

DIFF'RENT

A Play in Two Acts

by

Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953)

Text as published in *The Complete Works* (1924)

Characters

CAPTAIN CALEB WILLIAMS

EMMA CROSBY

CAPTAIN JOHN CROSBY, *her father*

MRS. CROSBY, *her mother*

JACK CROSBY, *her brother*

HARRIET WILLIAMS, *Caleb's sister (later MRS. ROGERS)*

ALFRED ROGERS

BENNY ROGERS, *their son*

Scenes

ACT I

Parlor of the Crosby home on a side street of a seaport village in New England--mid-afternoon of a day in late spring in the year 1890.

ACT II

The same. Late afternoon of a day in the early spring of the year 1920.

DIFF'RENT

ACT ONE

SCENE--Parlor of the Crosby home. The room is small and low-ceilinged. Everything has an aspect of scrupulous neatness. On the left, forward, a stiff plush-covered chair. Farther back, in order, a window looking out on a vegetable garden, a black horsehair sofa, and another window. In the far left corner, an old mahogany chest of drawers. To the right of it, in rear, a window looking out on the front yard. To the right of this window is the front door, reached by a dirt path through the small lawn which separates the house from the street. To the right of door, another window. In the far right corner, a diminutive, old-fashioned piano with a stool in front of it. Near the piano on the right, a door leading to the next room. On this side of the room are also a small bookcase half filled with old volumes, a big open fireplace, and another plush-covered chair. Over the fireplace a mantel with a marble clock and a Rogers group. The walls are papered a brown color. The floor is covered with a dark carpet. In the center of the room there is a clumsy, marble-topped table. On the table, a large china lamp, a bulky Bible with a brass clasp, and several books that look suspiciously like cheap novels. Near the table, three plush-covered chairs, two of which are rockers. Several enlarged photos of strained, stern-looking people in uncomfortable poses are hung on the walls.

It is mid-afternoon of a fine day in late spring of the year 1890. Bright sunlight streams through the windows on the left. Through the window and the screen door in the rear the fresh green of the lawn and of the elm trees that line the street can be seen. Stiff, white curtains are at all the windows.

As the curtain rises, Emma Crosby and Caleb Williams are discovered. Emma is a slender girl of twenty, rather under the medium height. Her face, in spite of its plain features, gives an impression of prettiness, due to her large, soft blue eyes which have an incongruous quality of absent-minded romantic dreaminess about them. Her mouth and

chin are heavy, full of a self-willed stubbornness. Although her body is slight and thin, there is a quick, nervous vitality about all her movements that reveals an underlying constitution of reserve power and health. She has light brown hair, thick and heavy. She is dressed soberly and neatly in her black Sunday best, style of the period.

Caleb Williams is tall and powerfully built, about thirty. Black hair, keen, dark eyes, face rugged and bronzed, mouth obstinate but good-natured. He, also, is got up in black Sunday best and is uncomfortably self-conscious and stiff therein.

They are sitting on the horsehair sofa, side by side. His arm is about her waist. She holds one of his big hands in both of hers, her head leaning back against his shoulder, her eyes half closed in a dreamy contentedness. He stares before him rigidly, his whole attitude wooden and fixed as if he were posing for a photograph; yet his eyes are expressively tender and protecting when he glances down at her diffidently out of the corners without moving his head.

EMMA--(*sighing happily*) Gosh, I wish we could sit this way forever! (*then after a pause, as he makes no comment except a concurring squeeze*) Don't you, Caleb?

CALEB--(*with another squeeze--emphatically*) Hell, yes! I'd like it, Emmer.

EMMA--(*softly*) I do wish you wouldn't swear so awful much, Caleb.

CALEB--S'cuse me, Emmer, it jumped out o' my mouth afore I thought. (*then with a grin*) You'd ought to be used to that part o' men's wickedness--with your Pa and Jack cussin' about the house all the time.

EMMA--(*with a smile*) Oh, I haven't no strict religious notions about it. I'm hardened in sin so far's they're concerned. Goodness me, how would Ma and me ever have lived in the same house with them two if we wasn't used to it? I don't even notice their cussing no more. And I don't mind hearing it from the other men, either. Being sea-faring men, away from their women folks most of the time, I know it just gets to be part of their natures and they ain't responsible. (*decisively*) But you're diff'rent. You just got to be diff'rent from the rest.

CALEB--(*amused by her seriousness*) Diff'rent? Ain't I a sea-farin' man, too?

EMMA--You're diff'rent just the same. That's what made me fall in love with you 'stead of any of them. And you've got to stay diff'rent. Promise me, Caleb, that you'll always stay diff'rent from them--even after we're married years and years.

CALEB--(*embarrassed*) Why--I promise to do my best by you, Emmer. You know that, don't ye? On'y don't git the notion in your head I'm any better'n the rest. They're all good men--most of 'em, anyway. Don't tell me, for instance, you think I'm better'n your Pa or Jack--'cause I ain't. And I don't know as I'd want to be, neither.

EMMA--(*excitedly*) But you got to want to be--when I ask it.

CALEB--(*surprised*) Better'n your Pa?

EMMA--(*struggling to convey her meaning*) Why, Pa's all right. He's a fine man--and Jack's all right, too. I wouldn't hear a bad word about them for anything. And the others are all right in their way, too, I s'pose. Only--don't you see what I mean?--I look on you as diff'rent from all of them. I mean there's things that's all right for them to do that wouldn't be for you--in my mind, anyway.

CALEB--(*puzzled and a bit uneasy*) Sailors ain't plaster saints, Emmer,--not a darn one of 'em ain't!

EMMA--(*hurt and disappointed*) Then you won't promise me to stay diff'rent for my sake?

CALEB--(*with rough tenderness*) Oh, hell, Emmer, I'll do any cussed thing in the world you want me to, and you know it!

EMMA--(*lovingly*) Thank you, Caleb. It means a lot to me--more'n you think. And don't you think I'm diff'rent, too--not just the same as all the other girls hereabouts?

CALEB--'Course you be! Ain't I always said that? You're wo'th the whole pack of 'em put together.

EMMA--Oh, I don't mean I'm any better. I mean I just look at things diff'rent from what they do--getting married, for example, and other things, too. And so I've got it fixed in my head that you and me ought to make a married couple--diff'rent from the rest--not that they ain't all right in their way.

CALEB--(*puzzled--uncertainly*) Waal--it's bound to be from your end of it, you bein' like you are. But I ain't so sure o' mine.

EMMA--Well, I am!

CALEB--(*with a grin*) You got me scared, Emmer. I'm scared you'll want me to live up to one of them high-fangled heroes you been readin' about in them books. (*He indicates the novels on the table.*)

EMMA--No, I don't. I want you to be just like yourself, that's all.

CALEB--That's easy. It ain't hard bein' a plain, ordinary cuss.

EMMA--You are not!

CALEB--(*with a laugh*) Remember, I'm warnin' you, Emmer; and after we're married and you find me out, you can't say I got you under no false pretenses.

EMMA--(*laughing*) I won't. I won't ever need to. (*then after a pause*) Just think, it's only two days more before you and me'll be man and wife.

CALEB--(*squeezing her*) Waal, it's about time, ain't it?--after waitin' three years for me to git enough money saved--and us not seein' hide or hair of each other the last two of 'em. (*with a laugh*) Shows ye what trust I put in you, Emmer, when I kin go off on a two

year whalin' vige and leave you all 'lone for all the young fellers in town to make eyes at.

EMMA--But lots and lots of the others does the same thing without thinking nothing about it.

CALEB--(*with a laugh*) Yes, but I'm diff'rent, like you says.

EMMA--(*laughing*) Oh, you're poking fun now.

CALEB--(*with a wink*) And you know as well's me that some o' the others finds out some funny things that's been done when they was away.

EMMA--(*laughing at first*) Yes, but you know I'm diff'rent, too. (*then frowning*) But don't let's talk about that sort o' ructions. I hate to think of such things--even joking. I ain't like that sort.

CALEB--Thunder, I know you ain't, Emmer. I was on'y jokin'.

EMMA--And I never doubted you them two years; and I won't when you sail away again, neither.

CALEB--(*with a twinkle in his eye*) No, even a woman'd find it hard to git jealous of a whale!

EMMA--(*laughing*) I wasn't thinking of whales, silly! But there's plenty of diversion going on in the ports you touched, if you'd a mind for it.

CALEB--Waal, I didn't have no mind for it, that's sartin. My fust vige as skipper, you don't s'pose I had time for no monkey-shinin', do ye? Why, I was that anxious to bring back your Pa's ship with a fine vige that'd make him piles o' money, I didn't even think of nothin' else.

EMMA--'Cepting me, I hope?

CALEB--O' course! What was my big aim in doin' it if it wasn't so's we'd git married when I come to home? And then, s'far as ports go, we didn't tech at one the last year--'ceptin' when that durn tempest blowed us south and we put in at one o' the Islands for water.

EMMA--What island? You never told me nothing about that.

CALEB--(*growing suddenly very embarrassed as if some memory occurred to him*) Ain't nothin' to tell, that's why. Just an island near the Line, that's all. O'ny naked heathen livin' there--brown colored savages that ain't even Christians. (*He gets to his feet abruptly and pulls out his watch.*) Gittin' late, must be. I got to go down to the store and git some things for Harriet afore I forgets 'em.

EMMA--(*rising also and putting her hands on his shoulders*) But you did think of me and miss me all the time you was gone, didn't you?--same as I did you.

CALEB--'Course I did. Every minute.

EMMA--(*nestling closer to him--softly*) I'm glad of that, Caleb. Well, good-by for a little while.

CALEB--I'll step in again for a spell afore supper--that is, if you want me to.

EMMA--Yes, of course I do, Caleb. Good-by. (*She lifts her face to his.*)

CALEB--Good-by, Emmer. (*He kisses her and holds her in his arms for a moment. Jack comes up the walk to the screen door. They do not notice his approach.*)

JACK--(*peering in and seeing them--in a joking bellow*) Belay, there! (*They separate with startled exclamations. Jack comes in grinning. He is a hulking, stocky-built young fellow of 25. His heavy face is sunburned, handsome in a coarse, good-natured animal fashion. His small blue eyes twinkle with the unconsciously malicious humor of the born practical joker. He wears high seaboots turned down from the knee, dirty cotton shirt and pants, and a yellow sou'wester pushed jauntily on the back of his head, revealing his disheveled, curly blond hair. He carries a string of cod heads.*)

JACK--(*laughing at the embarrassed expression on their faces*) Caught ye that time, by gum! Go ahead! Kiss her again, Caleb. Don't mind me.

EMMA--(*with flurried annoyance*) You got a head on you just like one of them cod heads you're carrying--that stupid! I should think you'd be ashamed at your age--shouting to scare folks as if you was a little boy.

JACK--(*putting his arm about her waist*) There, kitty, don't git to spittin'. (*stroking her hair*) Puss, puss, puss! Nice kitty! (*He laughs.*)

EMMA--(*forced to smile--pushing him away*) Get away! You'll never get sense. Land sakes, what a brother to have!

JACK--Oh, I dunno. I ain't so bad, as brothers go--eh, Caleb?

CALEB--(*smiling*) I reckon you'll do, Jack.

JACK--See there! Listen to Caleb. You got to take his word--love, honor, and *obey*, ye know, Emmer.

EMMA--(*laughing*) Leave it to men folks to stick up for each other, right or wrong.

JACK--(*cockily*) Waal, I'm willin' to leave it to the girls, too. Ask any of 'em you knows if I ain't a jim-dandy to have for a brother. (*He winks at Caleb who grins back at him.*)

EMMA--(*with a sniff*) I reckon you don't play much brother with them--the kind you knows. You may fool 'em into believing you're some pumpkins but they'd change their minds if they had to live in the same house with you playing silly jokes all the time.

JACK--(*provokingly*) A good lot on 'em 'd be on'y too damn glad to git me in the same house--if I was fool enough to git married.

EMMA--"Pride goeth before a fall." But shucks, what's the good paying any attention to you. (*She smiles at him affectionately.*)

JACK--(*exaggeratedly*) You see, Caleb? See how she misuses me--her lovin' brother. Now you know what you'll be up against for the rest o' your natural days.

CALEB--Don't see no way but what I got to bear it, Jack.

EMMA--Caleb needn't fear. He's different.

JACK--(*with a sudden guffaw*) Oh, hell, yes! I was forgittin'. Caleb's a Sunday go-to-meetin' Saint, ain't he? Yes, he is!

EMMA--(*with real resentment*) He's better'n what you are, if that's what you mean.

JACK--(*with a still louder laugh*) Ho-ho! Caleb's one o' them goody-goody heroes out o' them story books you're always readin', ain't he?

CALEB--(*soberly--a bit disturbed*) I was tellin' Emmer not to take me that high.

