it, Daddy.

PEYTON. Um—yes—but that's different.

CLAUDIA. (*After pause, looking up at him*)
Daddy, when we are having our jolly-go-bang, will
mamma see us from way up in Heaven?

PEYTON. (*Gently*) Yes, darling . . . I know
she will . . . and it will make her, oh, so happy.
Well, does the secret wind things up?

CLAUDIA. Oh, no. There's the purple balloon
and the Noah's Ark, and a kitten, and—Oh! a real
live pony and a pony cart and—

PEYTON. Hold on—a pony cart! Hold on.
Real live ponies cost heaps of money, Piggy, and
you know our bargain. We are going to save until
the bank man will take off his hat when he sees us
in the street; and then we will get on a big steam-
boat and sail away to—

CLAUDIA. *To Princess Alice!*

PEYTON. (*Happily*) Yes, dearie, yes! . . . To
Princess Alice . . . and then our life will be
(*Slowly*) one . . . long . . . sweet . . .

CLAUDIA. *Jolly-go-bang?*

PEYTON. (*Smiling and holding her close in his
arms*) I think it will be even more, little one . . .
even more.

CLAUDIA. And will the Princess love me, Daddy?

PEYTON. Love you? . . . Yes. . . You will
be our little girl then—*her's* and mine. You would
like that, wouldn't you?

CLAUDIA. (*Thoughtfully*) Daddy . . . I think
I would rather stay right here with—with just you.

PEYTON. Ah, bless your heart! (*Kissing her*)
Well, run along to your sweeping now. (CLAUDIA
*slips from his lap, takes up dust broom and pan
and begins sweeping, humming happily to herself.*
PEYTON *returns to his letters*)

CLAUDIA. (*Reflectively. Comes to table oppo-
site PEYTON, kneels on a chair*) Daddy!

PEYTON. (*Seated R. of table*) Well, little woman?

CLAUDIA. Do you believe in Santa Claus—honest—double and twisted?

PEYTON. (*Starting*) Do I be— Why—why—Claudia!—what put such an idea into your head?

CLAUDIA. (*Leaning forward, with her chin upon her hands*) I've been thinking, Daddy—hard—and I—

PEYTON. (*Tenderly*) Well! Let's see if we can straighten it out. What's the trouble?

CLAUDIA. Is Santa Claus a good man?

PEYTON. Good! Why, he's just about the best old chap that ever lived.

CLAUDIA. (*Slowly*) Then, why is it . . . that when children are rich, Santa Claus brings 'em—Oh—just heaps of things . . . and when they are poor, he—he don't bring 'em—er—hardly anything. Why is that, Daddy?

PEYTON. (*Simply sits and stares at CLAUDIA, finally turns face R. and emits long whistle. Aside*) Good Lord, but that's a poser! (*Turning to CLAUDIA—talks across table*) Um—you see, Piggy—it's *this* way. That old man knows what he's about. Don't you doubt it for a minute. Now, take the rich children—

CLAUDIA. But *their* Papas can give 'em toys and things, anyway.

PEYTON. (*Scratching his head in perplexity*) All right. Take the *poor* children. (*He hesitates, looks troubled, then goes on*) Suppose Santa Claus brought those poor children guns and trumpets and things. Do you think the little beggars would be satisfied? Not a bit of it. They'd just want more! It's all for the best! You see that, don't you? (*Sits in arm-chair. Picks up letter and scans page*)

CLAUDIA. (*Reflectively*) No, I don't!

PEYTON. (*Looks at her quickly. Thinking*)

hard) Well, that's too bad. All right. Look at it another way. (*He pauses again in perplexity, then his face lights up*) Ah! (*Moves chair*) Now, for the last whole month you've just been aching for a real live pony and a pony cart, haven't you?

CLAUDIA. (*Leans eagerly across table. Clapping her hands and sighing*) Yes, Daddy! Can I have him?

PEYTON. You wait a minute. (*Pointing finger at her and speaking slowly and impressively*) Suppose . . . when you waked up on Christmas morning and came in here . . . you found the pony cart—and nothing else—*then* what would you want?

CLAUDIA. (*Putting hands behind head and laughing*) Daddy . . . I—I reckon I'd want the pony.

PEYTON. (*Rises, slapping knee, goes to R. Grinning broadly and kicking out his feet as he walks*) There you are! What did I tell you? Santa Claus *knows* something! *He's* nobody's jack-o-me-lantern! (*Turning and speaking seriously—returns to C. and stands*) Now, let's sift this thing to the bottom. Who started you to think about it?

CLAUDIA. Puckers.

PEYTON. She did, eh? What about her?

CLAUDIA. (*Knitting her brows*) Well, last Chris'mus she hung up her stockin' . . . and after she had wrote—

PEYTON. (*Correcting her*) Written!

CLAUDIA. Written letters to Santa Claus and hollered up the chimney and prayed God for a ring and five boxes of candy and a red flannel petticoat—what do you think she found in her stockin'?

PEYTON. What?

CLAUDIA. (*Slowly, with indignation and disgust*) *Not—a-bloomin' thing!*

PEYTON. (*Striving to suppress a laugh*) Well . . . that was rather rough on poor little Phoebe.

(*Thoughtfully*) Humph! . . . (*Leans against table c.*) Maybe she didn't pray hard enough.

CLAUDIA. But she did, though. She—she prayed like thunder!

PEYTON. (*Aside*) Another hickory-nut for youthful faith to crack a tooth on—(*Moves from table after pause. Turning*) Well, Piggy, I'll tell you what we'll do. (*Crosses to mantel L.*) You tell Puckers to hang her stockings here—(*Touches mantel*) by yours—and perhaps—I say perhaps—

CLAUDIA. (*Going towards him*) And will Santa Claus really put something in?

PEYTON. Haven't a doubt of it. Fact is, I'll speak to him myself.

CLAUDIA. (*Running to him*) Oh, Daddy . . . you're awful good!

PEYTON. (*Swings her to standing position on chair L., reprovngly*) Claudia! . . . you mustn't say *awful good*. It isn't correct.

CLAUDIA. (*Stretching up her arms to him*) I know it isn't, Daddy. . . . But it's true. (*Arms about his neck*)

(PEYTON picks her up in his arms and kisses her.

Enter RUNION with a card tray and an air of pompous dignity.)

PEYTON. (*Glancing toward card tray*) Well, Runion? (*Crosses to c.*) Who is it?

(CLAUDIA jumps down, picks up pan and brush and exits door up c.)

RUNION. (*Closing his eyes and rolling the name with unctuous enjoyment*) Sir John Bollin'brook Rodney, sir—Earl of 'Untin'ton!

PEYTON. The Earl of Huntington, eh? (*Takes card*) Well—tell Jack to trot along up.

RUNION. (*Aghast*) Trot, sir? The Earl of 'Untin'ton trot?

PEYTON. (*Moves L.—Taking card*) Um—h'm!

(RUNION, *with an air of outraged dignity, retires slowly to R., glancing over his shoulder at PEYTON, and exits.*)

PEYTON. (*Stands with back to fire reading card. Looking at the card in amusement*) Earl of 'Untin'ton! Ha, he, ha, ha! The idea of Jack's sending up his card. Ha, ha, ha, ha! Ridiculous!

RUNION. (*From doorway, pompously*) The Earl of 'Untin'ton!

(*Enter JACK RODNEY in immaculate morning dress, monocle, etc. He advances slowly, speaking with a refined drawl.*)

JACK. A—h! Are you there, old chap?

PEYTON. (*Crossing to c and extending his hand warmly*) Hello! Come in. Glad to see you.

JACK. Er—thank you. Glad to see you, Billy!

PEYTON. (*Hands box from table*) Have a cigar?

JACK. Thank you—n-e-o!

PEYTON. Have a drink?

JACK. Thank you—n-e-o!

PEYTON. (*Motions to arm-chair R. of table. Laughing*) Well, have an inexpensive seat.

JACK. Thank you—y-e-s! (*Seating himself deliberately, arranging his coat-tails and adjusting the knees of his trousers*) Fact is, dear boy . . . have come to awsk . . . a favar.

PEYTON. (*Dropping into chair L. of table c.*) All right. Blaze away!

JACK. Huh?

PEYTON. Heave ahead!

JACK. What?

PEYTON. What's the row?

JACK. Oh! I see what you mean. Fact is, dear

boy . . . have an ordah for a painting . . . from a church. Rum go . . . having an ordah . . . from a church. . . Isn't it?

PEYTON. (*Lights a cigar. Puffing his cigar*) Yes. It would be still more rummy, though, if you had it from a saloon.

JACK. (*Blankly*) Er—beg pardon?

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) Nothing, Jack, I reckon that one's too deep for you. Well—the favor?

JACK. Am looking for a model . . . for the painting.

PEYTON. Oh, I see! And so you want to paint me, do you? Good!

JACK. *You!* (*Disgustedly*) N-e-o! The ideah! Ha, ha! Absurd! Fancy *you* . . . in a church. Ha, ha!

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) Then, suppose you take Runion. *He's* solemn enough, Goodness knows.

JACK. Runion! Rot! Er— Billy . . . how do you Americans express it . . . when a chap is a sort of idiot—some beastly nonsense about—er—a trolley.

PEYTON. Trolley?

JACK. Off something or other.

(PEYTON *smiles, thinks for a moment, then turns again with a twinkle in his eye.*)

PEYTON. Oh, I see, then what would you say to Puckers? Valkyrie entering upon the wings of storm—coalscuttle in foreground—woe and devastation trailing after—action—spirit—tone—

JACK. (*Raising his hands as though he were warding off a blow*) Oh, I say, Billy—don't! Fact is, dear boy . . . I want that little girl of yours. Jolly little beggar! Ha, ha!

PEYTON. *Claudia?* Why, Jack! I—I appreciate it, and will be delighted.

JACK. Er—thank you.

PEYTON. That is—of course—if the sittings are not too long. I wouldn't like to tire her, you know.

JACK. Only want her . . . for half an hour . . . three days.

PEYTON. Good! It will please the child vastly. (*Rises to L. c.*) And I know you will do the picture well. Um—what about her clothes and things?

JACK. Very simple. . . Nothing. . . She's a cherub.

PEYTON. (*Starting*) The nude! (*After slight pause*) That—that alters it—of course. (*Puts down cigar in ash tray*) I thought you wished to paint her—er—otherwise. However, it is quite out of the question—quite out of the question. (*Goes down L.*)

JACK. (*Rises, laughing. Stands looking at PEYTON*) Oh, I say, Billy. What an extrawd'n'ry chap you are! All this fuss . . . over . . . a baby's petticoat. Ha, ha! What would it matter?

PEYTON. It matters everything—everything!

JACK. (*Shrugging*) But, she's not your child. . . . She's only a—

PEYTON. (*Wheeling sharply*) She's my life—my heart—my soul! (*As JACK rises, backing away in astonishment, PEYTON speaks in a calmer tone*) Come, man, don't let our friendship split on such a little rock as this.

JACK. (*Crosses quickly. Taking hand, holding it and speaking slowly*) Billy, old fellar . . . I'm quite old enough. . . to have known better. . . Forgive me. . . . I'm an ass!

PEYTON. (*Laying his other hand on JACK's as they shake*) It's all right. Now, sit down and have a smoke.

JACK. Thank you—n-e-o!

PEYTON. Why not? You haven't a thing in the world to do.

JACK. Must find a model . . . for the painting. (*Crossing to door*) Drop in, old chap, and give me

the benefit . . . of your advice. . . (*Smoothing his silk hat with his sleeves*) By the way, Billy—saw something in a Christmas shop to-day. . . Think it would please . . . your little girl. (*At door he turns with a beaming smile*) Rum go . . . having an ordah . . . from a church. . . Isn't it? (*Exit*)

PEYTON. (*Calling after him*) Good-bye, Jack! Come again—often!

JACK. (*Outside*) Thanks!

PEYTON. (*Slowly pacing up and down with his eyes on the floor*) He didn't think . . . the dear old idiot. . . . (*Stands R. C., looking at door R.*) I reckon he didn't think. (*CLAUDIA enters from right, at "Thanks," carrying a folded note in her hand. She crosses to fire-place, places the note in a pair of tongs and pushes it up the chimney. PEYTON turns, leans down to see what she is doing, etc. Watching her*) What are you doing, little woman? Taking another whack at that pony? (*Over L. C.*) If I were you, I wouldn't set my heart on him too much. I'm afraid he won't come this Christmas.

CLAUDIA. (*L., with her back to the fire*) I wasn't askin' for the pony, Daddy. I was just writin' about the reins and the whip that—that come with him.

PEYTON. (*Smiling*) Yes, I see. Delicate little feminine hint for the balance of the outfit. (*Shaking head*) But, it won't do, Claudia; it won't do.

(*Enter RUNION with card tray.*)

RUNION. (*Crosses to table C., stands R. of it*) Beg pardon, sir—a despatch. Jus' come, sir—charges paid.

PEYTON. (*L. of table, reaches across—taking the telegram*) Thank you, Runion. You needn't wait.

