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*The Bulletin
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Agricultural Extension Division

Back to the Farm

A Play in Three Acts

By

Merline H. Shumway



*General Series No. 12, February 1914
Reprinted, October 1916, November 1919, and
July 1922*

*Entered at the post-office in Minneapolis as second-class matter
Minneapolis, Minnesota*

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Act of October 3, 1917, authorized July 12, 1918*

"BACK TO THE FARM"

and

"KINDLING THE HEARTH FIRE"

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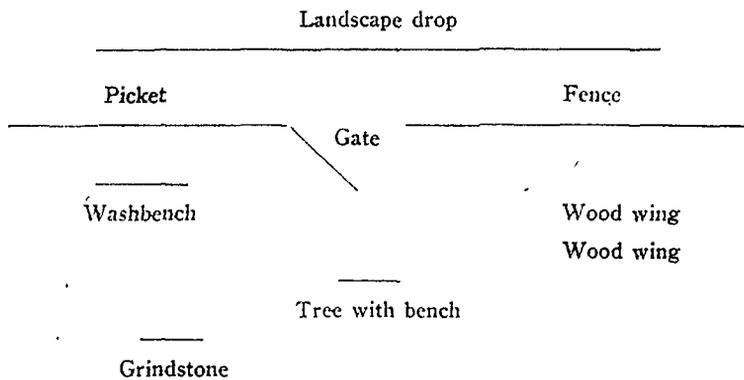
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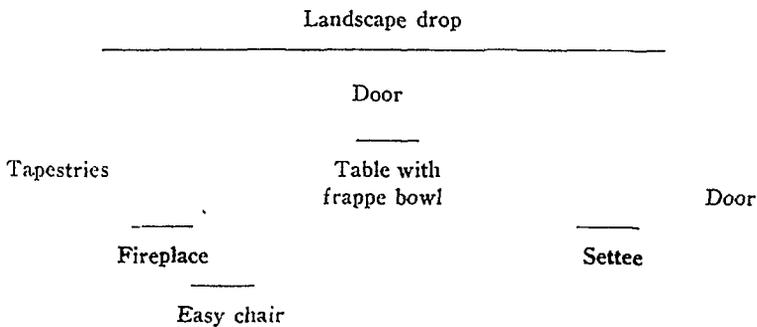
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PLAN OF STAGE

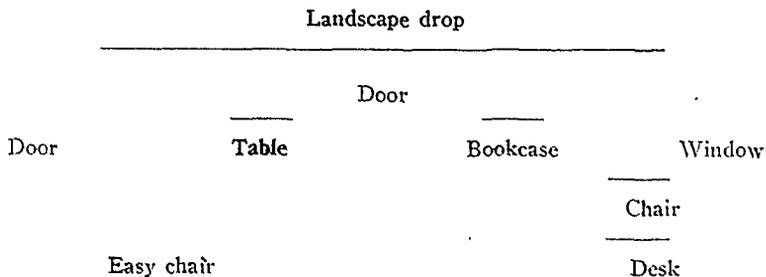
ACT I



ACT II



ACT III



CAST OF CHARACTERS

CHARLES MERILL, a farmer of the old school

MERTON MERILL, his son

MRS. MERILL, the farmer's thrifty wife

ROSE MEADE, the school ma'am

GUS ANDERSON, the hired man

REUBEN ALLEN, a neighbor

MR. ASHLEY, a lawyer and real estate agent

ROBERT POWELL, a senior in law

MARGERIE LANGDON, a promising society debutante

HULDA, the maid

ACT I

The Merrill farm. Mid-autumn, 1906. Morning.

ACT II

The University of Minnesota. Five years later. At the fraternity ball.

ACT III

Merton's study at the Merrill farm. Two years later. Morning.

CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

Mrs. Merrill is a short woman of about fifty, with silvery-gray hair. She walks with a quick, nervous gait, and her words are snapped out with a knowing air. In Act I she wears a kitchen apron over a plain, dark wrapper. In Act II she wears an old-fashioned black silk skirt; short, tightly fitted jacket with full sleeves; a small bonnet tied under the chin; and mitts. In Act III she wears a black-and-white striped house dress and a small white apron.

Mr. Merrill is a tall, rather thin man of the Yankee type, about fifty years old. His shoulders are stooped, and he walks with a shuffling gait. He speaks in a hard, dry, authoritative voice. He wears blue overalls, flannel shirt, and gray felt hat.

Mr. Allen is a typical Yankee. He talks with a Yankee drawl. He has a chin beard. He wears a straw hat, overalls, high boots, and a ragged flannel shirt.

Rose Meade is a pretty, vivacious girl of about twenty, with somewhat more style than the ordinary country girl. She has a sweet voice, an attractive manner, and much personal charm. In Act I she wears a simple pink linen dress with white lace collar and cuffs, and a large straw hat trimmed with flowers and tied under the chin with ribbons. In Act II she wears a pretty evening dress of yellow silk with a bunch of red roses at her belt and a bright ornament in her hair. In Act III she is dressed in a traveling suit, over which she wears a motor coat and pink motor veil.

Merton Merrill is a rather awkward country boy of nineteen. He is very earnest and gives the impression of having thought more than either Allen or his father. In Act I he wears the ordinary clothes of a farm hand. In Act II he wears a dark blue business suit, with gray tie. In Act III he has a gray flannel shirt and gray trousers.

Mr. Ashley is a lawyer of about thirty, very much impressed with his own dignity, eager to give advice. He is determined to make a success in life. In Act I he is dressed in a hunting suit and carries a shotgun. In Act II he wears a conventional dress suit; in Act III, a business suit, motor coat and cap.

Gus Anderson is a large-boned, awkward man of thirty. He is of decided Scandinavian type with a shock of yellow hair, and has a broad Scandinavian accent. In Act I he wears overalls and a gray shirt, the sleeves of which are rolled up showing a red undershirt. In Act III he wears a white dairyman's suit and white cap.

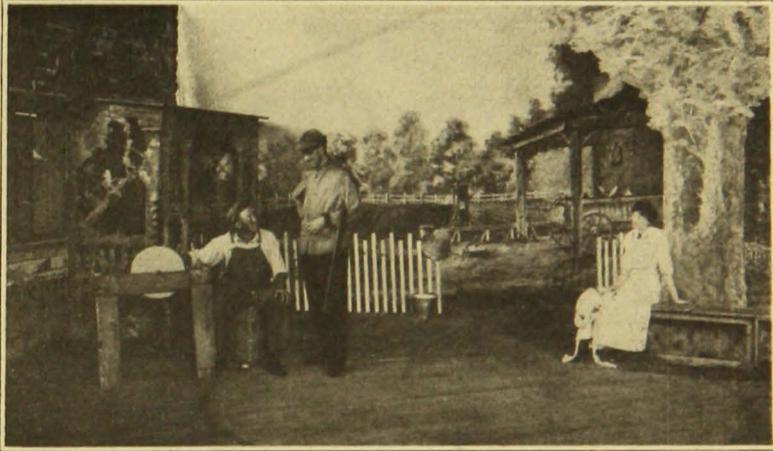
Hulda is a Swedish girl who has just come over. She is lazy and shiftless, but very good-natured. She has untidy yellow hair, blue eyes, and a large mouth which is open most of the time. She wears a red calico waist, flowered pink skirt, and a blue gingham apron tied on crooked.

Robert is a jolly college boy. His chief interest in college is its gayety. In Act II he wears a well-cut blue serge suit and a rather bright tie; in Act III, overalls and flannel shirt.

Margerie Langdon is a college belle. She is clever, vivacious, and eager for a good time. She wears an elaborate evening dress, and feathers in her hair.

BACK TO THE FARM

ACT I



Ashley: "You haven't seen a covey around here, have you, Merton?"

Scene, the Merrill farm in mid-autumn. An old-fashioned frame cottage to the right with low porch and two steps leading up to it. Trellised over the porch are climbing roses. In front stands a low bench on which is a pail partly filled with water, a wash basin, and a bar of soap. Wood wings to the left. The landscape backing is a farm scene showing fields, pastures, and grain stacks. A rustic fence is in the rear with a gate in the center. A tree down L. with a rustic bench beneath.

At rise of curtain, a faint light is streaming through the trees at the left. As the act progresses the lights grow brighter gradually until the border and footlights are on full.

Music—Home Sweet Home—low and gradually dying out. A cock crows. A cow moos. Noise within house of the shaking of a stove grate.

(Enter Mr. Merrill, L. He crosses to the door of the house and calls.)

MERRILL Gus! *(Pause. Cock again crows.)* Oh, Gus! *(Pause. Cow moos.)* Gus! *(indignantly).*

GUS *(from within house; yawns sleepily).* Ay ban standing oup.

MERRILL. Merton! (*louder*) Merton! (*still louder*) Merton!

MERTON (*from within house*). Ah ha.

MERRILL. Roll out. It's late. Ma!

MRS. MERRILL (*from within house*). Yes, I'm up. (*Cock crows*).

MERRILL. Gus!

GUS (*from within house*). Ay ban com-min.

MERRILL (*with authority*). Well, get down here! It's a quarter past five. Merton!

MERTON (*from within house; uncomfortably*). Yes.

MERRILL. This is the last time I call you. (*Cow moos*).

(*Exit Merrill, L.*)

(*Noise from house as pail falls off a table.*)

GUS (*angrily*). Dog-gone das har, anaway. (*Enter Gus from house.*) Ay ain't waked oup yet. (*Carrying two milk pails, he crosses to R. C., sets pails down, rubs eyes, yawns, and stretches.*) Ma goodness, but ay ban sleepy. (*Places hand to forehead.*) Ma, such a headache. (*Emphatically*) Ay bet you ay not go to town again. (*Cow moos. Gus looks up.*) Das is all right, boss, ay milk you right away. (*Picks up pails and crosses to L. C.*)

(*Enter Mrs. Merrill.*)

MRS. MERRILL (*from doorway*). Hurry in with that milk, Gus. I need some for breakfast.

GUS. Yaw, ay vil. (*Exit yawning and singing.*) "Keep on da sunny side, Always on da sunny side, Keep on da sunny side of life." (*Sings brokenly.*)

(*Exit Gus, L.*)

MRS. MERRILL. Merton! (*Pause.*) Merton!

MERTON (*from within house*). Yes, I'm getting up.

MRS. MERRILL (*angrily*). Now, you just hurry up out of here. Pa will be awful mad if he comes in and finds you abed.

(*Enter Allen from L. E. He looks right and left and calls out in a sing-song way.*)

ALLEN. Hello, everybody!

(*Enter Mrs. Merrill carrying a grape basket.*)

MRS. MERRILL. Why, good morning, Mr. Allen. What are you doing over here so bright and early?

ALLEN (*slowly*). Why, I promised Charles t' other day I'd come up and help him get that 'ere hay down in the slough. I reckoned I'd come up early, so's we could get a good start.

MRS. MERRILL (*throwing up hands in despair*). My goodness, has he gone to haying again?

ALLEN. Wall, that's what he says to me. (*Opens gate and comes down R. C.*)

MRS. MERILL (*with disgust*). Land sakes, that's just the way with him, he's always behind with the work. (*Comes down to R. C.*) I get so disgusted sometimes I think I can't stand it a minute longer. No matter what season of the year it is, he's behind. Haying when he should be cutting; cutting when he ought to be plowing; and here he's gone to haying again. I just wish nature would slip a cog sometimes, so as to give him a chance to catch up.

