
HARVARD PLAYS

EDITED BY
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THE HARVARD PLAYS

A Collection of One Act Plays

SELECTED AND EDITED BY PROF. GEORGE P. BAKER

Vol. I. Plays of the 47 Workshop, 1st Series

THREE PILLS IN A BOTTLE, by Rachel L. Field.

A fantasy, including a dance, for 4 men, 3 women, 1 child; 35 minutes.

THE GOOD MEN DO, by Hubert Osborne.

A drama on Shakespeare's death, costume, for 3 men, 3 women; 30 minutes.

TWO CROOKS AND A LADY, by Eugene Pillot.

An exciting crook play, for 3 men, 3 women; 20 minutes.

FREE SPEECH, by Wm. Prosser.

An amusing satire, for 7 men; 20 minutes.

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THE FLORIST SHOP, by Winifred Hawkrige.

A comedy, for 3 men, 2 women; 45 minutes.

THE BANK ACCOUNT, by Howard Brock.

A drama of modern life, for 1 man, 2 women; 25 minutes.

THE RESCUE, by Rita C. Smith.

A drama of New England life, for 3 women; 40 minutes.

AMERICA PASSES BY, by Kenneth Andrews.

A pathetic comedy, for 2 men, 2 women; 30 minutes.

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THE FOUR-FLUSHERS, by Cleves Kinkead.

A satirical farce, for 3 men, 2 women; 30 minutes.

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A tragedy of Fisherfolk, for 2 men, 1 woman, 1 boy; 25 minutes.

SCALES AND THE SWORD, by Farnham Bishop.

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THE PLAYROOM, by Doris Halman.

A touching fantasy, for 2 men, 2 women, 2 children; 30 minutes.

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A lively comedy, costume, for 5 men, 1 woman; 20 minutes.

COOKS AND CARDINALS, by Norman C. Lindau.

A farce-comedy, for 3 men, 2 women; 25 minutes.

TORCHES, by Kenneth Raisbeck.

A tragedy, costume, for 2 men, 2 women; 1 hour.

Vol. V. Plays of the 47 Workshop, 3rd Series

THE CROWNEST, by Wm. F. Manley.

A war play for 3 men; 15 minutes.

THE HARD HEART, by M. A. Kister, Jr.

Tragedy for 6 men, 2 women, 1 child; 25 minutes.

MIS' MERCY, by Louise Whitefield Bray.

Drama of the sea for 2 men, 2 women, 1 youth; 20 minutes.

THE OTHER ONE, by Arthur Ketchum.

Hobo drama for 3 men; 20 minutes.

Vol. VI. Plays of the 47 Workshop, 4th Series

THE STRONGEST MAN, by Elizabeth Higgins Sullivan.

A tragedy for 3 men, 2 women, 1 boy; 35 minutes.

THE SLUMP, by Frederic Lansing Day.

A tragedy for 2 men, 1 woman; 25 minutes.

THE MOURNER, by James Mahoney.

A sprightly comedy for 3 men, 1 woman; 25 minutes.

BROTHERHOOD, by William H. Wells.

A drama for 9 men; 20 minutes.

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PLAYS OF THE
47 WORKSHOP

THIRD SERIES

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PREFACE

THE four plays in this volume are all genuine products of the 47 Workshop, that is, written by men or women who have been members of the courses in playwriting. Produced at regular performances before 47 Workshop audiences, they have been corrected in accordance with their criticisms. At first sight, *The Crowsnest* and *The Other One* may seem difficult to produce; but nothing is asked for in the way of setting and lighting these plays which has not been found possible with the very limiting conditions at Agassiz House, Radcliffe College, where the Workshop plays are given. The stage on which they were originally given is only twelve feet deep by twenty feet wide. Even this twenty narrows steadily towards the back to fourteen feet. On this stage it is quite impossible to raise the scenery out of sight above the proscenium arch; and the lighting board is very simple. Given a dimmer, all the desired effects in *The Crowsnest* or *The Other One* may easily be gained on a stage quite inadequate as compared with the professional stage.

The plays included were chosen from a large number because they were specially liked by the

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audiences before which they have been given. Heretofore, the volumes of one-act plays issued have, in the main, aimed at requiring very simple settings. It is hoped that this volume will meet the need of two kinds of organizations: those which depend chiefly on the acting for the results gained; and also those which are quite as interested in lighting and scenery. Of course, *Mis' Mercy* and *The Hard Heart* are more difficult than either of the others, for, depending little on lighting or setting, they must stand or fall on the acting given them. *The Hard Heart* has been printed because it thoroughly justified the belief of those who chose it for production that in spite of its unusual method of exposition, it would be clear and would convey to an audience exactly the emotions intended.

It may seem wise, perhaps, to repeat here a statement made in the second series of 47 Workshop plays as to the attitude of the 47 Workshop and its authors toward performances of its plays:

“The growing number of presentations of such plays in settlement houses, schools and colleges, and experimental theatres is very encouraging, but a word must be said in protection of the authors. The chief reason why there has been in this country a larger number of really good one-act plays in the last few years is this: they could be written with some justifiable anticipation that they would be played repeatedly and bring in a small royalty each time. Few people, least of all young dramatists, can afford to write even one-act

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plays for free performances by anyone who cares to use them. There is, however, a curious feeling in many minds that because the one-act play is short, it cannot have cost much labor, and that its author should be glad to have it given as may be desired without recompense. Though the 47 Workshop is always ready to consider special reasons why the usual small royalties required for presentation of the plays printed for it and The Harvard Dramatic Club should be remitted, it has found it necessary in almost every instance to insist on the regular fee. Only in that way can it insure a succession of other short plays likely to be as satisfactory to its public as the plays already published. This statement may, perhaps, save misunderstanding and disappointment in the future."

The 47 Workshop is much interested in the performances of its one-act plays given increasingly throughout the country. It welcomes inquiries as to details of the original productions, and also comments as to the merits and demerits of the plays. Indeed, it would welcome any suggestions from people using its plays as to the kinds which they need. It cannot promise to make an effort to have the desired pieces written, but it will make up any future volumes with such suggestions in mind.

GEORGE P. BAKER.

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THE CROWSNEST

BY

WILLIAM F. MANLEY

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THE CROWSNEST

The setting for *The Crowsnest*, though seemingly complicated, was really cheap and easy to construct.

Two effects are of special importance for this play; first, an illusion of space not only in an expanse of night sky, but in the height of the crowsnest from the deck of the old hooker; second, a feeling of mystery to conform to the mood of the play. As the 47 Workshop stage is very small—the proscenium opening being a scant twenty by eleven feet—it was necessary to gain these effects under difficulties.

The units indispensable for action are: a crowsnest large enough to hold three people; the mast of a ship; two rope ladders; a spar of sufficient strength to bear the weight of the Kid; a ship's lantern; and a sky backing or cyclorama of some sort. For the mast, two ordinary wood columns, obtained from a planing mill, eight feet long and nine inches in diameter, were used. When these were bolted together side by side, they made a very substantial lower section of the mast. As all the strain and action of the play was on and below the spar, which was placed on top of this eight-foot section, the remainder of the mast was a framework of light wood, tapering toward the top, over which canvas was stretched. This section was notched half way through at the bottom and upward for a distance of eighteen inches so that it would fit on the lower section of the mast and give the impression of the two sections spliced together. Two light iron bands held the sections in place. The spar was made from a ten-foot, four-by-six-inch piece of ash, rounded and tapered to the ends. At the center it was bolted to the top of the lower section of the mast. Ropes attached to either end of the spar and guyed to rings at the base of the mast warranted its not tipping when the Kid's weight was thrown on one end. A two-foot iron railing of three-quarter-inch pipe extended around three sides of the crowsnest—the back unprotected—to the

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rope ladder which, stretched taut, reached on the left from the intersection of the spar with the mast to the three-foot platform at the base of the mast to which it was bolted. Although the crow's nest was but three feet off the floor, an effect of great height was gained in two ways: first, by setting the mast almost against the proscenium arch so that the crow's nest seemed to overhang the audience; second, by introducing, a foot beneath the crow's nest, another spar, seventeen feet long, to which a sail was reefed, very tight at the ends but bulging out in folds to the stage floor near the center. Behind the sail the characters lay concealed until time for their entrance. Then by grasping the lower rungs of the rope ladder and slowly dragging themselves up a rung at a time, with their entire momentum coming from the pull on their arms, the effect was the same as if they had climbed up through a trap door in the stage. A second and narrower rope ladder, five feet to the right of the mast and six feet up stage, extended from the floor, at a slight angle with the mast, out of sight into the flies. This was used by the Kid in getting to the spar. The few guy ropes used to help steady the mast and crow's nest against the strain became, by equipping part of them with fake pulleys, part of the rigging of the ship. The mast and spars were painted in blues and weather-beaten grays, little of which could be discerned except around the lantern. The sail was of dark smudged cloth, very old and tattered.

For a background a cyclorama was used that reached in a prolonged curve from one edge of the proscenium arch to the other, extending not more than twelve feet beyond the arch at the deepest point. This was lighted dimly in deep midnight blue and gave the illusion of limitless space. A box light on the floor behind the mast and directed upward produced this effect. This arrangement prevented any light from striking the floor or any shadows from the rigging on the sky. As all light was directed on the sky, the entire outline of mast, spars, and crow's nest was in silhouette except where a ship's lantern against the mast threw a dull glow over the crow's nest. A small amber spotlight, concealed overhead and directed downward, served to light the characters, faces and seemingly came from a natural source, — the lantern.

When Peterson put out the lantern, the spotlight also went out and the following scene between him and the Kid was strikingly played in silhouette against the sky. The

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winking of the signal light in the distance was obtained with a pocket flashlight, pressed against the cyclorama from behind so that it showed through faintly, as from a distance. Later, when Jo-Jo was thrown into the sea, all the lights went off just as he was about to go over the rail. His cry, the splash, and the "Ah" from the deck below, came out of total darkness. This not only simplified matters greatly, but strongly appealed to the imagination of the audience. For the effect of dawn, the first border was brought on so slowly and kept so dim that the scene appeared to be in a thick misty fog.

ROLLA L. WAYNE.

*Designer of the Setting Used
by The 47 Workshop.*

CHARACTERS

THE GREENHORN KID

JO-JO, COCKNEY A. B.

MR. PETURSON, THE MATE

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THE CROWSNEST

SCENE: *The old hooker Jessamine, beating her way down the South American coast. Only the mast shows against the background of sky and sea. Stars gleam beyond the masthead, deep glowing and warm. Against the sky the crows-nest shows boldly. It is inclosed by dark canvas, torn and weather-beaten. From it a ladder of rope leads to the deck. Just above the mast there is a spar, and from its end another ladder leads down to the deck. Stage in semi-darkness.*

CURTAIN: *Discovered, two men in the crows-nest. Two bells sound as the curtain rises.*

JO-JO [*shaking his companion who leans against the mast*] Hi! Wike up. This ain't a bloomin' bunk.

KID [*in a surly voice*] I'm not asleep.

JO-JO. Then 'old yer 'ead up.

[*A moment's silence and the Kid yawns.*]

KID. Ain't it almost time to go below?

JO-JO. If yer'd keep yer silly ears open yer'd know what time it was! [*He scratches a match and lights his pipe. His plug falls to the floor of the nest and he takes down the lantern that hangs on the mast to recover it*] Yer'll never

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learn ter be a sailor if yer don't keep yer ears open.

KID [*rebelliously*] I don't want to be a sailor.

Jo-Jo. Tired of it already, are yer? An' on yer first cruise! Well — so was I, twenty years ago: I'm still 'ere.

KID. Don't *you* ever get sick of it?

Jo-Jo [*mimicking him*] Aye, I gets sick of it. [*in his natural voice*] Specially when they sticks me up 'ere with a blinkin' little 'alf baked swab, what don't even know 'ow ter wash a deck proper!