JACK--No use, Caleb. She won't hear of it. She's got her head sot t'other way. You'd ought to heard her argyin' when you was gone about what a parson's pet you was. Butter won't melt in your mouth, no siree! Waal, love is blind--and deaf, too, as the feller says--and I can't argy no more 'cause I got to give Ma these heads. (*He goes to the door on right--then glances back at his sister maliciously and says meaningly*) You ought to have a talk with Jim Benson, Emmer. Oughtn't she, Caleb? (*He winks ponderously and goes off laughing uproariously.*)

CALEB--(*his face worried and angry*) Jack's a durn fool at times, Emmer--even if he is your brother. He needs a good lickin'.

EMMA--(*staring at him--uneasily*) What'd he mean about Jim Benson, Caleb?

CALEB--(*frowning*) I don't know--ezactly. Makin' up foolishness for a joke, I reckon.

EMMA--You don't know--*exactly*? Then there is--something?

CALEB--(*quickly*) Not as I know on. On'y Jim Benson's one o' them slick jokers, same's Jack; can't keep their mouths shet or mind their own business.

EMMA--Jim Benson was mate with you this last trip, wasn't he?

CALEB--Yes.

EMMA--Didn't him and you get along?

CALEB--(*a trifle impatiently*) 'Course we did. Jim's all right. We got along fust rate. He just can't keep his tongue from waggin', that's all's the matter with him.

EMMA--(*uneasily*) What's it got to wag about? You ain't done nothing wrong, have you?

CALEB--Wrong? No, nothin' a man'd rightly call wrong.

EMMA--Nothing you'd be shamed to tell me?

CALEB--(*awkwardly*) Why--no, Emmer.

EMMA--(*pleadingly*) You'd swear that, Caleb?

CALEB--(*hesitating for a second--then firmly*) Yes, I'd swear. I'd own up to everything fair and square I'd ever done, if it comes to that p'int. I ain't shamed o' anything I ever done, Emmer. On'y--women folks ain't got to know everything, have they?

EMMA--(*turning away from him--frightenedly*) Oh, Caleb!

CALEB--(*preoccupied with his own thoughts--going to the door in rear*) I'll see you later, Emmer. I got to go up street now more'n ever. I want to give that Jim Benson a talkin' to he won't forgit in a hurry--that is, if he's been tellin' tales. Good-by, Emmer.

EMMA--(*faintly*) Good-by, Caleb. (*He goes out. She sits in one of the rockers by the table, her face greatly troubled, her manner nervous and uneasy. Finally she makes a decision, goes quickly to the door on the right and calls*) Jack! Jack!

JACK--(*from the kitchen*) What you want?

EMMA--Come here a minute, will you?

JACK--Jest a second. (*She comes back by the table, fighting to conceal her agitation. After a moment, Jack comes in from the right. He has evidently been washing up, for his face is red and shiny, his hair wet and slicked in a part. He looks around for Caleb.*) Where's Caleb?

EMMA--He had to go up street. (*then coming to the point abruptly--with feigned indifference*) What's that joke about Jim Benson, Jack? It seemed to get Caleb all riled up.

JACK--(*with a chuckle*) You got to ask Caleb about that, Emmer.

EMMA--I did. He didn't seem to want to own up it was anything.

JACK--(*with a laugh*) 'Course he wouldn't. He don't 'preciate a joke when it's on him.

EMMA--How'd you come to hear of it?

JACK--From Jim. Met him this afternoon and me and him had a long talk. He was tellin' me all 'bout their vige.

EMMA--Then it was on the vige this joke happened?

JACK--Yes. It was when they put in to git water at them South Sea Islands where the tempest blowed 'em.

EMMA--Oh. (*suspiciously*) Caleb didn't seem willing to tell me much about their touching there.

JACK--(*chuckling*) 'Course he didn't. Wasn't I sayin' the joke's on him? (*coming closer to her--in a low, confidential tone, chucklingly*) We'll fix up a joke on Caleb, Emmer, what d'ye say?

EMMA--(*tortured by foreboding--resolved to find out what is back of all this by hook or crook--forcing a smile*) All right, Jack. I'm willing.

JACK--Then I'll tell you what Jim told me. And you put it up to Caleb, see, and pretend you're madder'n hell. (*unable to restrain his mirth*) Ho-ho! It'll git him wild if you do that. On'y I didn't tell ye, mind. You heard it from someone else. I don't want to git Caleb down on me. And you'd hear about it from someone sooner or later 'cause Jim and the rest o' the boys has been tellin' the hull town.

EMMA--(*taken aback--frowning*) So all the town knows about it?

JACK--Yes, and they're all laffin' at Caleb. Oh, it ain't nothin' so out o' the ordinary. Most o' the whalin' men hereabout have run up against it in their time. I've heard Pa and all the others tellin' stories like it out o' their experience. On'y with Caleb it ended up so damn funny! (*He laughs.*) Ho-ho! Jimminy!

EMMA--(*in a strained voice*) Well, ain't you going to tell me?

JACK--I'm comin' to it. Waal, seems like they all went ashore on them islands to git water and the native brown women, all naked a'most, come round to meet 'em same as they always does--wantin' to swap for terbaccer and other tradin' stuff with straw mats and whatever other junk they got. Them brown gals was purty as the devil, Jim says--that is, in their heathen, outlandish way--and the boys got makin' up to 'em; and then, o' course, everything happened like it always does, and even after they'd got all the water they needed aboard, it took 'em a week to round up all hands from where they was foolin' about with them nigger women.

EMMA--(*in anguish*) Yes--but Caleb--he ain't like them others. He's diff'rent.

JACK--(*with a sly wink*) Oho, is he? I'm comin' to Caleb. Waal, seems 's if he kept aboard mindin' his own business and winkin' at what the boys was doin'. And one o' them gals--the purtiest on 'em, Jim says--she kept askin', where's the captain? She wouldn't have nothin' to do with any o' the others. She thought on'y the skipper was good enough for her, I reckon. So one night jest afore they sailed some o' the boys, bein' drunk on native rum they'd stole, planned to put up a joke on Caleb and on that brown gal, too. So they tells her the captain had sent for her and she was to swim right out and git aboard the ship where he was waitin' for her alone. That part of it was true enough 'cause Caleb was alone, all hands havin' deserted, you might say.

EMMA--(*letting an involuntary exclamation escape her*) Oh!

JACK--Waal, that fool brown gal b'lieved 'em and she swum right off, tickled to death. What happened between 'em when she got aboard, nobody knows. Some thinks one thing and some another. And I ain't sayin' nothin' 'bout it--(*with a wink*) but I know damn well what I'd 'a done in Caleb's boots, and I guess he ain't the cussed old woman you makes him out. But that part of it's got nothin' to do with the joke nohow. The joke's this: that brown gal took an awful shine to Caleb and when she saw the ship was gittin' ready to sail she raised ructions, standin' on the beach howlin' and screamin', and beatin' her chest with her fists. And when they ups anchors, she dives in the water and swims out after 'em. There's no wind hardly and she kin swim like a fish and catches up to 'em and

tries to climb aboard. At fust, Caleb tries to treat her gentle and argy with her to go back. But she won't listen, she gits wilder and wilder, and finally he gits sick of it and has the boys push her off with oars while he goes and hides in the cabin. Even this don't work. She keeps swimmin' round and yellin' for Caleb. And finally they has to p'int a gun at her and shoot in the water near her afore the crazy cuss gives up and swims back to home, howlin' all the time. (*with a, chuckle*) And Caleb lyin' low in the cabin skeered to move out, and all hands splittin' their sides! Gosh, I wish I'd been there! It must have been funnier'n hell! (*He laughs loudly--then noticing his sister's stony expression, stops abruptly.*) What're you pullin' that long face for, Emmer? (*offendedly*) Hell, you're a nice one to tell a joke to!

EMMA--(*after a pause--forcing the words out slowly*) Caleb's comin' back here, Jack. I want you to see him for me. I want you to tell him--

JACK--Not me! You got to play this joke on him yourself or it won't work.

EMMA--(*tensely*) This ain't a joke, Jack--what I mean. I want you to tell him I've changed my mind and I ain't going to marry him.

JACK--What!

EMMA--I been thinking things over, tell him--and I take back my promise--and he can have back his ring--and I ain't going to marry him.

JACK--(*flabbergasted--peering into her face anxiously*) Say--what the hell--? Are you tryin' to josh me, Emmer? Or are you gone crazy all of a sudden?

EMMA--I ain't joking nor crazy neither. You tell him what I said.

JACK--(*vehemently*) I will like--Say, what's come over you, anyhow?

EMMA--My eyes are opened, that's all, and I ain't going to marry him.

JACK--Is it--'count of that joke about Caleb I was tellin' you?

EMMA--(*her voice trembling*) It's 'count of something I got in my own head. What you told only goes to prove I was wrong about it.

JACK--(*greatly perturbed now*) Say, what's the matter? Can't you take a joke? Are you mad at him 'count o' that brown gal?

EMMA--Yes, I am--and I ain't going to marry him and that's all there is to it.

JACK--(*argumentatively*) Jealous of a brown, heathen woman that ain't no better'n a nigger? God sakes, Emmer, I didn't think you was that big a fool. Why, them kind o' women ain't women like you. They don't count like folks. They ain't Christians--nor nothin'!

EMMA--That ain't it. I don't care what they are.

JACK--And it wasn't Caleb anyhow. It was all her fixin'. And how'd you know he had anything to do with her--like that? I ain't said he did. Jim couldn't swear he did neither.

And even if he did--what difference does it make? It ain't rightly none o' your business what he does on a vige. He didn't ask her to marry him, did he?

EMMA--I don't care. He'd ought to have acted diff'rent.

JACK--Oh golly, there you go agen makin' a durned creepin'-Jesus out of him! What d'you want to marry, anyhow--a man or a sky-pilot? Caleb's a man, ain't he?--and a damn good man and as smart a skipper as there be in these parts! What more d'you want, anyhow?

EMMA--*(violently)* I want you to shet up! You're too dumb stupid and bad yourself to ever know what I'm thinking.

JACK--*(resentfully)* Go to the devil, then! I'm goin' to tell Ma and sic her onto you. You'll maybe listen to her and git some sense. *(He stamps out, right, while he is speaking. Emma bursts into sobs and throws herself on a chair, covering her face with her hands. Harriet Williams and Alfred Rogers come up the path to the door in rear. Peering through the screen and catching sight of Emma, Harriet calls Emmer! Emma leaps to her feet and dabs at her eyes with a handkerchief in a vain effort to conceal traces of her tears. Harriet has come in, followed by Rogers. Caleb's sister is a tall, dark girl of twenty. Her face is plainly homely and yet attracts the eye by a certain boldly-appealing vitality of self-confident youth. She wears an apron and has evidently just come out of the kitchen. Rogers is a husky young fisherman of twenty-four, washed and slicked up in his ill-fitting best.)*

ROGERS--Hello, Emmer.

EMMA--*(huskily, trying to force a smile)* Hello, Harriet. Hello, Alfred. Won't you set?

HARRIET--No, I jest run over from the house a second to see if--Where's Caleb, Emmer?

EMMA--He's gone up street.

HARRIET--And here I be waitin' in the kitchen for him to bring back the things so's I can start his supper. *(with a laugh and a roguish look at Rogers)* Dearie me, it ain't no use dependin' on a man to remember nothin' when he's in love.

ROGERS--*(putting his arm about her waist and giving her a squeeze--grinning)* How 'bout me? Ain't I in love and ain't I as reliable as an old hoss?

HARRIET--Oh, you! You're the worst of 'em all.

ROGERS--You don't think so. *(He tries to kiss her.)*

HARRIET--Stop it. Ain't you got no manners? What'll Emmer think?

ROGERS--Emmer can't throw stones. Her and Caleb is worsen at spoonin' than what we are. *(Harriet breaks away from him laughingly and goes to Emma.)*

HARRIET--(*suddenly noticing the expression of misery on Emma's face--astonished*) Why, Emmer Crosby, what's the matter? You look as if you'd lost your last friend.

EMMA--(*trying to smile*) Nothing. It's nothing.

HARRIET--It is, too! Why, I do believe you've been crying!

EMMA--No, I ain't.

HARRIET--You have, too! (*putting her arms about Emma*) Goodness, what's happened? You and Caleb ain't had a spat, have you, with your weddin' only two days off?

EMMA--(*with quick resentful resolution*) There ain't going to be any wedding.

HARRIET--What!

ROGERS--(*pricking up his ears--inquisitively*) Huh?

EMMA--Not in two days nor no time.

HARRIET--(*dumbfounded*) Why, Emmer Crosby! Whatever's got into you? You and Caleb must have had an awful spat!

ROGERS--(*with a man-of-the-world attitude of cynicism*) Don't take her so dead serious, Harriet. Emmer'll git over it like you all does.