ALLEN. (*Goes over to tree, picks up stick of wood, and proceeds to whittle it.*) Well, I reckon as how he wished 'twould, cause he's got to have some hay for the cattle this winter.

MRS. MERILL (*looking up with surprise*). Well, if them chickens haven't gone and got into the garden again. They seem to stay up all night, so as to get into the garden early in the morning. (*Picks up apron.*) Shoo chick! Shoo! Shoo! Shoo!

(*Exit Mrs. Merrill, L.*)

ALLEN. (*Stands up against tree, takes plug of tobacco from his pocket and bites off a chew, looking after her.*) Gosh all fishhooks, she sure's a busy old soul. If my wife was like that I reckon as how I'd have to get out and mow the clover some myself. (*Places one foot on bench.*)

(*Enter Miss Rose, R., carrying a bunch of wild flowers.*)

ROSE. Good morning, Mr. Allen.

ALLEN (*turning quickly*). Why, good morning, Schoolmarm. (*Crosses to R. C.*) Ain't you up' rather early?

ROSE. Oh, I always like to get up early so as to get the benefit of this morning air. It's so exhilarating. Don't you think so? (*Comes down to C.*)

ALLEN. Ex—ex—exhilarating. (*Scratches head.*) I shouldn't wonder but what it was.

ROSE (*smiling*). You folks are all coming over to the program my school children are going to give, aren't you?

ALLEN. Wall, I calculate we'd have a scrumptious time all right. (*Crosses to tree and expectorates behind the tree.*) But ma says we ought to stay hum and paint the kitchen floor so I reckon we'll have to pustpone it.

ROSE (*imploringly*). I would like *very* much to have you come, if you though you possibly could. The children are going to do splendidly, I think. (*Crosses to bench and sits down.*)

ALLEN. Wall, you see, we farmers are pretty busy folks. We don't have no time to attend these society doin's.

ROSE. If I could only work up more interest in this community in the schoolhouse as a social center, we could have perfectly lovely times together. (*Looks up with a resolute little smile.*)

ALLEN. I reckon you will have to get them 'ere fool notions out of your head. I was reading a piece t'other day in the farm paper. They wanted to make the skulehouse into one of these here employment agencies. Wall, of all the durn fool ideas I ever heard of, that takes the cake! (*Crosses to her and places one foot on bench.*)

ROSE. What makes you think that? (*Arranges her flowers.*)

ALLEN. Why, what do we farmers need of such a thing? We got enough work as it is. (*Shifts his cud, and expectorates behind tree.*) Them folks as writes them pieces gets paid for it. They don't know what we farmers need. All they got ter do is to tell their typewriter what they want and the typewriter does it for 'em.

(*Enter Merrill from L., carrying a mower sickle.*)

MERRILL. Good morning, Allen, yer over rather early.

ALLEN. I left the old woman home ter do the chores. What can I do to help?

MERRILL. Why, you can go out in the barn and harness up Tom and Jerry. Use the light set of driving harnesses. (*Crosses to grindstone, and leans sickle against it.*)

ALLEN (*to Rose*). See that cow rubbin' her ear on that fence pust? (*Points to the left.*)

ROSE. (*Rises and crosses to him*). Yes.

ALLEN. Wall, that's a sign of rain.

ROSE. Is that so? How do you make that out?

ALLEN. "When a cow tries to rub her ear,

It means a shower is very near."

ROSE (*laughingly*). If I were you, Mr. Allen, I would train a cow to do that so you could have rain whenever you needed it.

ALLEN. I don't think it works out that way.

(*Exit Rose and Allen, L.*)

(*Enter Merton, from the house. Crosses stage to R. C.*)

MERRILL (*angrily, on seeing him*). Well, this is a pretty time of day to be getting up. If you intend to work for me, you will have to get up in the morning. I'm paying you wages just the same as any man. Where did you go last night?

MERTON (*sulkily, after a pause*). I went to the dance.

MERRILL (*amazed*). Dance! You heard what I told you about that dance, didn't you? (*Pause.*) Didn't you?

MERTON. Why, yes, but—

MERRILL (*interrupting*). Just because you are getting old now I'm not going to have you gallivanting over the country. You are going to mind me as long as you stay here.

MERTON. Why, Gus went. Why don't you—

MERRILL (*between his teeth, angrily*). Never you mind what Gus did, I'm talking to you now. So long as you work for me you'll do just as I say.

MERTON (*angrily*). That's what you always say, but don't forget, just because you are paying me wages, that I'm not a machine. I've got to have some fun. You can't expect me to stay here on the farm day in and day out. (*Turns and crosses over to tree.*)

MERRILL (*following him up*). We'll find out whether you can or not. The sooner we come to an understanding, the better.

MERTON (*turning and facing his father*). Now, look here, Dad, I'm not a kid any more. You treat me as if I were a little baby. I'm old enough to be a little independent.



Mrs. Merrill

Farmer Merrill

MERRILL. *Independent!* You talking independence! Oh, yes, you've got a high-school education, I know, and it ain't going to hurt you a bit, now, if you forget about it. What could you do without me and the old farm?

MERTON. I can get something to do all right. I want to get out and see some of the world, anyway. Life is too short to stay here on this little farm.

MERILL (*somewhat more calmly*). I would have given you a chance to go to the city to school, but you'd only have been discontented and not want to come back on the farm.

MERTON. If I did, it would be because I liked city life better than I do the farm. I don't have to stay here under the rule of your thumb all my life. I've been penned in here long enough. If I want to go to a dance, I'm going, whether you like it or not.

MERILL (*in anger*). Why, you independent (*raises hand as if to strike him*) you (*pause*), how dare you talk to me this way?

MERTON (*holding his father's arm*). I am getting a little too old for such treatment, Dad. That's the way you have made me see your side of an argument ever since I have been old enough to stand it. (*Merill gradually drops hand to side.*) I've worked out there in those fields for the last ten years and I have had a good deal of time to think things over seriously. I want to get away from this farm and do something worth while, something big. I have no opportunities here. It's the same continuous round, the four seasons of the year. I could plow, harrow, and plant grain when I was twelve years old, and still you want me to do this all my life, not rising above the standard of a twelve-year-old boy, with no chance to broaden my views or make the work interesting. (*Turns and crosses over L.*)

(*Enter Mrs. Merill, carrying a grape basket filled with kindlings, followed by Gus.*)

MRS. MERILL (*in surprise*). Why, what's the matter, Merton?

MERTON (*sulkily*). Nothing much.

(*Exit Merton, L.*)

(*Enter Gus.*)

GUS (*carrying milk pails, crosses to Merill, who is looking after the boy in a dazed sort of way, and sets down pails.*) Ay, quit, ay vant ma pay.

MERILL (*still staring after the boy absently*). What's the matter, Gus?

GUS (*emphatically*). Ay no milk your cow any more. Ay quit.

MERILL (*as if noticing Gus for the first time*). What's the trouble?

GUS. Ah, your wife she kick all a time. Ay quit.

MRS. MERILL. I've told him time and again not to put his hands in the milk, but that's all the good it does. This morning he did it again. I'll not have it. It's a dirty, filthy habit.

GUS. Ay can't milk with a dry hand; ay vant ma pay.

MERILL (*sternly*). Gus, go out to the barn and finish milking.

GUS. Dog-gone das—

MERILL (*commandingly*). You heard what I said.

Gus. By golly, some day Ay vill quit. (*Picks up pails and crosses to L. E.*) Ay don't have to vork har all de time. Dese women make me so darn mad.

(*Exit Gus, L.*)

MRS. MERILL (*to Merrill*). Did you and Merton have a quarrel this morning? He was as white as a ghost when I came in.

MERILL. He didn't get in till two o'clock last night. Said he'd been to a dance. When I tried to call him down, he insulted me. It's the first time he's ever talked to me in this way. (*Crosses to porch and buries his face in his hands.*)

MRS. MERILL. (*Crosses to him; soothingly.*) Don't you think you are rather harsh with Merton, Pa? He's getting old now, almost a man. Merton has always been a good boy, and has done just as you told him. You should give him more liberty. You can't expect him to stay here on the farm and be contented, when you give him no more opportunities than you do. He sees Gus go out nights, and you say nothing to him. He thinks if he gets out he can have the same privileges.

MERILL. (*Jumps to his feet; angrily.*) That's just like you! Always standing up for him. If I call him down for what he has done, you side in and take his part. That's what's the trouble with him now. You wanted to send him to town to the high school. What good did it do him? Just got some of those new-fangled ideas into his head. He isn't content to stay on the farm any more. He's going to stay here and do as I say or he's going to get out. Why don't he settle down now? He's got his education. I told him the other day that when he settled down and married I'd turn the farm over to him. But no, he's got to go chasing over the country first. I was married when I was his age. Why can't he?

MRS. MERILL. Times have changed, Pa; they don't do that way now.

(*Enter Merton, L.*)

MERILL (*to Merton*). Sharpen up that sickle.

(*Exit Merrill, L.*)

MRS. MERILL (*to Merton, who has taken the sickle and proceeds to sharpen it*). Why did you insist on going to the dance last night, when you knew it was contrary to your father's wishes?

MERTON. Oh, I don't know. (*Sits facing right. Mrs. Merrill looks at him sympathetically, and goes into the house.*)

(*Enter Miss Rose from L., leading a shepherd dog and talking to it as she enters running.*)

ROSE Why, what's the matter with you, Don? You're not half so good a sprinter as I. (*Opens gate and comes down to bench, sits down, strokes dog's head.*) Why, do you know, I believe I could beat you easily in a hundred-yard dash. But then you have the rheumatism. You are getting old, Don, you're not the dog you used to be. Every dog has his day and you've had yours, and a glorious life it has been, too, hasn't it? All the birds and jackrabbits that your little heart could desire to chase

over the fields. Did you ever catch any, Don? I doubt it. Dogs are just like men. They will tramp all day in the hope of shooting a duck or a prairie chicken. (*Tilts head sideways and speaks to Merton, who is furiously grinding the sickle. Shyly.*) Did you hear that, Merton? Oh, Merton! (*Crosses to him.*) I believe the cat has his tongue (*to dog*). Don't you, Don? Why don't you speak, Merton?

MERTON (*laughing and looking up*). I'm mad.

ROSE. (*Shakes finger at him, warningly.*) Angry. Any one of my children would have known better than that. Only dogs get mad. (*to dog*) Isn't it so, Don? (*tantalizingly*). Did Mertons' papa chastise him for running away to the dance? (*Merton grinds.*) No? Maybe his mamma chastised him. Couldn't Merton have his own way? (*Merton throws his sickle down and starts for her with arms outstretched.*)

MERTON. I'll fix you for this. (*She dodges under his arm, and runs past him, leaving the tree between them.*)

ROSE. You are not going to touch me. (*to dog*) Don't you let him, Don. You bite him if he comes past that tree.

MERTON. If I had you in my arms once, I'd fix you for this.

ROSE. You're not going to touch me. (*Strikes dramatic attitude.*) Villain, don't you pass that dividing line. (*Laughs.*)

MERTON (*earnestly*). Come, now, be reasonable, we'll compromise. I'll not touch you if you will tell me why you wouldn't go to the dance with me last night.

ROSE. Your father didn't want you to go. You should do as your father—

MERTON. That's no reason why you couldn't go.