KID. Yea, that's all I do — wash decks! And freeze up here all night. B-r-r-r! Say Jo, why do they need two guys up here?

Jo-Jo. Thought yer liked ter stand watch? Yer begged the Mite ter let yer come with me the first time.

KID. Well, it was all right — at first. But now it's always the same. Everything's the same on this old hooker — except the grub! That gets worse every day.

Jo-Jo. Yer'd better go 'ome an' run a bloomin' bootcher shop!

KID. Why, we haven't seen a whale — or even an iceberg. It's just like working on shore — only you got no place to go, and you sleep in a dirty hole with a pack of swine!

Jo-Jo. I notice they washes their face about as often as you do, me lad.

KID — [*breaking in on him*] Say —

Jo-Jo. Well —

KID. Say! What 'ud they do if I give 'em the

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slip! Beat it when we come to port, and didn't come back again!

Jo-Jo. Well, now, I guess they'd tike the ship 'ome just the sime.

[*A pause and Jo-Jo adds banteringly*]

What would you do all alone in a blinkin' South American port? Join the army, eh?

KID [*eagerly*] D'you think they'd take me?

Jo-Jo [*after a hearty chuckle*] Tike yer? Sure they'd tike yer! Always lookin' fer brave young bloods, they are. Why — when I was yer age I was a — general.

KID. A general! You!

Jo-Jo. Well, I had ter be a colonel first. Why, I was president of their blighted country, till their bloody revolution went to pieces — then I slid out o' the country 'id in a box o' bananas!

KID. When you were my age, Jo-Jo! Say — say, how many revolutions you been in?

Jo-Jo. Oh, a dozen or more, me lad.

KID [*sighing*] Gee! If I could do something like that I'd stay at sea. I wouldn't mind the work, if only there was a little excitement!

Jo-Jo. You follows the sea long enough, me lad, an' yer'll get all the excitement yer wants!

KID. Yes, but not on this old hooker! It's the last time I'll ever sign up on a tramp fruit ship.

Jo-Jo [*mysteriously*] Fruit ship, yer said, lad?

KID. Well, ain't she a fruit ship?

Jo-Jo [*piling on the mystery*] Ah!

KID. What do you mean?

Jo-Jo. Ah! *That's* the question.

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KID. I guess I ought to know! I handled crates of bananas down in the hold till I could hardly stand up.

Jo-Jo. It's a big 'old, Sonny, an' you didn't 'andle *every* crate what went into it.

KID. Huh?

Jo-Jo. A big 'old, Sonny — a big 'old. What's more — there's room fer more than bananas. Boxes, maybe — 'id underneath: *long* boxes; 'eavy ones!

KID. Rifles!

Jo-Jo. Shush!

KID. Rifles — and ammunition!!

Jo-Jo. Shut up, will yer! D'yer want us ter 'ave our bloody 'eads bashed in?

KID [*breathless*] Who are they for?

Jo-Jo. What was that yer said? Did yer 'ighness h'address a question ter me?

KID [*shaking him*] Who are they for, Jo!

Jo-Jo [*in a deep voice*] Ever 'ear of a *revolution!* Rifle runnin'! Yer'll 'ang 'igher than that rope if yer caught!

KID. When do we land?

Jo-Jo. Not in the daytime — yer can make up mind ter that!

KID. Tonight, then!

Jo-Jo. Aye, tonight!

KID. Gosh!

Jo-Jo. Aye, an' fer a damn good reason! Bananas in the 'old: very valuable fruit down 'ere — an' the sunlight spoils 'em.

KID [*very wise*] Oh, it's not that, Jo.

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Jo-Jo. Or maybe — maybe there's a blinkin' *cruiser* waitin' at the mouth o' the 'arbor: Wait-in' ter tike 'em off fer breakfast!

KID. How do you know all this?

Jo-Jo. Aye, 'ow does I know all this — that's the question.

KID [*springing to the side of the nest*] Look, Jo! Is it — the cruiser!

Jo-Jo. What are yer talkin' about? Who said anythin' about a cruiser?

KID. The light — the light out there!

Jo-Jo. That's the coast: shore-lights, sonny!

KID. Gee! I bet it *is* the cruiser! Do you think they'll see us?

Jo-Jo. They'll 'ear us if yer don't keep yer trap closed!

KID [*delightedly*] We're in real danger now, ain't we, Jo?

Jo-Jo [*yawning*] Aw, shut up. I'm sick o' 'earin' yer gabble.

KID. I bet there'll be shooting!

Jo-Jo. Shut up, shut up, or I'll slap yer face. [*He looks towards shore and says fervently*] I wishes I was ashore, with a tidy bottle o' rum at me elbow, 'earin' some gal 'it at a bloomin' tambourine — that's what I wish.

KID [*one sinner to another*] Say, Jo! Swede's got a bottle o' rum hid down in his sea-chest. Let's pinch it. I'm dry as hell!

Jo-Jo. You! Gawd — listen to 'im talk.

KID. It'll kinda — help us to keep our nerve up, Jo!

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Jo-Jo [*moving towards the ladder*] Well, well — bless 'is little 'eart!

KID. Lemme go for it, Jo!

Jo-Jo. Take yer 'ands off me: don't yer think I can steal me own liquor?

KID [*slumping against the rail*] Aw, you never will let me do nothing!

Jo-Jo. [*on the ladder*] 'Old yer 'ead up, me precious an' don't go to sleep, an' I'll bring yer a thimbleful, maybe.

KID. Aw, shut up!

Jo-Jo [*on the ladder out of sight*] Yer all alone now, so don't let 'er run on no bloomin' reefs. Don't let the cruiser catch us, captain! [*His laughter is heard as he goes down.*]

KID — [*his head slumped down on to his arms*] Aw, go to hell!

The Kid looks out to sea, then emits a disillusioned grunt. He yawns, stretches and settles himself against the rail. His head droops lower and lower. The stage goes gradually darker. The light of the sky changes from grey-blue to a deep turquoise. From the sea a light blinks, then blinks four times, rapidly. The Kid straightens up and notices the light. Once more it blinks; once, followed by four quick dashes: — — — —. The Kid springs to the side of the nest and whispers "Jo-Jo!" several times. The ladder sways and bangs against the nest. Someone is coming aloft. A man enters the nest. It is not Jo-Jo.

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MATE [*speaking with a Swedish accent*]
Where's Cho?

KID. He's sick; he's gone below.

MATE. Sick, eh? [*fiercely*] Douse thad light!

KID [*hurriedly*] Yes, sir! [*He takes down the masthead light and as he does so he involuntarily swings it.*]

MATE. Quid thad! [*He grasps the light and cautiously blows it out, shielding it with his coat.*]
Haf you been fooling wid thad light?

KID. I haven't touched it, sir. Is anything wrong?

MATE. Dere's dirty work aboard!

KID. P'raps the light was swinging with the roll of the ship, or maybe — someone on the ladder underneath the crowsnest, sir. We couldn't a seen 'em from here.

MATE [*grabbing him*] Don't lie to me!

KID. I'm not lying, Mr. Peturson!

MATE. How long haf you been up here alone?

KID. Not more'n a minute, sir. I wonder you didn't pass him on deck.

MATE. See here! You sure he went *down* the mast ladder?

KID. There ain't no other way, sir.

MATE [*pointing*] How about thad ladder ub dare?

KID. But I saw him go *down*, sir.

MATE. Sick, eh?

KID. Yes, sir.

MATE. If he was sick why didn't he come to the pridge and let me know he was going pelow!

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KID. He was coming right back, just as soon as he got a bit of a drink.

MATE [*laying hold of the Kid*] You see thad wader down dare? How'd you like me to drob you right into some shark's pelly!

KID [*crying out in pain*] Leggo! You're hurting me!

MATE. We're ten miles from shore. If you're lying to me you'll *swim* in, see!

KID. I'm not lying sir — so help me God I'm not!

MATE. Then why did you tell me Cho went below for a drink? I just looked into the fo'castle. He wasn't dare!

KID [*stubbornly*] He told me he was going below for a drink.

MATE. Sick, eh?

KID. No sir. I just told you that 'cause I was afraid you wouldn't like his leaving watch.

MATE [*sneering at him*] Bud you kep preddy good watch yourself?

KID. I wasn't alone for more'n a minute.

MATE. Don't dry to hide anything from me, sonny! I heard you whisbering down thad ladder!

KID [*breathless*] Mr. Peturson, I *did* see something, but I didn't think you and the Captain wanted —

MATE. Well!

KID. Mr. Peturson! I saw a light — out there! It's the cruiser, ain't it, sir?

MATE. Who's been dalking to you!

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KID. No one, sir.

MATE. You're a preddy wise kid. Dis your first cruise?

KID. I used to work on a ferryboat, sir!

MATE [*savagely*] If I tought you was mixed ub in this business I'd trow you overboard, you whelp!

KID. I'm not mixed up in it, sir — but I know there's something below beside bananas!

MATE. What's dat!

KID. Something *heavier* than bananas!

MATE. You're a smard boy: I suppose you guessed dat.

KID. No, sir. Someone told me.

MATE [*quick as a flash*] Was it Cho-Cho?

KID [*confused*] I — mustn't tell, sir.

MATE [*earnestly*] See here, lad! Id'll mean fifty poun' for you if you dell the truth. Did you see Cho touch dat light?

KID. No, sir — except just to look for a knife he dropped when he was cutting his plug.

MATE [*triumphantly*] So! He went to all the drouble of daking down the light. [*Then*] Do you know why he did that, poy?

KID. No sir, — 'less he was afraid a match would blow out.

MATE. Then I'll dell you! He swung dat light to giv' away our position to that cruiser out there!!

KID. Golly! Traitors aboard!

MATE. That kinda surprises you? Well, it

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don't surprise me! I never yet trusted these damned limys!

KID. Why would he do it?

MATE. Gold! Money! — Thad's what they pay for thad kind of pusiness. If we're caught it means the hanging of every man on poard — except him. You better dell all you know, lad.

KID. I don't know nothing else, sir.

MATE. Dere are five tousand rifles in the hold of dis shib. We ged ten dollars a gun! If you do as I say you ged one tousand of thad pile!

KID. A thousand! — What is it, sir?

MATE. Shiver my timbers, lad! Aren't you afraid?

KID [*magnificently*] What's the dope, lad? I'm your man!

MATE. Go pelow to my cabin. You'll find a gun under my pillow. Pring it pack as quick as you can move.

KID. Aye, aye, sir!

MATE. Hurry! Don't led him see you!

KID [*on the ladder*] Keep up your courage, lad! I'll be back!

[*He goes below. The mate makes a hurried examination of the nest with a flash light. The ladder sways again. Someone is coming up from below.*]

Jo-Jo [*on the ladder, out of sight*] Si, kid! 'old out the bloomin' lamp. I can't 'ardly see.

[*No reply. Jo enters the nest*] What ch'er mean by lettin' the lamp go out? — Gone ter sleep 'ave yer? Hi! wike up.

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[*He draws a small signal lamp (red) from under his coat, and lifts it up and down several times.*]

MATE [*straightening up*] Well, Cho-Cho!

Jo-Jo. Mr. Peturson!

MATE. Aye, and douse thad light!

Jo-Jo. Captain's orders, sir.

MATE. Douse thad light!

Jo-Jo. You don't run this 'ere ship! [*The Mate swings at him. Jo ducks and pulls a gun.*] You whimper an' I'll shoot yer through the guts, so 'elp me Gawd!

MATE [*hands over head*] So you're the dirty snake thad's been doing all dis! I susbected you all along, you damned limy!

Jo-Jo. You be careful o' your language. If yer don't, mister Mite, I'll put a 'ole through yer.

MATE. You've god me now, but when dis ting's over I'll ged you, don't forged dat — I'll ged you!