RUNION. Very good, sir. (*He glances longingly at the envelope and exits lingeringly*)

PEYTON. (*Opening telegram with his pencil*) We can't have everything we want, Piggy—I knew

a little girl once—nice little girl she was, too—who wanted— (*He glances at the contents of the telegram, gasps. Reads again, crushes it in his hand and cries out in ecstasy*) Piggy . . . Oh, Piggy, Piggy, who do you think is coming?

CLAUDIA. The pony?

PEYTON. (*Stands L. c. Joyously*) No, darling, no! . . . Princess Alice! (*Seizing CLAUDIA and tossing her up in the air*) Think of it! She's coming! Here! To us! To you . . . and to me! (*Showing telegram. Taking CLAUDIA'S hands, dancing up and down, laughing boyishly. CLAUDIA does so reluctantly*) And just at Christmas time, too! Lordy! Think of that! What did I tell you about the jolly-go-bang we were going to have? It will be bigger now . . . for Alice will be with us! Alice! (*Crosses to R. c. Starting. Taking out his watch*) You stay here and keep house for me. Get my hat! Get my hat! (*As CLAUDIA retires at rear c., he calls*) Runion! Oh, I say, Runion! Runion!

RUNION. (*Entering R. hurriedly*) Anything wrong, sir?

PEYTON. (*Laughing joyously*) Wrong? Not much! It's right! (*Slaps him on L. shoulder. Laughs again as RUNION stares at him*) There'll be a lady here presently, and—

RUNION. A lady, sir?

PEYTON. Now, don't look at me as if you never heard of a lady before in all your born days! Yes a lady! My lady! She's going to be my wife, Runion . . . my wife!

RUNION. O—h!

(CLAUDIA returns from c. with the hat and stick which she hands to PEYTON, then without a word she crosses to the ottoman, at table c., seats herself, with her elbows on her knees, her chin upon her hands.)

PEYTON. (*To RUNION*) She'll dine with us tonight, of course, and I just want you to spread yourself. Have a dinner that—that will make us sit up. Understand?

RUNION. Very good, sir.

PEYTON. That's it—exactly! I want it very good. (*Clapping his hat on the back of his head, and looking at his watch*) Here—take the money and get what you need. (*Gives gold piece*) Never mind the cost—and—and keep the change!

RUNION. (*Bowing and scraping*) Oh, thank you, sir—thank you very much, sir—I—(*Starts to exit door R.*)

PEYTON. (*Snapping his watch. Turning and calling loudly as RUNION reaches the door*) And, oh, I say, Runion—for the Lord's sake—*don't forget—the soup!*

RUNION. (*Bowing rapidly*) No, sir, I won't forget it, sir—hoxtail, sir—very good, sir—thank you, sir—(*Exit door R.*) hoxtail.

PEYTON. (*Turning to CLAUDIA happily. Kisses her*) Now, dear, I'm off to meet the Princess. Good-bye! . . . (*She sits on hassock. At the door he turns*) Oh, I say . . . Piggy! *Perhaps . . .* we can think about that pony, after all.

CLAUDIA. (*Looking at the floor and speaking with a quivering lip*) I—I *don't* want the old pony now—I—

PEYTON. (*Comes to R. C. Starting and coming toward her rapidly*) Why, Claudia! What's the matter, child?

CLAUDIA. (*Rising and running toward him*) Oh, Daddy, Daddy, you love her more than me! (*Stretching up her arms to him, sobbing*) Oh, Daddy, *don't*—*don't* love Princess Alice more than me!

(*PEYTON kneels beside her, takes her in his arms, speaking tenderly, earnestly. After short embrace, she turns her face aside sullenly.*)

PEYTON. Claudia, listen to me. . . Give me your hand. . . There! . . Now, look me in the face. . . Daddy loves you better than anything else in all the world. He loves you . . . and nothing, nothing, . . . shall ever come between us. (*She throws her arms about his neck again*) He loves Princess Alice, too . . . but it's a different kind of love. (*As CLAUDIA looks up inquiringly*) You wouldn't understand it, dear; but you will when you are older.

CLAUDIA. (*Sobbing*) But—but, I want to understand it *now*.

PEYTON. (*Thinking a moment*) . . . Don't you love Uncle Jack Rodney? (*She nods*)—the jolly Earl who used to ride you on his foot, and bring you pockets full of candy?

CLAUDIA. Yes-s.

PEYTON. All right. Now, think! Do you love Daddy any less, just because you are so devoted to Uncle Jack?

CLAUDIA. N-no.

PEYTON. (*Smiling*) Well, there you are! Don't you see it's different? Come now—dry your eyes and work it out by yourself. (*Rising. CLAUDIA crosses to L. c.*) Ah, here's the idea! Take this pencil and paper. (*At table c.*) and write a letter to Santa Claus for poor little Phoebe Puckers. She hasn't any Daddy, and not the very first sign of an Uncle Jack. Think of that!

CLAUDIA. (*With a half sob*) All right, Daddy. Good-bye. (*Runs up to him for a kiss*)

PEYTON. Good-bye, Piggy. (*He kisses her tenderly, crosses to door, turns back to smile, and exits*)

(*CLAUDIA kneels in chair beside the table, and writes in silence, her breath catching occasionally with a dry sob.*)

CLAUDIA. (*Pausing*) I wish—I wish she wasn't coming, though.

(*Again she writes in silence. Enter RUNION, with a bucket of water and a large rag. He sighs dejectedly, shakes his head and begins slowly to wash the window sashes, etc. Apron tied high under arms.*)

(*Looking up*) Runion, how do you spell Phoebe?

RUNION. Why, I spells it with a F, Miss—that bein' the letter as was made for it.

CLAUDIA. (*Doubtfully*) Do you? I—I thought Daddy said it was a P.

RUNION. (*Smiling indulgently and standing with the rag in his hand*) Did you now? Well, well, well! It do take time for a young'un to learn all twenty-six of the alphabets, an' that's a fact. Now, a P is good enough to spell potato with, an' even a Puckers, at a pinch—but for foxes and Feeby's an' fools an' things like that, I allers uses a F, Miss. It comes more 'andy.

CLAUDIA. (*Simply*) Thank you. (CLAUDIA returns to her writing, RUNION, with a sigh, begins to wash the window, when CLAUDIA once more looks up) Runion . . . do you believe in Santa Claus?

RUNION. (*Working away*) Me? W'y, Lor' love ye, I know 'im personal.

CLAUDIA. Do you? I wish I did. Think you'll have anything in your stocking Christmas?

RUNION. (*Stops work and turns*) Yes'm. I will that, an' no mistake.

CLAUDIA. What?

RUNION. (*Grinning*) My foot.

CLAUDIA. (*Climbing slowly out of the chair, with her paper and pencil in hand, and regarding RUNION with deep indignation*) Runion . . . I wish Daddy hadn't told me not to call you a dunderhead.

RUNION. (*Still grinning*) An' may I awsk, miss—w'y?

CLAUDIA. (R. of table) 'Cause, if he hadn't told me not to, I'd—I'd call you it—that's why!

(NOISE: PUCKERS falling up stairs. H'o God! H'o God! RUNION looks at door—nothing appears. He resumes work. CLAUDIA lifts her chin and marches up c., scornfully, out of the room, while RUNION, whistling merrily, returns to his window washing. Presently PUCKERS enters very quietly from R. In one hand she holds a torn paper bag, and on the wide-spread fingers of the other, she carries several egg shells, the yolky part trickling down her wrist. She coughs to attract RUNION'S attention.)

PUCKERS. (Stands R. c.) 'Ere's the eggs wot the grocer man brought, Mr. Runion! (As RUNION stares at her in dumb horror) I—I fell hup the steps, sir, but I didn't broke but only three. Lucky . . . hain't it?

RUNION. (Crossing to her, taking away the bag, and regarding PUCKER long and earnestly) Phoebe Puckers . . . if somebody was to put you in a bag . . . an' tie you up with ropes of iron an' ropes of steel . . . blarst me . . . if you wouldn't tumble me out an' bust somethink.

PUCKERS. Yes, sir. Does yer want the shells?

RUNION. (Sharply) No, I don't, I—(She removes them) An' look a 'ere! The first thing you have got to do is to wash them gormy 'ands an' w'en yu gets that done, you got to wash this winder, w'ilst I goes down to interview that ijjit of a grocer man for a trustin' you with anything softer than a cobble stone or a brick! (RUNION holds her with a severe eye a moment then exits c. with bag. PUCKERS crosses to the bucket and wipes her hand on the window rag)

PUCKERS. (Singing)

'Umpty Dumpty 'e set on a wall,
'An 'Umpty Dumpty 'e come down—kerflop!

(*She hurls the rag into the bucket, takes it out again and begins smearing the window panes, humming to herself joyfully. CLAUDIA enters from rear with her pencil and the folded note. She sees PUCKERS, puts the note behind her and tips toward the fire-place, where she is about to poke the note up the chimney when RUNION enters from rear. He stares at PUCKERS' work, in amazement. He clenches his hands, tips to a corner R., taking up a slender stick which he feels as he moves cautiously toward PUCKERS. PUCKERS spies him over her shoulder, drops the rag and exits precipitately at R. CLAUDIA runs forward, intercepting RUNION.*)

CLAUDIA. Runion! Were you going to—to whip poor little Puckers?

RUNION. (*Eyeing the stick in some confusion*) Me, miss? Er—well, no, miss; I didn't 'ave no such intentions, though she *do* need a warmin', an' no mistake.

CLAUDIA. But—but you were going 'after her with a stick.

RUNION. A stick? Um—er—(*With a sudden smile*) W'y, Lor' love ye, miss, this 'ere's my winder washer. (*He fastens the rag on the end of the stick and begins to wipe the window*)

CLAUDIA. Oh!

(*She crosses again to the fire-place, while RUNION, when her back is turned, discards the rag, and with the stick in his hand, rolls up his sleeves and follows PUCKERS. KNOCK at door—CLAUDIA runs and opens it. Enter ALICE TRAVERS.*)

CLAUDIA. How do you do?

ALICE. (*In doorway, after regarding CLAUDIA in silence*) Is this Mr. Peyton's studio?

CLAUDIA. Yes. Daddy is away. (*Moves to c. behind chair R. of table*) But—but I'll talk to you till he gets back. (*Places chair*) I always do that.

ALICE. (*Comes a step into room*) Ah, I see, you are Claudia. (*As CLAUDIA nods*) When do you expect your father home?

CLAUDIA. (*Shaking her head*) I don't know. He's gone to meet a Princess. Princess Alice. (*ALICE winces, turns away and begins tapping the floor with her foot*) Won't you sit down? (*Moves arm-chair to proper angle*)

ALICE. (*Crosses to the chair and sits as CLAUDIA closes door. Sinking into chair*) Why does your Daddy call her Princess Alice?

CLAUDIA. (*Returning to R. C.*) Oh, it's a story about her.

ALICE. Is it? Won't you tell it to me, Claudia?

CLAUDIA. (*Stands R. of ALICE. Climbing into a chair opposite ALICE*) Yes; but I can't tell it like Daddy can. (*After short pause*) Once upon a time there was a Prince Chap . . . and he lived in a big city named New York . . . and he didn't have any money . . . and he was poor. He made little figures out of clay with his hands—like Daddy does—but the people wouldn't buy 'em, and—and it hurt the Prince Chap. . . . And then he met a Princess . . . but he couldn't stay where *she* lived—er—'cause he was poor. So he went away to seek his fortune . . . and Princess Alice she cried and cried 'cause she couldn't go with him, too . . . and then he got on a big ship and sailed for miles and miles and miles . . . till he came to another place. . . . And now he's still makin' his little figures out of clay . . . and hopin' to get back home again. And we pray for him—Daddy and me.

ALICE. (*Wiping her eyes as CLAUDIA pauses, and speaking gently*) Yes, Claudia—go on.

CLAUDIA. That's all. Daddy says the story isn't finished yet. (*Goes up c.*)

ALICE. (*Turning her head away and speaking half in an aside*) He's right. (*Slowly*) The story isn't finished yet—(*After a pause, turning abruptly*) Did your father teach you this?

CLAUDIA. (*Comes down L. of table. In some astonishment at her manner*) No. I—I just learned it when—when he would tell me. Mamma used to tell me stories, but—but when she went away—er—Daddy told 'em to me. (*At L. corner of table*)

ALICE. (*Quickly*) Oh! and your mamma used to live here?

CLAUDIA. (*Puzzled, answering slowly*) I—I don't know. I was little, then.

ALICE. Try to remember, Claudia. Your mamma brought you here, or—

CLAUDIA. (*Quickly*) Yes. (*Pointing to room at rear*) She was ill—in there . . . and Daddy made her go away to a place where she could rest . . . and her cough wouldn't hurt her any more.

ALICE. (*Speaking with suppressed excitement*) Yes, yes, and then—?

CLAUDIA. (*Sitting slowly on bench*) And then God got sorry for her, and—and took her home with him. Daddy told me so, and he was sorry, too.