ROSE. I didn't think you should go, either.

MERTON. Why not?

ROSE. Why, you're young, and you work hard all day, and besides the dances they have around here are not just exactly proper.

MERTON. I was awfully mad—no, angry—at you last night.

ROSE. I know you were.

MERTON. I went anyway.

ROSE. And you made your father awfully mad—angry.

MERTON. Aw, say mad, it's more expressive. I know I did, but Pa's old-fashioned. He doesn't stop to think he was once a kid. I'll bet he went out nights, when he was a boy.

ROSE. Most likely that's the reason he wants to bring you up properly. You can benefit by his experience.

MERTON. No, that doesn't work out. Everyone has to find out for himself.

ROSE. Then you did find out.

MERTON. I feel awfully bum this morning.

ROSE (*laughingly*). That's the boy. I knew you would own up to it. You can sit down if you want to. (*They both sit on bench. Exit Don, L.*) The trouble with you is you are so headstrong that if anyone wants you to do a thing, you want to do just the opposite.

MERTON. You seem to understand my disposition pretty well. (*Sits nearer.*)

ROSE. I can only judge others by myself. My father didn't want me to come out here and teach, but I wanted to get away. I think I am quite efficient in my practical knowledge of human nature.

MERTON. Then you know how I feel toward you, Rose?

ROSE. Toward me?

MERTON. Yes.

ROSE. Why I suppose you are annoyed at me for not going to the dance with you last night.

MERTON. It's not that.

ROSE. What then? (*Suddenly becomes preoccupied, fingering the flowers on her hat.*)

MERTON (*squaring his shoulders and clearing his throat*). Oh—well, you see—I—Miss Meade—Rose, it's this way. I've known you ever since you started to teach school here and boarded at our house.

ROSE. Yes.

MERTON (*leaning forward and speaking in soft tones*). Well, you've been awful good to me, and I've liked you from the first—and—well—I've tried to be the same to you (*after a brief pause*). I want to ask you to—(*Takes her hand in his.*) Rose, I love you, and I want to ask—

ROSE. (*Rises and stands; pleadingly.*) Please don't go on—

MERTON (*pleadingly*). No, don't go, Rose. I'm dead in earnest about this. Sit down. (*She obeys.*) You know what I was going to ask you.

ROSE. You were going to ask me—to—

MERTON. Marry me.

ROSE. Please don't.

MERTON. Why not?

ROSE. It's so utterly impossible.

MERTON. I don't see why!

ROSE. Why I—I had thought—(*half rising*).

MERTON. No, wait. It's someone else? Some city fellow?

ROSE. No, it's not that.

MERTON. What is it, then?

ROSE. Please don't ask me. Can't you see?

MERTON. No. Father told me the other day that when I married and settled down he'd turn the farm over to me. This is a good farm, and—

ROSE. It is not that I am thinking about.

MERTON. Then what is it? Tell me. Don't you like me?

ROSE. Why, yes, I think you are a nice boy. I haven't looked at it—I never thought of you in any other way. Can't you see?

MERTON. No.

ROSE. You are hardly more than a boy, only twenty.

MERTON. Lots of folks get married at that age. I don't think I could make a better choice, if I lived ever so long.

ROSE. It's so impossible, Merton. I was brought up in the city. My people have let me have all that I asked for. I never did any real hard

work. I couldn't become accustomed to the life on the farm. What would my life be here?

MERTON. What more does a girl want? What is a girl's ambition but to get married and have a home?

ROSE. I couldn't become a farmer's wife. The man I marry must provide me with the conveniences that I am accustomed to. What is the life of a farmer's wife? She must work from sunrise to sunset. Work! Work! Work! Nothing but dull drudgery.

MERTON (*rising*). I hadn't thought about it in that way before. Come to think about it, you wouldn't make me a very good wife. I hadn't thought of this matter seriously enough. I suppose you would marry any man that could furnish you with an automobile, fine clothes, cut flowers, and luxuries of all kinds. Is that your idea of happiness?

ROSE. Merton!

MERTON. Can't I choose a wife with regard to my own happiness? If we loved each other in the right way, if we understood life at its best, we would stand shoulder to shoulder, and work humbly and gratefully at whatever was at hand. But being a farmer I can't have a wife who will bring up my children with high ideals and great aspirations. Why? Because a farmer's wife must be able to work, cook, sew, scrub, clean house. Do you think that is the reason I asked you to marry me? Answer me, do you?

ROSE. (*Rises and crosses over.*) But, Merton, that is the view that most of the farmers take of the situation. There is a great deal of truth in what you say. More than you imagine.

MERTON. (*Crossing to her, takes her hand in his.*) But just the same Rose, I love you. I am going off and learn how to farm. I know there must be ways of doing it right and some day I'll come back and make you see that the right kind of a farm home is the happiest place on earth.

ROSE. You never can do it, Merton. It isn't possible.

MERTON. Just wait and see.

(*Enter Gus, singing, from L. E. Rose and Merton move suddenly apart, looking embarrassed. Gus is carrying pails full of milk, his clothes are covered with chaff.*)

GUS. (*singing*). "Open vide de vindows and drive out sin, and let a little sunshine in." (*To Merton.*) Say, Merton, da ol' man he vants ter know vot you did vid das hare set of vagon double-tras. (*He sets the pails down in front of Rose.*)

MERTON. They are on the drag. (*Crosses to grindstone and resumes the task of sharpening sickle. Rose crosses and sits on bench. Gus crosses to L. E. and calls off wings.*)

GUS. Mr. Merill, day ban on der drag by da granary. (*Crosses to pails. Looks at Rose.*) Hello.

ROSE (*to Gus*). Why, Gus, have you been burrowing in the straw

pile? Your clothes are covered with chaff. You look like a typical hayseed.

Gus. No, ay vos just stooping over in das manger to get some bedding and das here cow he got too fresh mit his horns, and butted me right up in das har manger. *(Rose laughs. Gus stands over the milk pails and brushes the chaff from his clothes.)*

ROSE *(screaming)*. Don't.

Gus *(jumping)*. Vot ban the matter vid you?

ROSE. You are brushing that chaff and dirt right into the milk.

Gus. Val, ain't I going to strain it?

ROSE. You might get the milk contaminated with germs.

Gus. Vell, I'll strain dem out, too!

ROSE *(laughing)*. They are so small you can't strain them out!

Gus. Val, dan dey ain't going to hurt nobody. Ay ban on the farm pretty long while, and ay ain't seen no yerms yet. Das har postmaster over in town he says there vas yerms in everything. He says at ban dangerous to handle paper money, but ha don't stop none to take a chaw of my terbacker.

MRS. MERILL *(from doorway)*. Gus, you hurry in with that milk. It seems to me you could do the milking in less time than it takes you.

Gus. Val, ay can't do everything at vonce. *(Picks up the pails and goes into the house.)*

ROSE *(crossing to Merton)*. You can't make Gus believe there is anything but what he can see.

(Enter Mr. Ashley, L.)

ASHLEY *(crossing to gate)*. Good morning. *(Tips his cap.)*

ROSE *(turning)*. Why, its Mr. Ashley. Hunting so early in the morning?

ASHLEY. Well, they say that "the early bird catches the worm." *(Opens gate and comes down stage.)* I don't know whether that rule will apply to the man catching the bird or not. You don't happen to know of a covey around here do you, Merton? *(Shakes hands with Rose.)*

MERTON. There's one down at the end of the corn field, but I was figuring on them myself. Won't you stop for breakfast?

ASHLEY. Is breakfast ready?

MERTON. Very nearly, I guess.

ASHLEY. Well, now, I say, that is a temptation. I wanted to see Mr. Merrill on a little business matter, anyway.

MERTON *(calling to house)*. Ma!

MRS. MERILL *(from house)*. Yes. *(Comes to doorway with hands covered with flour.)*

MERTON. Mr. Ashley is going to stop for breakfast.

MRS. MERILL. Good morning, Mr. Ashley. *(Ashley tips his cap.)* We're not having much for breakfast. Do you like baking-powder biscuits and honey?

ASHLEY (*clapping his hands with delight*). Do I? Homemade baking-powder biscuits and honey! Could I think of anything more delicious? To my mind homemade biscuits and honey are the acme of life.

MRS. MERILL. Then do stay.

(*Exit Mrs. Merrill into house.*)

ROSE. You must get tired of boarding at the hotel all the time.

ASHLEY. I should say I do.

ROSE. I don't see why you remain a bachelor, Mr. Ashley, with all the pretty girls there are in town. I should think you would find one that could make baking-powder biscuits for you.

ASHLEY. There is a certain young lady that teaches school, outside of town, who looks very charming to me. (*Laughs and crosses stage, leans gun against tree. Rose rises and crosses toward house.*)

MERTON (*to Rose, who is beside him*). There is your chance, Rose, he'll buy you all the automobiles you want.

ROSE (*stamping her foot indignantly*). Merton, you let that matter drop!

(*Exit Rose into house.*)

(*Enter Gus from house with milk pails.*)

GUS (*crossing to Mr. Ashley*). Good morning, Mr. Ashley, ay vas yust going down to feed the pigs. Ve got some fine vons. Vant to see them?

ASHLEY. No, I came to see Mr. Merrill.

GUS. He ban down to the barn.

MRS. MERILL (*from doorway*). Gus, you bring me in an armful of wood, quick.

GUS. Ya. (*Mrs. Merrill goes into house.*) By golly, das here women folks dey 'work a man to deat'. (*Picks up pails.*)

(*Exit Gus. L.*)

MERTON (*crossing to Ashley*). Mr. Ashley.

ASHLEY (*turning*). Yes.

MERTON. I'd like to have your opinion of a certain matter.

ASHLEY. Why, certainly. (*Crosses to R. C.*)

MERTON. I suppose you lawyers want pay for all the advice you give out.

ASHLEY (*smiling*). Well, now, that depends. We're not all so bad as we are painted.

MERTON. I've made up my mind that I need further education. I've never been off the farm. All I know about farming I've learned from doing it. Aren't there places where they teach you how, and why? It seems to me you could save a lot of time and work if you knew the best methods. Men get trained for almost every other kind of occupation, why not for farming?

ASHLEY. Certainly, Merton. You have hit the nail on the head. Many of the best universities now have agricultural schools, and every year their value to the community increases. It won't be long before it will be considered as shortsighted for a man to try to be a farmer without

any training, as it would for him to be an engineer. *(They cross to bench, sit, and continue conversation.)*

(Enter Mrs. Merrill, from doorway, and Gus, L. C., carrying an armful of wood.)

MRS. MERILL *(to Gus)*. Well, it's time you got in with that wood, the fire is nearly out. I might a good deal better do things myself than expect you to do them.

GUS *(crossing stage)*. Val, ay can't do everyting at vonce. *(Falls on porch and scatters wood on the porch.)*

MRS. MERILL. Land sakes! You are the awkwardest man I ever saw. Now pick that wood up and put it into the woodbox where it belongs. You can't seem to do a thing without making a mess of it.

GUS *(Begins calmly to pick up the wood.)* Dog-gone das. Ay got me mad, by golly, ay going to quit.

MRS. MERILL. Well, you won't quit till you get this wood off my front porch, I'll tell you that.

(Exit Mrs. Merrill into house.)