Jo-Jo. Yes, an' when yer lined up agin a bloomin' wall with the rest 'o yer bloody crew, an' they shoots ye full o' 'oles yer'll do a *lot* a 'arm, won't yer?

MATE [*with trembling voice*] See here, Cho-Cho! You wouldn't turn over your old ship-mates, Cho-Cho? Why, it would mean the death of every man on board!

Jo-Jo. Except me! It means a tidy thousand poun' fer me, an' a major-general's commission in their bloody army, if yer please! [*He takes the signal light from where he has hung it on the mast*

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and begins to swing it. The light from the sea answers. The mate groans in helpless rage]
She ain't much 'o a cruiser from my way a thinkin' — but she's faster than this 'ere old box. Any news for the missis, Mite, when I gets back ter Lunnon? 'Ow yer was brave ter the end, 'an wouldn't let 'em bandage yer bloomin' eyes?

[He hangs the lamp on the mast and the Mate moves for him. Jo turns like a flash and jams the gun against his ribs. They are very close.] None o' that! — 'Ow does yer like the feel o' that against yer belly?

[Voices from below, becoming louder and louder. At least a dozen men must be assembled at the foot of the mast.]

VOICE. The Mate's aloft, boys!

KID *[on deck]* Are you there, Mr. Peturson?

Jo-Jo *[to the Mate]* Shut — up!

VOICE. Go get him, Swede! *[Ladder sways]*

Jo-Jo *[pulling another gun]* Stay where you are! Another inch an' I shoot!

VOICE ON LADDER. Go to hell! — *[A forearm and fist appear, grasping upward. Jo shoots. Thud as body falls to deck, followed by groan of dismay.]*

Jo-Jo. That's one, an' I got enough left for heverybody, so step up, mites!

KID *[below]* Don't shoot! You'll hit the Mate.

MATE. Plaze away, poys!

KID. Leave him to me, lads!

VOICE. Aye, let the Kid get him!

Jo-Jo *[sneering over the edge]* Aye, let the Kid

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get 'im, you white livered skunks! There ain't a man in the crew what's got pluck enough to come an' get me hisself! [*Signal light blinks from the sea*] Yer see that, lads? Don't worry — I'll tike the news 'ome ter yer gals. [*A figure appears on the ladder leading to the spar above the nest. Jo-Jo, leaning over the side, does not see it.*] Twice as nice as dyin' in bed an' no funeral hexpenses. Buried by the gov'n'ment, as it were. Now the Mite 'ere, 'e 's goin' ter 'ave me 'anged. What ch'er think o' that, lads — have ol' Jo-Jo 'anged! — Don't stand so quiet, mites. Yer look up 'ere as though yer 'spected the Hangel Gabriel ter come down the bloomin' mast fer yer! Just wait, lads —

[*Here the Kid, who has crept along the spar, a huge knife in his teeth, reaches the mast, and drops into the nest on to Jo-Jo. Great roar below.*]

MATE. Hold his arm, lad!

[*A shot rings out in the nest and the stage goes black.*] Over with him, lad!

Jo-Jo [*screaming*] Don't! Oh Gawd, mites — don't! [*Silence — then four bells sound. Very slowly the light begins to grow until it reaches the cold grey of early dawn. Jo-Jo is smoking in the crow'snest. The Mate is seen climbing up ladder. The Kid leans against the rail in sleep.*]

MATE [*entering nest*] Hi, Jo-Jo!

Jo-Jo. 'Ullo, sir. [*Points to Kid*] He's a pretty one! Couldn't keep 'is blessed eyes open all night. [*Shakes Kid*] Hi! Wike up. [*Kid wakes with a start, a little cry. He sees Jo and jumps at his*

THE CROWSNEST

throat. Jo slaps his face. The Kid begins to cry.

KID [*in bewilderment*] You — you!

MATE. Yes, me. Go pelow and wash the aft deck, you swab.

KID [*meekly and in a dazed voice*] Yes, sir.

He crawls down the ladder, glancing yearningly aloft as

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE HARD HEART

BY

M. A. KISTER

CHARACTERS

PAPERÉ FLAÏRY

MAMÈRE FLAÏRY

DELOR FLAÏRY

LUCILLE GUESTIER

HAROLD GUESTIER

JOSEPH RAMEAU

LITTLE VICTOR

DEROCHIE

MCDONALD

GUARDS

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THE HARD HEART

[Flairy's dining-room. Left, a door leading into the parlor; center rear, a door and window opening upon the porch. Mamere is sitting, right; Delor stands by the rear door; and Papere is crossing toward him as the curtain rises.]

MAMERE. Dark — will the dark hurt him, then?

DELOR *[glancing at her, laughs.]*

PAPERE. I don' know. But I know it's a night to stay in. Now you have my word on it.

[He locks the porch-door, and returns toward the parlor, stopping long enough to hold up the key.]

Show me how you get out now!

DELOR *[throws up the window.]*

MAMERE. He goes to look for his gun.

DELOR. Eh?

MAMERE. He hopes to find it in the top-drawer.

DELOR. Will Papere try keeping me in with a gun? *[Laughs.]*

MAMERE. You know how your father is — so quiet, old-like. And he don' want you to go out. If he see you going out, I don' know myself, but maybe he shoot at you. *[Laughs.]*

THE HARD HEART

DELOR. So he don't want me to go out.
[Laughs.] You can do something for me!

MAMERE [hungrily] Ah, you trus' in me!

DELOR. How do *you* feel, Mamere?

MAMERE. I don' know nothing. But I feel — what you like, I like that, too.

DELOR. Yes, I know you. You're egging me on.

MAMERE. I want you to do what you want to. That's all.

DELOR. Maybe I want to go out, and maybe I don't. [He starts to climb through the window.]

MAMERE [mischievous] It mus' be he cannot find his re-vol-ver.

DELOR. I will wait till he finds it. Maybe there will be some fun.

MAMERE. You think I will get you out.

[Delor laughs.]

MAMERE [bitterly] Ah, your mother — you know she did always get you out of trouble!

DELOR. Sure, she's crazy about me. She likes me even better than her plants, those that won't live in the winter . . . Remember your lemon tree?

MAMERE. Pshaw, I don't want to talk about it!

DELOR [masterful] Remember it!

MAMERE [meekly] Well, it has grown so big!

[She makes a gesture representing a height the same as his.]

DELOR. Yes. It is dead.

MAMERE. Ah . . . ! I don' believe you.

THE HARD HEART

DELOR. All right. When I put it out today, after the parade —

MAMERE. It is the one I planted when you was born.

DELOR. Yes. When I put it out for fun, the iceman's horses trampled on it.

MAMERE. I raised it from so high — such a nice tree — un arbre gai, do you understand?

DELOR. I gave the iceman a calldown for it.

MAMERE. Ah, what for? I can see it was the iceman's horse.

DELOR. Well, it don't matter.

MAMERE. Oh, no, no, no!

DELOR. We won't cry. What's one tree more or less?

MAMERE. Sure, we don' care. Yet it was my tree, for myself. And I did plant it when you was born.

DELOR. But we won't cry. We don't believe in crying like the rest. [*Laughs*]

MAMERE. No, no! [*Laughs*]

DELOR. Ah, you're crying. I can see your face is wet.

MAMERE. It's not so.

DELOR. Hurry up — wipe your face before Papere comes back.

MAMERE. It's a lie.

DELOR [*comforting*]. Don't call me a liar, or I'll break your neck.

MAMERE. It's plain you're not big enough.

DELOR. Do as I tell you.

MAMERE. You make me!

THE HARD HEART

DELOR. No crying here!

[*As he advances, she slaps his face. He seizes her by the elbows. For a moment she remains defiant, then goes limp suddenly.*]

MAMERE [*girlishly*] Look out — you hurt!

DELOR. See! Now you do as I tell you — all the time. And don't forget it. [*He crosses left, and sits down.*]

MAMERE [*smugly*] All right.

[*As she rubs her sleeve across her eyes, Papere comes back, and silently takes a seat by the locked door.*]

MAMERE. So you don't find your gun?

PAPERE [*aggressive*] Who says I was lookin' for my gun?

MAMERE. Voila!

[*Taking the revolver from her dress, she holds it toward her husband, who at first starts for it, but stops. She lays it on the floor.*]

MAMERE. You want it — you don' want it — there it is!

PAPERE [*to Delor*] I see you're here.

DELOR. You're right.

PAPERE. I see you're not goin' out, either.

DELOR. You're seeing things.

PAPERE. I won't stand for it!

MAMERE. Tell me, what day it is?

DELOR. Labor Day.

PAPERE. They didn't use to be a day for celebratin' goin' to work.

DELOR. Around here it must be to celebrate being out of work.

THE HARD HEART

MAMERE. Pshaw! I know it's a holiday myself. Haven't I been making the pies and cakes for the fête tonight? But what I am thinking is, there was a touch of the frost last night, as I don't remember coming so early before.

DELOR [*irritated*] Oh, I know what you're driving at!

PAPERE [*mumbling*] I don't know what's got in 'em, these days.

DELOR. Say, do you like to work?

PAPERE [*shouting*] You bet I do!

DELOR. I'd rather throw horseshoes.

PAPERE. I allus was a good worker. When I was a kid I picked up berries for the butcher. I picked up coal on the tracks, too. That's what a real man's got to do.

[*Mamere joins in with him at this point, and the following speeches are given together, Mamere's rising triumphantly above her husband's, which soon subside into a sort of grumble.*]

PAPERE: And I pulled nets on the river for Simon

MAMERE: What I am thinking is the touch of frost

PAPERE: Fouquereau. After that I worked at the

MAMERE: Has made the green apples ripe. When you

PAPERE: foundry and the shipyard. When I got through

MAMERE: Was enfant there was a dozen trees around here:

THE HARD HEART

PAPERER: with George Wilson, he said himself that I drug

MAMERE: But now the only one is at McDonald's. It is

PAPERER: more stone than any two teams he ever had workin'.

MAMERE: Jus' beyond the iron fence, near the house. [*alone*] Now all the green apples are at McDonald's.

DELOR [*irritated*] I know, I know! I'll get them.

PAPERER [*darkly, to his wife*] You could do better than talkin' me down.

DELOR. Come on — I want to get away before the folks! Let's have the key now.

PAPERER. No, sir!

DELOR [*laughing*] Maybe I'm a dub, eh? [*He throws up the window.*]

PAPERER. Drop that, drop that! [*He picks up his revolver.*]

DELOR. Look out — that's loaded.

PAPERER. I know who loaded it.

DELOR. Say, where do you think I'm going?

PAPERER. I don' like the way you act.

DELOR. What do you think I'm going to do?

PAPERER. I'm tellin' you what you're goin' to do.

DELOR [*laughing*] So you'll shoot at me to keep me in!

PAPERER. I can stand just about so much.

DELOR. Well, go ahead — and shoot!

THE HARD HEART

[*He puts a leg through the window. Papere raises the revolver.*]

MAMERE. Ah-ah-ah-ah!

DELOR. What's the matter, Ma. Want me to come back?

MAMERE [*shaking her head in denial*] Ah-ah-ah!

PAPERE. It's the pain in the back. Sacré diable! [*He throws his pistol to the floor. His voice is beaten and plaintive*] I don' want him to go out — I don' want him to go out!

MAMERE [*calmly*] I want him to do as he like.

DELOR. Somebody's coming — I think the Guestiers. [*He slams the window down.*]

MAMERE [*To her husband*] You — unlock the door quick and put that gun away. What if that girl was to find us like this! Delor, you let them in.

PAPERE [*picking up his revolver*] Ah, my poor old one — it is broken.

[*He goes into the parlor. A knock; Delor admits a young man and young woman.*]

MAMERE. How do you do. I see you got your brother too. Here, give me your hat, Harold. Delor, help Lucille with her coat.