(*ALICE rises and stands in silence, looking down at CLAUDIA, then she slowly crosses to window and stands idly gazing out. CLAUDIA watches her in puzzled wonder. She starts several times to speak, and is silent.*)

ALICE. (*Comes down R. of table. Turns suddenly*) And do you know who I am? (*As CLAUDIA shakes her head, ALICE sits on bench with CLAUDIA*) I want you to tell me . . . a lot of things. I am Alice—the Princess Alice who—

CLAUDIA. (*On bench with ALICE—gazing at her in joy*) You? Oh! (*CLAUDIA, outstretched arms to kiss ALICE*)

ALICE. There, there——

CLAUDIA. Don't you kiss people when you're glad to see them?

ALICE. Of course—but——

CLAUDIA. (*Shaking her head*) Oh, no. You are not the Princess Alice——

ALICE. But I *am*. Why do you think I'm not?

CLAUDIA. (*Backing away distrustfully*) Our Princess Alice loves me, and—(*Her voice breaking*) and you don't.

ALICE. (*Nervously*) There, child, you don't understand—you——

(PEYTON is heard to call outside.)

PEYTON. Runion! Runion!

(*As he enters from R. ALICE has turned to the window L., quickly, on hearing PEYTON'S voice, and PEYTON does not see her on entering.*)

CLAUDIA. (*Crosses quickly to door R.*) Daddy Princess Alice has come!

PEYTON. (*Starting, turning and seeing ALICE*) Alice! (*She comes c. He runs forward, placing his arms about her and kissing her*) You dear!

(*RUNION looks on in open-mouthed astonishment, CLAUDIA, down R., coldly.*)

ALICE. (*Releasing herself in confusion. Comes down L. of table c.*) Why, Will! You—you are such a boy! Really——!

PEYTON. (*Coming down R. of table. Stepping backward, a note of disappointment in his tone*) But, aren't—aren't you glad to see me?

ALICE. Yes, yes—of course—but—(*Waving her hand in the direction of RUNION*)—we are not alone, Will.

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) Oh, I see! But five years is a long time to wait, dear. (*Turning*) You may go, Runion. Let me know when dinner is served. (*To ALICE*) We have waited dinner for you, and Claudia is going to sit up in honor of the occasion!

(*Exit RUNION.*)

ALICE. (*c., in front of the table*) Dinner? Well, Will, I—I fear it will be quite impossible. You see I am staying with Helen—Cousin Helen, you know—and of course I could hardly remain away the first evening. (*Pause*) I am to dine there to-morrow, and— Don't be unreasonable. I will come the day after, perhaps, or—or the next day.

PEYTON. (*Dejectedly*) Yes—I see.

ALICE. (*With an effort at brightness*) But, you haven't asked me why I came. (*Sits in chair L. of table. Speaking rapidly*) Cousin Helen offered me the trip—to spend the holidays with her. She sent me the money. Wasn't it good of her? I barely had time to tumble a few things into my trunk and catch the steamer. I didn't even have time to write to you.

PEYTON. (*Slowly, dejectedly*) No—it seems not. (*Pause*) You came alone?

ALICE. (*Still seated. Slightly confused*) Well, no—that is—not exactly. There were quite a number of pleasant people on board, and—(*Pausing, then speaking with a shade of defiance*) Besides, there was Mr. Helmer.

PEYTON. (*Looking up quickly*) Helmer! Who is he?

ALICE. A very dear friend of mine—and moth-

er's. He—he lives in New York. I have known him ever so long, and we happened to cross on the same steamer.

PEYTON. (*Nodding*) I see. (*Reflectively*) Helmer! . . . I don't remember your having mentioned him in your letters. (*After marked silence*) Money?

ALICE. (*Rises. Resentfully*) That's most unkind of you, Will.

PEYTON. (R. C.) I didn't mean it so. . . . Well?

ALICE. (*Strolling down L.*) Well, at any rate, suppose we change the subject. I wired you last evening from Liverpool. (*Turns*) But we changed our plans and came on an earlier train—the express. You received my message, of course.

PEYTON. (*Slowly*) Yes, I received it . . . half an hour ago. (*He takes the crumpled paper from his pocket*) It must have been . . . delayed.

ALICE. (*Biting her lips*) Why, how odd! Oh, well, it doesn't matter now. (*Moves to c.*) I will be in London for perhaps two weeks. You—you have Cousin Helen's address? You were always a favorite with her, I believe.

PEYTON. (*Crosses to c.*) Alice! . . . While my servant was present, there was some excuse; but now—when we're alone—

ALICE. You forget Claudia.

PEYTON. (*Starting*) Oh! Oh, yes—of course! (*He steps to CLAUDIA, who has been watching silently, smiles faintly and puts his hand tenderly on her head*) Run along now, Piggy, like a good little girl, Daddy will call you presently. (*CLAUDIA, without a word, walks slowly up centre and exits.*)

PEYTON comes to R. of table. Coming toward ALICE with his hands outstretched) Come now, sweetheart. . . . (*ALICE sits L. of table R., as if to prevent any embrace*) what is it? Tell me. . . . Be open . . . and square . . . as you were in the old days. (*She allows her hand to remain in his, but*

turns her head away. PEYTON leans against the table) Don't you know I have loved you—longed for you—every day—every hour . . . since I saw you standing on the pier . . . and lost you in the mist? . . . (*Still she is silent*) If only you knew how we have talked and dreamed of you—Claudia and I—how we built our castles around the Princess—our Princess Alice . . . who was waiting till we came.

ALICE. (*Releasing her hand*) Yes—but Claudia!

PEYTON. (*In wonder*) Claudia? What of her?

ALICE. The words you spoke to her here—just now?

PEYTON. (*More mystified*) What were they?

ALICE. (*Slowly*) Daddy . . . will call you . . . presently. What did they mean?

PEYTON. (*With a puzzled frown*) Mean? . . . Why—that I would call her presently—after—

ALICE. (*Rising and facing him. Sharply*) Yes, yes—but—but—Daddy!

PEYTON. (*Looking in her face, then speaking reproachfully*) Alice! (*Steps back in astonishment. He turns, bows his head and slowly crosses the room. ALICE watches him, with her lips compressed*)

ALICE. (*Quickly*) Some ugly stories have reached me, Will; stories of you . . . and Claudia's mother. I tried to close my ears to them at first. She was a model, I believe. (*He nods*) You helped her . . . with food—money—

PEYTON. (*Quietly*) Yes, Alice, I helped her . . . I did more . . . I buried her. (*Pause in which both are silent*) I wrote you about it at the time—the woman's pitiful marriage and her death. I told you how Claudia came, and how, when first her baby lips had lisped your name, I loved her . . . for your sake, Alice . . . and for

her's. (*Coming to ALICE's side*) Do you doubt me?

ALICE. (*Looking into his face and speaking coldly*) Yes, Will . . . I doubt you. (*PEYTON starts, opens his lips to speak, then turns silently away—up R.*) You have said she was not your own—

PEYTON. (*Turns from up R.*) What more do you ask.

ALICE. Proof! (*Takes a step to R.*)

PEYTON. I will give you any proof you wish.

ALICE. Then send the child away.

PEYTON. (*Sharply, then pitifully*) Send Claudia away? My little Claudia—why—surely you don't mean that?

ALICE. I meant it, Will—the proof of your honor—the proof of your love for me.

PEYTON. (*Lifting his head*) No! Never!

ALICE. Not even for me?

PEYTON. Not even . . . for you!

ALICE. You had best think it over, Will.

PEYTON. (*Calmly*) It needs no thought. If a gift from God is mine . . . then she is mine . . . it needs no thought.

(*ALICE crosses to door, pauses, takes up her purse and gloves from the table, and crosses to R.*)

PEYTON. (*Intercepting her and speaking in a hoarse whisper*) You will leave me, then—like this!

ALICE. Yes, I'm going.

(*She pauses as if relenting, when once more PEYTON steps forward, but she changes her mind swiftly. She passes out, leaving PEYTON staring dumbly after her. After a moment CLAUDIA enters and crosses to PEYTON's side.*)

CLAUDIA. Has she gone, Daddy?

PEYTON. (*Feeling for her hand and gazing vacantly at the open door*) Yes, dear . . . she's gone. . . .

CLAUDIA. But, she'll come back . . . won't she, Daddy?

PEYTON. I hope so, darling . . . I hope so.

CLAUDIA. (*Looking up at him*) I'm not sorry, Daddy,—it's nicer to have you—just by yourself.

CURTAIN ON SCENE FIRST.

SCENE II:—*Christmas Eve night, four days after Scene First. The room is as before, with the exception of lights which are burning, and a row of stockings hung at the fire-place. CLAUDIA is seated in the middle of the table, tying up a large package, other packages and loose papers being scattered about her. RUNION stands at her side holding a large pair of scissors and a ball of string.*

CLAUDIA. (*Working in silence at the bundle, pulling and turning it several ways, then pausing and looking at it disgustedly*) Won't you help me with this string, Runion? Every time I think I've got it tied, it—it just slips!

RUNION. To be sure, miss. You got to tie a 'orse knot, like they does in the army.

CLAUDIA. A horse knot? How do you do that?

RUNION. (*Taking bundle and string, demonstrating*) This a-way. Now, 'ere's your lead-strap—so. Then you 'oobles your 'orse, 'iches 'is 'eels to 'is 'ead, an' presto, the more 'e kicks the tighter 'e ties hisself. (*Knotting string*) There you are. Couldn't get away if 'e tried. (*Regarding bundle solemnly*) Er--wot you got in it, Miss Claudia?

CLAUDIA. It's the secret for Daddy; but you won't tell him, *will* you?

RUNION. Me? W'y, Lor' love ye, miss, I wouldn't let on, no not if 'e pulls me teeth out, an'—an' throws 'em away.

CLAUDIA. And do you think he'll like it?

RUNION. *Like it!* Jus' listen at that now! W'y—*(He pauses, listening, with his scissors elevated in the air)*

(PEYTON enters from R. CLAUDIA throws herself across package, covering it with her arms.)

CLAUDIA. Don't look, Daddy. Don't you look.

PEYTON. *(Dejectedly, as he crosses to easy-chair, removes his coat which RUNION takes, and sinks despondently into seat)* All right—all right—I won't, dear—not a peep.

CLAUDIA. *(After despositing bundle in corner carefully and coming back to other bundles on table)* Did you see Princess Alice, Daddy?

PEYTON. *(Sadly)* No, Piggy. . . She had gone out.

CLAUDIA. Who did she go with?

PEYTON. Mr. Helmer. *(To himself, bitterly)* Mister Helmer! *(He sits in silence. CLAUDIA comes to his side, laying her cheek against his shoulder)*

CLAUDIA. I'm glad you came home. It's—it's lonesome when you don't come home.

PEYTON. *(With a caress and a forced smile)* If you're glad, then I'm glad. It's so calm and peaceful here. *(A wail of grief is heard outside)* Puckers!

(The cries grow nearer. CLAUDIA runs to door at R. and opens it, as PUCKERS bursts in. She drops her shawl, sinks on the floor R. C., buries her head in her arms and sobs bitterly.)

CLAUDIA. *(At door)* Oh, what's the matter—what is the matter?

RUNION. (*At back c.*) The high-stericks, sir, and no mistake!

PEYTON. (*Crossing and raising PUCKERS to her feet*) Come now, Puckers, what's the trouble? You are not hurt, are you?

PUCKERS. N-n-n-n-o, sir. (*Wails*)

PEYTON. Well, then, what is it? No nonsense! Come now!

PUCKERS. (*Accompanying her narrative with sobs and gasps*) I 'ad four sivpences wot Mr. Bal-lin'ton give me, 'cause 'e said as 'ow 'is 'eart 'urt 'im for a-throwin' me down stairs—(*Sobs*)

PEYTON. Well, well—go on.

PUCKERS. An' I went hout for to buy some Chris-mus fixin's, and I didn't 'ave no pockets . . . and me 'ands was cold . . . an' I put me money in me mouth—(*More wails*)

PEYTON. Yes, yes; you put your money in your mouth. Well, what then?

PUCKERS. They was nice new sixpences, Mr. Peyton, sir . . . an'—an' I seen somethink in the winder . . . an' I went to say *O—h!* an'—an'—an' I swallered 'em!

(*RUNION laughs, PEYTON smiles, CLAUDIA, sympathetic look as PUCKERS wails afresh.*)

PEYTON. What! You swallowed your six-pences? *All* of 'em?

PUCKERS. Yes, sir; hevery bloomin' one! An' they went down suddint, sir, like rats when you 'oller at 'em!

CLAUDIA. Are they way down in the inside of you now, Puckers?

RUNION. (*Steps forward, as PUCKERS nods miserably*) Awskin' yer pardon, sir, if we was to stand her on her head and jounce 'er same as a money bank, w'y—

PEYTON. Runion! Be careful!

RUNION. (*Steps back*) Yes, sir. I'll be careful, sir. (*Makes a motion as though to take hold of her. She shrinks back, crying in fear*)

PEYTON. (*Taking PUCKERS' chin in his hand and regarding her earnestly*) H'u'm! I'm afraid they've gone, Puckers. I'm afraid they've gone.