GUS *(calling after her)*. Ay vill tal Mr. Merrill on you. He'll fix you. *(Exit Gus with wood. Noise as if wood were dropped into box, and Mrs. Merrill's voice is heard scolding him.)*

ASHLEY. Gus has been with you for some time, hasn't he?

MERTON. Ever since I can remember. Father wouldn't fire him for all the men in the state.

(Enter Gus.)

GUS *(crossing stage, singing)*. "Open vide the vindows and drive out sin, and let a little sunshine in."

ASHLEY *(to Gus)*. What will you take for the song, Gus?

GUS. *(Turns, shakes head.)* At ain't for sale.

(Exit Gus, L.)

MERTON *(to Ashley)*. I like the farm, Mr. Ashley, but I want to get out where they are doing really big things. Any one can farm the way we do. Many of the farmers around here have been successful, some of them never saw the inside of a school.

ASHLEY. They have made a great deal of their money by land speculation. They live very near to the soil, and far away from the rest of the world. What the farm needs today is men who will farm scientifically, common-sense farming, if you like that better. We must get away from this one crop idea. Unless we do, this land will run down like the land in the eastern states.

MERTON. I have never considered farming a very high calling.

ASHLEY. It is true that the word "hayseed" has been a term of contempt. But not so today. Farming is becoming a highly respectable occupation. To be an honest tiller of the soil is to be a sovereign of the people. Every merchant, banker, and professional man is directly dependent upon the farmer for his own healthful existence.

MERTON. Would there be any money in it for me, I mean big money?

ASHLEY (*standing*). Possibly no enormous amount. Not all the trial balances in life can be struck out in figures.

MERTON. Would you advise me to go to an agricultural college?

ASHLEY. Yes, if you like the farm. It is no longer true to say that farming is too small a field for a really big man. I hope you will forgive me for preaching a sermon like this, but it is a subject that I have taken a great deal of interest in, as one of great importance.

MERTON (*standing*). I thank you, Mr. Ashley, for the advice you have given. You have started me thinking.

ASHLEY. I wouldn't act hastily in the matter. Explain your wants to your father, arrange it so that you can work here on the farm in the summer months.

MERTON. No. I want to be independent. I have enough money in the bank to carry me through one year, I guess, and in the summer I can go out in different localities.

ASHLEY. Boy, let me give you one piece of advice. As long as you have a home to go to, go there. Put your learning into practice here, on the farm. Make this farm the best producer in the state. You can do it.

MERTON (*shaking Ashley's hand*). I'll do it. Thank you, Mr. Ashley.

ASHLEY. If you are dead in earnest about this, you will succeed. But remember, success depends upon the man, his knowledge and judgment, and his persistence.

(*Enter Mr. Merrill and Reuben Allen at L. C., talking. They cross stage.*)

ALLEN. I tell you it is going to rain.

MERRILL (*upon noticing Ashley*). Good morning, Ashley. Hunting? (*Shakes hands.*)

ASHLEY. Yes, I walked across lots. I hoped I might scare up a few chickens. I wanted to see you in regard to the mortgage. Your folks persuaded me to stop for breakfast.

MERRILL. Why, sure, come on over any time. You're welcome.

ASHLEY. You certainly are hospitable.

MERRILL (*to Merton*). Say, Merton, go down and chase that black and white heifer up out of the corn. I'm afraid she'll get more than's good for her. (*Merton crosses to L. E.*) And take a hammer along with you and fix up the fence below the barn.

(*Exit Merton, L.*)

ALLEN (*to Ashley*). I was telling Charles as how he hadn't ought to get down any hay, as I calculated as how it was going to rain.

ASHLEY. Are you a weather prophet? It doesn't look like rain.

ALLEN. Wall, I've been pretty gosh darn observing in my time, and when I see the sun come up behind that cloud this morning, I 'spects as how it was going to rain. And then I heard a pig squeal last night,

that's a sure sign. I never knew that un to fail. (*Crosses to bench, picks up a stick, and busies himself whittling it.*)

ASHLEY (*to Merrill*). I bought that mortgage over for your signature. (*Takes folded mortgage from his pocket.*) It is filled out properly, I think. Mr. Allen, will you act as a witness?

ALLEN. Sure. Buying more land, Merrill?

(*Enter Mrs. Merrill from doorway.*)

MERRILL. Yes, I bought that quarter joining on the north where old man Smith lived.

MRS. MERRILL (*in surprise*). What?

MERRILL (*taken back*). Why, I am buying that quarter—

MRS. MERRILL (*interrupting*). Buying more land? What do you want of more land?

MERRILL. Why, I thought I could manage that quarter—

MRS. MERRILL (*commandingly*). Well, you don't need it, and you ain't going to buy it. Going to raise more hogs, I suppose—to buy more land. We ain't going to need it, and we're not going to have it. What's that paper you've got? (*Snatches it from his hand.*)

MERRILL. That's the mortgage.

MRS. MERRILL (*in surprise*). Mortgage! (*Drops mortgage.*) Mortgage! (*pleadingly*). You weren't going to mortgage the homestead, were you? I'm just scared to death of a mortgage. Charley, you're not going to mortgage the—

MERRILL (*in anger*). I guess I know what I am doing. You go into the house and let me attend to my own affairs.

MRS. MERRILL (*pleadingly*). Don't, please. Please don't Pa. We've lived on the homestead for so long, and you're sure to lose it if—

ASHLEY. (*Stoops and picks up mortgage from ground.*) Well, if that's the way your wife feels I suppose it is all off. I didn't particularly care whether I sold it or not. I can get sixty for it in a year or so.

MERRILL (*to Mrs. Merrill*). I'll tend to this myself. Do you want to have me lose this chance? It's a good speculation. (*Takes mortgage from Ashley.*) I know what I'm about. Haven't I kept the farm so far? I'm not going to have you whimpering around here. We'll go into the house and fix it up.

MRS. MERRILL (*disgusted*). Pa, I don't want you to do it.

MERRILL. Well, I'm going to, so that settles it.

MRS. MERRILL (*crossing slowly to house*). I'm sure something will go wrong.

(*Exit Mrs. Merrill into house.*)

MERRILL (*in disgust*). Just like a woman. Scared to death of anything like a mortgage.

(*Exit Merrill into house.*)

ASHLEY. May I have your signature also, Mr. Allen?

ALLEN. Sure.

(*Exeunt Ashley and Allen into house.*)

(Enter Gus. He goes to washbench, pours some water into basin, and washes vigorously. Then he wipes his face and hands.)

Gus *(looking into house)*. By golly! Ve goin' to have company for breakfast, she's got on a white tablecloth. *(Puts hand in pocket and pulls it out with a disgusted look.)* Yee! Dar vas an egg in dar.

(Exit Gus into house.)

(Merill goes to grindstone and picks up sickle. Re-enter Ashley.)

ASHLEY. That's a fine piece of land, Mr. Merill. As good a piece as there is in the state. *(Crosses to bench.)* Merton just expressed a desire to further his education.

MERILL. *(Has been examining the sickle, turns quickly.)* What's that?

ASHLEY. Said he wanted to go off somewhere to school. I tried to show him the value of an agricultural education.

MERILL *(putting sickle down)*. Well, he'll have to get that idea out of his head.

ASHLEY. Don't you think it would be beneficial to him here on the farm?

MERILL. No, I don't. He's just getting old enough now so as he can do a little work. I ain't got money to spend on him, so as he can learn to play football and crokinole and basketball and such darn fool games.

ASHLEY. But, Mr. Merill, surely you don't think that all their time is spent in athletics.

MERILL. Well, a good deal of it is. In order to be able to farm you don't have to be able to orate at a debating society. You can't learn how to farm in a laboratory nor by reading books. It's the experience you need in farming. I ain't had no schooling to speak of, and I'm just as good a farmer as any of 'em.

ASHLEY. One of the worst drawbacks that agriculture has today is the difficulty of inducing the farmers to adopt improved methods.

MERILL. Well, I reckon they are wise enough not to let any white-fingered men, who read out of books, tell them what to do.

ASHLEY. It's an absolute fact, Mr. Merill, that the farms in this locality are producing less each year. What we need to do is to increase our production, and the only solution of the problem is the employment of more improved methods.

MERILL. Ah! that idea's just a fad! They'll get over it in time.

(Enter Mrs. Merill.)

MRS. MERILL. Breakfast is ready.

ASHLEY *(crossing over)*. I hope you didn't make any extra preparations, Mrs. Merill.

MRS. MERILL. Oh, mercy, no.

(Exit Mrs. Merill and Ashley into house.)

(Enter Merton from L. E., crosses to washbench, and begins to wash.)

MERRILL *(putting down sickle and picking up a whip from the ground.)*
Ashley was just telling me that you want to go to an agricultural college.

MERTON. Yes, I had a little talk with him about it.

MERRILL. Well, you had better change your mind.

MERTON. Why should I?

MERRILL. Because you are going to stay here on the farm.

MERTON. Mr. Ashley says that I could run the farm better if I had—

MERRILL. I don't care what Ashley says, you're going to stay here, and the sooner you get that notion out of your head the better. Now, I'm going to give you your choice, stay here on the farm and do as I say or get out. If you get out, you're out for good.

MERTON. *(Turns; pauses.)* I'm going to get an agricultural education.

MERRILL. What?

MERTON. I don't feel like settling down here on the farm just yet. If you want to put it that way, I suppose I'll have to get out.

MERRILL *(angrily)*. I'll give you just thirty seconds to change your mind.

MERTON. I don't intend to.

MERRILL. You don't? *(Strikes him with whip.)*

(Enter Mrs. Merrill.)

MRS. MERRILL. Pa!

MERRILL. Go into the house! *(Strikes him again. Merton steps back. Mrs. Merrill rushes to her husband and puts her hand on his arm. Merrill pushes her aside. Merton then takes the whip from Merrill, breaks it in pieces, and throws it on the ground.)*

MERTON. I've stood all of that I'm going to.

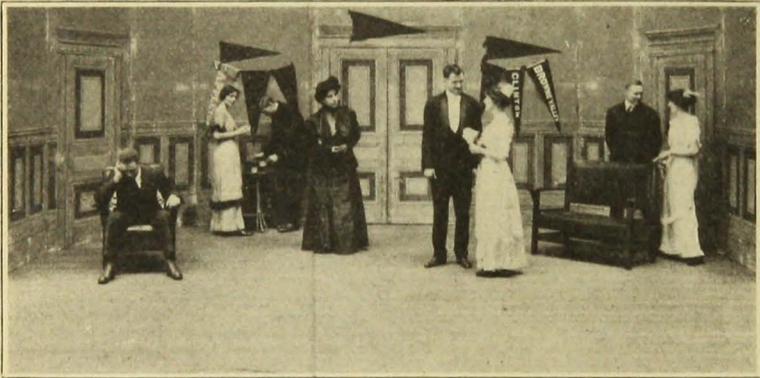
MERRILL *(in mad rage)*. You've taken your choice, now go up to your room and pack up what belongings you have, and go!

MRS. MERRILL *(coming forward)*. Pa, you don't mean—

MERRILL. He's taking his choice, he gets out. *(To Merton)* Don't you ever set foot on this farm again! *(Points to door.)* Go! *(Merton goes out followed by Mrs. Merrill, wiping her eyes on her apron.)*

(Curtain)

ACT II



Mrs. Merill's Entrance in Act II

Scene, ballroom at the fraternity house. Fireplace R., settee L., frappe table U. R., arm chair in front of fireplace. At rise of curtain several couples are dancing. Music stops and they gather around the frappe bowl. Margerie and Robert come forward.