EMMA--(*angrily*) You shet up, Alf Rogers! (*Mrs. Crosby enters bustlingly from the right. She is a large, fat, florid woman of fifty. In spite of her two hundred and more pounds she is surprisingly active, and the passive, lazy expression of her round moon face is belied by her quick, efficient movements. She exudes an atmosphere of motherly good nature. She wears an apron on which she is drying her hands as she enters. Jack follows her into the room. He has changed to a dark suit, is ready for "up street."*)

MRS. CROSBY--(*smiling at Harriet and Rogers*) Afternoon, Harriet--and Alf.

HARRIET--Afternoon, Ma.

ROGERS--Afternoon.

JACK--(*grinning*) There she be, Ma. (*points to Emma*) Don't she look like she'd scratch a feller's eyes out! Phew! Look at her back curve! Meow? Sptt-sptt! Nice puss! (*He gives a vivid imitation of a cat fight at this last. Then he and Rogers roar with laughter and Harriet cannot restrain a giggle and Mrs. Crosby smiles. Emma stares stonily before her as if she didn't hear.*)

MRS. CROSBY--(*good-naturedly*) Shet up your foolin', Jack.

JACK--(*pretending to be hurt*) Nobody in this house kin take a joke. (*He grins and beckons to Rogers.*) Come along, Alf. You kin 'preciate a joke. Come on in here till I tell you. (*The grinning Rogers follows him into the next room where they can be heard talking and laughing during the following scene.*)

MRS. CROSBY--(*smiling, puts her arms around Emma*) Waal, Emmer, what's this foolishness Jack's been tellin' about--

EMMA--(*resentfully*) It ain't foolishness, Ma. I've made up my mind, I tell you that right here and now.

MRS. CROSBY--(*after a quick glance at her face--soothingly*) There, there! Let's set down and be comfortable. Me, I don't relish roostin' on my feet. (*She pushes Emma gently into a rocker--then points to a chair on the other side of the table.*) Set down, Harriet.

HARRIET--(*torn between curiosity and a sense of being one too many*) Maybe I'd best go to home and leave you two alone?

MRS. CROSBY--Shucks! Ain't you like one o' the family--Caleb's sister and livin' right next door ever since you was all children playin' together. We ain't got no secrets from you. Set down. (*Harriet does so with an uncertain glance at the frozen Emma. Mrs. Crosby has efficiently bustled another rocker beside her daughter's and sits down with a comfortable sigh.*) There. (*She reaches over and takes one of her daughter's hands in hers.*) And now, Emmer, what's all this fuss over? (*as Emma makes no reply*) Jack says as you've sworn you was breakin' with Caleb. Is that true?

EMMA--Yes.

MRS. CROSBY--Hmm. Caleb don't know this yet, does he?

EMMA--No. I asked Jack to tell him when he comes back.

MRS. CROSBY--Jack says he won't.

EMMA--Then I'll tell him myself. Maybe that's better, anyhow. Caleb'll know what I'm driving at and see my reason--(*bitterly*)--which nobody else seems to.

MRS. CROSBY--Hmm. You ain't tried me yet. (*after a pause*) Jack was a dumb fool to tell you 'bout them goin's-on at them islands they teched. Ain't no good repeatin' sech things.

EMMA--(*surprised*) Did you know about it before Jack--

MRS. CROSBY--Mercy, yes. Your Pa heard it from Jim Benson fust thing they landed here, and Pa told me that night.

EMMA--(*resentfully*) And you never told me!

MRS. CROSBY--Mercy, no. 'Course I didn't. They's trouble enough in the world without makin' more. If you was like most folks I'd told it to you. Me, I thought it was a good joke on Caleb.

EMMA--(*with a shudder*) It ain't a joke to me.

MRS. CROSBY--That's why I kept my mouth shet. I knowed you was touchy and diffrent from most.

EMMA--(*proudly*) Yes, I am diff'rent--and that's just what I thought Caleb was, too--and he ain't.

HARRIET--(*breaking in excitedly*) Is it that story about Caleb and that heathen brown woman you're talking about? Is that what you're mad at Caleb for, Emmer?

MRS. CROSBY--(*as Emma remains silent*) Yes, Harriet, that's it.

HARRIET--(*astonished*) Why, Emmer Crosby, how can you be so silly? You don't s'pose Caleb took it serious, do you, and him makin' them fire shots round her to scare her back to land and get rid of her? Good gracious! (*a bit resentfully*) I hope you ain't got it in your head my brother Caleb would sink so low as to fall in love serious with one of them critters?

EMMA--(*harshly*) He might just as well.

HARRIET--(*bridling*) How can you say sech a thing! (*sarcastically*) I ain't heard that Caleb offered to marry her, have you? Then you might have some cause--But d'you s'pose he's ever give her another thought? Not Caleb! I know him better'n that. He'd forgot all about the hull thing before they was out o' sight of land, I'll bet, and if them fools hadn't started this story going, he'd never remembered it again.

MRS. CROSBY--(*nodding*) That's jest it. Harriet's right, Emmer.

EMMA--Ma!

MRS. CROSBY--Besides, you don't know they was nothin' wrong happened. Nobody kin swear that for sartin. Ain't that so, Harriet?

HARRIET--(*hesitating--then frankly*) I don't know. Caleb ain't no plaster saint and I reckon he's as likely to sin that way as any other man. He wasn't married then and I s'pose he thought he was free to do as he'd a mind to 'til he was hitched up. Goodness sakes, Emmer, all the men thinks that--and a lot of 'em after they're married, too.

MRS. CROSBY--Harriet's right, Emmer. If you've been wide awake to all that's happened in this town since you was old enough to know, you'd ought to realize what men be.

HARRIET--(*scornfully*) Emma'd ought to have fallen in love with a minister, not a sailor. As for me, I wouldn't give a durn about a man that was too goody-goody to raise Cain once in a while--before he married me, I mean. Why, look at Alf Rogers, Emmer. I'm going to marry him some day, ain't I? But I know right well all the foolin' he's done--and still is doing, I expect. I ain't sayin' I like it but I do like him and I got to take him the way he is, that's all. If you're looking for saints, you got to die first and go to heaven. A girl'd never git married hereabouts if she expected too much.

MRS. CROSBY--Harriet's right, Emmer.

EMMA--(*resentfully*) Maybe she is, Ma, from her side. I ain't claiming she's wrong. Her and me just looks at things diff'rent, that's all. And she can't understand the way I feel about Caleb.

HARRIET--Well, there's one thing certain, Emmer. You won't find a man in a day's walk is any better'n Caleb--or as good.

EMMA--(*wearily*) I know that, Harriet.

HARRIET--Then it's all right. You'll make up with him, and I s'pose I'm a fool to be takin' it so serious. (*as Emma shakes her head*) Oh, yes, you will. You wouldn't want to get him all broke up, would you? (*as Emma keeps silent--irritably*) Story book notions, that's the trouble with you, Emmer. You're gettin' to think you're better'n the rest of us.

EMMA--(*vehemently*) No, I don't! Can't you see--

MRS. CROSBY--Thar, now! Don't you two git to fightin'--to make things worse.

HARRIET--(*repentantly, coming and putting her arms around Emma and kissing her*) I'm sorry, Emmer. You know I wouldn't fall out with you for nothing or nobody, don't you? Only it gits me riled to think of how awful broke up Caleb'd be if--But you'll make it all up with him when he comes, won't you? (*Emma stares stubbornly before her. Before she has a chance to reply a roar of laughter comes from the next room as Jack winds up his tale.*)

ROGERS--(*from the next room*) Gosh, I wished I'd been there! (*He follows Jack into the room. Both are grinning broadly. Rogers says teasingly*) Reckon I'll take to whalin' 'stead o' fishin' after this. You won't mind, Harriet? From what I hears o' them brown women, I'm missin' a hull lot by stayin' to home.

HARRIET--(*in a joking tone--with a meaning glance at Emma*) Go on, then! There's plenty of fish in the sea. Anyhow, I'd never git jealous of your foolin' with one o' them heathen critters. They ain't worth notice from a Christian.

JACK--Oho, ain't they! They're purty as pictures, Benson says. (*with a wink*) And mighty accommodatin' in their ways. (*He and Rogers roar delightedly. Emma shudders with revulsion.*)

MRS. CROSBY--(*aware of her daughter's feeling--smilingly but firmly*) Get out o' this, Jack. You, too, Alf. Go on up street if you want to joke. You're in my way.

JACK--Aw right, Ma. Come on up street, Alf.

HARRIET--Wait. I'll go with you a step. I got to see if Caleb's got back with them supper things. (*They all go to the door in rear. Jack and Rogers pass out, talking and laughing. Harriet turns in the doorway--sympathetically*) I'll give Caleb a talking-to before he comes over. Then it'll be easy for you to finish him. Treat him firm but gentle and you'll see he won't never do it again in a hurry. After all, he wasn't married, Emmer--and he's a man--and what can you expect? Good-by. (*She goes.*)

EMMA--(*inaudibly*) Good-by.

MRS. CROSBY--(*after a pause in which she rocks back and forth studying her daughter's face--placidly*) Harriet's right, Emmer. You give him a good talkin'-to and he won't do it again.

EMMA--(*coldly*) I don't care whether he does or not. I ain't going to marry him.

MRS. CROSBY--(*uneasy--persuasively*) Mercy, you can't act like that, Emmer. Here's the weddin' on'y two days off, and everythin' fixed up with the minister, and your Pa and Jack has bought new clothes speshul for it, and I got a new dress--

EMMA--(*turning to her mother--pleadingly*) You wouldn't want me to keep my promise to Caleb if you knew I'd be unhappy, would you, Ma?

MRS. CROSBY--(*hesitatingly*) N-no, Emmer. (*then decisively*) 'Course I wouldn't. It's because I know he'll make you happy. (*as Emma shakes her head*) Pshaw, Emmer, you can't tell me you've got over all likin' for him jest 'count o' this one foolishness o' hisn.

EMMA--I don't love him--what he is now. I loved--what I thought he was.

MRS. CROSBY--(*more and more uneasy*) That's all your queer notions, and I don't know where you gits them from. Caleb ain't changed, neither have you. Why, Emmer, it'd be jest like goin' agen an act of Nature for you not to marry him. Ever since you was children you been livin' side by side, goin' round together, and neither you nor him ever did seem to care for no one else. Shucks, Emmer, you'll git me to lose patience with you if you act that stubborn. You'd ought to remember all he's been to you and forget this one little wrong he's done.

EMMA--I can't, Ma. It makes him another person--not Caleb, but someone just like all the others.

MRS. CROSBY--Waal, is the others so bad? Men is men the world over, I reckon.

EMMA--No, they ain't bad. I ain't saying that. Don't I like 'em all? If it was one of the rest--like Jim Benson or Jack, even--had done this I'd thought it was a joke, too. I ain't strict in judging 'em and you know it. But--can't you see, Ma?--Caleb always seemed diff'rent--and I thought he was.

MRS. CROSBY--(*somewhat impatiently*) Waal, if he ain't, he's a good man jest the same, as good as any sensible girl'd want to marry.

EMMA--(*slowly*) I don't want to marry nobody no more. I'll stay single.

MRS. CROSBY--(*tauntingly*) An old maid! (*then resentfully*) Emmer, d'you s'pose if I'd had your high-fangled notions o' what men ought to be when I was your age, d'you s'pose you'd ever be settin' there now?

EMMA--(*slowly*) No. I know from what I can guess from his own stories Pa never was no saint.

MRS. CROSBY--(*in a tone of finality as if this settled the matter*) There, now! And ain't he been as good a husband to me as ever lived, and a good father to you and Jack? You'll find out Caleb'll turn out the same. You think it over. (*She gets up--bustlingly*) And now I got to git back in the kitchen.

EMMA--(*wringing her hands--desperately*) Oh, Ma, why can't you see what I feel? Of course, Pa's good--as good as good can be--

CAPTAIN CROSBY--(*from outside the door which he has approached without their noticing him--in a jovial bellow*) What's that 'bout Pa bein' good? (*He comes in laughing. He is a squat, bow-legged, powerful man, almost as broad as he is long--sixty years old but still in the prime of health and strength, with a great, red, weather-beaten face seamed by sun wrinkles. His sandy hair is thick and disheveled. He is dressed in an old baggy suit much the worse for wear--striped cotton shirt open at the neck. He pats Emma on the back with a playful touch that almost jars her off her feet.*) Thunderin' Moses, that's the fust time ever I heerd good o' myself by listenin'! Most times it's: "Crosby? D'you mean that drunken, good-for-nothin', mangy old cuss?" That's what I hears usual. Thank ye, Emmer. (*turning to his wife*) What ye got to say now, Ma? Here's Emmer tellin' you the truth after you hair-pullin' me all these years 'cause you thought it wa'n't. I always told ye I was good, ain't I--good as hell I be! (*He shakes with laughter and kisses his wife a resounding smack.*)

MRS. CROSBY--(*teasing lovingly*) Emmer don't know you like I do.