RUNION. I knowed a butler wunst—big strappin' feller 'e was, too—wot bolted a brass farthin', an'—(*Solemnly*) An' it gangreened 'im!

(PUCKERS *howls afresh.*)

PEYTON. (*As PUCKERS begins to sob*) Runion!

RUNION. Yes, sir. 'E done it w'ilst a-makin' change.

PEYTON. (*Striving to comfort her*) There—they won't hurt you, my dear—(*She looks up suddenly*) upon my word, they won't. (*Taking money from his pocket*) Here's a nice little shilling for you. Now, run along and don't worry any more. (*Goes to fire-place and gazes into fire*)

PUCKERS. (*In delight*) Ho, thank yer, sir! (*She puts the shilling unblushingly into a hole in the side of her stocking and begins to speak excitedly*) Them winders was jus' fine! I seen dolls an' cats an' animals an' everythink. I seen a little red man all made houter tin, wot, w'en yer wind 'im hip with a key, 'e dances all aroun' (*Pirouettes about*) on 'is 'ead an' 'is 'ands, a-wavin' of 'is 'eels on 'igh.

CLAUDIA. (*Breathlessly*) Oh, did you?

PEYTON. (*Interrupting PUCKERS and CLAUDIA*) Here, here, here. Now, vamoose! both of you. (*Seating himself at fire-place L.*) Seems to me I heard sleigh-bells a while ago. Think what an awful thing it would be if Old Santa came around and found you sitting up.

CLAUDIA. (*Crossing to his chair*) Did—did you see the reindeers?

PEYTON. (*Down L.*) No, but I think I heard 'em snort. Better scuttle along for he may be here any minute.

PUCKERS. (*Moves to c. in front of table*) Ho, Lud! 'E might be a-skimmin' down that chimney right now.

CLAUDIA. (*R. of PEYTON, who is seated. Glancing at the fire-place and back to PEYTON*) And will you come to tell me good-night . . . and hear my prayers?

PEYTON. Yes, in ten minutes. (*He kisses her*) Hurry now! Puckers, be off with you! (*PUCKERS lingers, locking her fingers across her head and swinging one foot bashfully*) Well?

PUCKERS. I—I wish't I 'ad somebody kiss *me* good-night. I don't believe nobody done it yet, sir.

PEYTON. (*With a smile*) Is that really true?

PUCKERS. Yes, sir. Ain't 'ad a smack—no, not sence I was a crawler, sir!

PEYTON. (*With back to fire. After sitting a moment in thought, regarding PUCKERS*) Claudia! . . . Go get me a towel with a wet end.

(*CLAUDIA gets towel as requested, from RUNION. RUNION at back R., looks on in silent, open-mouthed wonder.*)

PUCKERS. Wot—wot you goin' to do, sir?

(*PEYTON makes no answer, but takes towel from CLAUDIA, crosses to c., then he seizes PUCKERS and begins polishing her cheek with the wet end of the towel.*)

RUNION. (*After PEYTON kisses PUCKERS' cheek*) Well!

PEYTON. (*After stooping and kissing PUCKERS' cheek*) There! Is that all right?

PUCKERS. Yes, sir. Er—er—thank you, sir.

PEYTON. (*Moves beyond c. to r. With a smile and a bow*) Don't mention it.

PUCKERS. (*Quickly*) Ho, no, sir. I won't mention it to anybody, sir! (*She crosses to the door, makes sure that her shilling is safe, then turns as she is about to depart*) Good-night, Miss Claudy. 'Appy Chris'mus. Good-night, Mr. Runion. Good-night, Mr. Peyton, thank yer, sir. You better tell Mr. Santa Claus to put a apple in me stockin' first, or the nuts an' razins an' things will come a-tumblin' hout of the 'ole in the toe. (*She shuts the door, then opens it again. Turns at doorway. She slams the door r. and disappears. She is heard descending the stairs*)

PEYTON. (*R. C., RUNION retreats to rear at L.*) Now, Piggy,—bed!

CLAUDIA. (*Crossing to c.*) You won't look at any of the things till mornin', will you?

PEYTON. I? Wouldn't think of it. Hurry up, little one.

CLAUDIA. (*Closing the door at rear, then opening it again—runs to RUNION, who is up L.*) Don't you tell, Runion! Don't you tell!

RUNION. (*Calling back*) No, miss. I won't say nothing! (*When the door is closed, RUNION fastens it; he turns to PEYTON*) Lor' bless her 'eart, sir; I 'opes she'll allers be 'appy same as she is to-night, sir. I'd give a 'eap to make it that a-ways.

PEYTON. Thank you, Runion. I hope so. (*Sighing and pressing his hands over his eyes—comes to c.*) Well . . . let's get it over as soon as possible. I'm tired . . . and want to go to bed. (*They go up stage r., and concealed by a curtain or draping bring down small Christmas tree on a wooden stand. This they place in the centre of the room, then PEYTON sinks dejectedly into his chair r. of table*) Runion . . . we'll leave that thing till last.

Just bring me those stockings, will you . . . and put the candy and nuts over here.

RUNION. (L.) Very good, sir. (*He gets stockings from mantel and places boxes and bundles on the table, beginning to open them*)

PEYTON. (*Sorting out stockings*) Claudia's—Puckers (*Bus. with PUCKERS' stocking*) poor little motherless rat—and—(*Holding up a large white sock*) What's this one, Runion?

RUNION. (L. of table. *With a foolish grin*) Awskin' your pardon, sir,—ha, ha—it's mine. Miss Claudia hexpressed 'erself as bein' wishful, sir, that I, too, should join in the festivities.

PEYTON. (*Nodding and smiling sadly*) Oh, yes, yes—of course. We'll fill 'em all up, Runion—and make her day as happy a swe can. (*PEYTON begins filling stocking, pauses in reverie and lets his hand fall to his side*)

RUNION. Beg pardon, sir, but you're not feelin' well to-night.

PEYTON. No, Runion . . . I'm tired—out of sorts—and I wish it was all over. Christmas isn't what it used to be when you and I were boys. There's something gone out of it—*broken* out of it.

RUNION. (*Chewing on a gum drop*) Maybe, sir, it's jus' because you've growed up, sir. It'll happen to all of us,—in time—every mother's son of us. (*Puts candy into mouth abstractedly*)

PEYTON. (*Nodding miserably*) Maybe so, Runion . . . I don't know. (*KNOCK off R.—door knocker*) here we go! Something more for Claudia, I dare say. Lucky little beggar! (*As RUNION crosses to door R. he speaks with a smile*) Hope it isn't that pony, Runion. You'll have to take him to sleep with you!

RUNION. (*Over near door. Aghast*) A pony, to bed with me, sir?

PEYTON. Don't worry, he won't come till mornin'. You needn't be alarmed.

RUNION. O—h! (*Exits at R.*)

PEYTON. (*Leaning his chin on his hand*) Oh, Alice, Alice, how different you could have made our Christmas!—and that man Helmer! (*He pauses*) Perhaps when he has gone—(*The half-filled stocking drops to the floor*) Perhaps——!

RUNION. (*Stands R. C. Entering with two bundles in his arms*) For Miss Claudia, sir—and you.

PEYTON. (*Rises quickly. Puzzled*) For me? Why, who in the world!—Here, let's see it. (*He rises and takes the two packages, comes to back of the table c., glancing at the address then starts*) Alice! (*With a look of happiness*) Why, the dear girl! . . . How good of her to think of—of Claudia!

RUNION. Shall I put them with the other things, sir?

PEYTON. (*Handing one package*) Yes, just as well.

RUNION. (*Holding out his hand*) And that one, sir?

PEYTON. (*Hesitating*) Well—er—well, no, Runion. (*With a light laugh*) Think I'll just—er—just keep it over here . . . (*RUNION crosses to back at L.*) where I can see it, you know. (*Patting the box and shaking it*) Sounds heavy, Runion! Heavy! Ha, ha—something fine! (*Placing it on the table*) There! (*RUNION crosses and deposits CLAUDIA'S bundle near mantel L.*) Dear old Alice! She hasn't forgotten us after all. . . (*Happily*) I think it will be all right now . . . all right. (*Turning jubilantly*) Now, Runion, my boy, get a move on! Help me shovel in these jim-cracks and things! (*Stuffing hands full of candy into a stocking*) Jolly old time, Christmas,—isn't it?

RUNION. (*Staring at him*) W'y, sir, arskin' your pardon, sir, I thought you said as 'ow you was feelin' a bit broke-uppish, sir, an'——

PEYTON. Did I? (*Laughing*) Well, I reckon it's a sort of passing off. Christmas in my bones, Runion—Christmas in my bones! (*LAUGHTER and NOISE outside R. by BALLINGTON, RODNEY, YADDER and FRITZ*) You see—Hullo! (*The door opens in a crack and BALLINGTON's head appears*)

BALLINGTON. (*Sticks head in door, others in a group behind*) Hi, Billy! Coast clear?

PEYTON. (c.) Come in! Come in! (*More NOISE, LAUGHTER, etc., outside*)

BALLINGTON. S-h-h-h! (*To others*) Claudia gone to bed yet?

PEYTON. Yes. What's the row? Come in.

(*Enter JACK RODNEY, BALLINGTON, YADDER and FRITZ. They are arrayed fantastically in studio toggery. BALLINGTON has on a dressing-gown with the cords and tassels tied under his chin like a cravat, a feather duster stuffed in the back of his collar. YADDER has on a flowing Japanese kimono and a Turkish fez. FRITZ is in his shirt sleeves; has on a blue checked apron, and a beaver hat on the back of his head, to which red and white streamers are tied. JACK is in simple evening dress and has his arms full of small bundles.*)

PEYTON. (*Shaking hands all around*) Hello, Jack! Ballington! Yadder! Fritz, how are you! (*Laughing. All join hands with PEYTON in c. and dance around him in a circle twice, singing "Come to see Miss Jenny a Jones"*) What's this—bit of a spree again?

(*They surround PEYTON noisily, all striving to talk at once. At end of dance, all are in same positions as at beginning except FRITZ, who goes well L.*)

YADDER. (*Pushing the others apart*) Shut up,

you chaps! Let the Arch Bishop speak! (*Points to JACK*)

ALL. Speech! Speech! etc.

BALLINGTON. Silence for the Arch Bishop! Go it, Canterbury! (*Dusts him off with duster*)

YADDER. (*Clapping his hands*) Object to the name. Call him *de-canter-bury*.

(*Laughter, pushing, and cries of "Hear, Hear!"*)

JACK. (*L. c. Arm full of bundle.*) Oh, see here, you fellows, don't be such beastly—ah—idiots! (*Turning to PEYTON*) You see, Billy—it isn't anything . . . to call for a speech, or any such—er—nonsense, you know.

ALL. Hear! Hear!

JACK. (*Clearing his throat*) Fact is, Billy, we chaps in the studio—all of us, you understand—are in love with . . . little Claudia. Heels over head—and all that sort of thing. (*Cries iof Hearr! Hear!*) Jolly little beggar! Wanted to—er—to make her Christmas happy, we chaps; and so, Billy, we thought we'd—er—bring her a few trifles, you know . . . and—and—and—oh, damn it all!—here you are! (*He dumps bundles on the table—BALLINGTON, YADDER and FRITZ each seize a light chair astride and ride around once in a circle as JACK and PEYTON stand R. and L. of table c., laughing, while his speech is received with whoops of delight from the others*)

PEYTON. (*After the business. Faltering*) Now, look here, boys, that's clever of you—I swear it is. When you are good to Claudia, you—you hit me *here*—in the heart. I—I really don't know how to thank you enough, boys, but—but—(*Calling*) Runion! For heaven's sake give us a drink!

(*RUNION has tray and glasses ready up L.—soda siphon, etc.*)

BALLINGTON. (*Slapping him on the back*) That's the way to put out gratitude, my son. It gives us a chance to toss it off and be done with it. (*In an undertone*) But, say, Billy, don't let us have but one. Little jamboree up stairs in my den—bowl of hot punch—want you to come up.

PEYTON. (*Beaming*) Bully! All right.

FRITZ. (*Advancing to c. from R.*) Ach Gott, yah, Pilly! Him ver' fine ponch. I mage him. Yes?

YADDER. (*Grinning*) You see, Peyton, we ran out of Jamaica rum; so Fritzzy is spiking the stuff with his imported accent. (*Knocking off the German's beaver hat and speaking sternly*) Come here, Gotterdamerung, take off your hat and tell the the gentlemen how to make a punch!

FRITZ. (*Beaming*) You see, von I mage dat punch, I haf de maderials reatty against my elpows; den I asg dat somevun sit on Yadder and stop him dat he talk so much. Den I migs in a pan zom r'rum und sooker und a leedle bit varmoot . . . vich I puts den on de fiar . . . und leds dem simper.

PEYTON. Preparatory to taking a smile.

FRITZ. (*Nodding*) Yah, dot iz it. Un ven dem is simpered, I mage chastizement a schpoon mit, until dem iz that so done. Eh?

PEYTON. (*Sits on arm of chair.* BALLINGTON *leans on back*) Fritz, it makes me dizzy just to hear about it.