MARGERIE. Here's a nice cool place. Let's sit down. *(They sit on settee.)*

ROBERT. Pretty good crowd out tonight. There's nothing like feeling that it's the last time to make you appreciate a thing like this.

MARGERIE. That's so. "Bright college years," as the song says, are over for us. By the way, who's that man over there with Rose? His college years have been over for some time, I should say.

ROBERT. That? Oh, that's old Ashley—1900. Funny to see him skipping about with the kids. Wonder what brought him—

MARGERIE. Why, he's here with Rose. She brought him, or rather he brought her. Didn't you see them come in?

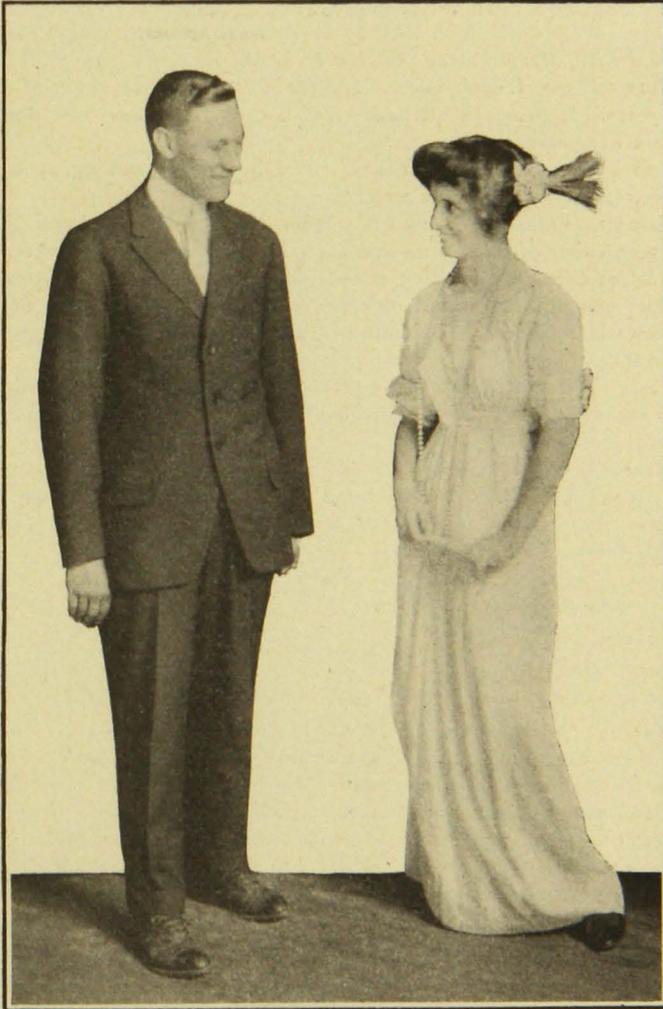
ROBERT. Oh, of course, I remember now. He's been sweet on her this long time. Been down three times this winter to see her in Chicago.

MARGERIE. What's she doing in Chicago?

ROBERT. Oh, she's at the University studying Domestic Science, Home Economics, or one of those new freak courses.

MARGERIE *(rising)*. Foxy lady. That's the way to capture a husband these days. Just bait your hook with the art of Home-making with a capital H. You can land them every time.

ROBERT (*rising; indignantly*). Nothing of the sort. Rose doesn't need any extra bait on her hook. She's a peach. She can have me any day in the week.



MARGERIE: "How about you? You're no bait for peaches."

MARGERIE (*mischievously*). She doesn't, eh? Well, how about you? You're no bait for peaches.

ROBERT. Oh, come along. We're missing all the dance.

(*Exeunt all.*)

(Enter Rose and Merton.)

ROSE. This is pleasant. Isn't it?

MERTON. Yes, there goes the music. Let's sit it out. Would you mind? Somehow, I don't feel like dancing tonight.

ROSE. Why not? You used to be so keen about dancing. (Sits in arm chair, R. Merton stands talking to her.)

MERTON. Oh, I don't know. I guess it is seeing you again after all these years. It brings it all back—that last day at home—just think, it has been five years.

ROSE. Five years! So it has. And how is everything at home? Are your father and mother well?

MERTON. Father and mother! Why, Rose, don't you know? I've never seen either of them since that day. Father's never forgiven me. He won't let mother even mention my name, or write to me if he knows it. She does smuggle letters out, though, sometimes. But it's been ever so long now since I had a letter from her, and I'm afraid things aren't going very well out there.

ROSE. Yes, but Merton, haven't you ever gone back and asked your father to forgive you? He couldn't hold out if he really saw you and felt you had given in.

MERTON. No, I haven't. If he'd say the word, I'd go in a minute, but to crawl back like a whipped dog and say I was sorry—I just can't. I suppose there is too much Merill in me for that—and I wasn't wrong, either. (Draws up chair and leans on back.)

ROSE. No, I don't believe you were, but still, Merton, he is your father. And think of your mother!

MERTON. I do think of her. Poor mother!

ROSE. But, Merton, how did you get on at first—how did you live? Wasn't it awfully hard getting started?

MERTON (sitting). Hard? Well, I should say it was. I tell you, Rose, there were times when I would have chucked the whole thing for half a cent. That was a pretty bitter day for me. I lost everything at one blow—parents, home, and hope—the old home I'd grown up in, and the new one I'd dreamed of, and—some of my faith in women, to boot.

ROSE (trying to change the subject). Yes, but tell me about it. How did you get a start?

MERTON. Oh, I came up here and worked my way, a little of everything—waiting on tables, tending furnaces—anything I could get. It was easier after the first year. I tell you, Rose, there are some bully men in the college faculty. The way they will stand back of a fellow when they see he's in earnest is certainly great. When such men have faith in you, it bolsters up your faith in yourself.

ROSE. Poor Merton!

MERTON (standing). Oh, not so poor. I'm all right now. After the first summer I've had a job for the state every vacation. I've paid my

way, and saved something besides. Yes, Miss Meade, behold in me an embryo Rockefeller. I've got money in the bank.

ROSE. That's splendid. (*Rises and crosses L. to settee.*) Well, now you're through with the University, what will you do, teach?

MERTON. I could. I've a fine offer just this week from the Extension Division, good pay, congenial work, and a chance to rise; but, Rose, do you remember what I told you that last morning at home? Well, I just can't get that idea out of my mind. Only then it was a dream, built on hope and imagination; now it's a vision developed from my life and experience. I want to show what a farm can be—what a farm home can be—when there's enthusiasm, knowledge, and trained ability back of it. And I'm going to do it. I've some money, as I told you, and I am planning to start in a small way on an undeveloped farm in the northern part of the state.

ROSE. That sound interesting. (*Sits on settee.*)

MERTON (*sitting by Rose*). Rose, if I made good, made a go of it, do you suppose you'd ever change your mind?

ROSE (*half rising, embarrassed and pleading*). Oh, Merton, please don't tonight—

(*Enter Robert Powell and Margerie Langdon.*)

ROBERT. Oh, Merton—telephone! "Mr. Merrill wanted at the 'phone." Just like a popular doctor. I tell you, Miss Meade, Merton's some pumpkin these days.

(*Exit Merton, R.*)

ROBERT. Heard about the dandy offer he had from the Extension Division? The chance of the year.

MARGERIE (*sitting comfortably in the easy chair*). And what do you think he told me? That he wasn't going to take it. Wants to be a farmer. Can you beat it? Not for me, thank you. I can do without the morning songs of the birds and the sunrises and the fresh air of heaven, if I can have a warm bathroom and a gas range and a chance to see somebody besides cows and pigs once in a while. It's work all day and then some for the farmer's wife. I spent a month on a farm once. That cured me. Up before daylight, cooking for a lot of men, nice little journeys out to the pump and woodpile—such good exercise in the fresh air. Then when you've got the men out of the way, there are the chickens and the ducks and the pigs and the dogs and the milk—mercy, there's no end of it! And when you do finally get cleaned up, the hired man comes in with his muddy boots and tramps all over the floor. Oh, it's a gay life!

(*During this speech Rose has listened with rising indignation.*)

ROSE (*forgetting herself*). I don't think that's fair at all. A farmer's wife doesn't need to have such a hard time if she's any kind of a manager, and knows anything about home economics. They can have just as comfortable a home as any one, certainly a great deal more comfortable than one of those stuffy little city flats.

(Enter Ashley, R.)

MARGERIE. Oh, a new Daniel come to judgment! Since when did you become an advocate of the simple life, Rose? Perhaps you would like to go out with Merton and help him in his little object lesson—how to be happy though a farmer?

ROSE. Don't be silly, Margerie! But if you'd seen as much of cities as I have in the last five years, perhaps some of your illusions would be gone, too. There's something more to life than bodily ease and comfort. Smart clothes, afternoon teas, and a chance to go to the movies every time you feel like it don't make character. Anybody can keep up a bluff in town, but it takes real men and women to make good in the country. When you come up against the elemental forces of nature, you've got to have something in you or go under. Why do all the best men come from the country? Just that!

MARGERIE (rising). Oh, come along, Robert. This sounds like preaching. I want to dance.

(Exit Robert and Margerie, R.)

ASHLEY. (Who has stood, R., listening.) Why, Miss Meade, you are quite an orator. I didn't know you felt so strongly about cities. Was that why you gave up your life in New York?

ROSE (sitting on settee). Yes, it was. Two years of it were all I could stand. I felt smothered. So I just made up my mind I'd go to Chicago and learn to teach girls how to live where life could mean something. I've finished my course, and have my position. It's out in your town, too. I'm going to have a consolidated school! Isn't it splendid?

ASHLEY. Oh, yes, I suppose so, but I'm getting tired of the country. In a year or two I hope to open up an office in St. Paul. Maybe I will be in New York before I die.

ROSE. Don't say New York to me! I hate it.

ASHLEY. The country's all right; the trouble is with the farmers. They are not progressive. Why, there's the Merill place—best land in the state, all run down, crops failing, mortgaged. That's one of the disagreeable things I've got to do when I get back, foreclose that mortgage.

ROSE (rising, shocked). Oh, Mr. Ashley, you can't turn the Merills out of their home. Does Merton know?

ASHLEY. No, I don't suppose he does. The old man's been nursing his wrath like a bear with a sore head all this time. Won't hear Merton's name mentioned, and now that Merton has taken up new methods he's more set against him than ever. Between you and me, I believe he's been eating his heart out for the boy all these years, and too proud to admit it.

ROSE (sitting). And Merton's up here eating his heart out, too! Oh, Mr. Ashley, it's too bad. Can't you do something to bring them together?

ASHLEY. Well—perhaps—maybe, but then—Rose, Miss Meade, (Sits by Rose.) they are not the ones I am interested in bringing together, you must have seen that. Now that you have finished your course in Chicago, why not start right in applying it? What can be better practice for a

graduate in Home Economics than making a home? You could do your teaching by example, and at the same time you could make me the happiest man on earth. Won't you try? *(Takes her hand.)*

ROSE *(trying to draw away)*. No, indeed, Mr. Ashley, I couldn't. Please don't.

(Enter Merton. Sees them. An embarrassed pause.)

MERTON. Oh, excuse me. I was just looking for—

ROSE *(jumping up, embarrassed)*. Don't go, Merton. Mr. Ashley was just telling me—that is—I mean—Oh, what was your telephone?