DELOR. She ain't got a busted arm.

LUCILLE. He talks like we was married already.

MAMERE. Well, I hope he don' talk like that no more.

LUCILLE. I don't mind.

THE HARD HEART

MAMERE. I bet you don'.

[*She carries Lucille's coat into the parlor, leaving the girl standing alone, embarrassed.*]

HAROLD. I hear you pulled off a good one today.

DELOR [*admitting nothing*] Yeh?

HAROLD. I wasn't there myself.

DELOR. I guess you wouldn't be.

HAROLD [*defensively*] Well, it's none of my business. I never worked at the shipyard. [*Flattering*] Everybody's wondering what you'll do next.

DELOR. I hope they don't get fooled.

[*Enter Papere, who greets the Guestiers, and kisses Lucille in a formal way.*]

PAPERE. Lucille — do you know — the kid he is going to leave us.

LUCILLE. Going to leave me, too?

[*Mamere returns.*]

DELOR. I don't see much to keep me.

MAMERE [*with devilry*]. Maybe Lucille — she could coax him to stay.

HAROLD. Ah, let him go! He's got something up his sleeve. To-morrow everybody'll be talking about him.

MAMERE. Maybe he's got another girl — I don' know.

LUCILLE. It's just exactly like him.

PAPERE. Where would he find anybody?

DELOR. I guess you don't look around.

PAPERE. But I don' see nobody like my Lucille.

DELOR. It must be your eyes is bad.

THE HARD HEART

LUCILLE [*seriously, nervous*] I'm 'fraid I haven't any influence.

[*A knock. Enter two men and a boy of eight, who exchange greetings with those present.*]

FIRST MAN. Hello, Delor; I see you're still kickin' around.

DELOR. They haven't got me yet.

FIRST MAN. You going to stay in — lay low for a while?

DELOR. [*mocking*] What'd you do, Derochie?

DEROCHIE. Just wait — slick it over.

SECOND MAN. Everybody's all behind you to the last drop, Delor.

DELOR. Yeh — I know.

DEROCHIE. Trouble — no use. Rameau's always talking fight.

MAMERE [*to Rameau*] Delor's going out tonight, Joseph.

RAMEAU. That's the good stuff! Go up and take him by the nose, son.

DEROCHIE. No, just smooth it over, explain — sorry.

DELOR. Oh, what do I care about him, one way or the other!

MAMERE. What are they talking about?

DELOR. They're a great couple of kidders.

MAMERE [*doubtful*] Maybe you better stay here.

LUCILLE [*eagerly*] Yes, we'll have a dance.

DELOR. I've done that before.

THE HARD HEART

LUCILLE. Look — your mother has got wine and cake ready.

MAMERE. Don't worry — I'll save him some of that.

DELOR. Maybe I won't want it when I get back.

DEROCHIE. You see — if he goes up and slicks it over — it will help the whole bunch.

RAMEAU. Don't knuckle down, Delor; don't knuckle down.

HAROLD. Why, if you put it over on him, they'll talk about it for a week!

PAPERE. I'm against it. I allus was against it, right from the beginning, and I'm against it now.

LUCILLE. Stay and walk home with me.

DELOR. If I stay in, I stay in.

LUCILLE. I wish you wouldn't go.

MAMERE. Let him do as he likes.

[*She exchanges a glance with him, and they both laugh. Delor opens the door.*]

DELOR. So long. I'll be back before you know it — before you finish dancing.

[*He goes. A pause.*]

PAPERE [*pounding the table*] Sacré diable!

LUCILLE. Now we've got nothing to do but wait for him.

[*A pause.*]

HAROLD. Mamere, did I hear you say something about wine?

MAMERE. Sure, sure; you all go into the parlor for a while.

THE HARD HEART

LUCILLE. I'll help you.

MAMERE. No, no, no!

LUCILLE. I want to.

MAMERE. Well, sit down.

[*The men and the boy Victor go out, while the women arrange their refreshments.*]

LUCILLE. I see they are laying out tonight.

MAMERE. Who is that?

LUCILLE. The Laflures.

MAMERE. Those around the corner?

LUCILLE. Yes. I pecked in the window coming by — I couldn't help peeking — the old man looked fine — he had a hundred candles — the big dear ones — all around him.

MAMERE. It must have been a treat.

LUCILLE. I like candles, don't you? They look fine.

MAMERE. Yes. And we are told to have them, too. [*With a suggestion of crossing herself*] I can slice this cake myself. Oh, mon dieu, the cigars! Here, take them the cigars!

[*Lucille goes into the parlor. Mamere hums the tune of La Galère. Delor enters, very quiet.*]

What 's the matter? Did you forget something?

[*Delor shakes his head sullenly.*]

Didn't you forget nothing?

DELOR. Oh, no! I don't know.

MAMERE. If there's anything you want —

Delor. No, no.

MAMERE [*as if to herself*] Maybe you don't feel well. Today I was goin' to make you a pie;

THE HARD HEART

but there was no green apples in the house. Tomorrow I will make you one.

DELOR. I went by Laflure's.

MAMERE. I remember, when you was enfant, there was a dozen trees around here. I used to hold you up to pick the little green apples. The sun used to shine in your eyes. You was un blanc bébé —

DELOR. I looked in the window going by Laflure's. They are laying the old man out.

MAMERE. Your cheeks was white like milk. Ah, you are white now!

DELOR [*holding himself as if sickened*] They are fussing over the old man; I could see; they have a lot of candles.

MAMERE. You know why.

DELOR. Not for me. No fussing and no candles, no candles, if ever —

MAMERE. Ah, pshaw! You are young.

DELOR. You aren't like Mamere Laflure. Why don't you never cry or hold your hands?

MAMERE. When you 're here, I feel young, too. But when you ain't here, maybe I could cry. Bah! We don' cry like the rest. Tomorrow I will make you a pie. Let's do something for fun.

DELOR. Well, I will go up now. What's an old guy and a couple of candles!

MAMERE. Sure, we are young — you and me.

DELOR [*pointing toward the parlor*] What would they say? [*He laughs.*]

MAMERE [*laughing*] It's a joke on them.

DELOR. Good-by. [*He opens the door.*]

THE HARD HEART

MAMERE. It's true you did forget something.

DELOR. Let me worry.

[*He starts out, but returns; and holds and kisses her passionately. Lucille comes back.*]

MAMERE [*with devilry*] Here's Lucille.

DELOR. I see her.

[*He goes. Lucille gives a sharp sob. A pause.*]

MAMERE. It's all right. You can cry as long as he's not here.

[*Little Victor comes in.*]

VICTOR. Mamere, are you going to stand up tonight?

MAMERE [*flattered*] Little pig, mind your own business. Here is a piece of candy.

[*Enter the men, talking.*]

RAMEAU. Crash! it went like that, all over the walk.

HAROLD. That's what they told me.

MAMERE. What's this?

DEROCHIE. At our parade this afternoon.

MAMERE. Delor was there; he didn't tell me nothing.

HAROLD. I guess not. [*The men laugh.*]

LUCILLE. I don't know either. What happened?

PAPERE. Bad enough, I think.

DEROCHIE. You're right.

HAROLD. Let Joseph tell it.

RAMEAU. Well, when we was getting ready for the parade, there was a lot of talk on whether we should go past the boss's house.

DEROCHIE. Mistake, mistake.

THE HARD HEART

RAMEAU. You're crazy! But wait till we see how it comes out.

LUCILLE. Go on.

RAMEAU. Well, there was a lot of talk, but we agreed to do it. I said: "What good is a parade of strikers on Labor Day if their boss won't see them?" Well, no sooner had we come near his house, than — bam! — somebody lets drive a stone that crashes through a window. The big one over the door. But the funny thing is, who should I see looking out, that minute, from the little window down below but old McDonald himself.

MAMERE [*to her husband*] Did you know this?

PAPERE. I just found out. But I had a feeling.

LUCILLE. Who threw the stone?

HAROLD. That's the funniest part of it.

RAMEAU. Delor.

[*Mamere drops the glass that she is holding.*]

PAPERE [*to Derochie*] She never does that.

DEROCHIE. He was walking beside me; I saw him chuck it all on a sudden.

PAPERE. I don' like the way he acts.

HAROLD. Darn smart trick, I think.

DEROCHIE. May start — lot — trouble.

RAMEAU. But it's what old McDonald needed; shows we ain't scared of him. And Delor's the only one to care enough to take the chance.

LUCILLE. You think he did it for the whole bunch, then?

RAMEAU. Why, sure.

THE HARD HEART

DEROCHIE. Of course he thought it was the right thing, but I don't know.

HAROLD. It's made everybody talk about him, anyway.

MAMERE. He used to throw a lot of stone, when he was a boy — just for fun

RAMEAU. And I don't know exactly, but I bet he's gone up there tonight, to settle the whole thing.

MAMERE. Ah, you think so?

HAROLD. You ought to know.

MAMERE. Wait until I'm telling . . . Come on, Lucille — sing!

LUCILLE. I can't tonight; my throat's caught.

PAPERE. She can't sing without Delor.

LUCILLE. I don't want to without him.

MAMERE. Maybe somebody can recite, eh?

RAMEAU. Derochie.

VICTOR. Pa, you can.

[His father, without a word, gets him by the arm, and pulls him out of sight.]

PAPERE *[to Derochie]* Here's a chair.

[Derochie climbs upon it, and, after clearing his throat, begins to recite:]

“Venez ici, mon cher ami, and sit down by me so,
And I will tell you story of long time long ago . . .

[He is lost.]

And I will tell you story of long time long ago.”

Oh, I can't do it like Delor.

[He gets down in a silence.]

VICTOR. Pa, can I have a piece of cake?

THE HARD HEART

RAMEAU [*with astonishing fierceness, but he is speaking in phrases*] I'll fix you if you don't shut up!

MAMERE. Ah, give the poor child some cake!
[*She hands him a piece, and is about to serve the others, but hesitates.*]

I guess we wait until Delor gets back.

HAROLD [*who is hungry*] It may be a long wait.

PAPERE [*to Derochie*] He talk too much to suit me.

[*A pause.*]

LUCILLE. The Laflures are laying out.

PAPERE. I know about it.

LUCILLE. They must have a hundred candles there.

HAROLD. I wonder why they have candles.
[*Everybody laughs.*]

LUCILLE. They always have candles.

HAROLD. But why?

PAPERE. Who knows?

HAROLD. Maybe it's to keep the Old Boy away. [*Everybody laughs, Harold the loudest.*]

MAMERE. Candles are to light the soul to purgatory, eh?

HAROLD. Then if there wasn't no candles, the soul wouldn't have to go to purgatory. [*Everybody laughs, Harold the loudest.*]

HAROLD. No, it could go straight to hell.
[*Harold laughs alone. A pause.*]

PAPERE [*to Derochie*] I think he talk too much.

VICTOR. Mamere, ain't you going to stand up?

THE HARD HEART

RAMEAU. When I get you home . . . !

MAMERE. Maybe some of the men like to dance?

HAROLD. No, no. You and Lucille.

DEROCHIE. I'll play the machine. [*He brings out a harmonica.*]

LUCILLE. I'm tired tonight.

MAMERE. Come on, girl.

[*While Derochie plays, the women jig against each other, stamping and clapping, full of conflict. The others watch for a time.*]

HAROLD. They say McDonald will break this strike if he spends his last dollar.

RAMEAU. Sure — he wants to crush us.

[*Lucille's attention is drawn to the talk; her dancing grows haphazard, and Mamere's triumphant.*]

PAPERE. Is it true that he keeps guards at his house day and night?

RAMEAU. Every man has a big gun.

PAPERE. Is that so?

RAMEAU. And they like to use 'em, too.

LUCILLE [*clutching at her heart*] What is that? I hear something. I hear you — oh, Delor!