FRITZ. (*R. of PEYTON, . vastly pleased*) So. Den I puds in de—de—how you calls him?

YADDER. (*Slaps FRITZ on the back roughly—R. of FRITZ*) Stuff.

FRITZ. Yah, dot iz it. I puds in de stuff und migses all togedder som in a pig powl.

PEYTON. In a *what?*

BALLINGTON. He means a big bowl—so let it pass.

FRITZ. (*Nodding and smiling*) Yah. Und den

I migses him mit finar so hot like hell, und—(*With a sweeping bow*) und de veast iz reatty.

YADDER. (*R. Seizing FRITZ's blue check apron and pulling it over his head*) Oh, let us draw a veil upon this foul murder of a Christian tongue.

JACK. (*L. of table. As the two scuffle together*) Oh, I say—Claudia will never get to sleep. (*BALLINGTON separates them. As RUNION places whiskey and glasses on the table*) Here we are. All up!

(*They scramble for places around the table, while BALLINGTON pours from the decanter.*)

BALLING. Only one, boys—remember that—and then we'll help old Santa Claus fix up Claudia's tree.

OTHERS. All right. All right, etc.

JACK. (*Raising his glass*) To Piggy—the witch!

ALL. Piggy! Piggy! Piggy!

YADDER. (*Beginning to sing*) For she's a jolly good Pig-gy. For she's a jolly good Pig-gy.

JACK. Oh, shut up, Yadder!—All over!

PEYTON. (*Softly*) Thank you, boys—thank you. (*Crosses to FRITZ, who is R.*)

BALLING. (*Back of table c.*) Now, get to work, you sappers, and clear things up a bit. Here, Runion, take away that horrible temptation, and—and swallow some yourself.

RUNION. Yes, sir—thank you, sir—your 'ealth, sir. (*He clears the table*)

JACK. (*Handing out stockings*) Here you are—candy—nuts—everything. Get to work. (*They all go to work with a will. PEYTON gets to L. for PUCKERS' stocking, some filling stockings, others dressing the tree with tinsel, candles, silver butterflies, golden beetles, etc.*)

YADDER. What have you got, Billy?

PEYTON. (*Holding up stocking*) This?

(*Laughing*) Belongs to Her Most Smooty Highness—Phoebe Puckers—Empress of the Coal Bin. Long may she wave! Oh, I say, boys, let's chip in, and——

JACK. Jolly! (*Taking FRITZ's hat*) Here, you chaps—a shilling all round for Puckers.

PEYTON. (*Remains over L.*) Good, Jack! Good! (*As JACK passes the hat*) And may Santa Claus blast the miser! Shell out! Shell out! (*They laughingly deposit money in the hat which JACK passes at last to PEYTON*)

PEYTON. (*Adding to it, putting it in and tying the stocking*) There! If *that* don't make your eyes bulge, then I'm a Turk! Here, Runion! Hang this up again, will you?

RUNION. (*Taking stocking*) Yes, sir. (*He crosses to fire-place, while PEYTON opens a box down L., takes out a large wax doll and holds it up admiringly. RUNION putting hand in pocket and atking out coin*) Beg pardon, sir, but may I also?

PEYTON. (*Slapping him on back*) Good old Runion! (*The others cheer*) Aha! How's that, Vritzy? Now, isn't she a royal flush?

(FRITZ and JACK around the table.)

FRITZ. Och! Gott! Wunderschon!

JACK. (*Crossing*) What is it . . . Billy?

PEYTON. (*Advancing towards them*) Doll for Claudia—"that when you squeeze her in the stomach she says, "w-a-n-n-nh!" (*Squeezes the doll and the others laugh. As others laugh PEYTON replaces the doll in its box down L. BALLINGTON is standing on a chair back of the table c.*)

YADDER. (*R. of table. Taking from the table the box which ALICE has sent*) Hello! What's this?

PEYTON. (*Crossing to L. of table swiftly, his hand shooting out toward the box*) *That's mine!*

YADDER. (*Drawing away*) Girl, eh? Oh, you sly old rascal!

FRITZ. (*Boisterously*) Oben him! Yah! Yah! Oben him! Ve see vat de Fraulein send! Yah! Yah! (*YADDER is about to break the string, when PEYTON speaks again, quietly, but with a dangerous glitter in his eye*)

PEYTON. Yadder! Don't do that!

BALLINGTON. (*Laughing and jumping from the chair*) Open it, Yad. I'll hold Billy. (*Puts his arm about PEYTON*)

PEYTON. (*Wrenching himself free and turning on YADDER and BALLINGTON*) Look here, boys, my temper isn't easily ruffled, but I tell you once for all—*don't*. (*He looks YADDER in the eye. YADDER hesitates, then replaces the box on the table, holding out his hand*)

PEYTON. (*Smiling and pressing his hand*) I'll show it to you to-morrow, boys—to-morrw.

BALLINGTON. I say, the punch! It's getting cold!

YADDER. (*Flinging up his hands in mock despair*) Horrible! The punch is getting cold! To the rescue! (*Runs to door R., then turns*)

JACK. (*Crosses to R. As he crosses*) Coming, Billy?

PEYTON. (*Front of table*) Yes, I'll be there prensently—ten minutes. But don't wait.

(*The visitors cross toward the door at R.*)

FRITZ. (*Going to door*) Him ver' good punch! Bedder com quvick, Pilly poy, Pilly poy!

PEYTON. (*Calling*) I will, Vritzy, I will! (*They troop out noisily, singing, "Tommy Atkins" and are heard clattering up the stairs. PEYTON crosses to door, closes it, then turns to RUNION*) Jolly old crowd! But, Lord! What heads they'll have in the morning.

RUNION. (*At fire-place hanging stockings, etc.*) Like plum puddings, sir, with the suet sore.

PEYTON. (*Crosses back to table to ALICE'S present. Laughing*) Exactly! Now, Runion, suppose you trot along to bed. I'll finish up the rest of these things myself.

RUNION. (*Hanging up the last stocking*) Very good, sir. Thank you, sir. Good-night.

PEYTON. Petter unfasten the small hall door. (*RUNION unfastens door c. Following him up R.*) Merry Christmas to you, Runion, Merry Christmas. (*Laughing*) Perhaps we'll put something into that old white sock of yours that will surprise you, after all. (*Laughing*) Good-night, Runion! Good-night!

RUNION. (*Bowing in the doorway*) Thank you, sir. Good-night. (*Exit*)

(*PEYTON listens intently for a moment, then crosses swiftly to the table, covering ALICE'S present with both his hands.*)

PEYTON. (*R. of table*) Alice! . . . (*He holds the box to his breast, gently replaces it on the table, pats it with his hands, then begin slowly pacing up and down*) Wonder what's in it, anyway— (*Sits on arm of chair*) Square . . . and heavy! . . . H'u'm! . . . I know. Silver hair brush! (*Picks up package and shakes it*) No! Too heavy for that! (*Sets it down*) Now, what the dickens!—(*Pauses, his fingers toying with the string*) Promised Claudia—wouldn't look till morning—not till morning. (*Sets it back. He edges away to L., walking around table, looking at package*) But, she'd open hers!—and—er—shaving mug! That's it! Always did want a shaving mug! (*Rubs chin*) Ha, ha! Wish I hadn't promised Claudia. . . (*Starting suddenly*) Why, it may need an answer. (*He snatches up the box*) Good

old Alice! (*Setting it down with a determined bang*) But — I — won't — open — that — box — to-night! H'u'm! (*Returns to fire-place. Takes out his pocket knife and springs the blade*) Wouldn't think of opening it . . . to-night! Said I wouldn't—(*Looks behind him guiltily*)—and I won't. (*He cuts the string, then stops suddenly*) But just one peep—just one—and besides, there might be a note in it. (*Pulling off the string and the wrapper*) That's so . . . I'm perfectly right in opening it—perfectly! (*As he moves the wrapper a note slips out, falling to the floor*) Aha! Just knew there was a note in that box! (*Nodding his head emphatically*) Now, suppose I hadn't opened it! (*He seats himself in an easy-chair r. of table, facing the audience, holding the box in his arm, while he breaks the seal of the note, when CLAUDIA is heard calling*)

CLAUDIA. Daddy! Daddy!

PEYTON. (*Calling*) In a minute, darling! Just a minute! (*Opening the note, glancing at the first line and smiling*) My dear Will! (*Presses the note to his lips*) Well—let's see. (*Reading*) I send two packages; one a little cloak for Claudia—(*Looking up happily*) Ah! Bless her heart; Now, isn't that just like her! (*Reading*)—a cloak for Claudia; yet the other is not a gift. I return your own—which, at best, must be the saddest of sweet memories—your letters and your ring. Alice Helmer. (*Starting, then breaking into a nervous laugh*) Why—why, it's some trick—some—(*Returning to letter. His hand sinks to his side. As he rises from his seat, the box in his arm tilts, and his letters scatter upon the floor. For an instant he gazes at them numbly, then with a smothered cry, he sinks into his seat. In this scene there must be no outburst, the actor showing mutely the crushing blow which has been dealt him. Still holding the empty box, he sits gazing out before him, his eyes*

fixed on nothingness, his lips moving silently.
 CLAUDIA'S face appears in doorway at rear)

CLAUDIA. (*Calling*) Daddy! (*No answer.*
She enters in her night dress and starts to advance,
when she spies the Christmas tree) Oh! Why,
 Daddy! Has he come already? (*No answer*)
 Daddy! (PEYTON, *unconscious of her presence,*
gazes before him. CLAUDIA *crosses to his side*)
 You didn't come to tell me good-night . . . and
 hear my prayers. Did—did you forget?

PEYTON. (*Numbly*) Forget? No, dar-
 ling I'll never . . . forget!

CLAUDIA. (*In wonder and fear*) You are cry-
 ing, Daddy what's the matter?

PEYTON. Nothing, darling—only—I had such a
 pain—*here* where my heart used to
 be! (*Bows his head.* CLAUDIA *puts arms around*
him)

(*A peal of soft toned CHRISTMAS CHIMES is*
heard in the distance.)

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE:—*Sitting room in Mr. PEYTON'S apartments,*
ten years after close of Act Second. *The room*
is furnished simply but artistically; rugs, drap-
eries, pictures, bronzes etc. *At left is an open*
fire-place, before which is a large easy-chair.
At R. is an upright piano. At centre is a
settee piled with cushions. At left is a small
table upon which is a cigar holder, also al-
cohol lamp; at rear right another small table.
Over the piano hangs a large picture of
 CLAUDIA *in an oval frame.*

Entrance at right rear, and wide doorway at rear centre showing four steps and a platform to stairs, also passageway leading off to right. At left rear is a window hung with lace curtains.

DISCOVERED:—RUNION seated in an easy chair before the fire. He is nodding, with his hands folded across his stomach, and has a sealed letter in one hand.

PEYTON enters from rear, comes to RUNION, looks down upon him with a smile, glances at address on letter and takes it from RUNION'S hand. He reads letter, folds it, then turns to RUNION.

PEYTON should show a slight increase of age in make up.

PEYTON. Ahem! (*As RUNION starts up in confusion*) Good evening, Runion. I trust you find the chair and fire conducive to comfort—peace?

RUNION. Er—yes sir—that is—I mean I was a-waitin' for you, sir. A letter come by 'and, sir—and—(*He looks about and begins fumbling in his pockets*)

PEYTON. (*Tapping letter with his fingers, and smiling*) Perhaps this is it. You delivered it while asleep.

RUNION. (*In astonishment*) Delivered it w'ilst—O—h! (*Backing away*) I—I remember, sir. Dooty . . . 'as become a second nature, sir.

PEYTON. Yes, I see. Tell Claudia I am here, will you? I came home earlier than I expected.

RUNION. Very good, sir. (*He feels in his inner coat pocket, glares at PEYTON over his shoulder and exits at rear*)

(PEYTON stands for a moment, turns and looks at CLAUDIA'S picture, with his hands behind his

back. He turns with a sigh, crosses slowly and seats himself in easy-chair before the fire, re-reads his letter and falls into reverie. CLAUDIA appears on stairway at rear.)

CLAUDIA. Daddy! (*As PEYTON starts slightly, putting the letter in his pocket, she trips across to him, seats herself on the arm of his chair and puts her arms about his neck*) Wasn't the club attractive this evening?

PEYTON. (*With a smile*) Not half so much as home, little woman—not half.

CLAUDIA. I'm glad of that. But, tell me—what is it?

PEYTON. What's what?

CLAUDIA. It is I who ask the question. You sat dreaming . . . and your thoughts were not happy, Dad.

PEYTON. Nonsense, Piggy—nonsense!

CLAUDIA. (*After slight pause*) Then, too, you had a letter, and when I came in, you put it in your pocket. Was it something you didn't wish me to see? (*As PEYTON smiles and shakes his head*) Oho! I know! A lady!

PEYTON. (*Rising*) Yes, dear—a lady.

CLAUDIA. (*With indrawn breath*) Princess Alice?