(Enter dancers and Robert, who form group around frappe bowl.)

MERTON. Oh, that. It was my roommate. Curious thing. Says there is a lady at the house to see me. Won't give her name.

ROBERT. A mysterious lady! That is exciting. Is it your past running you down?

MERTON. Don't be ridiculous. It's an old lady, seems distressed. Who could it be? My—*(interrupted by music.)*

ROBERT *(to Rose)*. Is this our dance, Miss Meade?

ROSE *(consulting program)*. I believe it is.

(Exit Robert and Rose, C., followed by group.)

MERTON *(crossing to Ashley)*. Don't you have this dance?

ASHLEY *(consulting program)*. No, I'm not booked.

MERTON. Good. I've been anxious to have a talk with you.

ASHLEY. Come over here and sit down. *(Ashley sits in arm chair by fireplace. Merton brings up chair from near frappe table and stands leaning on it.)*

MERTON. I want to hear the news from home. It's been months since I heard from mother, and I'm getting pretty anxious.

ASHLEY. Then you haven't heard—

MERTON. Nothing. Is there anything wrong?

ASHLEY. No, and yes. The farm is running along in the same old rut, only worse. This was a bad year out our way. Your father's crops dried up. You know he doesn't put them in right.

MERTON *(sitting)*. No, just scratches the top of the ground.

ASHLEY. He had to sell off his stock because he hadn't feed for them.

MERTON. What dad needs is a silo.

ASHLEY. Yes, there are lots of things he needs. Then his hogs got cholera and most of them turned up their toes.

MERTON. Didn't he have them vaccinated?

ASHLEY. Vaccinated! Did you ever know your father to take up with any of those "new-fangled notions," as he calls them?

MERTON. Well, it's too bad he lost his hogs. Anything else?

ASHLEY. No, except he's laid up with rheumatism and couldn't put in his crop himself.

MERTON. He has help, hasn't he?

ASHLEY. Yes, Gus is with him yet. He's afraid to quit for fear he'll never get what your father owes him.

MERTON. Well, Ashley, this is all news to me. You see it's been a long time since I heard from mother.

ASHLEY. The worst of all is, of course, the mortgage.

MERTON (*starting up*). What mortgage?

ASHLEY. Didn't you know your father's farm was mortgaged? Let me see! He mortgaged it the day you left home. He's been able to meet the payments every year until this one. Now he's so hard up for cash that he can't.

MERTON (*leaning on mantel*). Mother never told me anything about it.

ASHLEY. I'm surprised at that. I suppose she wanted to save you from worrying.

MERTON. That's just like mother.

ASHLEY. Here's a letter I received from the company last night. (*Hands letter to Merton.*) Unless the interest is paid by the first of June, they say I am to foreclose. (*Merton sits and reads letter.*) I hate to do it. It's downright mean. But you see they say there's no money in this mortgage unless they do foreclose.

MERTON. (*Folds letter and gives it back.*) Poor mother!

ASHLEY. It's too bad, Merton, that you can't help them out, but I know a man at college is always on the rocks. I was there myself not so very long ago. But I hate to see that farm go into the hands of a land company. There is money in it if it were worked right. Your father is getting old, too. But no one can blame you if the old man does lose his farm.

MERTON (*standing*). Perhaps not. But I might blame myself. Five years of hustling have been pretty good training for me. I have decided that I was a headstrong young fool. I am not so hard up as you suppose. I have worked some, I can tell you, and now I'm graduating with money in the bank.

ASHLEY. That's fine.

MERTON. Do you know, Ashley, I love the farm. I'm planning to begin in a small way on some cut-over land in the northern part of the state. Can get it cheap from a lumber company. I have my crop rotation planned for three years.

ASHLEY. That's why you turned down the Extension Division?

MERTON. You bet. I'm going to have some of the land cleared right away and sow clover. I know where I can get some good Holstein cattle, and in a few years I intend to work into the dairy business.

ASHLEY (*standing*). You'll succeed. You have the right kind of stuff in you.

MERTON. But that mortgage, Ashley. Isn't there any way of adjusting it?

ASHLEY. No, the interest must be paid or the farm goes.

MERTON. How much is it?

ASHLEY. Four hundred and eighty dollars.

MERTON. That would just about clean me out.

ASHLEY. The old man doesn't deserve it, Merton.

MERTON. I know it, but mother does. Poor mother!

ASHLEY (*crossing to C.*) They're coming in for the next intermission. I wonder if I have this dance? (*Consults program.*)

MERTON. Let me go out on the balcony. I want to think this over. Gee! I'd hate to give up that farm.

ASHLEY. Have a cigar. (*Offers one.*)

MERTON. No, thanks, haven't formed the habit. (*Laughing*) I never had money to burn.

(Exit Merton, L.)

(Enter Margerie with partner, C., and others, who form groups.)

MARGERIE (*to Ashley*). Aren't you dancing?

ASHLEY. No, I'm rusty, out of date. I don't know the new dances. This one, for instance. (*Shows program.*)

MARGERIE. Why, that's easy. I'll show you. Rob was my partner for it, but he went out for a smoke. (*She does a step of the Spanish down C. very lightly and gracefully. He tries awkwardly to imitate.*)

ASHLEY. I'm afraid I'm too old to learn. Let me get you some frappe. (*Offers her frappe.*)

(Enter Robert.)

ROBERT. Come, Margerie, I've been looking everywhere for you, now the dance is almost over.

(Exit Margerie, Robert, and others.)

(Enter Merton, L.)

ASHLEY (*crossing to him*). Well, what about it?

MERTON (*pulling check out of check book*). I can't see the old farm go to strangers. Here's a check for the amount. Don't let father know where it came from.

ASHLEY. You're on the square, Merton. Some day I hope you'll have your farm.

(Enter Rose with partner, and dancers. She crosses to Ashley, who is standing, L. Merton sits, R., lost in thought.)

ROSE. Aren't you dancing?

ASHLEY. No, I can't get the new dances. This one for instance. (*Shows program.*)

(Enter Mrs. Merrill, R. She wanders for a moment, looking for Merton, then sees him.)

MRS. MERILL. Merton. (*Rushes to him with outstretched arms.*)

MERTON. Mother! (*They embrace.*) But what brings you here, and alone, too? Is anything wrong at home? How's father? Why didn't you write?

MRS. MERILL. I did. Merton, didn't you get my letters? I wrote three times and you never answered, so I came. Merton, won't you come home? We want you!

MERTON. Did father send for me? Does he want me?

MRS. MERILL. Yes, Merton, he does. He's sick and discouraged, and he wants you. I think he wanted you all the time. Won't you come?

MERTON. Why, Mother, you know—but you haven't seen Rose, Mother.

MRS. MERILL (*to Rose*). My, but it seems good to me to see some one I know in this big city! (*Embraces her.*)

ROSE. How did you manage to find your way here?

MRS. MERILL. Oh, I asked everybody I met where Merton lived.

(*Enter Robert and Margerie with others, R.*)

MARGERIE (*to Robert*). Oh, say, Bob, who is that back number talking with Rose Meade?

ROBERT. Can't tell you.

MARGERIE. She certainly looks as though she had come out of the Ark. Who ever brought her here? (*Laughs.*)

MERTON (*overhearing*). Miss Langdon, that is my mother and the best mother in the world, too, even if she is old-fashioned.

MARGERIE. Forgive me, I didn't know—I didn't know it was your—

MRS. MERILL (*crossing to C.*). Merton, I'm out of place here, I never thought about that. I'll go right away.

MERTON. No, mother, don't say that. You're all the world to me.

MRS. MERILL. You'll come home with me, son, won't you? I need you.

MERTON. Yes, mother, I've had enough of catacombed tenement houses, congested business centers, and overdone fashions and amusements. I am going back to live in God's country, back to the farm.

(*Curtain*)

ACT III



Merton: "The finest girl in the world has promised to make this the best farm home in the western hemisphere."

Scene, Merton Merrill's office. Desk piled with papers, R.; easy chair, L.; small table with Babcock tester at back of stage. Walls hung with weather maps, calendar, and pictures of farm animals.

MERTON (*speaking into desk telephone*). Hello, Mr. Moore. This is Merrill talking. What price can you give me on ten tons of phosphate? The National Fertilizing Company quote it three dollars a ton cheaper. . . . No, there is no need of a complete fertilizer. I have found by plot tests carried out on one of my fields in cooperation with the University Department of Agriculture, that there is a deficiency of phosphate and nitrogen. There is plenty of potash. I can get the nitrogen from the air through my clover crops and that without any expense. . . . No, I need only the phosphate. Very well, I'll get it of the National. . . . Well, why didn't you say so in the first place? Ten tons.

(Enter Mrs. Merrill, L. doorway.)

MERTON. Is Bob up yet?

MRS. MERILL. No. I'm going to call him if he doesn't get up pretty soon.

MERTON. No, mother, you must not.

MRS. MERILL. There is no sense in lying abed this way. I want to get the bed made. Here it is eight o'clock. *(Sits in arm chair, R., and knits.)*

MERTON. He is from the city, mother.

MRS. MERILL. Did you do that when you were in the city?

MERTON (*smiling*). Sometimes later than this.

MRS. MERILL (*amazed*). Merton! How could you? (*Telephone rings.*)

MERTON (*During this conversation Mrs. Merrill shows curiosity and rising interest.*) Hello! . . . Yes. (*Listens.*) Certainly, we'd be glad to see you. When did you come? . . . Who? . . . Why, yes, by all means. Come to dinner. . . . No, indeed, we'd be only too delighted. . . . At twelve-thirty. (*To Mrs. Merrill*) Mr. Ashley's in town, wants to run out to see us. Says he will bring Rose Meade out for the ride in his new auto. He's run down from St. Paul in it.

MRS. MERILL. Mr. Ashley! Sakes alive, I haven't seen him since he moved his office to the city. Good land! What shall I have for dinner?

MERTON. Why, baking-powder biscuits and honey.

MRS. MERILL. Bringing Rose out here! Do you think there's anything in it, Merton?

MERTON. How should I know, mother? Why not? He's rich and good-looking, lives in town. What more could she want?

MRS. MERILL. (*Rises and comes to Merton at desk.*) Oh, Merton, I used to think you and Rose would make a match some day. Why don't you, Merton? She's a lovely girl, and I'd like to see you settled with a good wife before I die.

MERTON (*bitterly*). That's a vain dream, mother. Rose told me once that she'd never be a farmer's wife and she's the only girl in the world for me. There never has been any one else.

MRS. MERILL. (*Smooths his hair as she speaks. He takes her hand and puts it gently down.*) But, Merton, that was long ago. Why don't you ask her again? She's changed a bit these last few years, and do you know, sometimes I think she does care for you. There's something about the way she treats me that makes me believe it.

MERTON. Foolish little mother. Rose never would give up her splendid work in the district to settle down to being a humdrum farmer's wife.

MRS. MERILL. Well, you ask her, anyhow. (*Sits by Merton L., and continues her knitting.*)

(*Enter Robert, R. door.*)

ROBERT. Good morning.

MERTON. Good morning, Bob.

ROBERT. At work so early?

MERTON. "He who lies in bed, his estate must feel it." That's from your friend Shakespeare.

MRS. MERILL. Afternoon's more like it.