CROSBY--(*turning back to Emma again*) Look-a-here, Emmer, I jest seen Jack. He told me some fool story 'bout you fallin' out with Caleb. Reckon he was joshin', wa'n't he?

MRS. CROSBY--(*quickly*) Oh, that's all settled, John. Don't you go stirrin' it up again. (*Emma seems about to speak but stops helplessly after one glance at her father.*)

CROSBY--An' all 'count o' that joke they're tellin' 'bout him and that brown female critter, Jack says. Hell, Emmer, you ain't a real Crosby if you takes a joke like that serious. Thunderin' Moses, what the hell d'you want Caleb to be--a durned, he-virgin, sky-pilot? Caleb's a man wo'th ten o' most and, spite o' his bein' on'y a boy yit, he's the smartest skipper out o' this port and you'd ought to be proud you'd got him. And as for them islands, all whalin' men knows 'em. I've teched thar for water more'n once myself, and I know them brown females like a book. And I tells you, after a year or more aboard ship, a man'd have to be a goll-durned geldin' if he don't--

MRS. CROSBY--(*glancing uneasily at Emma*) Ssshh! You come out in the kitchen with me, Pa, and leave Emmer be.

CROSBY--God A'mighty, Ma, I ain't sayin' nothin' agen Emmer, be I? I knows Emmer ain't that crazy. If she ever got religion that bad, I'd ship her off as female missionary to the damned yellow Chinks. (*He laughs.*)

MRS. CROSBY--(*taking his arm*) You come with me. I want to talk with you 'bout somethin'.

CROSBY--(*going*) Aye-aye, skipper! You're boss aboard here. (*He goes out right with her, laughing. Emma stands for a while, staring stonily before her. She sighs hopelessly, clasping and unclasping her hands, looking around the room as if she longed to escape from it. Finally she sits down helplessly and remains fixed in a strained attitude, her face betraying the conflict that is tormenting her. Slow steps sound from the path in front of the house. Emma recognizes them and her face freezes into an expression of obstinate intolerance.*)

CALEB--(*appears outside the screen door. He looks in, coughs--then asks uncertainly*) It's me, Emmer. Kin I come in?

EMMA--(*coldly*) Yes.

CALEB--(*comes in and walks down beside her chair. His face is set emotionlessly but his eyes cannot conceal a worried bewilderment, a look of uncomprehending hurt. He stands uncomfortably, fumbling with his hat, waiting for her to speak or look up. As she does neither, he finally blurts out*) Kin I set a spell?

EMMA--(*in the same cold tone*) Yes. (*He lowers himself carefully to a wooden posture on the edge of a rocker near hers.*)

CALEB--(*after a pause*) I seen Jim Benson. I give him hell. He won't tell no more tales, I reckon. (*another pause*) I stopped to home on the way back from the store. I seen Harriet. She says Jack'd told you that story they're all tellin' as a joke on me. (*clenching his fists--angrily*) Jack's a durn fool. He needs a good lickin' from someone.

EMMA--(*resentfully*) Don't try to put the blame on Jack. He only told me the truth, didn't he? (*Her voice shows that she hopes against hope for a denial.*)

CALEB--(*after a long pause--regretfully*) Waal, I guess what he told is true enough.

EMMA--(*wounded*) Oh!

CALEB--But that ain't no good reason for tellin' it. Them sort o' things ought to be kept among men. (*after a pause--gropingly*) I didn't want nothin' like that to happen, Emmer. I didn't mean it to. I was thinkin' o' how you might feel--even down there. That's why I stayed aboard all the time when the boys was ashore. I wouldn't have b'lieved it could happen--not to me. (*a pause*) I wish you could see them Islands, Emmer, and be there for a time. Then you might see--It's hard 's hell to explain, and you havin' never seen 'em. Everything is diff'rent down there--the weather--and the trees and water. You git lookin' at it all, and you git to feel diff'rent from what you do to home here. It's purty hereabouts sometimes--like now, in spring--but it's purty there all the time--and down there you notice it and you git feelin'--diff'rent. And them native women--they're diff'rent. A man don't think of 'em as women--like you. But they're putty--in their fashion--and at night they sings--and it's all diff'rent like something you'd see in a painted picture. (*a pause*)

That night when she swum out and got aboard when I was alone, she caught me by s'prise. I wasn't expectin' nothin' o' that sort. I tried to make her git back to land at fust--but she wouldn't go. She couldn't understand enough English for me to tell her how I felt--and I reckon she wouldn't have seed my p'int anyhow, her bein' a native. (*a pause*) And then I was afeerd she'd catch cold goin' round all naked and wet in the moonlight--though it was warm--and I wanted to wrap a blanket round her. (*He stops as if he had finished.*)

EMMA--(*after a long, tense pause--dully*) Then you own up--there really was something happened?

CALEB--(*after a pause*) I was sorry for it, after. I locked myself in the cabin and left her to sleep out on deck.

EMMA--(*after a pause--fixedly*) I ain't going to marry you, Caleb.

CALEB--Harriet said you'd said that; but I didn't b'lieve you'd let a slip like that make--such a diff'rence.

EMMA--(*with finality*) Then you can believe it now, Caleb.

CALEB--(*after a pause*) You got queer, strict notions, Emmer. A man'll never live up to 'em--with never one slip. But you got to act accordin' to your lights, I expect. It sort o' busts everythin' to bits for me--(*His voice betrays his anguish for a second but he instantly regains his iron control.*) But o' course, if you ain't willin' to take me the way I be, there's nothin' to do. And whatever you think is best, suits me.

EMMA--(*after a pause--gropingly*) I wish I could explain my side of it--so's you'd understand. I ain't got any hard feelings against you, Caleb--not now. It ain't plain jealousy--what I feel. It ain't even that I think you've done nothing terrible wrong. I think I can understand--how it happened--and make allowances. I know that most any man would do the same, and I guess all of 'em I ever met has done it.

CALEB--(*with a glimmer of eager hope*) Then--you'll forgive it, Emmer?

EMMA--Yes, I forgive it. But don't think that my forgiving is going to make any diff'rence--'cause I ain't going to marry you, Caleb. That's final. (*after a pause--intensely*) Oh, I wish I could make you see--my reason. You don't. You never will, I expect. What you done is just what any other man would have done--and being like them is exactly what'll keep you from ever seeing my meaning. (*after a pause--in a last effort to make him understand*) Maybe it's my fault more'n your'n. It's like this, Caleb. Ever since we was little I guess I've always had the idea that you was--diff'rent. And when we growed up and got engaged I thought that more and more. And you was diff'rent, too! And that was why I loved you. And now you've proved you ain't. And so how can I love you any more? I don't, Caleb, and that's all there is to it. You've busted something way down inside me--and I can't love you no more.

CALEB--(*gloomily*) I've warned you often, ain't I, you was settin' me up where I'd no business to be. I'm human like the rest and always was. I ain't diff'rent. (*after a pause--uncertainly*) I reckon there ain't no use sayin' nothin' more. I'll go to home. (*He starts to rise.*)

EMMA--Wait. I don't want you to go out of here with no hard feelings. You 'n' me, Caleb, we've been too close all our lives to ever get to be enemies. I like you, Caleb, same's I always did. I want us to stay friends. I want you to be like one of the family same's you've always been. There's no reason you can't. I don't blame you--as a man--for what I wouldn't hold against any other man. If I find I can't love you--that way--no more or be your wife, it's just that I've decided--things being what they be and me being what I am--I won't marry no man. I'll stay single. (*forcing a smile*) I guess there's worse things than being an old maid.

CALEB--I can't picture you that, Emmer. It's natural in some but it ain't in you. (*then with a renewal of hope*) And o' course I want to stay friends with you, Emmer. There's no hard feelin's on my side. You got a right to your own way--even if--(*hopefully*) And maybe if I show you what I done wasn't natural to me--by never doin' it again--maybe the time'll come when you'll be willin' to forget--

EMMA--(*shaking her head--slowly*) It ain't a question of time, Caleb. It's a question of something being dead. And when a thing's died, time can't make no diff'rence.

CALEB--(*sturdily*) You don't know that for sure, Emmer. You're human, too, and as liable to make mistakes as any other. Maybe you on'y think it's dead, and when I come back from the next vige and you've had two years to think it over, you'll see diff'rent and know I ain't as bad as I seem to ye now.

EMMA--(*helplessly*) But you don't seem bad, Caleb. And two years can't make no change in me--that way.

CALEB--(*feeling himself somehow more and more heartened by hope*) I ain't givin' up hope, Emmer, and you can't make me. Not by a hell of a sight. (*with emphasis*) I ain't never goin' to marry no woman but you, Emmer. You can trust my word for that. And I'll wait for ye to change your mind, I don't give a durn how long it'll take--till I'm sixty years old--thirty years if it's needful! (*He rises to his feet as he is speaking this last.*)

EMMA--(*with a mournful smile*) You might just as well say for life, Caleb. In thirty years we'll both be dead and gone, probably. And I don't want you to think it's needful for you to stay single 'cause I--

CALEB--I ain't goin' to stay single. I'm goin' to wait for you. And some day when you realize men was never cut out for angels you'll--

EMMA--(*helplessly*) Me 'n' you'll never understand each other, Caleb, so long as we live. (*getting up and holding out her hand*) Good-by, Caleb. I'm going up and lie down for a spell.

CALEB--(*made hopeless again by her tone--clasps her hand mechanically--dully*) Good-by, Emmer. (*He goes to the door in the rear, opens it, then hesitates and looks back at her as she goes out the door on the right without turning around. Suddenly he blurts out despairingly*) You'll remember what I told ye 'bout waitin', Emmer? (*She is gone, makes no reply. His face sets in its concealment mask of emotionlessness and he turns slowly and goes out the door as*

The Curtain Falls)

ACT TWO

SCENE--*Thirty years after--the scene is the same but not the same. The room has a grotesque aspect of old age turned flighty and masquerading as the most empty-headed youth. There is an obstreperous newness about everything. Orange curtains are at the windows. The carpet has given way to a varnished hardwood floor, its glassy surface set off by three small, garish-colored rugs, placed with precision in front of the two doors and under the table. The wall paper is now a cream color sprayed with pink flowers. Seascapes, of the painted-to-order quality, four in number, in gilded frames, are hung on the walls at mathematically spaced intervals. The plush-covered chairs are gone, replaced by a set of varnished oak. The horsehair sofa has been relegated to the attic. A cane-bottomed affair with fancy cushions serves in its stead. A Victrola is where the old mahogany chest had been. A brand new piano shines resplendently in the far right corner by the door, and a bookcase with glass doors that pull up and slide in flanks the fireplace. This bookcase is full of installment-plan sets of uncut volumes. The table at center is of varnished oak. On it are piles of fashion magazines and an electric reading lamp. Only the old Bible, which still preserves its place of honor on the table, and the marble clock on the mantel, have survived the renovation and serve to emphasize it all the more by contrast.*

It is late afternoon of a day in the early spring of the year 1920.

As the curtain rises, Emma and Benny Rogers are discovered. She is seated in a rocker by the table. He is standing by the Victrola on which a jazz band record is playing. He whistles, goes through the motions of dancing to the music. He is a young fellow of twenty-three, a replica of his father in Act One, but coarser, more hardened and cocksure. He is dressed in the khaki uniform of a private in the United States Army. The thirty years have transformed Emma into a withered, scrawny woman. But there is something revoltingly incongruous about her, a pitiable sham, a too-apparent effort to cheat the years by appearances. The white dress she wears is too frilly, too youthful for

her; so are the high-heeled pumps and clocked silk stockings. There is an absurd suggestion of rouge on her tight cheeks and thin lips, of penciled make-up about her eyes. The black of her hair is brazenly untruthful. Above all there is shown in her simpering, self-consciously coquettish manner that laughable--and at the same time irritating and disgusting--mockery of undignified age snatching greedily at the empty simulacra of youth. She resembles some passé stock actress of fifty made up for a heroine of twenty.

BENNY--(*as the record stops--switches off the machine*) Oh, baby! Some jazz, I'll tell the world!

EMMA--(*smiling lovingly at his back*) I'm glad you like it. It's one of them you picked out on the list.

BENNY--Oh, I'm a swell little picker, aw right. (*turning to her*) Say, you're a regular feller--gettin' them records for me.

EMMA--(*coquettishly*) Well, if that ain't just like a man! Who told you I got them just for you?

BENNY--Well, didn't you?

EMMA--No indeedy! I only took your advice on what to get. I knew you'd know, being growed to a man of the world now since you was overseas. But I got 'em because I like them jazz tunes myself. They put life and ginger in an old lady like me--not like them slow, old-timey tunes.

BENNY--(*bends over chair--kiddingly*) You ain't old. That's all bunk.

EMMA--(*flattered*) Now, now, Benny!

BENNY--You ain't. You're a regular, up-to-date sport--the only live one in this dead dump. (*with a grin*) And if you fall for that jazz stuff, all you got to do now is learn to dance to it.