PEYTON. No. I have not heard from Princess Alice for many years and, perhaps will never hear again. (*As CLAUDIA'S look of happiness returns*) But, about the other lady I wish to speak with you—seriously.

CLAUDIA. (*Joyously*) Serious? You serious? Dad, I don't believe it.

PEYTON. (*Slowly, and with a frown*) Claudia . . . I'm going to engage . . . a housekeeper.

CLAUDIA. (*In open astonishment*) A what?

PEYTON. A housekeeper. A Mrs. Partridge—

middle aged and most respectable—to—er—look after things, you know.

CLAUDIA. But, Daddy . . . what for?

PEYTON. (*Hesitating*) Well, you see—it's this way—(*Taking her hand tenderly*) You have your music and your French and—um—and lots of things to occupy your time; and while—

CLAUDIA. (*Pouting*) And you are dissatisfied with *me*, Dad? Haven't I fixed you up perfectly heavenly little dinners and mended your socks and coddled you and spoiled you and—Oh, Daddy! (*Pulls her hand away and moves to centre*)

PEYTON. (*Following her*) No, no, no—you don't understand—you—

CLAUDIA. (*Flinging up her hands*) And, oh, Runion! Won't he raise a rumpus when he finds— (*Imitating RUNION's dismal tone*) You've gone an' 'ired a 'ousekeeper hover 'is 'ead? (*Drops on piano stool and plays a strain of "There is a Happy Land Far, Far Away"*)

PEYTON. Now, never you mind about Runion. I'll manage *him*. (*Sitting on settee at centre*) I'm only thinking of you.

CLAUDIA. (*Turning on stool and facing him*) Well, that part is easy enough. I won't have her!

PEYTON. Claudia!

CLAUDIA. No, it's no use urging, Dad, I just won't. She'd have a huge feather duster and a long red nose and—Daddy, look me in the eye! Hasn't she a long red nose?

PEYTON. But, Piggy, my dear. I haven't even seen her yet. If you'd only listen—

CLAUDIA. No, wait! Wait! (*She runs to table at left rear, returns with a cigar and a lighted spirit lamp, handing him the cigar*) Light that, please—quick.

PEYTON. Thank you. (*After lighting cigar meekly and turning to CLAUDIA, who has crossed to*

replace the spirit lamp) And, may I inquire into the reason of this donation?

CLAUDIA. Certainly. (*Returning to settee*) You are always in a better humor when you smoke, and I can manage you better when you are in a better humor. (*Flinging her arms about his neck, laying her cheek against his, and speaking in the old, childish, wheedling tone*) We don't want any red nosed housekeeper—do we?

PEYTON. (*Tenderly*) Oh, Piggy, Piggy, what is the use of parental armor when the child knows every crevice? (*Removing her arms from his neck and speaking earnestly*) But, come, dear, I am serious. You will listen?

CLAUDIA. Why, yes, Dad—of course. (*Sits herself beside him*)

PEYTON. Think, Claudia, you are no longer a child—but a woman. In—let me see—in about three weeks we will place just nineteen candles around your birthday cake.

CLAUDIA. (*With a mock sigh*) Yes, Daddy I'm an old maid!

PEYTON. (*Paying no heed to her tone of banter*) You are living here—with me—er—practically alone—

CLAUDIA. (*Quickly*) There's Mary.

PEYTON. —and you see—

CLAUDIA. Well, I've lived so for thirteen years. Why should I not go on?

PEYTON. Because you are a woman, Claudia. Don't you understand?

CLAUDIA. (*Looking him squarely in the eye*) No, Dad, I don't!

PEYTON. (*After pause*) And, don't you know that there are people in this world who have a way of saying unkind things—brutal things?

CLAUDIA. And what do we care what other people say? We don't say unkind or brutal things.

PEYTON. (*Gently*) No, dear, but it is because

of these other people that I wish to have some other woman in our home—near you—with you. (*He pauses, and CLAUDIA knits her brows in thought, then turns to him openly and in wonder*)

CLAUDIA. But—but, Daddy . . . WHY? (PEYTON *ponders a moment, rises and paces to R. in thought. As he reaches the piano his eye falls upon a book. He touches it lightly, then turns to CLAUDIA*)

PEYTON. My dear . . . I wish you would read this book. It isn't much of a story to be sure, but—but perhaps it will help you to understand. (*He crosses, standing in rear of the settee. CLAUDIA, who has been watching him, rises and crosses to piano. She looks at book, then turns, speaking carelessly*)

CLAUDIA. Why, I've read that book. (*Pause*) It's a horrid story. (*Looking up with a light laugh*) Why, surely, Dad, you don't mean to say—(*She pauses, abruptly noting his silent mien and averted face, then speaks again in dawning fear*) You don't mean that they would say (*Turning slowly away as she understands*) Oh Daddy! (*The strained silence is broken by the entrance of RUNION at rear. He is about to to speak, when he stops suddenly, shaking with suppressed amusement*)

PEYTON. (*Speaking with a shade of severity*) Well, Runion? What does this mean?

RUNION. (*Striving to hold himself in check*) Nothink, sir—only—(*He bursts into a laugh, which he checks by stuffing a fold of a portiere into his mouth*)

PEYTON. (*More severely*) Runion! What's the matter with you!

RUNION. Beg pardon, sir, but—but—(*Spluttering*) it's P-P-Puckers, sir! (*Again he stuffs portiere into his mouth*)

PEYTON. What! Phoebe? (*Laughing*) Oh, I see. Well, show her in, by all means.

CLAUDIA. (*Turning from where she has stood silent at R., as RUNION exits quickly*) Yes, do. (*To PEYTON*) Why, we haven't seen her for five years. Think of it!

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) And, by the way, I forgot to tell you. I met Ballington—in the Park this afternoon—wonderfully sober he was, too, told me that Puckers was in town . . . and had joined a circus.

CLAUDIA. A circus?

PEYTON. (*Nodding*) Um-hum—A real, live, glittering, three-ringed affair. We'll have to see it. (*Turning*) Ah!

(*Enter PUCKERS from rear. She is attired in the costume of a Cheapside belle, topped off with a gorgeously flowered hat, which is continually sliding over one ear. She carries a small hand bag, and wears black half-mitts, a cheap handkerchief being pinned to the back of one of them. She advances with little bobbing curtseys.*)

And it's Puckers in the flesh.

PUCKERS. W'y, Mr. Peyton, 'ow do you do? I just come as soon as I could to see you an'—(*Turning as she catches sight of CLAUDIA*) Miss Claudy! (*She runs forward as if to take CLAUDIA in her arms, and pauses abruptly in confusion*) O—h!

CLAUDIA. (*Laughing, as she takes PUCKER'S hands cordially*) Why, Puckers! Is it you! How good of you to come to see us—really. (*Leading her toward settee*) And this is our Phoebe of the studios. I just can't believe it.

PUCKERS. No more can I, miss—you a growed hup young loidy, and as Mr. Runion says, with five young men a-sparkin' of you.

(RUNION, *who is peeping through curtains, shakes his finger and disappears suddenly. He appears and disappears all through this scene.*)

PEYTON. (*Smiling*) Have a seat, Puckers—won't you?

PUCKERS. Thank you, sir. (*Seating herself on the extreme edge of settee*) But, I ain't got but a minute, sir. (*Adjusting her hat complacently*) Piffessinals is rushed—just awful.

PEYTON. (*Smiling*) And so you've joined a circus. I believe "tumbling" used to be your specialty. Still at it?

PUCKERS. No, no, sir, but I'm hunderstudy to Mam'selle Peachay—'er as rides bare-back, you know and 'ops through 'oops.

CLAUDIA. Ma'am'selle who?

PUCKERS. Peechay. That means peach in the French langwitch, Miss.

PEYTON. It's great. We'll come to see you . . . when the steam caliope drowns the roaring of the lions—when Phoebe Puckers leaps upon a snorting steed, careers around the ring—the brass band tooting, and the multitudes gone mad with thunders of applause.

PUCKERS. (*Clapping her hands rapturously*) Yes, sir.

CLAUDIA. And, do you really love the life?

PUCKERS. I loves it in the day time, but I ain't so keen about it of nights. W'y, I never knows wot minute a tagger or a 'ienna or somethink will get a-loost and come a-jumpin' in me bed.

CLAUDIA. It's terrible.

PUCKERS. Yes'm. I tried to get a iron cage wot belonged to a lion afore 'e died, but the clown 'e got it first. 'E says as 'ow sleepin' restless affects 'is jokes.

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) I dare say it might. Well, why not settle it by marrying the clown.

PUCKERS. Ho, Lud, Mr. Peyton, sir, I can't do that. (*Faltering bashfully*) I'm goin' to marry another man sir!

CLAUDIA and PEYTON. WHAT!

(PUCKERS starts, slips from the settee, and takes a seat on the rug. PEYTON on one side and CLAUDIA on the other assist her in rising. She sits again, adjusting her hat.)

PUCKERS. Thank you, sir. You—you spoke so suddint. (*Turning*) Yes, Miss Claudy, I'm going to be married. That's w'y I come, Miss, to ast you to the weddin'. (*She fishes a much soiled envelope from her bag, handing it to CLAUDIA*) It's an invite, that's wot it is. We 'ad so many buzzom friends that them 'ere cards they wouldn't go round, so I shows 'em an' passes 'em along.

CLAUDIA. (*Glancing at card, then offering her hand*) Why, Puckers. It's perfectly splendid! A hundred congratulations.

Always said you'd come out strong on matrimony. Who's the lucky chap?

PUCKERS. (*Proudly*) A hartist, sir.

PEYTON. An artist! Bully! What's his line?

PUCKERS. 'E's a arry-nort, sir.

CLAUDIA. A what?

PUCKERS. A arry-nort. A hartist wot goes hup in a bal-loon, an' comes a-floatin' down in a parrot-shoot.

PEYTON. Ah, I see. An aeronaut.

PUCKERS. Yes, sir. (*Turning*) An' say, 'e's awful 'andsome. Pink legs, all over spangles (*Declaiming*) wot, flashin', glistenses in the sun of Gawd's gloryis rays. (*Starting, as PEYTON looks up in surprise*) It—it says that on 'is bill.

PEYTON. (*Smiling*) Oh, yes, of course. (*Taking card from CLAUDIA*) And what, may I ask, is the daring gentleman's name?

PUCKERS. They calls 'im the Seeny you Mallygancy, but 'is right name is 'Arry Swivers. (*To CLAUDIA, with a look of pride*) Me an' 'im met at the cirkis, Miss, an' loved at sight.

CLAUDIA. How deliciously romantic. (*Doubtfully*) But—but don't you find his profession a trifle—er—risky?

PUCKERS. Yes'm, that I do. W'y, Miss Claudia, w'en I walks on the street I daresn't look hup in the helements for fear of seein' my own fyancy come a-plungin' down on the top of me 'ead. Talk about 'avin' lovers throwed at you. My Gawd!

PEYTON. Well, Puckers, let us hope that there will be no accidents to the Senor, and that the Senora Maliganzi will be happy always.

CLAUDIA. (*As PUCKERS backs away*) Won't you have some tea and cake before you go?

PUCKERS. No, no, thank you; I've hardly got the time. (*Taking card which PEYTON hands her*) You'll come to the wedding, won't you?

CLAUDIA. We wouldn't miss it for the world.

PEYTON. And, we'll remember the wedding presents, too.

PUCKERS. Ho, thank you, sir. Thank both of you. (*Pausing*) I'm very 'appy, sir. I think I'd rather be the Seenyoura Malygancy than—than the Venus de Medicine. (*With a series of little bobbing curtseys*) Good-bye. Good-bye. Good-bye. (*She adjusts her hat and exits at rear. PEYTON crosses to fire-place, while CLAUDIA goes to rear, looking after PUCKERS. In a moment she turns*)

CLAUDIA. Wasn't she funny, Dad?

PEYTON. Yes; but without her scuttle and her smutty face, gracious, what an evolution.

(*RUNION enters from rear, with card tray.*)

CLAUDIA. Well, Runion?

RUNION. A lady, miss. (*Extending tray toward PEYTON, who is nearest him*) She awsked for you, sir, and Miss Claudia.

PEYTON. (*Taking the mourning card from tray, glancing at the name with a slight start, then letting his hand sink slowly to his side*) You may show her in, Runion. (*Exit RUNION at rear, while PEYTON stands in thought*)

CLAUDIA. Who is it, Daddy?

(*PEYTON silently hands her the card, then walks to rear.*)

CLAUDIA. (*Starting, as she reads name*) Mourning! For whom?

RUNION. (*Announcing*) Mrs. 'Elmer!

(*Enter MRS. HELMER, attired in mourning, but with her veil drawn aside.*)

ALICE. (*With outstretched hands*) Will!

PEYTON. (*Meeting her, but without marked enthusiasm*) Why, Alice! This is indeed a surprise.

ALICE. And a pleasure, may I hope?

PEYTON. I'm glad to see you.

ALICE. How dear of you. (*Turning*) And this is Claudia! I dare say you don't remember me, for you were quite a little girl when I saw you last.