ROBERT. I hope I haven't inconvenienced you, Mrs. Merrill.

MRS. MERILL (*sweetly*). Oh, not at all, lie abed as long as you like.

ROBERT. Thank you. Lying abed in the morning is one of the greatest enjoyments I have. When I hear the alarm clock going off, and know

that Gus has got to get up and milk the cows, I shake hands with myself in a congratulatory way, and roll over and go back again to dreamland.

MRS. MERILL. Does that alarm clock bother you? I will have Gus—

ROBERT. No, I wouldn't have you stop it for the world. It is so satisfying to have it go off. I don't know when I have enjoyed a vacation as much as I have this one.

MRS. MERILL. I am glad you are enjoying yourself.

ROBERT. Do you know, you folks are converting me into a genuine farmer. Look at that! (*Slaps his leg.*) Overall. I'm going out and listen to the hay cocks crow. I believe I'll start in farming.

MRS. MERILL. The farm is the only place to live.

ROBERT. I'm beginning to believe it. I have often wondered what there was in farming, but now I understand it. I find myself hanging on the gate after you have thrown the corn in for the hogs, to watch them eat and hear them grunt; and a satisfactory feeling comes over me when I go out in the meadow and get a whiff of that flower-scented breeze. I can set my teeth into Mrs. Merrill's delicious pies without any thought of indigestion. If I can die eating your pies, Mrs. Merrill, I'll die happy.

MRS. MERILL. You flatterer, you want some breakfast, don't you? (*Crosses to door, R., and calls.*) Hulda!

(*Enter Hulda.*)

HULDA. Ya. (*She stands in doorway with her arms hanging and her mouth half open.*)

MRS. MERILL. Get Mr. Powell his breakfast.

HULDA. Ya, vat val ay gat?

ROBERT. Anything at all.

HULDA. Ya.

MRS. MERILL. Hulda, your mouth is open again.

HULDA. Ya, ay opened it.

MRS. MERILL. Well, shut it.

(*Exit Hulda and Mrs. Merrill, R.*)

MERTON. There are a good many enjoyments on the farm. I find myself going out in the field, running my hand down into the soil and wondering if that particular seed is going to come up. It's the joy of making things grow. I have health and I am independent. I feel that I have part ownership in this world of ours.

ROBERT (*sitting on desk*). You have the idea. I've had a little taste of what drudgery at the desk means, ever since I put out that shingle, "Robert Powell, Lawyer." I'd have given up long ago if it hadn't been for the old man. He keeps saying, "Make good, make good." Here you are making good and enjoying life, too, a real success. There is only one thing lacking in your equipment here.

MERTON. And that?

ROBERT. A wife. (*Stands.*)

MERTON (*throwing up hands as if to ward him off*). No! No!

ROBERT. That's it, exactly. You could be the happiest man alive if you had a cheerful little wife, one who could appreciate the farm.

MERTON. Come now, you have no right to talk to me this way.

ROBERT. Oh, but I have. It's different in my case.

MERTON. A Margerie Langdon, for instance.

ROBERT. Oh! You don't want to wish me any bad luck, do you? She's out my class entirely. Her goal is society. I can't afford to keep an auto and do things on that scale.

MRS. MERILL (*from door*). Breakfast is ready, Mr. Powell.

ROBERT. I'll be there with bells on. I'm actually ashamed of the way I eat, but such cooking!

(Exit Robert, R.)

(Enter Gus, L. Works with Babcock tester on table. Telephone rings.)

MERTON. Hello! Who is this? . . . Mr. Cameron, well . . . Stock food? . . . So you are the man that took the liberty of sending your stock food out to my place. You'll find it in my machine shed. You can thank my man, Gus, for setting it in out of the rain. . . . No, I have too much respect for my cows . . . I don't care if it is ten feeds for one cent, when I want stock food I'll order it. . . . You can do just as you like about that, but be sure to take it far enough away from the house so that the chickens won't get any of it. Good-by. (*Hangs up receiver.*)

GUS. Har ban das record sheets for das cows. (*Crosses and places them on desk.*)

MERTON. Do they balance? (*Looks at them.*)

GUS. Ya.

MERTON. How about this cow, Buttercup?

GUS. Ah, ha ain't no good at all.

MERTON. Have you followed the ration closely?

GUS. Ya, at don't do no good, do'. Ay gets lots of milk but at ain't no good on dis test.

MERTON. I think the wisest thing we can do is to weed her out of the herd, don't you?

GUS. Ya, ay tank so. Ay tank she is losing proposition.

MERTON (*rising*). Transfer your records to this sheet in ink. (*Gus sits at desk.*)

(Exit Merton, R.)

(Enter Mrs. Merrill and Hulda, R. Hulda is carrying a broom and dusting cloth in one hand and an apple, half eaten, in the other.)

MRS. MERILL (*to Hulda*). There, you may sweep out this room. Be careful not to throw away any papers or anything, and don't raise any more dust than you can help, and don't break anything, and close your

mouth. I've got Gus so that he knows a little something now, and I'll have to start over again on you.

(Exit Mrs. Merrill, R.)

(Hulda sweeps vigorously.)



Gus and Hulda

GUS. Har, vat you doing?

HULDA. Ay sweeping das floor.

GUS *(rising and coming over to her)*. Don't you know no better dan to raise all dis dust? You stir up all de yerms and bacilli and tings.

You gat hydrophia if you don't look out. Dat ban dangerous. Don't you keep your mouth open all de time. Dat ban dangerous, too. (*Goes back, sits down at desk, and writes.*)

HULDA (*edging up to him*). Ay like you ven you talk like dat. You are such smart man. Ay going to marry you, ain't I?

GUS. Ya, when you learn to be up-to-date farmer's wife, but not till den.

HULDA (*edging nearer and nudging him with her elbow*). Ay like you pretty good. Ay let you kiss me, if you want to.

GUS (*just about to kiss, stops short and holds up hand as if to ward her off*). No, dat not be sanitary.

HULDA. Oh, Gus!

GUS. No, ay tell you dat not be sanitary. (*pause*) Ay ban reading dat on das paper.—Ah, ay got good idea—strain 'em out yist like das milk. (*Crosses to desk, takes piece of cheesecloth from desk and places over her mouth and kisses her. Crosses to L. with thumbs thrust in his vest, and chest thrown out; returns, and kisses her again.*)

(*Enter Merton, R.*)

MERTON (*laughing*). Why the cheesecloth, Gus?

GUS (*in great confusion*). Ay don't want to get no yerms.

MERTON. Don't you think you are carrying the germ idea a little too far, Gus? It is all right to be careful, but when you carry it so far that you fail to be sentimental any longer, it's time to stop.

GUS. At ban all right, ve ban going to get married.

MERTON. Is that so. (*Crosses to Hulda and takes her hand.*) I wish you joy, Hulda; congratulations, Gus. When does it come off?

GUS. Pretty quick now.

MERTON. This is news. (*disappointed*) I shall hate to losc you, Gus. You have done excellent work for me.

GUS. You ain't going to lose me!

MERTON. But I suppose you will want to start in farming for yourself.

GUS. If ay got to quit, ay not get married.

MERTON (*smiling*). Well, I'll see if I can arrange it so that you can both stay.

HULDA. T'ank you. (*Merton crosses to desk and sits. Exit Gus, R. Hulda continues sweeping and eating her apple, in corner down stage, R.*)

(*Enter Reuben Allen, R.*)

ALLEN. Good morning.

MERTON. Good morning, Mr. Allen.

ALLEN. Durn fine day, ain't it? (*Merton nods.*) Shouldn't wonder but what it would rain, though.

MERTON. Yes, the barometer stands low and there is a low due here most any time.

ALLEN. Oh, I don't take no stock in them idees. I can tell by the

different signs. I can hit the weather right square on the head every gosh darn time. That's more than them fellers at Washington can do.

MERTON. Mr. Allen, can't you do a thing unless there is some sign to guide you? You plant potatoes by the moon, kill your animals by the moon, every turn you make must prove some sign. Do you want to know what I think of your signs?

ALLEN. Why, yes.

MERTON. I think they are all rot, and wouldn't advise you to invest any money on them. Father is out in the kitchen.

ALLEN. Gosh, but you think you're smart, don't you?

(Enter Mrs. Merrill, R.)

MRS. MERILL. Good morning, Mr. Allen.

ALLEN. Morning. Is the old man out there?

MRS. MERILL. Yes.

ALLEN. How's his rheumatiz?

MRS. MERILL. It ain't much better. *(Exit Allen, R.)* Merton, I want you to kill those roosters I have shut up in the chicken coop.

MERTON. *(Crosses to table, gets his hat.)* You have finally decided to kill a few?

MRS. MERILL. Yes, they do a lot of crowing, but it is the hens that meet the demand for eggs. I made thirty dollars off them this month.

MERTON. Good.

(Exit Merton, R.)

MRS. MERILL *(turning to Hulda, who is eating her apple)*. Now you get to work! What? Eating apples again—I told you not to touch—you give me that apple. *(Hulda takes a big bite and hands her the apple.)* Now get to work!

(Mrs. Merrill goes out, R. Hulda crosses L., taking another apple from her pocket. She sits at desk and speaks into telephone.)

HULDA. Ay vont to talk to Mr. Swanson's residence place. . . . Swanson's! Swanson's! Can't you fursto da Anglich goud? . . . Ya, dot's him. . . . Hello! Das Lena Swanson? Das ban Hulda speaking. Ay got ma hat from Sears and Robeck's. Ay like it goud. Yust like de picture in da bouk. . . . Ya, on dollar nette otta. Dere vos one for two dollars, ay didn't like ham. . . . No. . . . Hello, hello, hello, vot you butt in for? Ay not talking to you. . . . Don't you gat fresh by me. *(Hangs up receiver.)* My goodness, ha ban fresh!

(Re-enter Mrs. Merrill.)

MRS. MERILL. Hulda, you get to work. *(Hulda dusts, L., during this scene.) (Calling out.)* Here, you two will have to get out of the kitchen. I can't have you in the way all the time. Gus, help Pa.

Gus. Ya.

(Enter Merrill with Gus and Allen on either side. Mrs. Merrill gets chair and places it down stage.)

MERRILL. Careful! Careful! Go easy now. There! (Sits.) Careful! Here! Here! Drop it! Drop it, I tell you! (Gus drops foot. It hits the floor with a bang.) Oh, get out of my sight, you blundering fool. (Hurls cane after him. Gus dodges out of room.)

MRS. MERRILL. Pa, control yourself.

(Exit Mrs. Merrill, R.)

ALLEN. Did you ever try a potato for your rheumatiz?

MERRILL. No.

ALLEN. By golly, it works like a charm. I tried it on Jones's boy last spring when he had 'flamitory; ain't had no rheumatiz since.

MERRILL. I don't know what Merton would think. He don't take much stock in things like that. Don't do any harm to try, though. How do you do it?

ALLEN. Yer take a common, ordinary potato and ya put it in yer pocket and carry it around with ya wherever yer happen to be, and the rheumatiz leaves yer, and goes into the potato. Then when yer ain't got no more rheumatiz left, ya throw the potato away and yer cured.

MERRILL. It sounds pretty good.

ALLEN. It's a sure thing. Wait! I'll get one. (Goes to R.) Mrs. Merrill.

(Enter Mrs. Merrill, R.)

MRS. MERRILL (at doorway). Well, what now?