EMMA--(*giggling*) I will--if you'll teach me.

BENNY--(*struggling with a guffaw*) Oh, oui! Sure I will! We'll have a circus, me an' you. Say, you're sure one of the girls aw right, Aunt Emmer.

EMMA--Oh, you needn't think we're *all* so behind the times to home here just because you've been to France and all over.

BENNY--*You* ain't, I'll say, Aunt Emmer.

EMMA--And how often have I got to tell you not to call me Aunt Emmer?

BENNY--(*with a grin*) Oh, oui! My foot slipped. 'Scuse me, Emmer.

EMMA--(*delighted by his coarse familiarity*) That's better. Why, you know well enough I ain't your aunt anyway.

BENNY--I got to get used to the plain Emmer. They taught me to call you "aunt" when I was a kid. (*Emma looks displeased at this remark and Benny hastens to add cajolingly*) And you almost was my aunt-in-law one time from what I've heard. (*winks at her cunningly*)

EMMA--(*flustered*) That was ages ago. (*catching herself quickly*) Not so awful long really, but it's all so dead and gone it seems a long while.

BENNY--(*unthinkingly*) It was before I was born, wasn't it? (*Seeing her expression he hurries on.*) Well, that ain't so darned long. Say, here's something I never could make out--how did you ever come to fall for Uncle Caleb?

EMMA--(*bridling quickly*) I never did. That's all talk, Benny. We was good friends and still are. I was young and foolish and got engaged to him--and then discovered I didn't like him that way. That's all there ever was to it.

BENNY--(*resentfully*) I can't figure how anybody'd ever like him anyway. He's a darn stingy, ugly old cuss, if you want my dope on him. I can't see him at all. I've hated him ever since Pa died and Ma and me had to go live next door with him.

EMMA--You oughtn't to say that. He's kind at bottom, spite of his rough ways, and he's brought you up.

BENNY--(*grumpily*) Dragged me up, you mean. (*with a calculating look at her out of the corners of his eyes*) He's a tightwad and I hate folks that're tight with their coin. Spend and be a good sport, that's my motto. (*flattering*) He'd ought to be more like you that way, Emmer.

EMMA--(*pleased--condescendingly*) Your Uncle Caleb's an old man, remember. He's sot in his ways and believes in being strict with you--too strict, I've told him.

BENNY--He's got piles of money hoarded in the bank but he's too mean even to retire from whalin' himself--goes right on makin' vige after vige to grab more and never spends a nickel less'n he has to. It was always like pryin' open a safe for me to separate him from a cent. (*with extreme disgust*) Aw, he's a piker. I hate him and I always did!

EMMA--(*looking toward the door apprehensively*) Sssh!

BENNY--What you scared of? He don't get in from New Bedford till the night train and even if he's got to the house by this he'll be busy as a bird dog for an hour getting himself dolled up to pay you a call.

EMMA--(*perfunctorily*) I hope he's had a good vige and is in good health.

BENNY--(*roughly*) You needn't worry. He's too mean ever to get real sick. Gosh, I wish Pa'd lived--or Uncle Jack. They wasn't like him. I was only a kid when they got drowned, but I remember enough about 'em to know they was good sports. Wasn't they?

EMMA--(*rather primly*) They was too sporty for their own good.

BENNY--Don't you hand me that. That don't sound like you. You're a sport yourself. (*after a pause*) Say, it's nutty when you come to think of it--Uncle Caleb livin' next door all these years and comin' to call all the time when he ain't at sea.

EMMA--What's funny about that? We've always been good friends.

BENNY--(*with a grin*) It's just as if the old guy was still mashin' you. And I'll bet anything he's as stuck on you as he ever was--the old fool!

EMMA--(*with a coquettish titter*) Land sakes, Benny, a body'd think you were actually jealous of your uncle the way you go on.

BENNY--(*with a mocking laugh*) Jealous! Oh, oui! Sure I am! Kin you blame me? (*then seriously, with a calculating look at her*) No, all kiddin' aside, I know he'll run me down first second he sees you. Ma'll tell him all her tales, and he'll be sore at me right off. He's always hated me anyway. He was glad when I enlisted, 'cause that got him rid of me. All he was hopin' was that some German'd get me for keeps. Then when I come back he wouldn't do nothin' for me so I enlisted again.

EMMA--(*chiding--playfully*) Now, Benny! Didn't you tell me you enlisted again 'cause you were sick o' this small place and wanted to be out where there was more fun?

BENNY--Well, o' course it was that, too. But I could have a swell time even in this dump if he'd loosen up and give me some kale. (*again with the calculating look at her*) Why, look here, right now there's a buddy of mine wants me to meet him in Boston and he'll show me a good time, and if I had a hundred dollars--

EMMA--A hundred dollars! That's an awful pile to spend, Benny.

BENNY--(*disgustedly*) Now you're talkin' tight like him.

EMMA--(*hastily*) Oh, no, Benny. You know better'n that. What was you sayin'--if you had a hundred dollars--?

BENNY--That ain't such a much these days with everything gone up so. If I went to Boston I'd have to get dolled up and everything. And this buddy of mine is a sport and a spender. Easy come, easy go is his motto. His folks ain't tight-wads like mine. And I couldn't show myself up as a cheap skate by travelin' 'round with him without a nickel in my jeans and just spongin' on him. (*with the calculating glance to see what effect his words are having--pretending to dismiss the subject*) But what's the good of talkin'? I got a swell chance tellin' that to Uncle Caleb. He'd give me one look and then put a double padlock on his roll. But it ain't fair just the same. Here I'm sweatin' blood in the army after riskin' my life in France and when I get a leave to home, everyone treats me like a wet dog.

EMMA--(*softly*) Do you mean me, too, Benny?

BENNY--No, not you. You're diff'rent from the rest. You're regular--and you ain't any of my real folks, either, and ain't got any reason.

EMMA--(*coquettishly*) Oh, yes, I have a reason. I like you very, very much, Benny--better than anyone in the town--especially since you've been to home these last few times and come to call so often and I feel I've growed to know you. When you first came back from France I never would have recognized you as Harriet's Benny, you was so big and strong and handsome.

BENNY--(*uncomfortably*) Aw, you're kiddin'. But you can tell how good I think you are from me bein' over here so much--so you know I ain't lyin'. (*made more and more uncomfortable by the ardent looks Emma is casting at him*) Well, guess I'll be movin' along.

EMMA--(*pleadingly*) Oh, you mustn't go yet! Just when we're gettin' so friendly!

BENNY--Uncle Caleb'll be over soon and I don't want him to catch me here--nor nowhere else till he gets calmed down after hearin' Ma's kicks about me. So I guess I better beat it up street.

EMMA--He won't come for a long time yet. I know when to expect him. (*pleading ardently and kittenishly*) Do set down a spell, Benny! Land sakes, I hardly get a sight of you before you want to run away again. I'll begin to think you're only pretending to like me.

BENNY--(*seeing his calculations demand it*) Aw right--jest for a second. (*He looks about him, seeking a neutral subject for conversation.*) Gee, you've had this old place fixed up swell since I was to home last.

EMMA--(*coquettishly*) Guess who I had it all done for, mostly?

BENNY--For yourself, of course.

EMMA--(*shaking her head roguishly*) No, not for me, not for me! Not that I don't like it but I'd never have gone to the trouble and expense for myself. (*with a sigh*) I s'pose poor Ma and Pa turned over in their graves when I ordered it done.

BENNY--(*with a sly grin*) Who d'you have it done for, then?

EMMA--For you! Yes, for you, Benny--so's you'd have a nice, up-to-date place to come to when you was on vacation from the horrid old army.

BENNY--(*embarrassed*) Well, it's great aw right. And it sure looks swell--nothing cheap about it.

EMMA--(*delighted*) As long as you like it, I'm satisfied. (*then suddenly, wagging an admonishing finger at him and hiding beneath a joking manner an undercurrent of uneasiness*) I was forgetting I got a bone to pick with you, young man! I heard them sayin' to the store that you'd been up callin' on that Tilly Small evenin' before last.

BENNY--(*with a lady-killer's carelessness*) Aw, I was passin' by and she called me in, that's all.

EMMA--(*frowning*) They said you had the piano goin' and was singing and no end of high jinks.

BENNY--Aw, these small town boobs think you're raising hell if you're up after eleven.

EMMA--(*excitedly*) I ain't blamin' you. But her--she ought to have better sense--at her age, too, when she's old enough to be your mother.

BENNY--Aw, say, she ain't half as old--(*catching himself*) Oh, she's an old fool, you're right there, Emmer.

EMMA--(*severely*) And I hope you know the kind of woman she is and has been since she was a girl.

BENNY--(*with a wink*) I wasn't born yesterday. I got her number long ago. I ain't in my cradle, get me! I'm in the army! Oui! (*chuckles*)

EMMA--(*fidgeting nervously*) What'd you--what'd you do when you was there?

BENNY--Why, nothin'. I told her to cut the rough work and behave--and a nice time was had by all. (*He grins provokingly.*)

EMMA--(*springs to her feet nervously*) I don't know what to think--when you act so queer about it.

BENNY--(*carelessly*) Well, don't think nothing wrong--'cause there wasn't. Bill Tinker was with me and we was both wishin' we had a drink. And Bill says, "Let's go see Tilly Small. She always has some buried and if we hand her a line of talk maybe she'll drag out the old bottle." So we did--and she did. We kidded her for a couple of drinks. (*He snickers.*)

EMMA--(*standing in front of him--fidgeting*) I want you to promise you won't go to see her no more. If you--if you want liquor now and again maybe I--maybe I can fix it so's I can get some to keep here for you.

BENNY--(*eagerly*) Say, that'd be great! Will you? (*She nods. He goes on carelessly.*) And sure I'll promise not to see Tilly no more. Gosh, what do you think I care about her? Or about any dame in this town, for that matter--'ceptin' you. These small town skirts don't hand me nothin'. (*with a grin*) You forgot I was in France--and after the dames over there these birds here look some punk.

EMMA--(*sits down--wetting her lips*) And what--what are those French critters like?

BENNY--(*with a wink*) Oh, boy! They're some pippins! It ain't so much that they're better lookin' as that they've got a way with 'em--lots of ways. (*He laughs with a lascivious smirk.*)

EMMA--(*unconsciously hitches her chair nearer his. The turn the conversation has taken seems to have aroused a hectic, morbid intensity in her. She continually wets her lips and pushes back her hair from her flushed face as if it were stifling her.*) What do you mean, Benny? What kind of ways have they got--them French girls?

BENNY--(*smirking mysteriously*) Oh, ways of dressin' and doin' their hair--and lots of ways.

EMMA--(*eagerly*) Tell me! Tell me all about 'em. You needn't be scared--to talk open with me. I ain't as strict as I seem--about hearin' things. Tell me! I've heard French girls was awful wicked.

BENNY--I don't know about wicked, but they're darned good sports. They'd do anything a guy'd ask 'em. Oui, tooty sweet! (*laughs foolishly*)

EMMA--And what--what'd you ask 'em, for instance?

BENNY--(*with a wink*) Curiosity killed a cat! Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.

EMMA--(*with queer, stupid insistence*) But won't you tell me? Go on!

BENNY--Can't be did, Aunt Emmer, can't be did! (*with a silly laugh*) You're too young. No, all I'll say is, that to the boys who've knocked around over there the girls in town here are just rank amatoors. They don't know how to love and that's a fact. (*He gets to his feet.*) And as for an old bum like Tilly--not me! Well, I guess I'll hike along--

EMMA--(*getting up and putting a hand on his arm--feverishly*) No, don't go. Not yet--not yet. No, don't go.

BENNY--(*stepping away with an expression of repulsion*) Why not? What's the matter with you, Aunt Emmer? You look 's if you was gettin' sick. (*Before she can reply, Harriet's voice is heard calling.*)

HARRIET--Benny! Benny! (*This acts like a pail of cold water on Emma who moves away from Benny quickly.*)

EMMA--That's Harriet. It's your Ma calling, Benny.

BENNY--(*impatiently*) I know. That means Uncle Caleb has come and she's told him her stories and it's up to me to go catch hell. (*stopping Emma as she goes toward the door as if to answer Harriet's hail*) Don't answer, Aunt Emmer. Let her come over here to look. I want to speak to her and find out how I stand before he sees me.

EMMA--(*doubtfully*) I don't know as she'll come. She's been actin' funny to me lately, Harriet has, and she ain't put her foot in my door the last month.

BENNY--(*as his mother's voice is heard much nearer, calling "Benny!"*) There! Sure she's comin'.

EMMA--(*flustered*) Land sakes, I can't let her see me this way. I got to run upstairs and tidy myself a little. (*She starts for the door at right.*)

BENNY--(*flatteringly*) Aw, you look swell. Them new duds you got looks great.