CLAUDIA. (*Shaking hands*) Oh, yes, Mrs. Helmer, I remember you very well.

ALICE. Thank you, Claudia. (*As she returns to centre. Sitting on settee*) And you don't know how glad I am to see you, Will—to see you so happy, so prosperous, in this ideal home of yours. (*With a smiling glance at CLAUDIA*) You should indeed be proud of it.

PEYTON. Proud of it? I am. (*Crossing and placing his arm about CLAUDIA, who nestles up to*

him) And this little woman has made it what it is—an oasis in the desert.

ALICE. (*Lightly*) How charmingly poetical! An oasis! Then may a wanderer hope that one of your many springs spouts tea? For, really, I am famished for a cup. In Genoa the tea is vile.

PEYTON. Why, with pleasure. (*Starts toward R., when CLAUDIA intercepts him*)

CLAUDIA. Let me get it, Daddy.

ALICE. (*Protesting*) No, no, no—don't trouble, my dear, I beg of you.

CLAUDIA. (*With formal inclination of her head*) It is none, I assure you.

(*As ALICE crosses and sinks into easy chair at L., CLAUDIA goes to R. rear. At the door she turns, looks back unhappily, and exits.*)

ALICE. And she calls you Daddy . . . still?

PEYTON. Yes. Why not?

ALICE. (*With a light laugh*) Oh, nothing! I was merely curious to know. It was always a fault of mine, this curiosity. (*With a change of tone*) I have just arrived from Genoa. Delightful climate—perfectly delightful. (*Glancing up*) Do you think it has agreed with me?

PEYTON. Yes—yes—of course—but—(*Glancing at her mourning weeds*) Pardon me—you—

ALICE. Yes, Will, he died nearly a year ago.

PEYTON. Oh! I—I hadn't heard. (*Pause*) There is little one may say—

ALICE. (*Interrupting*) There—don't waste your sympathy. I never really loved him. (*Rising as PEYTON turns away*) Come now—tell me about yourself.

PEYTON. (*Rather nervously*) Well—there is very little to tell. I've been moving along—er—in the same old way—

ALICE. (*Laughing*) How deliciously modest!

Ah, I have followed the sculptor's flight to fame. Success in your profession. The whole of London scrambling for your work. Really, Will, I'm proud to be of the same country with you. (*Pause, then glancing up*) Still a bachelor?

PEYTON. Er—thus far—guilty. But, you see, I've been so busy with my work—and—with Claudia's education—that I've had very little opportunity to mingle—so to speak—among—

ALICE. (*Merrily*) How utterly absurd! Why, you haven't changed one bit in the last ten years. (*As PEYTON endeavors to protest*) Now, don't put on a long face and tell me that a man loves but once. (*As PEYTON again tries to protest*) What! Surely you don't want me to believe that just because an impulsive young gentleman elects to misunderstand an equally impulsive girl—

PEYTON. (*In astonishment*) Misunderstand?

ALICE. Of course! . . . You treated me very badly, Will.

PEYTON. (*In blank amazement*) I?

ALICE. (*Coolly*) You did . . . But I forgave you long ago. (*Abruptly*) By the way, what a dear, sweet child Claudia is. (*As PEYTON turns involuntarily toward CLAUDIA'S picture*) Does she know why I . . . broke with you?

PEYTON. No. I have tried to spare her every sorrow possible.

ALICE. Will . . . you chose between Claudia and me—giving her a love that was rightly mine . . . You—

PEYTON. Alice!

ALICE. But, if misfortune has come to both of us, am I to blame? If you have suffered in silence for the past ten years, was it not Claudia who made it so?

PEYTON. (*With a sigh of impatience*) Say what you will of me—(*Turning again toward*

CLAUDIA'S *picture*)—but, of Claudia . . . *No!*
(*Turning*) Let's talk of something else.

ALICE. (*With a change of tone*) I'm sorry, Will . . . but some day—perhaps? (*Pause*) I'm going back to America. (*Pause*) I sail day after to-morrow. (*With a sigh she crosses to him, laying her hand on his arm*) Ah, Will, the fault was not all *mine*. They wanted me to marry money—*money!* They urged me—harried me—poisoned my mind against you. They told me that Claudia was your own . . . and when I saw how you loved the child, I, too, believed.

PEYTON. No, Alice. In your heart you *knew* I spoke the truth.

ALICE. And was there no suffering for me? Did I not learn to hate the very name of Helmer? when the memory of another came between us always? (*Tenderly*) The memory of a Prince Chap who had waited—waited—

PEYTON. (*Wheeling about*) And in vain. (*After pause, in changed tone*) You tell me you have suffered. I believe it . . . and I am sorry from the bottom of my heart; but the dead man is not alone responsible.

ALICE. (*With a sigh*) Perhaps your reproach is just. My defense would be idle. And yet . . . if you can find forgiveness in your heart—forgive.

PEYTON. (*Stretching out his hand*) Yes, Alice—Freely, and without the stain of bitterness.

ALICE. Then, good-bye, dear. . . My memories of you . . . will be the happiest of my life. Good-bye.

PEYTON. (*Taking her hand*) Good-bye, Alice. . . . I wish you luck—always. (*As they cross to rear*) You—you have a taxi—

ALICE. Well, no. I—I dismissed it. (*Smiling*) But it doesn't matter—really. The hotel is only a step. (*Glancing out of window*) Dear me, how

dark it has grown. (*Turning*) Would—would you mind—?

PEYTON. I will see you over—with pleasure. (*She smiles at him and exits, PEYTON following meekly. In a moment CLAUDIA enters from R. with tea tray, which she sets on the table. She looks up in astonishment to find herself alone, listens as she hears the front door close, then crosses to window*)

CLAUDIA. (*Advancing, then pausing in troubled thought*) How strange! I wonder . . . if she really wanted . . . that tea! (*She goes slowly toward fire-place, picks up MRS. HELMER'S card, and looks at it sadly*) She's free! . . . Free! (*Drops the card and sinks into chair*) And Daddy has gone with her . . . and never a word . . . to me. (*She turns to fire, covering her eyes with her handkerchief. Enter RUNION, with a look of gloom, carrying coal-scuttle in his arms. He glances at CLAUDIA and clears his throat, but she pays no heed. Presently he drops shovel on the floor deliberately*)

CLAUDIA. (*Starting*) Runion! Do be careful!

RUNION. Hexcuse me, miss, for a-causin' you to jump. It—it slipped.

(CLAUDIA once more begins looking into the fire. RUNION deposits the scuttle by the hearth, brushes his hands on his trousers and turns to her.)

RUNION. Beg pardon, Miss Claudia, but this 'ere Mrs. Partridge now. I understands as 'ow she's comin' 'ere . . . to be a . . . 'ousekeeper.

CLAUDIA. (*Not looking at him*) How did you know, Runion?

RUNION. (*In some confusion*) I—I over'ear'd it—er—accidental, miss.

CLAUDIA. (*Abstractedly*) Did you? Well, it's true.

RUNION. Aha! I 'ad my suspicions, but 'eld my tongue, 'ard as it was to 'old it! Fourteen years I served 'im faithful—bore with 'im—washed 'is winders . . . And now 'e goes and makes of me . . . a *underlin'*! (CLAUDIA *watches the fire, making no answer. RUNION continues solemnly*) And will I bow my neck? No, Miss Claudia! Not w'ilst ponds of water can be found in England, w'ere a man can jump and drown 'isself . . . and forget this 'arsh, 'igh 'andedness.

CLAUDIA. (*Abstractedly*) Yes, Runion.

(RUNION *is in the act of wiping his eyes with his coat sleeves, but, at CLAUDIA'S seeming indifference he stops abruptly, gazing at her in hurt astonishment.*)

RUNION. *I say that not w'ilst ponds of water can be—(Pausing)* Beg pardon, miss, but you don't seem special 'appy yourself now, at the prospeck o' this 'ere Mrs. Partridge a-bumpin' about.

CLAUDIA. No, Runion, I'm not feeling very well. (*Wiping her eyes*) I wish you would go across to the chemist's and get me some smelling salts.

RUNION. Er—*wot* kind of salt, miss.

CLAUDIA. Smelling salts. Do go—please.

RUNION. (*With mournful dignity*) Miss Claudia . . . with pleasure will I get your smellin' salt . . . and especial so, as the ack will be . . . the last sad hoffice of Marcus Runion . . . in this un'appy 'ous'old. 'Ow many pounds do you wish, miss?

CLAUDIA. Only a bottle, Runion. It comes in a small, green bottle. The chemist will know.

RUNION. (*On the verge of tears*) Very good, miss. I will 'urry—Mr. Peyton, miss, is old enough to know the workin's of the 'uman mind. If 'e *wants* partridges, 'e can 'ave partridges, but Marcus Runion 'e declines to serve 'em.

(RUNION stiffens his neck and exits majestically, while CLAUDIA turns once more to the fire. PEYTON, with his coat on, enters hurriedly from rear, wiping his brow with his handkerchief.)

PEYTON. By George! but that was close. (*Starting and laughing as he sees CLAUDIA*) Oh, hullo, Piggy. I didn't see you. (*Turns and begins taking off his coat*)

CLAUDIA. (*At fire-place*) Daddy was it her husband who died? I—I didn't hear.

PEYTON. Yes, dear. (*Laying his coat on chair*) I took Alice over to her hotel. Day after to-morrow she is going back to America and—

CLAUDIA. (*Starting happily*) Oh!

PEYTON. (*Turning*) What is it, Claudia?

CLAUDIA. (*In confusion*) Nothing—only—(*Turning to table*) Gracious, Dad, why didn't she wait for her tea?

PEYTON. U'u'm . . . I reckon Alice forgot her tea . . . and so did I. You see . . . (*Pauses as RUNION enters at rear*)

RUNION. (*Announcing*) The Earl of 'Untington. (*Exit RUNION*)

(*Enter JACK with a sheaf of roses.*)

PEYTON. Hullo, Jack! Come in! Come in!

CLAUDIA. (*Running toward him*) Why, Uncle Jack! I'm so glad to see you!

JACK. Are you, my dear? (*Handing roses*) Then I didn't stick my hands for nothing.

CLAUDIA. (*Taking flowers*) For me? How lovely! You are always thinking of me, Uncle Jack.

JACK. By Jove, Billy, I believe she's right.

PEYTON. Of course she's right. Claudia of ours isn't easy to forget. (*As CLAUDIA turns away.*)

placing flowers in vase on table at left rear) Sit down, old fellow—make yourself at home.

JACK. (*Seating himself in chair at fire-place*) Thank you. It's the laziest, most comfortable little nest in all London.

PEYTON. Mercy! Have a cigar?

JACK. Thank you, n-e-o.

PEYTON. Um—they—they are rather good. Better change your mind.

JACK. Thank you, n-e-o.

CLAUDIA. (*Coming forward with spirit lamp, taking cigar from PEYTON and crossing to JACK*) Not even if I light it, Uncle Jack?

JACK. (*Chuckling*) Well, of course, that's another frame—for the picture. (*Lighting, then patting CLAUDIA'S hand*) Thank you, Claudia. It makes possible even one of Billy's bad cigars.

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) Well, of all the impudence! Jack Rodney, you're a ruffian.

JACK. Billy . . . she's a wonder.

PEYTON. Of course, she's a wonder. Why—(*He pauses as RUNION enters and stands beside him, wearing a look of rooted gloom*)

RUNION. (*Loftily*) Beg pardon, sir—a person to see you—a Mrs. Partridge. . . She 'ad no card . . . and wouldn't state 'er business. . . She's awaitin' in the 'all.

PEYTON. Oh, yes, I know. Show her into the dining-room, and say I will see her at once. (*As RUNION still lingers disgustedly*)

RUNION. Er—anythink more, sir?

PEYTON. (*Looking up in astonishment*) No; I believe that's all. (*As RUNION turns and exits in wounded dignity*) You'll excuse me for a few moments, won't you, Jack?

JACK. (*Turning from CLAUDIA, with whom he is chatting in pantomime*) Delighted.

PEYTON. Wha—Oh! (*He laughs and goes at rear. CLAUDIA follows*)

CLAUDIA. Daddy! (*As he pauses*) Is she the—the housekeeper?

PEYTON. Yes, Piggy.

CLAUDIA. (*Looking at the floor*) Then, I hope you will engage her. I—I understand better now. (*PEYTON places his hand gently on her head, smiles and exits. CLAUDIA stands for an instant looking after him*) A Prince Chap grows into a King, doesn't he?

JACK. (*Turning his head*) A what kind of a chap?

CLAUDIA. A Prince.

JACK. Um—yes. It has happened . . . several times. Why do you arsk? (*He sits on the arm of the chair facing her*)

CLAUDIA. I didn't ask. I was only thinking. (*She turns in a moment, half kneeling on the settee*) Do you know, I'm rather glad we are alone. There is a little matter of business I wish to settle with you.

JACK. (*Astonished*) Business with me?

CLAUDIA. (*Sitting on settee, leaning forward and resting her chin on her hands*) If you had something which I wanted very, very much, would—would you sell it to me?