ALLEN. Could I have a potato? A small one is just as good.

MRS. MERRILL. Why, yes. What do you want of a potato?

ALLEN. I'm going to cure Merrill of this rheumatiz.

MRS. MERRILL. What nonsense are you up to now?

(Exit Mrs. Merrill.)

ALLEN. 'Taint nonsense neither; it works every time. (Mrs. Merrill re-enters with potato and gives it to Merrill.)

MRS. MERRILL. Here's your potato.

(Exit Mrs. Merrill.)

ALLEN. Now just put that in your pocket. (Merrill does so.) No, not that one, the one next the rheumatiz.

MERRILL. I don't feel no change.

ALLEN. Oh, ya don't feel it right away. You have to wait a little while before it begins ter work.

MERRILL. How are you coming with your plowing?

(Hulda picks up broom and goes out, R.)

ALLEN. Well, I ain't getting along very spry. I ain't got no feed for the horses and they can't stand very much. I might have knowed we was going to have a dry year when I saw that 'ere dry moon. I only got a

little crop, and that wasn't a very good stand, neither. (*Takes a bite off his plug of tobacco.*) You know Phillips, he tested his corn this year and he got a right smart stand. (*Shifts his cud.*) You know I kinder believe there's something to that 'ere notion. (*Shifts his cud.*) There's something to surface cultivation, too.

MERILL. Of course there is. Now, my boy Merton, he says there is, and I guess he knows if anybody does.

ALLEN. Keeps the weeds down, I suppose. (*Crosses to window and expectorates.*)

MERILL. No, he says that's only a small part of it. He says by cultivating you keep a dust blanket on the soil and that keeps the haterly, no, capillary water from coming up, whatever that is. Farming ain't like it used to be. Me and Merton got a crop, and a good one, too. That's more than lots of them did around this 'ere part of the country. The trouble with farmers is that they've been farming from here down (*places hand on level with his chin*) and they ain't been paying much attention to what was from here up. Now, as I sees it, the thing they've got to do is to farm from here up. You know times is changing; I used to walk hundred or miles behind a drag, in the dust, but now I don't look at a piece of farm machinery unless it's got a seat on it.

ALLEN. Wall, things has took a turn since Merton came back. Two years have made a lot of difference in the looks of this place. How about that mortgage you was worrying about so bad? Got that all paid off, I calculate.

MERILL. Paid off! No, sir. When I can borrow money at 5 per cent and turn it into work and improvements and clear 10 per cent, I'm not paying it back in a hurry. I was just saying to Merton yesterday, I can't see why folks is so skittish about mortgages.

(*Enter Gus and sits at desk.*)

ALLEN (*crossing to window*). Well, there's no getting out of it, if we have another such dry year I go plum busted.

GUS. By golly, at ban dry year all right. De other day ay caught a frog out in de field, and took him home and put him in dis har horse trough, and he come prutty nare drounding. He didn't even know how to swim.

(*Enter Robert, C.*)

ROBERT (*in great excitement*). Say, Gus, there is something the matter with one of your cows.

GUS. Vot?

ROBERT. All the teeth have fallen out of the upper jaw.

GUS (*laughing*). Das the vay dey always is. (*Laughs.*)

ROBERT. Well, laugh if you think it does you any good. I thought I had made a great discovery. I learn something new every day. And we

call you farmers green! Say, Gus, there's one thing more I want to ask.

Gus. Ya?

ROBERT. Now, don't laugh, if you do I'll—well—you laugh and see what happens to you. I've seen you milking the cows several times, and what I want to know is, how do you know when to stop milking?

Gus. Har. (*Places hand over mouth.*) Ay can't help it, ay got to laugh. Ay yust turn off de faucet. (*Laughs.*)

ROBERT. Well, laugh, I hope you choke.

(*Exit Gus, R.*)

(*Enter Merton, L.*)

ALLEN. Say, Merton, we was just having a little discussion here about how it was you got a good crop this year. How'd you do it?

MERTON. Well, this was a dry year, but I had plowed deep and was ready for it. Then I cultivated well to keep in what moisture I did have. The point is, Mr. Allen, that in farming, as in any other business, you've got to put your brains into your work. The man who works by muscle alone is bound to fall behind the man who works with both brain and muscle. We are told, Mr. Allen, that the man with the brawn must give way to the man with the brain, the man with the hoe must make room for the man with the dynamo. (*Crosses to desk.*)

MERRILL. That's it. (*Stands.*) That's it. I tell you, Allen, we've been wrong all these years about education and such.

(*Enter Mrs. Merrill. Raises hands in horror.*)

MRS. MERRILL. Pa! Your rheumatism! (*Merrill looks at his foot and sits.*)

ALLEN. By gosh, that potato is working.

MRS. MERRILL (*crossing to the window*). There is an auto coming down the road. It must be them. Yes, it is turning in, and there's two of them. Good land, and I haven't even made your bed. (*Auto horn.*)

ROBERT (*at the window*). Who is the young lady?

MERTON (*rising*). Young lady?

ROBERT. Yes.

MERTON. How am I to know?

ROBERT. Ah, come off, now, you do. Gee, she's a bear. I'm going to get out of here.

MERTON. No, you don't. (*Catches him by sleeve.*)

ROBERT. But let me get a collar on.

MERTON. No, I want her to see you just the way you are.

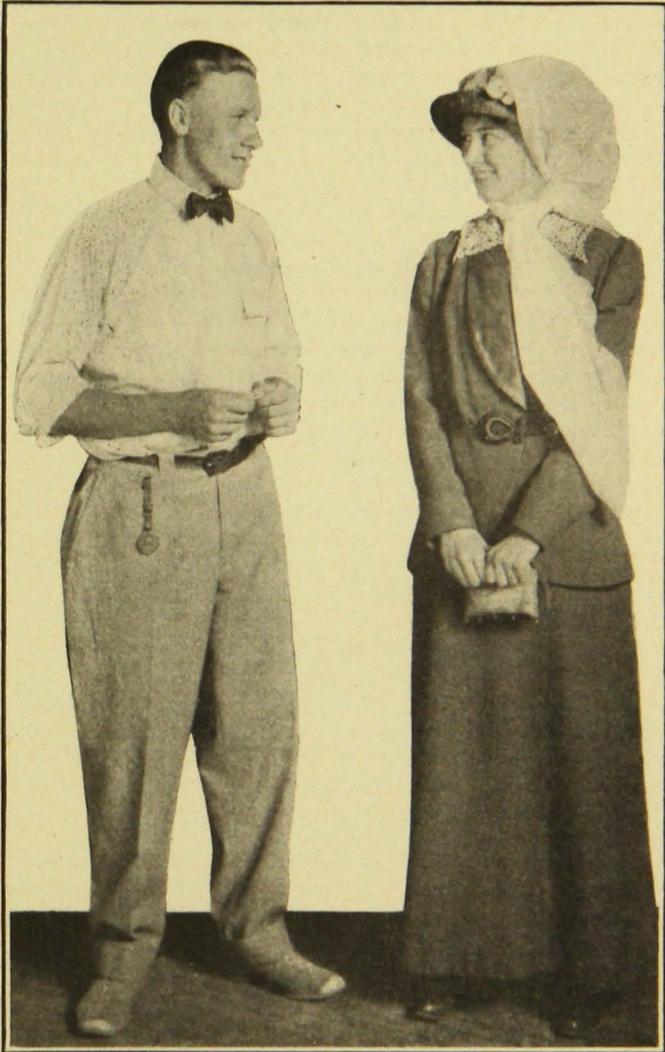
ROBERT. And you pretended you didn't know who it was. Is my hair combed?

(*Exit Merton, C. Robert crosses to L.*)

MRS. MERRILL. What is your rush?

ROBERT. I'm going to catch a train. (*Tries to pass her.*)

MRS. MERILL. No, you stay here. I want you to see Rose Meade.



Rose: "But I can't wait."

ROBERT. Rose Meade! Jumping Jerusalem!

MRS. MERILL. I want you to stay and meet her.

ROBERT. Meet her! Why Mrs. Merrill, I know her.

(Enter Rose, followed by Merton and Ashley.)

MRS. MERRILL. Rose, you dear, it's awful good of you to come out. You know Mr. Powell, don't you?

ROBERT *(comes forward)*. Yes, I've had that pleasure.

ROSE *(to Mrs. Merrill)*. We met up at the University *(to Robert)*. But what are you doing here on the farm? And your clothes!

ROBERT. Yes. Nifty, aren't they? I am spending my vacation here.

ROSE. Do you like it?

ROBERT. Do I? It's great!

ROSE. I suppose you are a great lawyer by now?

ROBERT. You haven't heard anything about me as yet, have you?

ROSE *(shaking hands with Merrill)*. How is your rheumatism?

MERRILL. 'Taint much better.

ALLEN. It's going to be, though. I got a sure cure for him.

ROSE *(to Allen)*. I saw you at the school entertainment last Friday.

ALLEN. Yes, I was over there.

ROSE. What did you think of it?

ALLEN. Finest school in the state.

ROSE. You didn't used to think so.

ALLEN. No, but these here consolidated schools, they're just the checker. You came down with Ashley in his new automobile wagon, I 'spose.

ROSE. Yes, we had a delightful ride.

ALLEN. I heard you was goin' to get one, Merrill. How about it?

MERRILL. Yes, we calculate to get one as soon as we can find one that suits us.

(Enter Gus.)

ASHLEY. Come out and take a look at mine. I think it's the best on the market. Let me help you, Mr. Merrill. How are the pigs, Gus? *(Ashley and Allen help Merrill.)*

GUS. Pretty good. How are you?

(Exit Merrill, Allen, Ashley, and Robert, C.)

MRS. MERRILL. Land sakes! I forgot all about them little chickens that I have in the brooder. I'll go and get the feed. Don't you want to see them?

ROSE. Yes, I should love to. *(Rose goes toward C.)*

(Exit Mrs. Merrill.)

MERTON. Oh, don't go, I want to speak to you.

ROSE. I think your mother wants to show me her chickens.

MERTON. Oh, the chickens can wait. See here, Rose, I suppose now Ashley's back, he'll be trying to persuade you to go back to town to live, where there are the advantages of art, music, gayety, and all that sort of thing.

ROSE. Well, suppose he does?

MERTON. Oh, then I suppose you'd do like all the rest of them, drop your work and all your grand ideas and settle down to the duties of a fashionable society woman.

ROSE. See here, Merton Merrill, I think it's mean of you to lay that up against me all these years, what I said to you that morning. Just because a girl is young and ignorant and says foolish things is no sign she can not change her mind.

MERTON. Oh, Rose, was it because you did not know? Have you changed your mind? Is there any hope for me? (*Rose turns away embarrassed.*) Oh, Rose, don't play with me. I know how absorbed you are in your work and I mustn't ask you to give it up, but if there was even a faint chance that some day you would, it would mean everything to me. I could wait, oh, ever so long, willingly, gladly.

ROSE (*turning*). But I can't wait. I ask nothing better than to work out my ideas, too, on this dear old farm.

MERTON. Do you mean it? (*He takes her in his arms.*)

(*Enter all others.*)

MERTON. Mother, father, everybody, hear the good news. The finest girl in the world is going to make this the best farm home in the western hemisphere. (*All congratulate them.*)

HULDA (*at window*). We ban goin' to get married, too. (*Gives Gus a bite of apple.*)

(*Curtain*)

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