EMMA--(*turning in the doorway--coquettishly*) Oh, them French girls ain't the only ones knows how to fix up. (*She flounces out. Benny stands looking after her with a derisive grin of contempt. There is a sharp knock on the door in the rear. Benny goes to open it, his expression turning surly and sullen. Harriet enters. She wears an apron over her old-fashioned black dress with a brooch at the neck. Her hair is gray, her face thin, lined, and careworn, with a fretful, continuously irritated expression. Her shoulders stoop, and her figure is flabby and ugly. She stares at her son with resentful annoyance.*)

HARRIET--Ain't you got sense enough, you big lump, to answer me when I call, and not have me shouting my lungs out?

BENNY--I never heard you callin'.

HARRIET--You're lyin' and you know it. (*then severely*) Your uncle's to home. He's waitin' to talk to you.

BENNY--Let him wait. (*in a snarling tone*) I s'pose you've been givin' him an earful of lies about me?

HARRIET--I told him the truth, if that's what you mean. How you stole the money out of the bureau drawer--

BENNY--(*alarmed but pretending scorn*) Aw, you don't know it was me. You don't know nothin' about it.

HARRIET--(*ignoring this*) And about your disgracin' him and me with your drunken carryin's-on with that harlot, Tilly Small, night after night.

BENNY--Aw, wha'd you know about that?

HARRIET--And last but not least, the sneakin' way you're makin' a silly fool out of poor Emmer Crosby.

BENNY--(*with a grin*) You don't notice her kickin' about it, do you? (*brusquely*) Why don't you mind your own business, Ma?

HARRIET--(*violently*) It's a shame, that's what it is! That I should live to see the day when a son of mine'd descend so low he'd tease an old woman to get money out of her, and her alone in the world. Oh, you're low, you're low all through like your Pa was--and since you been in the army you got bold so you ain't even ashamed of your dirtiness no more!

BENNY--(*in a snarling whisper*) That's right! Blame it all on me. I s'pose she ain't got nothin' to do with it. (*with a wink*) You oughter see her perform sometimes. You'd get wise to something then.

HARRIET--Shut up! You've got the same filthy mind your Pa had. As for Emmer, I don't hold her responsible. She's been gettin' flighty the past two years. She couldn't help it, livin' alone the way she does, shut up in this house all her life. You ought to be 'shamed to take advantage of her condition--but shame ain't in you.

BENNY--Aw, give us a rest!

HARRIET--(*angrily*) Your Uncle Caleb'll give you a rest when he sees you! Him and me's agreed not to give you another single penny if you was to get down on your knees for it. So there! You can git along on your army pay from this out.

BENNY--(*worried by the finality in her tone--placatingly*) Aw, say, Ma, what's eatin' you? What've I done that's so bad? Gosh, you oughta know some of the gang I know in the army. You'd think I was a saint if you did. (*trying a confidential tone*) Honest, Ma, this here thing with Aunt Emmer ain't my fault. How can I help it if she goes bugs in her old age and gets nutty about me? (*with a sly grin--in a whisper*) Gee, Ma, you oughta see her today. She's a scream, honest! She's upstairs now gettin' calmed down. She was gettin' crazy when your callin' stopped her. Wait till she comes down and you git a look! She'll put your eye out--all dolled up like a kid of sixteen and enough paint on her mush for a Buffalo Bill Indian--

HARRIET--(*staring at him with stern condemnation*) You're a worthless loafer, Benny Rogers, same as your Pa was.

BENNY--(*frustrated and furious*) Aw, g'wan with that bunk! (*He turns away from her.*)

HARRIET--And I'm goin' to tell Emma about you and try to put some sense back into her head.

BENNY--Go ahead. You'll get fat runnin' me down to her!

HARRIET--And if my word don't have no influence, I'll tell your Uncle Caleb everything, and get him to talk to her. She'll mind him.

BENNY--(*defiantly*) You just try it, that's all!

HARRIET--I've been scared to do more'n hint about it to him. I'm hopin' any day Emma'll come out of this foolishness, and he'll never know.

BENNY--Aw!

HARRIET--If shame was in you, you'd remember your Uncle Caleb's been in love with Emma all his life and waited for her year after year hopin' in the end she'd change her mind and marry him. And she will, too, I believe, if she comes out of this fit in her sane mind--which she won't if you keep fussin' with her.

BENNY--(*with revengeful triumph*) She'll never marry the old cuss--I'll fix that!

HARRIET--Now you're showin' yourself up for what you are! And I kin see it's come to the p'int where I got to tell your Uncle Caleb everythin' no matter how it breaks him up.

I got to do it for Emmer's sake as well as his'n. We got to get her cured of your bad influence once and for all. It's the only hope for the two of 'em.

BENNY--You just try it!

HARRIET--And as for you, you get back to the army where you b'long! And don't never expect another cent from me or Caleb 'cause you won't get it! And don't never come to see us again till you've got rid of the meanness and filth that's the Rogers part of you and found the honesty and decency that's the Williams part--if you got any of me in you at all, which I begin to doubt. *(goes to the door in rear)* And now I'm goin' back to Caleb--and you better not let him find you here when he comes less'n you want a good hidin' for once in your life. *(She goes out.)*

BENNY--*(stammering between fear and rage--shouting after her)* G'wan! Tell him! What the hell do I care? I'll fix him! I'll spill the beans for both of you, if you try to gum me! *(He stands in the middle of the room hesitating whether to run away or stay concentrating his thoughts on finding some way to make good his bluff. Suddenly his face lights up with a cruel grin and he mutters to himself with savage satisfaction)* By God, that's it! I'll bet I kin work it, too! By God, that'll fix 'em! *(He chuckles and goes quickly to the door on right and calls up to the floor above)* Emmer! Emmer!

EMMA--*(her voice faintly heard answering)* Yes, Benny, I'm coming.

BENNY--*(He calls quickly)* Come down! Come down quick! *(He comes back to the center of the room where he stands waiting, planning his course of action.)*

EMMA--*(appears in the doorway. Her face is profusely powdered--with nervous excitement)* Benny! What's the matter? You sounded so--why where's your Ma?

BENNY--Gone. Gone back to home.

EMMA--*(offendedly)* Without waiting to see me? Why, I only sat down for a minute to give you a chance to talk to her. I was coming right down. Didn't she want to see me? Whatever's got into Harriet lately?

BENNY--She's mad as thunder at you 'cause I come over here so much 'stead of stayin' to home with her.

EMMA--*(pleased)* Oh, is that why? Well, if she ain't peculiar! *(She sits in a rocker by the table.)*

BENNY--*(with a great pretense of grief, taking one of her hands in his)* Say, Emmer--what I called you down for was--I want to say good-by and thank you for all you've done--

EMMA--*(frightenedly)* Good-by? How you say that! What--?

BENNY--Good-by for good this time.

EMMA--For good?

BENNY--Yep. I've got to beat it. I ain't got no home here no more. Ma and Uncle Caleb, they've chucked me out.

EMMA--Good gracious, what're you saying?

BENNY--That's what Ma come over to tell me--that Uncle Caleb'd said I'd never get another cent from him, alive or after he's dead, and she said for me to git back to the army and never to come home again.

EMMA--(*gasping*) She was only joking. She--they couldn't mean it.

BENNY--If you'd heard her you wouldn't think she was joking.

EMMA--(*as he makes a movement as if to go away*) Benny! You can't go! Go, and me never see you again, maybe! You can't! I won't have it!

BENNY--I got to, Emmer. What else is there for me to do when they've throwed me out? I don't give a damn about leaving them--but I hate to leave you and never see you again.

EMMA--(*excitedly--grabbing his arm*) You can't! I won't let you go!

BENNY--I don't want to--but what can I do?

EMMA--You can stay here with me.

BENNY--(*his eyes gleaming with satisfaction*) No, I couldn't. You know this dump of a town. Folks would be sayin' all sorts of bad things in no time. I don't care for myself. They're all down on me anyway because I'm diff'rent from small-town boobs like them and they hate me for it.

EMMA--Yes, you are diff'rent. And I'll show 'em I'm diff'rent, too. You can stay with me--and let 'em gossip all they've a mind to!

BENNY--No, it wouldn't be actin' square with you. I got to go. And I'll try to save up my pay and send you back what I've borrowed now and again.

EMMA--(*more and more wrought up*) I won't hear of no such thing. Oh, I can't understand your Ma and your Uncle Caleb bein' so cruel!

BENNY--Folks have been lyin' to her about me, like I told you, and she's told him. He's only too glad to believe it, too, long as it's bad.

EMMA--I can talk to your Uncle Caleb. He's always minded me more'n her.

BENNY--(*hastily*) Don't do that, for God's sake! You'd only make it worse and get yourself in Dutch with him, too!

EMMA--(*bewilderedly*) But--I--don't see--

BENNY--(*roughly*) Well, he's still stuck on you, ain't he?

EMMA--(*with a flash of coquetry*) Now, Benny!

BENNY--I ain't kiddin'. This is dead serious. He's stuck on you and you know it.

EMMA--(*coyly*) I haven't given him the slightest reason to hope in thirty years.

BENNY--Well, he hopes just the same. Sure he does! Why Ma said when she was here just now she'd bet you and him'd be married some day yet.

EMMA--No such thing! Why, she must be crazy!

BENNY--Oh, she ain't so crazy. Ain't he spent every durn evenin' of the time he's to home between trips over here with you--for the last thirty years?

EMMA--When I broke my engagement I said I wanted to stay friends like we'd been before, and we always have; but every time he'd even hint at bein' engaged again I'd always tell him we was friends only and he'd better leave it be that way. There's never been nothing else between us. (*with a coy smile*) And besides, Benny, you know how little time he's had to home between viges.

BENNY--I kin remember the old cuss marchin' over here every evenin' he was to home since I was a kid.

EMMA--(*with a titter of delight*) D'you know, Benny, I do actually believe you're jealous!

BENNY--(*loudly--to lend conviction*) Sure I'm jealous! But that ain't the point just now. The point is *he's* jealous of me--and you can see what a swell chance you've got of talkin' him over now, can't you! You'd on'y make him madder.

EMMA--(*embarrassedly*) He's getting foolish. What cause has he got--

BENNY--When Ma tells him the lies about us--

EMMA--(*excitedly*) What lies?

BENNY--I ain't goin' to repeat 'em to you but you kin guess, can't you, me being so much over here?

EMMA--(*springing to her feet--shocked but pleased*) Oh!

BENNY--(*turning away from her*) And now I'm going to blow. I'll stay at Bill Grainger's tonight and get the morning train.

EMMA--(*grabbing his arm*) No such thing! You'll stay right here!

BENNY--I can't--Emmer. If you was really my aunt, things'd be diff'rent and I'd tell 'em all to go to hell.

EMMA--(*smiling at him coquettishly*) But I'm glad I ain't your aunt.

BENNY--Well, I mean if you was related to me in some way. (*At some noise he hears from without, he starts frightenedly.*) Gosh, that sounded like our front door slamming. It's him and he's coming over. I got to beat it out the back way. (*He starts for the door on the right.*)

EMMA--(*clinging to him*) Benny! Don't go! You mustn't go!

BENNY--(*inspired by alarm and desire for revenge suddenly blurts out*) Say, let's me 'n' you git married, Emmer--tomorrow, eh? Then I kin stay! That'll stop 'em, damn 'em, and make 'em leave me alone.

EMMA--(*dazed with joy*) Married? You 'n' me? Oh, Benny, I'm too old. (*She hides her head on his shoulder.*)

BENNY--(*hurriedly, with one anxious eye on the door*) No, you ain't! Honest, you ain't! You're the best guy in this town! (*shaking her in his anxiety*) Say yes, Emmer! Say you will--first thing tomorrow.

EMMA--(*choking with emotion*) Yes--I will--if I'm not too old for you.

BENNY--(*joyfully*) Tell him. Then he'll see where he gets off! Listen! I'm goin' to beat it to the kitchen and wait. You come tell me when he's gone. (*A knock comes at the door. He whispers*) That's him. I'm goin'.

EMMA--(*embracing him fiercely*) Oh, Benny! (*She kisses him on the lips. He ducks away from her and disappears off right. The knock is repeated. Emma dabs tremblingly at her cheeks with a handkerchief. Her face is beaming with happiness and looks indescribably silly. She trips lightly to the door and opens it--forcing a light, careless tone*) Oh, it's you, Caleb. Come right in and set. I was kind of expecting you. Benny--I'd heard you was due to home tonight. (*He comes in and shakes the hand she holds out to him in a limp, vague, absent-minded manner. In appearance, he has changed but little in the thirty years save that his hair is now nearly white and his face more deeply lined and wrinkled. His body is still erect, strong and vigorous. He wears dark clothes, much the same as he was dressed in Act One.*)

CALEB--(*mechanically*) Hello, Emmer. (*Once inside the door, he stands staring about the room, frowning. The garish strangeness of everything evidently repels and puzzles him. His face wears its set expression of an emotionless mask but his eyes cannot conceal an inward struggle, a baffled and painful attempt to comprehend, a wounded look of bewildered hurt.*)

EMMA--(*blithely indifferent to this--pleasantly*) Are you looking at the changes I've made? You ain't seen this room since, have you? Of course not. What am I thinking of? They only got through with the work two weeks ago. Well, what d' you think of it?