JACK. N-e-o. Wouldn't think of it. Would make you a present, my dear, down to my last lawn tie.

CLAUDIA. (*Laughing*) Oh, it isn't as bad as that, Uncle Jack; and, really, I don't want this something for myself after all. It's only a bad habit. One of yours. I want to buy it.

JACK. (*Staring in wonder*) A bad habit . . . O-h! (*Pause*) That is rather valuable. It—it isn't swearing a bit now and then, is it?

CLAUDIA. And is swearing a bit so essential to your happiness?

JACK. Absolutely, my dear—absolutely! Some beastly model . . . wants to stand on her silly head. Some beastly critic . . . wants to stand on mine. No, really, Claudia—I—

CLAUDIA. Well, it isn't swearing, Uncle Jack. Swearing is not a habit. It's a luxury. Wish I could do it myself sometimes. (*Smiling*) No; it's only a little sin. *You* wouldn't miss it—much. Will you sell?

JACK. To you? Ha, ha! What will you give?

CLAUDIA. (*Carelessly*) A kiss.

JACK. (*Rising and facing her*) Done! I'll take you . . . in advance.

CLAUDIA. (*Placing her heels together, her hands behind her back, leaning forward and pursing her lips*) The price is waiting, Uncle Jack. (*JACK hesitates, then kisses her warmly and turns away with a look of supreme satisfaction.* CLAUDIA *smoothes her hair and laughs*)

JACK. Do you know, my dear, I wish I were a very wicked old fellow—atrocious.

CLAUDIA. Do you? Why?

JACK. I should begin at the beginning . . . and dispose of *all* my vices . . . one at a time . . . at a profit.

CLAUDIA. Too bad! I've bought the only one. (*Coming to him and laying her hand on his shoulder*) And now your part of the contract. You mustn't ever again . . . call Daddy—er—Billy.

JACK. (*In wonder*) Not call Billy . . . Billy? Why?

CLAUDIA. (*Slipping her arm through his*) Well, you see—er—why, Uncle Jack, that's a goat's name.

JACK. A goat? O—h!

CLAUDIA. (*Stepping away*) And, besides, it—it doesn't sound respectful, somehow. (*Extending hand*) But, there—I have your promise, haven't I?

JACK. (*Taking her hand*) O'om . . . Yes. I shall call him—er—Wil-lium. (*Turning to L.*)

Droll idea! Devilish droll! (*After reflective turn*)
Er—Claudia . . . I should like to arsk a similar favor . . . of you.

CLAUDIA. Would you? What is it?

JACK. *You* have a bad habit, my dear. Should like uncommonly well for *you* to dispose of it. (*Stands as CLAUDIA did when about to be kissed*)

CLAUDIA. (*Laughing as she retreats*) It is yours. It's name.

JACK. Don't call me—er—Uncle Jack.

CLAUDIA. No? What then?

JACK. Call me (*Seating himself slowly*)
Ja-ack.

CLAUDIA. (*Laughing*) How absurd. I couldn't do that—really.

JACK. Why not?

CLAUDIA. Well, you were a great big grown man when I was a little thing, no bigger than—than a lump of chalk. You even used to ride me on your foot. (*Sitting beside him and pointing to his feet*) Don't you remember? This one was Robbin and that one was Dobbin. And such splendid horses, too!

JACK. Y-e-s; there were three of them, I believe. A couple of hacks and a Jack. Ha, ha! That's a joke.

CLAUDIA. But, it wasn't a joke to me, then, and it isn't now, for I will remember it always, even though it *was such* a long time ago.

JACK. (*Moving a little closer*) And do you think me, then, such a very old fellow—such an antiquated—er—Methuseleh?

CLAUDIA. (*Laughing*) The idea! I never thought of such a thing. Why, you are scarcely a year older than Daddy; and Daddy is—is just a boy.

JACK. Thank you, Claudia. (*For a moment he studies his boots in silence*) And what would you think . . . if one of these boys—these very

ancient boys—were to ask you . . . to be . . . his wife?

CLAUDIA. (*Merrily*) You? I think I should just laugh, (*Laughing as she rises*) for that would be the funniest joke of all. Yes, Uncle Jack, I know I should—just laugh. (*Laughs merrily as she crosses to arm chair at fire-place*)

JACK. (*Following her and speaking earnestly*) But, don't laugh, Claudia—don't—I beg you. I'm offering you my name—my life—(*As CLAUDIA starts, he sinks his voice, speaking sadly*) It isn't much of a life when all is said and done . . . but, without you, it's worthless—worthless as a dry and twisted paint tube—

CLAUDIA. (*In a troubled tone*) Oh, Uncle Jack, I—I didn't know. (*Turns to firelight*)

JACK. (*Taking her hand*) But, now that you do know, Claudia—tell me.

CLAUDIA. (*With her head turned away*) Don't ask me that—please—please—

JACK. But, some day—might it not—be so?

CLAUDIA. (*Turning and giving him her other hand*) Oh, Uncle Jack, I *do* love you—dearly—tenderly—as I have always done; but not, *not* as you would have me care. (*He drops her hand and turns sadly away. CLAUDIA follows him, placing her hand on his shoulder affectionately, her other hand on his arm*) Don't be angry with me. I wouldn't wound you for all the treasures I possess or hope to own. But, can't we go on and on as Claudia and Uncle Jack? And won't you let me love you always—better than anyone else—except—Daddy?

JACK. (*In a whispered aside*) Daddy. (*Turning quietly*) My dear . . . I shall never speak of this again. (*Offers his hand, which she takes in hers*) Forget, I beg you, the maddest of an old fogy's follies. It came from a hungry heart . . . when the head was far too dull . . . to teach it

reason. (*Turns away, then turns to her again*) But, tell me something, dear . . . I ask it for your sake, if not my own. Is it Daddy . . . or Mr. Peyton . . . whom you love?

CLAUDIA. (*Starting violently*) Mr. Pey— Why—you—

JACK. (*Gently*) Yes, dear. You are a woman now—and—

CLAUDIA. (*Retreating, but keeping her startled eyes upon him*) Uncle Jack! You—you have no right to ask me that—you—Oh! . . . Oh! (*She covers her face with her hands, bursts into tears and runs up stairs at rear, sobbing. JACK stands for a moment looking after her. Then his hands fall to his sides. He crosses to fire-place, sits in arm chair, and puffs once at his cigar*)

JACK. Vicious cigar, that—absolutely vicious! (*He tosses it into fire-place, polishes monocle with his handkerchief, and sits drumming with his fingers on the arm of his chair. PEYTON enters from rear*)

PEYTON. Hello, Jack! All alone?

JACK. N-e-o. You . . . are with me.

PEYTON. (*Laughing*) Hadn't thought of that. Where's Claudia?

JACK. Up stairs.

PEYTON. (*Coming down l. c.*) H'm! Ran away and left you, eh? What did she do that for?

JACK. (*Fiercely*) In order to reach the upper floor, I suppose!

PEYTON. (*Walking around JACK and surveying him with intense amusement*) Uum . . . Uum! What's the matter with you, anyway?

JACK. (*Rising*) Don't be silly, Bil—er—William.

PEYTON. (*His hand dropping on JACK's shoulder*) Now, look here, old chap, there's something gone amiss. You can't fool me for a minute. (*As JACK sits dejected on settee*) My! what a hang dog

air! (*Laughing*) Upon my word, Jack, you look as though you had stolen something.

JACK. Did try—er—Wil-lium. Failed.

PEYTON. (*Puzzled*) Tried? Failed . . . What are you driving at?

JACK. (*Sadly*) Tried to steal your little girl . . . Wouldn't have me.

PEYTON. (*Between surprise and gentleness*) Oh . . . Jack! (*Sits beside him, placing hand on his shoulder*) Come, old fellow; I didn't know you cared like—like this . . . and I'm sorry. I know the day must come when she will leave me . . . and there's no one else in the whole world, Jack, with whom I would rather trust her.

JACK. (*Dryly*) Thank you.

PEYTON. (*Dreamily*) And yet . . . when I know that she is to be left to me for a little while longer still—(*Rising*) forgive me for saying it—but there's something *here* . . . that is glad—*glad*.

JACK. (*More dryly*) Yes . . . I dare say.

PEYTON. (*After short pause*) But, tell me, Jack, why did Claudia refuse you?

JACK. (*Turning suddenly*) Don't you know?

PEYTON. (*Smiling*) Well, no. How should I?

JACK. (*After polishing his monocle, advances to PEYTON solemnly*) Wil-lium . . . upon several occasions . . . you have criticized me rather severely . . . for wearing a single . . . eye-glass. Damn it, old fellow, *get two!* (*Turning away, then back again*) Spectacles, Wil-lium . . . spectacles! (*He crosses to right. PEYTON looks at him in amazement. JACK suddenly snaps the cord of his monocle and hands it to PEYTON*) Take that, old man. It's better than none at all. (*PEYTON still looks perplexed, when at that moment CLAUDIA appears at rear on the stair landing*)

CLAUDIA. Uncle Ja—(*She stops as she discovers PEYTON, and is about to retreat when he crosses to her*)

PEYTON. (*Gently*) There, dear. I know all about it . . . and it's *all* right. (*Leading her forward to fire-place and turning*) Sit down, Jack.

JACK. Thank you, n-e-o.

PEYTON. Oh, do—please—there's a good fellow—come.

JACK. Thank you, n-e-o. That Musgrove chap—who thinks he paints—promised to bore me for half an hour at the Club. Never knew him to break his word. (*Turning*) Good-night, Claudia.

CLAUDIA. (*Running to him, while PEYTON goes near piano looking at monocle*) Uncle Jack . . . it won't make any difference between us, *will* it?

JACK. (*Softly*) No, dear. It won't make any . . . difference. (*He raises her fingers to his lips, then turns with a brave smile to PEYTON*) Good-night, goat.

PEYTON. (*Turning*) Eh—what!

JACK. (*In doorway*) Goat! Promised Claudia . . . wouldn't call you—er—Billy. That's a joke. Ha, ha! Good-night, goat.

PEYTON. (*Crossing to door and calling after him*) Good-night, old chap . . . Good-night. (*He stands for an instant, advances with a sigh and shakes his head*) Poor old Jack! How bravely he bears his disappointment! (*He looks at CLAUDIA, who is still standing at fire-place*) He told me of his failure—simply—honestly—(*Reflectively, as he twirls his monocle*) But, when I asked him a rather pointed question regarding it, do you know, he gave me a *very* curious answer. (*As CLAUDIA looks up quickly, fumbling with her handkerchief*) By the way, Claudia, what *was* your reason?

CLAUDIA. (*Nervously*) I—I didn't care for him in—in the way he wished.

PEYTON. (*Swinging monocle*) Yes, yes, I understand, of course. The very best reason in the world. And yet he's—a mighty good fellow to the woman who understands him—(*He breaks off*

suddenly to laugh) He is rather difficult to take seriously at times. When I asked him the reason why you—er—rejected him, he—well, what do you think he told me? (CLAUDIA *glances at him nervously, rolling her handkerchief between her palms*) Said I needed spectacles—and gave me *this*. (Twirls monocle) Now, what do you reckon he meant? (CLAUDIA *looks at him in nervous fear, and begins to retreat towards door at R. PEYTON continues, unconscious of her movements*) Spectacles! H'u'm! (He screws monocle to his eye and looks up with a boyish smile) Well! . . . *this* doesn't seem to help me much! (He turns to find CLAUDIA retreating, takes monocle from his eye, while he at once becomes serious) Claudia! (She pauses and looks at the floor in confusion) Ah, darling, is there something you are hiding from me? Something I should see—should know? (Tenderly) Don't, dear . . . Come—let us laugh away this foolish little ghost—the first to mar our perfect understanding. Come—kiss me—(As he endeavors to place his arms about her, she slips away)

CLAUDIA. No, Daddy—no—no—no!

(PEYTON'S *extended arms sink to his sides, and he looks at her in hurt wonder. After a short pause he looks from her to the monocle in his hand, then back at her averted figure. He raises his hand, while a light of happiness overspreads his features.*)

PEYTON. Oh! (He takes a step nearer, speaking in a whisper) Claudia! (As she makes no answer) Is it true, then, that my eyes are older than my heart . . . and yours?

CLAUDIA. (Retreating as he comes toward her) No, no—I don't want to come between you and your Princess Alice— She's free—free to—

PEYTON. (*Catching her hands and holding them*) And, don't you remember, dear, when you were a little girl how I took your hands and told you how I loved you better than anything else in the world, and that nothing, nothing should ever come between us?

CLAUDIA. (*Trying to release her hands*) But—but you would sacrifice yourself—for me—as you have always done—you—

PEYTON. I told you, too, it was a different kind of love; but I see it clearer now . . . through poor Jack's glass.

CLAUDIA. (*Drawing her hands away*) But, Daddy—

PEYTON. Daddy no more . . . I want you for my wife! . . . we have built a house of love. . . . It is yours . . . and mine! (*Spreading his arms*) Claudia! . . . Come home! (*She looks up at him with a happy smile. He takes a step forward and folds her in his arms*)

CURTAIN.



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