[*She runs to the door, the others following. When it is opened, a faint sound of singing enters.*]

RAMEAU. There ain't nothing.

PAPERE. It is jus' singing across the street.

MAMERE. They are dancing La Galère.

PAPERE. That's a New Year's dance. It's

THE HARD HEART

funny how the old celebrations have been changed to Labor Day. Now it's like that is the greatest holiday of all.

MAMERE. It's a fête-day; let's dance La Galère.

LUCILLE. I can't go on.

MAMERE. Yes you can, while we're waiting. Drag back the chairs, Joseph.

[*While the men clear the room, Lucille whispers to Papere.*]

PAPERE. Victor, come here.

[*He whispers vehemently to the child.*]

VICTOR [*standing still and sniveling*] I don't want to. . . . Pa!

RAMEAU. You do as he says.

PAPERE. What's the matter?

VICTOR. I'm — scared.

PAPERE. Bah!

VICTOR. Why don't you go?

PAPERE. Will I get that stick?

VICTOR [*going*] I don't want to — I don't want to.

MAMERE. Come on, we're ready.

PAPERE. I'll sit a while.

LUCILLE. I've got a hurt here.

MAMERE. Come on, come on — everybody, everybody!

[*She catches Lucille by the arm; Harold does the same with Flairy; and all link hands and form a circle around Mamere.*]

ALL. L'un à l'autre donne une main.

THE HARD HEART

MAMERE. (Dansez la Galère, la Galère comme il faut.)

ALL. Et reste heureux jusqu' à la fin.

MAMERE. (Dansez la Galère, la Galère comme il faut.)

[*When they have finished circling, they follow Mamere in the other steps.*]

ALL [*pointing their toes*] Un pied, deux pieds, un pied, deux pieds — dansez la Galère, la Galère comme il faut.

[*Hopping up and down.*]

Une jambe, deux jambes, un jambe, deux jambes — dansez la Galère, la Galère comme il faut.

[*On their knees, except Mamere, who remains standing throughout.*]

Un genou, deux genoux, un genou, deux genoux — dansez la Galère, la Galère comme il faut.

[*Little Victor reënters, wailing; Papere drops out and goes to him.*]

VICTOR. Pa!

RAMEAU. Some day I'll teach you!

MAMERE. Come on, come on!

[*The others begin half-heartedly.*]

Un genou, deux genoux, un genou, deux genoux — dansez —

PAPERE. He saw something; he ran into something in the dark.

MAMERE. Ah, he don' know what he's doing!

PAPERE. What's this? Look here!

RAMEAU. Leaves!

PAPERE. From your little lemon tree.

THE HARD HEART

[They all laugh with relief.]

HAROLD. That's funny! Why look, Mamere is even crying.

MAMERE. It's a lie!

HAROLD. Eh! I didn't mean to —

RAMEAU. Ain't we going to finish the dance?

MAMERE. Sure, let's finish the dance. Come on, come on!

LUCILLE. I can't.

[But they make her join, and begin again, with increased hilarity. Little Victor perches on a chair like a brooding old man.]

ALL *[on their knees and slapping the floor]*
Une main, deux mains, une main, deux mains —
dansez la Galère, la Galère comme il faut.

[Touching their elbows to the floor]

Un coude, deux coudes, un coude, deux coudes —
dansez la Galère, la Galère comme il faut.

[Their shoulders]

Une epaule, deux epaux, une epaule, deux epaux —
dansez la Galère, la Galère comme il faut.

LUCILLE *[dropping out]* I can't. It's awful!

MAMERE. Come on!

ALL. Une oreille, deux oreilles, une oreille,
deux oreilles — dansez la Galère, la Galère comme
il faut.

[With their foreheads on the floor, while Mamere stands very still and straight, leading with a slight gesture]

Un oeil, deux yeux, un oeil, deux yeux — dansez
la Galère, la Galère comme il faut. CABICHE!

THE HARD HEART

[*The men turn somersaults. A knock at the door. Silence.*]

LITTLE VICTOR [*thin and clear*] I saw something coming down the hill, too.

[*Silence. The door is opened slowly, and the faint sound of singing enters. A man's back appears.*]

GUARD [*turning his head*] We've got your boy here.

LUCILLE [*clutching at her heart*] Oh, I knew it!

PAPERE [*standing up and pointing, greatly*] Stop that music!

[*Derochie takes him by the arm.*]

Eh?

[*He is made to sit down. The guards place Delor's stretcher between two chairs, which Harold and Rameau set for them. Mamere leans against the wall.*]

GUARD. We don't know nothing about this. I guess he was shot some way. McDonald told us to bring the body here.

[*The guards go. Lucille clings to the body.*]

DEROCHIE [*pointing to Mamere*] She is still humming. [*They stare at her.*]

PAPERE. He can't do this to me. I'll show him. He can't treat me like this.

MAMERE. Your gun is broken; I remember.

PAPERE. I'll show him.

DEROCHIE. I guess we owe this to McDonald all right.

HAROLD. He thinks he can do anything.

THE HARD HEART

DEROCHIE. We must do something ourselves now.

HAROLD. Count on me.

RAMEAU [*breaking forth*] Let me tell you one thing: I'm going to take this up with him myself; this is between him and me from now on.

[*A knock, and the door opens.*]

HAROLD. McDonald!

[*The men start back in uncomfortable surprise.*]

MCDONALD. Where's Flairy?

[*Derochie brings up Papere.*]

PAPERE. I didn't think you'd do this to me, Mr. McDonald. Twelve years I worked in your shipyard, and I didn't think you'd do this to me. This ain't the right way to treat me, Mr. McDonald. And I'll get even. I'll show you. . . .

MCDONALD. Where's the boy's mother? [*To Mamere when they point her out*] I regret this — this necessity. It wasn't an accident. The man deliberately climbed over my iron fence, and he was shot while prowling round my house, in open defiance of the law and my signs. There is no doubt of his intention, either. He is the same man who threw — who was seen to throw — the stone this afternoon that broke my window. I understand he's always been a wild boy. You know the world hasn't any use for that sort. So it's a clear case of an unfortunate necessity and a malicious trespasser. I'm sorry for you, his parent; but I know I acted in the right.

THE HARD HEART

RAMEAU. If I didn't have a family on me, I'd show you who was sorry!

MCDONALD. You're the man that does all the talking.

DEROCHIE. But I've been quiet in this strike; and let me tell you, Mr. McDonald — and you tell him — that if I ever find the man who fired this shot, I'll make it up to him, all right.

MAMERE. What for? I can see how it was. He has a job, that's all. . . . Mr. McDonald, it is a fête-day with us. You see we have cake and wine over there. We was saving it until my son came back; but now we don't want to save it any more. Everybody that come in the house, he is a . . . a guest. Will you have a glass of wine, Mr. McDonald?

[She extends the glass, but Rameau takes it from her hand.]

RAMEAU. You must be crazy!

MAMERE. No, I am right; it is a fête-day.

MCDONALD [*briskly*] No, thanks, Mrs. Flairy; I can't stop. As I say, I regret this had to occur.

HAROLD [*largely*] Regret? you'll regret it, I'd say. This means the strike'll never end.

DEROCHIE. We'll have to go through now.

RAMEAU. That boy showed you up.

HAROLD. He'll be a regular martyr.

LUCILLE. What have I found? Tight in his hand.

PAPERRE. Just some green apples.

MAMERE. When he was small, we looked for

THE HARD HEART

them together. I used to hold him on my shoulder. He was un blanc bébé.

MCDONALD. I'll go now.

LUCILLE. Mr. McDonald!

MCDONALD. Yes.

LUCILLE. When he was — when you found him — didn't he say something?

MCDONALD [*embarrassed*] No. Well, I think something like "mamere."

MAMERE AND LUCILLE. Ah!

MCDONALD. Then he muttered something meaningless, probably unsettled a little — something about candles — he "didn't want candles."

MAMERE [*laughs*].

MCDONALD [*briskly*] Just a whim, I guess.

[*He goes.*]

VICTOR. Pa, what's funny?

RAMEAU [*not harshly*] Don't laugh.

[*Papere goes out.*]

DEROCHIE. I don't understand her.

HAROLD. She kept right on humming.

RAMEAU. She offered wine to him.

HAROLD. And she laughed, too.

DEROCHIE. I don't understand it.

RAMEAU. All the time she spoiled him; but —

LUCILLE [*looking up*] She has the hard heart.

[*Papere returns with tall candles. Mamere, turning with cake in her hand, makes an opposing gesture.*]

LUCILLE. She don't want candles even.

THE HARD HEART

DEROCHIE. Ah, she is herself, and can't change. Let's go.

MAMERE. See, I have the cake and wine all ready. You must take some. It is a fête-day.

LUCILLE. No; we couldn't swallow.

[She puts her cake and wine on a stool, and sets the stool by the body. The men go out one by one. Papere is lighting the tall candles, and placing them about the body.]

LUCILLE. I will stay with him.

MAMERE. The chairs are too hard to stay all night.

LUCILLE. I'll sit on the floor!

MAMERE. You better go.

LUCILLE. It's my last chance.

MAMERE. It was me he spoke of!

LUCILLE. You never felt like I did.

MAMERE. Get out.

[Lucille goes. Papere walks about the room mumbling, and his wife stands up to meet him, as if expecting to receive or give some sort of consolation.]

PAPERE. Why do you get in my way?

[She steps aside and watches, as he goes into the parlor.]

This is not the way to treat me. I will go up tomorrow and see him. I will write him a letter.

MAMERE *[quietly but with accent, kneeling by the boy]* "Almighty and most merciful creator, who, to refresh thy thirsting people in the desert, didst command streams of water to flow from the hard rock; touch, we beseech Thee, our stony

THE HARD HEART

hearts . . . and give us tears of perfect compunction . . .”

[Breaking off, she rises and pours the wine, slowly, to the last drop, on the floor. She crumbles the cake between her fingers, and throws it out upon the porch.]

Pour les petits oiseaux!

[Across the street they are still dancing and the sound of it is faintly audible.]

PAPERÉ *[outside]* Ah, you are still humming! Don' you dance any more.

[Closing the door, she nods no, no, no.]

And don' go near the candles. Who can tell what they stand for? *[Slight pause.]* All his life you spoiled him.

MAMERE *[kneeling again]* “And hear our supplication for this soul, that on earth hath sinned of pride and wilfulness, and died; and goeth now into a valley of the shadow, and alone into a place of darkness.”

[She pinches out the candles one by one. When it is wholly dark, she gives a sob, and falls upon the boy's face.]

CURTAIN

MIS' MERCY

BY

LOUISE WHITEFIELD BRAY

CHARACTERS

CAPTAIN JOHN HOMER *of the Bark "Mary L."*

JOHN, *his son, a young man of twenty-two.*

BENJAMIN, *his youngest son, a boy of fourteen.*

MIS' MERCY, *his wife.*

HANNAH MATTHEWS, *engaged to John.*

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MIS' MERCY

PLACE: *the Cape Cod of two generations ago, when the men, almost without exception, unless crippled or blind, went to sea. Some were whalers, some deep-sea fishermen, some merchant mariners to foreign ports. The tide of immigration was only just beginning to turn from the sea to the mainland, a tide now full, for when whaling ceased altogether, and the merchant vessel yielded to the swifter steamer, the men of the Cape turned to the mainland for their living. The sea had fostered the adventurous in them, — so that they could not be content on their narrow stretch of farm country.*

SCENE: *The play takes place in the period of the still glorious merchant marine, that is, in the early '70's. Mis' Mercy (it was the Cape custom to attach any title to the first name, if there were, as often, many families with the same surname,) is making pies and cake at a table in an old-fashioned kitchen so clean, sunshiny, and comfortable you wish to live in it. The table by which Mercy is standing is pulled out into the middle of the room, so that her back is toward the outer door, which opens directly into the kitchen. Newly made apple pies are cooling on another table or on*

MIS' MERCY

shelves. A closet of Chinese dishes stands against the wall. Pictures of barks and barkentines under full sail suggest that the Homers are sailors. The comfortable old chairs have tidies made of strips of Japanese embroidery and home crocheting. Mis' Mercy is singing "Rock of Ages" as she works. She always talks quietly and firmly.