CALEB--(*frowning--hesitatingly*) Why--it's--all right, I reckon.

EMMA--It was so gloomy and old-timey before, I just couldn't bear it. Now it's light and airy and young-looking, don't you think? (*with a sigh*) I suppose Pa and Ma turned over in their graves.

CALEB--(*grimly*) I reckon they did, too.

EMMA--Why, you don't mean to tell me you don't like it neither, Caleb? (*then as he doesn't reply--resentfully*) Well, you always was a sot, old-fashioned critter, Caleb Williams, same as they was. (*She plumps herself into a rocker by the table--then,*

noticing the lost way in which he is looking about him) Gracious sakes, why don't you set, Caleb? You give me the fidgets standing that way! You ain't a stranger that's got to be invited, are you? *(Then suddenly realizing the cause of his discomfiture, she smiles pityingly, not without a trace of malice.)* Are you looking for your old chair you used to set in? Is that it? Well, I had it put up in the attic. It didn't fit in with them new things.

CALEB--*(dully)* No, I s'pose it wouldn't.

EMMA--*(indicating a chair next to hers)* Do set down and make yourself to home. *(He does so gingerly. After a pause she asks perfunctorily)* Did you have good luck this voyage?

CALEB--*(again dully)* Oh, purty fair. *(He begins to look at her as if he were seeing her for the first time, noting every detail with a numb, stunned astonishment.)*

EMMA--You're looking as well as ever.

CALEB--*(dully)* Oh, I ain't got nothin' to complain of.

EMMA--You're the same as me, I reckon. *(happily)* Why I seem to get feelin' younger and more chipper every day, I declare I do. *(She becomes uncomfortably aware of his examination--nervously)* Land sakes, what you starin' at so?

CALEB--*(brusquely blurting out his disapproval)* You've changed, Emmer--changed so I wouldn't know you, hardly.

EMMA--*(resentfully)* Well, I hope you think it's for the best.

CALEB--*(evasively)* I ain't enough used to it yet--to tell.

EMMA--*(offended)* I ain't old-timey and old-maidy like I was, I guess that's what you mean. Well, I just got tired of mopin' alone in this house, waiting for death to take me and not enjoyin' anything. I was gettin' old before my time. And all at once, I saw what was happenin' and I made up my mind I was going to get some fun out of what Pa'd left me while I was still in the prime of life, as you might say.

CALEB--*(severely)* Be that paint and powder you got on your face, Emmer?

EMMA--*(embarrassed by this direct question)* Why, yes--I got a little mite--it's awful good for your complexion, they say--and in the cities now all the women wears it.

CALEB--*(sternly)* The kind of women I've seed in cities wearin' it--*(He checks himself and asks abruptly)* Wa'n't your hair turnin' gray last time I was to home?

EMMA--*(flustered)* Yes--yes--so it was--but then it started to come in again black as black all of a sudden.

CALEB--*(glancing at her shoes, stockings, and dress)* You're got up in them things like a young girl goin' to a dance.

EMMA--*(forcing a defiant laugh)* Maybe I will go soon's I learn--and Benny's goin' to teach me.

CALEB--(*keeping his rage in control--heavily*) Benny--

EMMA--(*suddenly bursting into hysterical tears*) And I think it's real mean of you, Caleb--nasty mean to come here on your first night to home--and--make--fun--of--my--clothes--and everything. (*She hides her face in her hands and sobs.*)

CALEB--(*overcome by remorse--forgetting his rage instantly--gets up and pats her on the shoulder--with rough tenderness*) Thar, thar, Emmer! Don't cry, now! I didn' mean nothin'. Don't pay no 'tention to what I said. I'm a durned old fool! What the hell do I know o' women's fixin's anyhow? And I reckon I be old-fashioned and sot in my ideas.

EMMA--(*reassured--pressing one of his hands gratefully*) It hurts--hearing you say--me 'n' you such old friends and--

CALEB--Forgit it, Emmer. I won't say no more about it. (*She dries her eyes and regains her composure. He goes back to his seat, his face greatly softened, looking at her with the blind eyes of love. There is a pause. Finally, he ventures in a gentle tone*) D'you know what time this be, Emmer?

EMMA--(*puzzled*) I don't know exactly, but there's a clock in the next room.

CALEB--(*quickly*) Hell, I don't mean that kind o' time. I mean--it was thirty years ago this spring.

EMMA--(*hastily*) Land sakes, don't let's talk of that. It only gets me thinking how old I am.

CALEB--(*with an affectionate smile*) We both got to realize now and then that we're gettin' old.

EMMA--(*bridling*) That's all right for you to say. You're twelve years older 'n me, don't forget, Caleb.

CALEB--(*smiling*) Waal, even that don't make you out no spring chicken, Emmer.

EMMA--(*stiffly*) A body's as old as they feels--and I feel right young.

CALEB--Waal, so do I as far as health goes. I'm as able and sound as ever. (*after a pause*) But, what I meant was, d'you remember what happened thirty years back?

EMMA--I suppose I do.

CALEB--D'you remember what I said that day?

EMMA--(*primly*) You said a lot that it's better to forget, if you ask me.

CALEB--I don't mean--that part of it. I mean when I was sayin' good-by, I said--(*He gasps--then blurts it out.*) I said I'd wait thirty years--if need be. (*after a pause*) I know you told me time and again not to go back to that. On'y--I was thinkin' all this last vige--that maybe--now when the thirty years are past--I was thinkin' that maybe--(*He looks at her humbly, imploring some encouragement. She stares straight before her, her mouth set thinly. He sighs forlornly and blunders on.*) Thirty years--that's a hell of a long time

to wait, Emmer--makin' vige after vige always alone--and feelin' even more alone in between times when I was to home livin' right next door to you and callin' on you every evenin'. (*a pause*) I've made money enough, I know--but what the hell good's that to me--long as you're out of it? (*a pause*) Seems to me, Emmer, thirty o' the best years of a man's life ought to be proof enough to you to make you forget--that one slip o' mine.

EMMA--(*rousing herself--forcing a careless tone*) Land sakes, I forgot all about that long ago. And here you go remindin' me of it!

CALEB--(*doggedly*) You ain't answered what I was drivin' at, Emmer. (*A pause; then, as if suddenly afraid of what her answer will be, he breaks out quickly*) And I don't want you to answer right now, neither. I want you to take time to think it all over.

EMMA--(*feebly evasive*) All right, Caleb, I'll think it over.

CALEB--(*after a pause*) Somehow--seems to me 's if--you might really *need* me now. You never did before.

EMMA--(*suspiciously*) Why should I need you now any more'n any other time?

CALEB--(*embarrassedly*) Oh, I just feel that way.

EMMA--It ain't count o' nothin' Harriet's been tellin' you, is it? (*stiffly*) Her 'n' me ain't such good friends no more, if you must know.

CALEB--(*frowning*) Her 'n' me nearly had a fight right before I came over here. (*Emma starts.*) Harriet lets her tongue run away with her and says dumb fool things she don't really mean. I didn't pay much 'tention to what she was sayin'--but it riled me jest the same. She won't repeat such foolishness after the piece o' my mind I gave her.

EMMA--What did she say?

CALEB--Oh, nothin' worth tellin'. (*a pause*) But neither you nor me ought to get mad at Harriet serious. We'd ought, by all rights, to make allowances for her. You know 's well as me what a hard time she's had. Bein' married to Alf Rogers for five years'd pizin' any woman's life.

EMMA--No, he wasn't much good, there's no denyin'.

CALEB--And now there's Benny drivin' her crazy.

EMMA--(*instantly defensive*) Benny's all right!

CALEB--(*staring at her sharply--after a pause*) No, that's jest it. He ain't all right, Emmer.

EMMA--He is, too! He's as good as gold!

CALEB--(*frowning--with a trace of resentment*) You kin say so, Emmer, but the facts won't bear you out.

EMMA--(*excitedly*) What facts, Caleb Williams? If you mean the nasty lies the folks in this town are mean enough to gossip about him, I don't believe any of 'em. I ain't such a fool.

CALEB--(*bitterly*) Then you've changed, Emmer. You didn't stop about believin' the fool stories they gossiped about me that time.

EMMA--You owned up yourself that was true!

CALEB--And Benny'd own up if he was half the man I was! (*angrily*) But he ain't a man noways. He's a mean skunk from truck to keelson!

EMMA--(*springing to her feet*) Oh!

CALEB--(*vehemently*) I ain't judged him by what folks have told me. But I've watched him grow up from a boy and every time I've come to home I've seed he was gittin' more 'n' more like his Pa--and you know what a low dog Alf Rogers turned out to be, and what a hell he made for Harriet. Waal, I'm sayin' this boy Benny is just Alf all over again--on'y worse!

EMMA--Oh!

CALEB--They ain't no Williams' blood left in Benny. He's a mongrel Rogers! (*trying to calm himself a little and be convincing*) Listen, Emmer. You don't suppose I'd be sayin' it, do you, if it wasn't so? Ain't he Harriet's boy? Ain't I brought him up in my own house since he was knee-high? Don't you know I got some feelin's 'bout it and I wouldn't hold nothing agen him less'n I knowed it was true?

EMMA--(*harshly*) Yes, you would! You're only too anxious to believe all the bad you can about him. You've always hated him, he says--and I can see it's so.

CALEB--(*roughly*) You know damned well it ain't, you mean! Ain't I talked him over with you and asked your advice about him whenever I come to home? Ain't I always aimed to do all I could to help him git on right? You know damned well I never hated him! It's him that's always hated me! (*vengefully*) But I'm beginning to hate him now--and I've good cause for it!

EMMA--(*frightenedly*) What cause?

CALEB--(*ignoring her question*) I seed what he was comin' to years back. Then I thought when the war come, and he was drafted into it, that the army and strict discipline'd maybe make a man o' him. But it ain't! It's made him worse! It's killed whatever mite of decency was left in him. And I reckon now that if you put a coward in one of them there uniforms, he thinks it gives him the privilege to be a bully! Put a sneak in one and it gives him the courage to be a thief! That's why when the war was over Benny enlisted again 'stead o' goin' whalin' with me. He thinks he's found a good shield to cover up his natural-born laziness--and crookedness!

EMMA--(*outraged*) You can talk that way about him that went way over to France to shed his blood for you and me!

CALEB--I don't need no one to do my fightin' for me--against German or devil. And you know durned well he was only in the Quartermaster's Department unloadin' and truckin' groceries, as safe from a gun as you and me be this minute. (*with heavy scorn*) If he shed any blood, he must have got a nose bleed.

EMMA--Oh, you do hate him, I can see it! And you're just as mean as mean, Caleb Williams! All you've said is a wicked lie and you've got no cause--

CALEB--I ain't, eh? I got damned good cause, I tell ye! I ain't minded his meanness to me. I ain't even give as much heed to his meanness to Harriet as I'd ought to have, maybe. But when he starts in his sneakin' thievery with you, Emmer, I put my foot down on him for good and all!

EMMA--What sneakin' thievery with me? How dare you say such things?

CALEB--I got proof it's true. Why, he's even bragged all over town about bein' able to borrow all the money from you he'd a mind to--boastin' of what an old fool he was makin' of you, with you fixin' up your house all new to git him to comin' over.

EMMA--(*scarlet--blazing*) It's a lie! He never said it! You're makin' it all up--'cause you're--'cause you're--

CALEB--'Cause I'm what, Emmer?

EMMA--(*flinging it at him like a savage taunt*) 'Cause you're jealous of him, that's what! Any fool can see that!

CALEB--(*getting to his feet and facing her--slowly*) Jealous? Of Benny? How--I don't see your meanin' rightly.

EMMA--(*with triumphant malice*) Yes, you do! Don't pretend you don't! You're jealous 'cause you know I care a lot about him.

CALEB--(*slowly*) Why would I be jealous 'count o' that? What kind o' man d'you take me for? Don't I know you must care for him when you've been a'most as much a mother to him for years as Harriet was?

EMMA--(*wounded to the quick--furiously*) No such thing! You're a mean liar! I ain't never played a mother to him. He's never looked at me that way--never! And I don't care for him that way at all. Just because I'm a mite older 'n him--can't them things happen just as well as any other--what d'you suppose--can't I care for him same as any woman cares for a man? And I do! I care more'n I ever did for you! And that's why you're lying about him! You're jealous of that!

CALEB--(*staring at her with stunned eyes--in a hoarse whisper*) Emmer! Ye don't know what you're sayin', do ye?

EMMA--I do too!

CALEB--Harriet said you'd been actin' out o' your right senses.