Hannah Matthews lifts the latch of the door and runs in, leaving the door wide open. Crimson ramblers frame the doorways and windows. Far out one sees the deep blue of the sea, such as comes only under a clear summer sky. Evidently the house is on a hill. Hannah is simply a very sweet young girl whose possibilities of fineness the years may develop. She looks round with an expression of keen disappointment.

HANNAH. They haven't come, Mis' Mercy!

MERCY [*putting flour and milk alternately into her cake mixture*] Not yet, Hannah. Trains never get this far down the Cape the minute they're due.

HANNAH [*dropping her cashmere shawl across a chair*] I was sure I'd made a mistake in the time. I moved all the clocks in the house to match the fastest and still the time dragged.

MERCY [*smiling*] You must remember, child, that John and his father only got to New York three day ago and they had t' unload and see the owners and come all that slow way here. But they won't be long now.

HANNAH. Even that long is too long, Mis'

MIS' MERCY

Mercy, when I've waited two years to see John.

MERCY [*understanding her excitement*] Bless you, child, it used to be three or five, more often than not, for a sailor's wife or lass. 'Try beatin' whites, Hannah. That'll help you to wait. If you'll notice, I've done a sight of cookin' this very mornin'.

[*Hannah sits down by the table absent-mindedly with a bowl of yolks of eggs instead of whites. She beats assiduously, when she does not forget! Mercy continues her cake-making.*]

MERCY. When they do come, Ben'll whisk 'em up here in a jiffy with the new ponies. I heard him before daylight creakin' downstairs to curry 'em. The boy's so proud of his corn and his ponies. I hope his father won't be too excited to notice 'em. John, I know, won't see a thing till he sees you. [*She looks over at Hannah.*] And he'll see somebody lookin' mighty nice this mornin'.

HANNAH [*glowing*] Oh, do you think so, Mother Mercy? I get so frightened sometimes, for fear John might find another girl on one of his trips that he'd like better than anyone could like me. There might be nicer English girls in Calcutta or Bombay, or even a Chinese lady,—like the one the captain in Hyannisport brought home.

MERCY. Sailors' womenfolks always have that "might" to consider, 'less there's a pretty strong anchor at home. I think you'll hold John.

HANNAH. Well, I'd feel a lot safer if my nose

MIS' MERCY

didn't freckle so fast in the summer time just when he's coming home.

MERCY [*smiling*] Now the whites. [*Hannah passes her the bowl of yellow froth.*]

MERCY. Colorblind, Hannah? [*Hannah, realizing for the first time what she has done, seizes the other bowl and beats briskly.*]

HANNAH. Oh, I'm so sorry. I'll have these ready in a jiffy.

MERCY [*going into the pantry for a tin for her cake*] Don't hurry, child. There's plenty of time. You're helpin' me wait too, you know. I don't have a husband and son comin' home from sea every day in the week, and it's kinder slow waitin'.

HANNAH [*breathless from beating*] Um — m — I can't think of anything but how I wish he would come. There! [*She hands the bowl to Mercy and runs to the door to look down the road once more.*]

HANNAH. O come — come — come, John!

[*Mercy has started to beat in the whites. Now, turning amused eyes to follow Hannah, she sees for the first time that the door is open.*]

MERCY. Close the door, Hannah.

HANNAH [*looking back in surprise*] But you'll shut out the sea. It's glorious today. Just look, it fairly smiles in the sunlight.

MERCY. Close the door, Hannah. I don't want to see her smile. She always smiles when she's [*she hesitates for the word*] — triumphant. She smiled the day I heard she had drowned David off the coast of Africa.

MIS' MERCY

HANNAH [*puzzled*] Why do you speak like that of the sea — as if she was a person?

MERCY [*looking out of the window and speaking bitterly*] Do I? I guess it's 'cause I get to think of her that way, when I'm here alone on the hill so much, and she's out there, taunting me, 'cause she can keep my men for years, and I get 'em back just a few weeks out of a lifetime. [*She notices Hannah's troubled face.*] Hannah, darling, I've no right to speak so, with your weddin' day so near. Forget what I've said. Think — you'll have John six whole weeks!

HANNAH [*brightening*] No, seven, Mis' Mercy. Oh, I forgot to tell you! I had a telegram from John. Did you ever hear of owners so good as ours? They gave him a whole extra week when they heard he was goin' to be married.

MERCY. A week! And them always so anxious to send a ship tradin' again when it's hardly cast anchor! Did he tell where they're bound for next?

HANNAH [*going to the window*] No, nothing about that.

MERCY. No words to waste on *that* subject. [*She smiles.*] After all, it may be only another two-year voyage. John's father's first trip after we was married was five years. David wore little trousers before his father ever saw him.

HANNAH [*only half-hearing, because she is watching the road and thinking*] I wonder if John has kept that curl on his forehead.

MERCY [*beating in the whites*] Not if he could

MIS' MERCY

help it. He was always trying to brush it away with my hairbrush and water.

HANNAH. What if he's grown a beard, like most sailors! I couldn't like him with a beard!

MERCY [*her tones as sure as if she were reciting the multiplication table*] I think you'll find it won't matter, Hannah, whether he's grown a beard or been tattooed all over. He'll be just the same John.

[*Mercy goes to the oven to test the temperature. Hannah watches her from near the window, and then, like a released explosive, goes over and shakes her.*]

HANNAH. How can you go on working, Mother Mercy, as if John and the Cap'n came home every day? Why, you're not excited a bit. I'd almost think you aren't glad they are coming.

[*Mercy does not answer. Hannah looks at her more closely.*]

HANNAH. You — aren't — glad!

MERCY [*breaking free*] I am glad, Hannah, but it tears me so to have them go. Even while they're comin', I can't forget they have to go, and how long they are away.

[*On Hannah's face dawns slightly the realization of what her life will mean as the wife of a sailor.*]

HANNAH. Is it always this way? Don't we ever get used to it?

MERCY. We do, Hannah. We have to. But it's hardest this time of all the times. They may

MIS' MERCY

take my Benjamin. Benjamin, Hannah, my baby.

HANNAH [*softly sympathetic*] They may not need him this time.

MERCY. It's now or not at all. Another trip will make him too old to start. It's Nature, I suppose, for men to strike out for themselves. But on the Cape we give up our men so utterly when they begin to go,—the sea or the town gets all we have. I've given the sea my husband and a son that is dead, and she has John. I had to give Reuben up to the town. I wanted him so on the farm, but he wasn't content to stay. I let him go, but I must have one, just one of my own. [*She turns sharply to Hannah.*] Hannah, when you get to be my age, you've almost learned to quit fightin' Nature, but I'll fight to the very end to keep Ben.

HANNAH [*trying to turn Mercy gently to a chair*] Sit down a minute and let me finish your work. I guess you're tired.

MERCY [*patting the hand on her shoulder*] I'm not tired. My thoughts seem strange to you, that's all. Run, dear, and look down the hill.

HANNAH [*in the doorway, pushes aside the roses to see more clearly*] They're coming! Coming! Coming!

[*Mercy runs to the door.*]

MERCY. Isn't Ben the proud lad! Just look at him handle those ponies!—And my cake not in! Flour the tin, Hannah, and hold it while I pour.

MIS' MERCY

[*Mercy gives a final beating to the cake as Hannah flours the tin. Hannah, holding the tin while Mercy pours in the mixture, keeps her eye on the door. As Mercy takes the tin, Hannah seizes her shawl from the back of the chair.*]

HANNAH [*in sudden panic*] I think—I mustn't stay. They—they might need me at home.

[*Hannah's cheek nestles for a moment on Mercy's shoulder as Mercy understandingly draws the girl to her.*]

MERCY. Frightened, Hannah? Run down to the hollow, then. I'll send John to you there.

[*As Hannah goes out, Mercy hurries to the oven with her cake and then toward the door to meet her husband and son. They enter before she reaches it, John pushing by his father for a hug and a kiss and a hasty question.*]

JOHN. Hello, Mother. [*Quick kiss*] Where's Hannah?

MERCY. In the hollow, John. [*As John almost stumbles in his hasty exit*] Don't trip!

[*Mercy turns to her husband with a smile and a quiet, close embrace.*]

MERCY. O John, my dear John!

CAPT. J. That young rascal thinks he's gladder to see a slip of a girl than I am to see you!

MERCY. Sailor's tongue!

CAPT. J. Let me look at you, Mercy! [*He raises her head and holds her off, her chin in his two hands. He seems satisfied, for he stoops once more and kisses her. Then he stretches his arms.*]

MIS' MERCY

Mercy watches him happily. Suddenly his right arm seems to catch and he rubs it with the other. Mercy starts toward him.]

MERCY [*quickly*] What's the matter, John?

CAPT. J. Just my arm. It got broke in a gale last winter. It's all right now, Mercy. It kinder ketches once in a while.

MERCY [*anxiously*] You'll have Dr. Robert look at it while you're home, — now won't you?

CAPT. J. Laws, Mercy, don't you go worryin' about that arm. I didn't want you should know anything about it.

MERCY. O John, if you only knew how much more I worry because you don't write me things than I would if you did! I never feel sure you and John are safe 'less I have you right here under my nose!

CAPT. J. You ain't goin' to scold me first thing, are ye, Mercy?

MERCY [*smiling at him*] What 'ud be the use? [*She pats his arm and goes back to her table. Capt. John stretches cautiously once more.*]

CAPT. J. Gosh, it's good to be here. [*Half-joking*] You women don't realize what we sailors give up, to keep you and your children in a comfortable, cozy old farmhouse like this!

MERCY. *Our* children, John. Besides, that's not what you do it for. You sail the seas because you want to.

CAPT. J. [*looking at her sharply*] What? [*After a moment's reflection*] Well, perhaps you're right.

MIS' MERCY

[Mercy piles up the soiled dishes on the table. The Captain putters about, apparently looking for something.]

MERCY. What do you want, John?

CAPT. J. My old coat. The one you said wouldn't hold together if twan't for the dirt. You hev'n't burnt it up on me, hev you?

MERCY. Certainly not, much as I knew I'd a duty to. But I did sew the buttons on.

CAPT. J. Mebbe I kin wear 'em off.

MERCY. It's been waitin' a month in the corner closet. I'll fetch it. And your slippers. I suppose you like them better because one's lost a heel.

[As she gets the coat and slippers, Capt. John takes off his boots with the aid of a homemade bootjack.]

CAPT. J. *[putting on the coat and slippers Mercy hands him]* Sure I do. What do you suppose I think about, night after night in my cabin? I think about settin' right here in this old chair with my coat and slippers on and you workin' away at that table. I can even smell apple pie sometimes. I got my sniffer so well trained that I just have to think apple pie and I kin smell it. Why, I kin smell it right now.

MERCY. Only it don't happen to be imaginary pie. *[She sees that he half draws out his pipe and then hurriedly starts to put it back again.]* Take out your pipe, John. You won't be happy till you do, and land knows, I want you happy,

MIS' MERCY

no matter how much that brand of tobacco makes other folks suffer.

[As he lights his pipe, Mercy picks up a pan of potatoes from the table, sits down opposite the Captain, and starts paring. At the first puff, Mercy chokes, but smiles valiantly, as the Captain settles back with a sigh of contentment.]

CAPT. J. There! Now I wouldn't change with the King of Hawaii! Did I tell ye, Mercy, I see the King of Hawaii?

MERCY. No!