EMMA--Harriet's mad because she knows Benny loves me better 'n her. And he does love me! He don't mind my bein' older. He's said so! And I love him, too!

CALEB--(*stepping back from her in horror*) Emmer!

EMMA--And he's asked me to marry him tomorrow. And I'm going to! Then you can all lie all you've a mind to!

CALEB--You're--going to--marry Benny?

EMMA--First thing tomorrow. And since you've throwed him out of his house in your mad jealousy, I've told him he can stay here with me tonight. And he's going to!

CALEB--(*his fists clenching--tensely*) Where--where is the skunk now?

EMMA--(*hastily*) Oh, he ain't here. He's gone up street.

CALEB--(*starting for the door in rear*) I'm goin' to find the skunk.

EMMA--(*seizing his arms--frightenedly*) What're you going to do?

CALEB--(*between his clenched teeth*) I don't know, Emmer--I don't know--On'y he ain't goin' to marry you, by God!

EMMA--Caleb! (*She tries to throw her arms about him to stop his going. He pushes her firmly but gently aside. She shrieks*) Caleb! (*She flings herself on her knees and wraps her arms around his legs in supplicating terror.*) Caleb! You ain't going to kill him, Caleb? You ain't going to hurt him, be you? Say you ain't! Tell me you won't hurt him! (*as she thinks she sees a relenting softness come into his face as he looks down at her*) Oh, Caleb, you used to say you loved me! Don't hurt him then, Caleb,--for my sake! I love him, Caleb! Don't hurt him--just because you think I'm an old woman ain't no reason--and I won't marry you, Caleb. I won't--not even if you have waited thirty years. I don't love you. I love him! And I'm going to marry him--tomorrow. So you won't hurt him, will you, Caleb--not when I ask you on my knees!

CALEB--(*breaking away from her with a shudder of disgust*) No, I won't touch him. If I was wantin' to git even with ye, I wouldn't dirty my hands on him. I'd let you marry the skunk and set and watch what happened--or else I'd offer him money not to marry ye--more money than the little mite you kin bring him--and let ye see how quick he'd turn his back on ye!

EMMA--(*getting to her feet--frenziedly*) It's a lie! He never would!

CALEB--(*unheeding--with a sudden ominous calm*) But I ain't goin' to do neither. You ain't worth it--and he ain't--and no one ain't, nor nothin'. Folks be all crazy and rotten to the core and I'm done with the whole kit and caboodle of 'em. I kin only see one course out for me and I'm goin' to take it. "A dead whale or a stove boat!" we says in whalin'--

and my boat is stove! *(He strides away from her, stops, and turns back--savagely)* Thirty o' the best years of my life flung for a yeller dog like him to feed on. God! You used to say you was diffrent from the rest o' folks. By God, if you are, it's just you're a mite madder'n they be! By God, that's all! *(He goes, letting the door slam to behind him.)*

EMMA--*(in a pitiful whimper)* Caleb! *(She sinks into a chair by the table sobbing hysterically. Benny sneaks through the door on right, hesitates for a while, afraid that his uncle may be coming back.)*

BENNY--*(finally, in a shrill whisper)* Aunt Emmer!

EMMA--*(raising her face to look at him for a second)* Oh, Benny! *(She falls to weeping again.)*

BENNY--Say, you don't think he's liable to come back, do you?

EMMA--No--he'll--never come back here--no more. *(sobs bitterly)*

BENNY--*(his courage returning, comes forward into the room)* Say, he's way up in the air, ain't he? *(with a grin)* Say, that was some bawlin' out he give you!

EMMA--You--you heard what he said?

BENNY--Sure thing. When you got to shoutin' I sneaked out o' the kitchen into there to hear what was goin' on. *(with a complacent grin)* Say, you certainly stood up for me all right. You're a good old scout at that, d'you know it?

EMMA--*(raising her absurd, besmeared face to his, as if expecting him to kiss her)* Oh, Benny, I'm giving up everything I've held dear all my life for your sake.

BENNY--*(turning away from her with a look of aversion)* Well, what about it? Ain't I worth it? Ain't I worth a million played-out old cranks like him? *(She stares at him bewilderedly. He takes a handful of almonds from his pocket and begins cracking and eating them, throwing the shells on the floor with an impudent carelessness.)* Hope you don't mind my havin' a feed? I found them out in the kitchen and helped myself.

EMMA--*(pitifully)* You're welcome to anything that's here, Benny.

BENNY--*(insolently)* Sure, I know you're a good scout. Don't rub it in. *(after a pause--boastfully)* Where did you get that stuff about askin' him not to hurt me? He'd have a swell chance! There's a lot of hard guys in the army have tried to get funny with me till I put one over on 'em. I'd like to see him start something! I could lick him with my hands handcuffed.

EMMA--*(revolted)* Oh!

BENNY--*(resentfully)* Think I'm bluffin'? I'll show you sometime. *(He swaggers about the room--finally stopping beside her. With a cunning leer)* Say, I been thinkin' it over and I guess I'll call his bluff.

EMMA--*(confusedly)* What--do you mean?

BENNY--I mean what he said just before he beat it--that he could get me not to marry you if he offered me more coin than you got. (*very interestedly*) Say, d'you s'pose the old miser really was serious about that?

EMMA--(*dazedly--as if she could not realize the significance of his words*) I--I--don't know, Benny.

BENNY--(*swaggering about again*) If I was only sure he wasn't stallin'! If I could get the old cuss to shell out that way! (*with a tickled chuckle*) Gosh, that'd be the real stunt aw right, aw right. Oui, oui! Maybe he wasn't kiddin' at that, the old simp! It's worth takin' a stab at, damned if it ain't. I ain't got nothin' to lose.

EMMA--(*frightenedly*) What--what're you talkin' about, Benny?

BENNY--Say, I think I'll go over and talk to Ma after a while. You can go over first to make sure he ain't there. I'll get her to put it up to him straight. If he's willin' to dig in his jeans for some real coin--real dough, this time!--I'll agree to beat it and not spill the beans for him with you. (*threateningly*) And if he's too tight, I'll go right through with what I said I would, if only to spite him! That's me!

EMMA--You mean--if he's willing to bribe you with money, you won't marry me tomorrow?

BENNY--Sure! If he'll put up enough money. I won't stand for no pikin'.

EMMA--(*whimpering*) Oh, Benny, you're only jokin', ain't you? You can't--you can't mean it!

BENNY--(*with careless effrontery*) Why can't I? Sure I mean it!

EMMA--(*hiding her face in her hands--with a tortured moan*) Oh, Benny!

BENNY--(*disgustedly*) Aw, don't go bawlin'! (*after a pause--a bit embarrassedly*) Aw, say, what d'you think, anyway? What're you takin' it so damned serious for--me askin' you to marry me, I mean? I was on'y sort of kiddin' anyway--just so you'd tell him and get his goat right. (*as she looks up at him with agonized despair--with a trace of something like pity showing in his tone*) Say, honest, Aunt Emmer, you didn't believe--you didn't think I was really stuck on you, did you? Ah, say, how could I? Have a heart! Why, you're as old as Ma is, ain't you, Aunt Emmer? (*He adds ruthlessly*) And I'll say you look it, too!

EMMA--(*cowering--as if he had struck her*) Oh! Oh!

BENNY--(*a bit irritated*) What's the use of blubberin', for God's sake? Can't you take it like a sport? Hell, I ain't lookin' to marry no one, if I can help it. What do I want a wife for? There's too many others. (*after a pause--as she still sobs--calculatingly*) Aw, come on, be a sport--and say, listen, if he ain't willin' to come across, I'll marry you all right, honest I will. (*more and more calculatingly*) Sure! If they mean that stuff about kickin' me out of home--sure I'll stay here with you! I'll do anything you want. If you want me

to marry you, all you've got to do is say so--anytime! Only not tomorrow, we'd better wait and see--

EMMA--(*hysterically*) Oh, go away! Go away!

BENNY--(*looking down at her disgustedly*) Aw, come up for air, can't you? (*He slaps her on the back.*) Buck up! Be a pal! Tell me what your dope is. This thing's got me so balled up I don't know how I stand. (*with sudden fury*) Damn his hide! I'll bet he'll go and leave all he's got to some lousy orphan asylum now.

EMMA--Oh, go away! Go away!

BENNY--(*viciously*) So you're givin' me the gate, too, eh? I'd like to see you try it! You asked me to stay and I'll stick. It's all your fool fault that's got me in wrong. And now you want to shake me! This is what I get for foolin' around with an old hen like you that oughta been planted in the cemetery long ago! Paintin' your old mush and dressin' like a kid! Christ A'mighty!

EMMA--(*in a cry of despair*) Don't! Stop! Go away.

BENNY--(*suddenly alert--sharply*) Sh! I hear someone coming. (*shaking her*) Stop--now, Emmer! Damn it, you gotta go to the door. Maybe it's him. (*He scurries into the room on right. There is a faint knock at the door. Emma lifts her head. She looks horribly old and worn out. Her face is frozen into an expressionless mask, her eyes are red-rimmed, dull and lifeless. The knock is repeated more sharply. Emma rises like a weary automaton and goes to the door and opens it. Harriet is revealed standing outside.*)

HARRIET--(*making no movement to come in--coldly*) I want to speak to Caleb.

EMMA--(*dully*) He ain't here. He left a while back--said he was goin' up street--I think.

HARRIET--(*worriedly*) Oh, land sakes! (*then hostilely*) Do you know where Benny is?

EMMA--(*dully*) Yes, he's here.

HARRIET--(*contemptuously*) I might have guessed that! (*icily formal*) Would you mind tellin' him I want to see him?

EMMA--(*turns and calls*) Benny! Here's your Ma!

BENNY--(*comes from the next room*) Aw right. (*in a fierce whisper as he passes Emma*) What d'you tell her I was here for, you old fool? (*Emma gives no sign of having heard him but comes back to her chair and sits down. Benny slouches to the door--sullenly*) What d'you want, Ma?

HARRIET--(*coldly*) I wanted your Uncle Caleb, not you, but you'll have to do, bein' the only man about.

BENNY--(*suspiciously*) What is it?

HARRIET--(*a bit frightenedly*) I just heard a lot of queer noises down to the barn. Someone's in there, Benny, sure as I'm alive. They're stealin' the chickens, must be.

BENNY--(*carelessly*) It's only the rats.

HARRIET--(*angrily*) Don't play the idiot! This was a big thumpin' noise no rat'd make.

BENNY--What'd any guy go stealin' this early--(*as Harriet turns away angrily--placatingly*) Aw right, I'm coming. I'll have a look if that'll satisfy you. Don't go gettin' sore at me again. (*While he is speaking he goes out and disappears after his mother. Emma sits straight and stiff in her chair for a while, staring before her with waxy eyes. Then she gets to her feet and goes from window to window taking down all the curtains with quick mechanical movements. She throws them on a pile in the middle of the floor. She lifts down the framed pictures from the walls and piles them on the curtains. She takes the cushions and throws them on; pushes the rugs to the pile with her feet; sweeps everything off the table onto the floor. She does all this without a trace of change in her expression--rapidly, but with no apparent effort. There is the noise of running footsteps from outside and Benny bursts into the room panting for breath. He is terribly excited and badly frightened.*)

BENNY--(*stops short as he sees the pile on the floor*) What the hell--

EMMA--(*dully*) The junk man's coming for them in the morning.

BENNY--(*too excited to be surprised*) To hell with that! Say, listen Aunt Emmer, he's hung himself--Uncle Caleb--in the barn--he's dead!

EMMA--(*slowly letting the words fall--like a beginner on the typewriter touching two new letters*) Caleb--dead!

BENNY--(*voluble now*) Dead as a door nail! Neck's busted. I just cut him down and carried him to home. Say, you've got to come over and help look after Ma. She's goin' bugs. I can't do nothin' with her.

EMMA--(*as before*) Caleb hanged himself--in the barn?

BENNY--Yes--and made a sure job of it. (*with morbid interest in the details*) He got a halter and made a noose of the rope for his neck and climbed up in the loft and hitched the leather end to a beam and then let himself drop. He must have kicked in that quick! (*He snaps his fingers--then urgently*) Say, come on. Come on over 'n' help me with Ma, can't you? She's goin' wild. I can't do nothin'!

EMMA--(*vaguely*) I'll be over--in a minute. (*then with a sudden air of having decided something irrevocably*) I got to go down to the barn.

BENNY--Barn? Say, are you crazy? He ain't there now. I told you I carried him home.

EMMA--I mean--my barn. I got to go down--

BENNY--(*exasperated*) Oh hell! You're as bad as Ma! Everyone's lost their heads but me. Well, I got to get someone else, that's all. (*He rushes out rear, slamming the door behind him.*)

EMMA--(*after a tense pause--with a sudden outburst of wild grief*) Caleb! (*then in a strange whisper*) Wait, Caleb, I'm going down to the barn. (*She moves like a sleepwalker toward the door in the rear as*

The Curtain Falls)