CAPT. J. M — m. We stopped with a lot of glass beads and got fruit enough for the rest of the voyage. Had to stay two days in the harbor to wait for a wind.

MERCY. What was he like? A cannibal?

CAPT. J. Guess not. Leastwise, we didn't miss any men, though one got so sot on a prune-colored damsel, I thought we'd have to lose him or take her. But they got him drunk on cocoanut juice and we hove him aboard. The king now, he was a little brown runt of a fellow with a whisk broom tied round his waist. He gimme a whisk when I told him I had a boy the size of one of his. D'ye think Ben'll like it?

MERCY. He'll have it out to show the boys at the swimmin' hole this very day. *[Hurriedly, to get away from the subject of Ben.]* Cap'n Asa's died since you been away.

CAPT. J. Do tell! I was mate under him — ten — eighteen year ago. Leave any property?

MIS' MERCY

MERCY. All he had — to Hannah. She's free now to come up here with me.

CAPT. J. Know when the weddin'll be?

MERCY. Friday, probably, 'less Hannah gets timid again.

CAPT. J. Today'd be none too soon for John. The *Mary L.* would 'a been keel-side up by now if he'd had his way. He wanted to crowd on every stitch of canvas spite of a reg'lar gale. And in New York he'd only put one foot inside the door at the owners', he was so anxious to get out again and start down home. Why, he didn't even want to let Ben do the drivin' up from the station.

MERCY. I'm glad you interfered. Ben has worked so hard with those ponies. He was proud to show 'em off. He gave up swimmin' three days this week to put extra time on 'em.

CAPT. J. He's a pretty likely youngster. Goshamighty, but it's good to see him lookin' husky. Not much like the pindlin' lad I left two year ago. [*Puffing pipe*] There's no doubt about it. This time he's strong enough to come with me. And as luck will have it, I've got just the place for him. The owners want my cabin boy for the coastin' service.

MERCY [*the muscles in her face tightening for the struggle ahead*] John! He ain't pindlin' now, but he's not been strong long. Only last December, we thought for two days he'd have pneumonia. But for Dr. Robert he would have. It was five weeks before he could go back to school.

MIS' MERCY

There are days now when he's not as excited as he is today, that he's pale and worn before the morning's half over.

CAPT. J. [*puffing decisively*] Sea's the place for him then. Toughen his lungs.

MERCY. Toughen his soul, you mean. He's only a boy, — more a boy than most boys of his age. You know what your men are like. Portuguese Joe can hardly keep a decent tongue even before his captain's wife.

CAPT. J. Pshaw, Mercy, what he hears won't hurt him. You're too pernicky. He needs knockin' about a bit to make a man of him and the sea's the place to do it. He's had too easy a way with you slavin' your life out for him.

MERCY. I've not hurt my boy. John. I've been firm when my very flesh ached to mother him. He's too sweet and wholesome for your men to harden.

CAPT. J. [*rising to the defence of his ship*] What kind of a ship do you think I've got? It's not worse than other men's.

MERCY. They're all alike. They're no place for a boy of fourteen.

CAPT. J. What are you talkin' about? I went to sea myself when I was twelve. I took David at fourteen.

MERCY. You took David at fourteen and John after him at fifteen, and the town took Reuben. And you? What have I had of my husband? We've been married twenty-eight years and out of

MIS' MERCY

them only three years have I had you, all told. Six weeks, perhaps, out of every two years or three years or four you come here. You're not even the man that I married. Your face, your voice, your very thoughts are not the same. The sea knows you better than I do. She's had you for twenty-five years and I only three, and yet you ask me to give her beside, the children that are mine, — mine much more than they're yours. I've lived for them. And you come and say — now I'll take this one and that one — one by one the sea or the town gets them. Leave me my Benjamin. Let me have him just a little while longer.

CAPT. J. [*his pipe falling neglected on the table*] Why — why — Mercy, I never knew you felt like this. What makes you talk so queer about the sea — like she was human? Now look here, we've got to be sensible about this thing. You'll miss Ben, but you'll have Hannah. [*Mercy startles him still more by a little ironical laugh*] Of course it's hard for you, but most of the women on the Cape have to stand it.

MERCY. We give and give!

CAPT. J. [*putting his hand on Mercy's where it grips the edge of the table*] Don't take it this way, Mercy. Now see here, my dear, what would there be for Ben if he didn't go to sea? Why, we Homers always go to sea. You can't expect to keep him forever.

MERCY. Don't I know how hopeless that would be? I've begged you to leave him for just one more voyage.

MIS' MERCY

CAPT. J. But he'd be seventeen when I come back, too old for cabin boy and he wouldn't know enough for a sailor.

MERCY [*putting the question that has waited for utterance every time her men have left for long voyages*] Why does he need to be a sailor? Why can't he be a farmer, like the men upstate?

CAPT. J. [*slowly, as if the thought had occurred to him for the first time in his life*] I don't know. I never thought about it. We Homers just *are* sailors. We never think of bein' anything else.

MERCY [*inexorably*] Why shouldn't you think of it?

CAPT. J. [*fumbling for words*] I guess you don't understand. Mebbe a woman can't rightly understand it. The sea ain't like what you think. I ain't got words to explain it, but it's the thing that fills me with peace — and satisfies me somehow. It makes me content. I get restless on land — you know that. I think I'm happy enough while I stay — and I am happy — and I say the sea's only water after all, and mebbe I'm a fool to care. But when I get back to it again, I know there's no explainin' the content it does give me.

MERCY [*melting*] I want you content, but oh, I want my content too!

CAPT. J. It's only fair you should have it. I won't take Ben.

[*Mercy hides her face on his shoulder, while he strokes her hair.*]

MIS' MERCY

CAPT. J. There — there — this sea-farin' presses kinder hard on you mothers.

[*Ben's impatient hand fumbles with the latch and pushes open the door. Ben runs in. He has been putting up the ponies. He is not very large for his age, a thin boy with a delicate, high-spirited face, bearing the stamp of Mercy's parentage. He is primed with questions.*]

BEN. I could bring in your box, Father, if you wanted me to.

CAPT. J. [*picking up the forgotten pipe*] Now what makes you think there is anything in that box for you?

BEN. Is it a bowie knife?

CAPT. J. A bowie knife? Why don't you ask for a splinter off the North Pole? Where would I be gettin' a bowie knife? They don't grow 'em in China.

MERCY. They grow tea sets in China, like ours in the corner.

CAPT. J. And they've taken to raisin' silk shawls. I brought one to your mother to see if 'twould bear transplantin'.

BEN [*refusing to be diverted*] Well, anyhow, old Cap'n Ezra that you sailed with first off, he said you and him killed twenty-two savages between you with one bowie-knife. He showed me just how you did it, — how you passed the knife from hand to hand, and across [*Ben illustrates ecstatically*] so's your arm wouldn't get tired. Did you do that, Father? On your very first voyage?

MIS' MERCY

CAPT. J. [*laughing heartily*] Well, I do remember 'twas on that voyage Cap'n Ezra taught me never to contradict him. What else did he tell you?

BEN [*sitting excitedly on the edge of a chair*] Oh, about nights in the tropics, when there's no wind, and the sails don't even stir, and you wait — and wait — and wait for something to happen. Gee, I'd like to see it!

MERCY [*almost pleadingly*] O Ben, my boy, don't you know they're romancing?

[*She is listening with great anxiety to this conversation, which is bringing a great light, for Ben, boylike, has hidden the deep feeling he has for the sea.*]

BEN. O sure, I know, Mother, 'tain't just like what they say, but it's all true about storms, — when the squall comes and the cap'n (just like you, Father) has to be out on deck givin' orders and thinkin' quick as a wink, 'cause the wind is snappin' the masts and sweepin' the men off with 'em into the sea. It is like that, isn't it, Father?

CAPT. J. Not often, thank God!

BEN [*hesitatingly*] Say, Father, Cap'n Ezra, he said mebbe —

CAPT. J. Mebbe what, my boy?

BEN. Mebbe you'd take me with you this time. O Father, will you?

CAPT. J. Guess not, Son. [*Mercy gives a sigh of relief.*] We've kinder led you off your longitude with our stories. Cap'n Ezra always could stretch a yarn further'n the truth would

MIS' MERCY

bear. The sea ain't like what we've told you, at least not all the time. Salt pork gets bitter in your mouth after four months of nothin' else. And some days you yawn, you're so sick of the sight of water.

BEN. But you always come to land in such interestin' places — like Bombay or Singapore. You can't hate the sea all the time. I couldn't. I've been out on it every minute I wasn't farmin' all summer long — and nights [*shyly*] I lie out on the cliff watchin' it.

MERCY [*Her face is pitiful to see*] O Benny! When I thought you were down in the village with the boys!

CAPT. J. [*Gently to Mercy*] Sea fever is catchin'. [*To Ben*] You think you like the sea, my son, but there are a good many things to take into account, — for one, this farm.

BEN. Lame Jim could come and do all I do now.

CAPT. J. But you'd have a lot more peaceful life if you'd stay right here and tend to it yourself.

BEN. Stay here! Live all my life on one little farm when there's a sea to take me anywhere I want to go — China, maybe, and Africa, and Spain! You know you said yourself you hoped some owner would send you to Spain before you died.

MERCY [*trying a last appeal*] But think of the corn you could raise and the ponies!

BEN [*understandingly*] O Mother, I knew

MIS' MERCY

you'd mind! That's why I couldn't bear to say anything till Father got home. But Father, you're a Homer, — you know no Homer was ever a farmer!

CAPT. J. There's a first time for everything, so far as I know. Look here, my boy. You say you knew your mother'd mind. Did you stop to figger just how much she'd mind? When we men-folks go to sea, we know just what's happenin' to us, but she stays here at home — imaginin' and wonderin' and dreadin' — alone. Think of your mother a bit.

[Before Ben can answer, Mercy goes hastily to him and puts her hands on his shoulders. She is no longer Mercy Homer; she is wholly Ben's mother.]

MERCY. Leave me out of it, John. Ben, do you want to be a sailor more than anything else in the world?

BEN *[speaking with the assurance of an inheritance that will not be denied]* I have to be, Mother.

MERCY *[dropping her hands from his shoulders and clenching them, as if to control herself for the difficult decision]* Then, — take him, John.

BEN. You mean I can go?

MERCY. That's what I mean, my boy.

[Ben kisses her hastily and capers round the room. As he passes the window, he sees Hannah and John coming up the hill, and opens the door for them, calling.]

BEN. I'm goin' to sea! I'm goin' to sea!

MIS' MERCY

[*Mercy's husband looks at her helplessly. Her face is calm and not unhappy.*]

CAPT. J. Well, I can't understand —

[*Mercy grasps his arm. It seems to help somehow, to hold it tight. Hannah and John enter. As they come in, Hannah slips from the arm across her shoulder, and runs over to Mercy.*]

HANNAH. O why did you do it, Mother Mercy? Why did you let him go when you wanted him so? You said you'd fight to the very end to keep Ben! [*The girl turns bravely to the Captain*] 'Tisn't fair for you to take him!

[*Young John, standing in the doorway, looks at Hannah in surprise.*]

JOHN. Why, Hannah, Homers always go to sea!

[*Only Mercy sees the flicker of fear in Hannah's eyes, a kind of terror of the inevitable. She draws Hannah aside.*]

MERCY. It's all right, Hannah. John wasn't goin' to take Ben. I let him go.

HANNAH. But why — why?

MERCY [*simply, as if this is all the explanation needed*] He wanted to go.

HANNAH [*looking at her and thinking the thing out aloud*] You loved him so much, you let him go, just because he wanted to.

MERCY [*half smiling*] That's about it, Hannah.

CAPT. J. Figure it how you like. I call it blame tough.

BEN [*pulling at his father's hand*] Can I bring in your box now, Father?

MIS' MERCY

CAPT. J. Comin', son. Haul away. Come 'long with us, John? This tad's too slim to handle a sea chest yet.

JOHN [*looking anxiously at Hannah, who is seeing, not the room about her, but the vista of the years ahead*] Will you stand by — here — Hannah? 'Twon't take two shakes.

HANNAH [*looking at him a moment before replying with meaning*] I'll stand by.

[*As the men go out, Mercy returns to the table, in the service of her family. Hannah sits by the table, her chin on her hands.*]

HANNAH [*finally, thinking aloud*] It takes a great deal of love.

MERCY. You mean — to give 'em up because they want to go? [*She leans over and puts one hand on Hannah's shoulder, saying very simply*] Why, child, what does a "great deal" matter, so long as there's love enough?

CURTAIN

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THE OTHER ONE
AN INTERLUDE

BY

ARTHUR KETCHUM

CHARACTERS

RAMBLIN' RED

THE CONNECTICUT KID

THE OTHER ONE

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THE OTHER ONE

TIME: *The day before tomorrow.*

SCENE: *A clear space under a railroad bridge. On either side, solid blocks of stone rising into the dimness, frame the picture. At their bases are a few scanty bushes, bleak and leafless. Within there is a suggestion of stonework that makes the walls. At the right side, against the stone, there are two railroad ties that make a sort of bench. The entire scene is played towards the front. The obscurity which completely hides the rear of the stage is lightened only by the fire. All the entrances are made from this darkness. The voices of Red and the Kid when outside are heard as from above. The play begins in the darkness of a rainy night in early spring.*

A moment after the curtain rises, a long, low whistle is heard from above. There is a pause. Then it is repeated and the voice of Red is heard speaking cautiously.

RED. Yer there, kid? It's all right. He's gone. Light up. [*There is no answer*] Ain't here yet.

[He is heard coming slowly down in the darkness. Presently there is a spurt of a match, and

THE OTHER ONE

he lights a bit of a candle. In the dim light is discovered a slim boy's figure lying prone on the railroad ties. He wears a pair of khaki trousers and an old black coat too large for him. A gray cap is pulled down over his eyes. Red, who is an older man, dressed roughly, with a battered hat pulled down on his reddish hair, stands at left rear a moment regarding him] Asleep, dry and comfortable and asleep, and me cold as hell. Wot yer think of that? Hey, Kid. [*The boy does not stir*] Kid! ! [*He shakes him roughly.*]

KID [*rising with a sudden start*] Comin', sir. [*Recognizing Red and recollecting himself with a sort of sheepish little laugh, half relieved*] Oh, you. I thought — I thought — I was —

RED. Never mind what yer thought. Yer ain't lit the fire like I told yer.

KID. The train must have been late, Red. I had to wait. Gee, it was an awful long train, rumblin', rumblin' over my head. Seemed like it never was going to get by. And then the track walker — [*Red sets candle on ground, far left, half front.*]

RED. He didn't see yer, did he?

KID. Sure he didn't see me. Wasn't I glued to these here ties like I growed here? I guess I know enough for that.

RED [*sarcastically*] Yer are naturally bright, that's all. Did he put the flash on yer?

KID. Not a flash, just walked along. He was whistlin'. It sounded good.

RED. Ah, you and yer sound. Got the wood?

THE OTHER ONE

KID. All I could, but it ain't much. Everything so damn wet.

[*He has taken some wood and brush and heaped them up between himself and Red, who has crouched down in anticipation of the fire. The Kid lights it but it will not burn.*] Y'ain't any paper on yer, have yer, Red?

RED. Say, what kind of a side partner are yer, anyway? First yer go to sleep and then yer can't get the fire goin'. And me wet and cold as a dog. I was to get the grub, wasn't I, and you was to have the fire ready, wasn't yer? Hell of a fire yer've got.

KID [*blowing on a few of the fast vanishing sparks*] Can't make it burn.

RED. Next time I won't join up with no more kids. I might ha' been in Springfield by now, but this draggin' along and restin' —

KID. You was awful good when my foot got sore and I don't know what I'd a' done tryin' to make Springfield alone. Five days! That's a long hike when yer don't know the way, and all by yerself. I hate to be by myself now.

RED. Oh, quit the talk and get that fire goin'. Yer've got some paper yourself.

KID. You mean — the letter?

RED. Sure I mean the letter. Yer've been readin' it enough times to know it by heart. Oh, I've see yer when yer thought I wasn't lookin'. Come on, Connecticut, I'm cold.

KID. Well, Red, yer see that letter —

THE OTHER ONE

RED. Oh, your lady friend'll write yer another.

KID. It ain't a lady friend. [*He draws from an inside pocket a letter. He takes something from inside the envelope quickly and puts it back in his pocket again*] Well, I guess yer right. I don't need it now, — It ain't as if I was all by myself, and besides — [*He crumples it up and places it under the wood, lighting it*] Besides, I do know it by heart. [*The blaze leaps up brightly.*] There's yer fire.

RED [*looking at the Kid with meaning*] An' yer didn't have to use it all either.

KID [*uneasily*] Yes, I did, all but —

RED. All but the money. I seen it, and yer can't deny yer've got it. God, yer a peach. Money in his pocket all the time and him never lettin' on! Lettin' me beat it for a hand-out and him takin' his share. Lettin' me be hungry and him with his money and enough to buy plenty for us both. When that soft old guy at the mission give me the two bits, oh, you didn't mind comin' in on it like a good pal. Pal! I wish't to hell I'd never joined up with a tight like you.

KID. Listen, Red. I meant to tell yer an I thought maybe y'd guessed anyway when I told yer I was going back east from Springfield. That's why I wanted to get there. [*He speaks with difficulty.*] Yer see, just before my time was up in — in that place there, I wrote home and my mother sent me this to come on as quick as I could. She didn't have very much, but it was

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enough — from Springfield. I know I didn't tell yer, but yer see it wasn't as if it was mine exactly. Yer see how it is, don't you, Red.

RED. Sure I see. [*With a hard laugh*] The little jail bird's goin' back to his nest. I suppose yer countin' on a brass band at the station and Welcome Home wavin' over Main Street between the drug store and the Post Office. That's what yer always count on — the first time.

KID. I ain't countin' on nothin'. Only gettin' there, and bein' with folks that don't believe I done it.

RED. *She* don't believe yer done it?

KID. *She* knows I didn't do it. That's what she wrote in the letter and why she sent the money, so's I could come back.

RED. It's all right about her, maybe, but how about the others? The boss at the factory, where you go to get your job: the man that owns the grocer's store when he asks you where you was working last; as if he didn't know! Think he is going to trust his team to a man that's done time? And how about the others that yer used to know? Think they're goin' to want to know yer any more? I guess me and the Connecticut Kid'll meet on the road again.

KID. I ain't never thought of that. I ain't never thought of nothing but just getting back. But I'll show 'em. I'll show 'em and I'll show 'em now.

RED. For God's sake what yer 'goin to do?

KID [*rising*] I'm goin' to hike to Springfield

THE OTHER ONE

now and get the first train back east. I've been too long already.

RED. Sit down! Ah, sit down, kid. Be reasonable. It is foolish to go now. It's forty miles if it's a step and yer've been on the road all day. We'll start early. There's plenty of time and plenty of trains, and with money — why, it's a cinch.

KID. I want to go now. I'll show 'em.

RED. But yer ain't forgot there was a favor yer was goin' to do for me in Springfield, have yer? Yer ain't goin' back on a partner like that.

KID. I suppose I might as well wait till the morning. And what's this yer want me to do for yer in Springfield? Y've been awful good to me, Red, and I can't forget it. Lettin' me come along with yer and helpin' me out like you done. Why, that day when you met up with me when I was sittin' there 'long side the track — [*a little laugh*] I was scared I guess. Kind o' funny in my head. Thinkin' there was somebody behind every bush waitin' to bring me back to the pen again. I used to run hard as I could, just away from nothing, till I hurt my foot. I know I ought to have told you about the money, but I didn't know how. It seems like boastin', but when I get back home —

RED. That'll be all right, when yer get back home. But here's somethin' would please me better'n a post card with "Greetings from Circleville" printed on it.

THE OTHER ONE

KID. What is it you want me to do, Red? I can't touch the money, but —

RED. What'd I want with your money. This is something different. It's this way. I got a friend waitin' for me at Springfield, or just this side of it. He and me's framed up a little job there on an old guy that's got more than's good for him. There's a reason why me and my friend can't do much goin' round in Springfield. A pretty good reason. What we want's a nice young feller, a feller looks like he's just out of a hospital, to make a few inquiries for us.

KID. I can't do it, Red. Honest, I can't do it. I can't run no risk of the pen again, and besides — I want to go straight.

RED. Pen, nothin' ! There ain't a Chinaman's chance of it. And there ain't nothin' wrong takin' somethin' from somebody that stole in the first place, is there? But you won't have nothin' to do with that part of it. Why, you'll be sittin' on velvet and half way to Circleville before anything happens. Yer on, ain't you, Kid?

KID. I don't like it. It don't sound straight.

RED. Who are you to be askin' if it's straight or not. That comes good from a man just out of the pen.

KID. But that didn't make me a crook. I tell you, I didn't do it.

RED. Just what I said the first time and the second time, too. But the Judge always seen it different. Can the bluff, Kid.

KID. It ain't a bluff. It's true.

THE OTHER ONE

RED [*in mock amazement*] Say, yer too good for this life. What brought you here, anyway?

KID. Oh, I got laid off and I heard about the harvest job, so I came out. Afterwards I got sick and all my money went. Then, — the trouble came. But I didn't do it, Red. I swear —

RED [*quickly*] All right, all right. But yer'll help a pal out now, won't yer, Kid? Yer just the one that can. I knew it the first minute I see you. Y'll do it? For a pal?

KID. If yer sure I can do it straight and there ain't no risk?

RED. Sure. Not a risk. Do you think the Ramblin' Red's takin' any risks — again? Not a chance, Kid, not a chance.

KID. Well — if you're sure. [*Shyly*] Yer've been pretty good to me, Red.

RED. Oh, cut it out. I want to eat. Find any grub? Spider said he'd leave some here, but he always was a liar.

KID. There was some tea in a can in the place yer said and a chunk of bread. Didn't they give you anything at the house you went to last?

RED [*with a short laugh*] The lady said she was a Christian and didn't believe in tramps. "Excuse me, lady," I said, "yer calling me out of my name. Not a tramp — a migratory worker." Well, us for the bread and tea.

KID. I'll go to the spring and get the water. It's your turn to take it easy by the fire.

[*He goes out with the can. The fire has be-*

THE OTHER ONE

gun to sink and Red moves about finding bits of brush and wood. He brings them to the fire and the flames leap up again. In the sudden light Red looks in the direction of the place where the Kid has been sitting and sees something that attracts his attention.. He makes a sudden movement and picks up a roll of bills from the ground.]

RED. Christ! The Kid's wad! [*He bends down near the fire counting it*] A five, another five, ten and and a ten. Thirty dollars. Well! [*He smiles*] Easy money. Just picking it up. [*Sits down with a sigh of satisfaction*] I guess you ain't goin' to be none too good for that Springfield job, Kid [*He notices near the fire a scarred scrap of the Kid's letter. He takes it up and slowly deciphers the writing on it.*] "No difference what you —" "waiting — you come back." "Welcome" [*He throws the fragment into the fire again with an exclamation, half of contempt.*] I guess they won't hang that "Welcome Home" banner across Main Street just yet a while.

[*He takes the money from his pocket and counts again, and then looks into the fire smiling with anticipation. The Kid is heard whistling a gay tune outside. Red puts the money hastily away. The whistling sounds nearer and in a moment the Kid enters.*]

RED. That's right. Tell 'em all we're here. Ask 'em in to supper and spend the evenin'. What yer makin' all that noise for?

KID. Oh, there's nobody 'round, Red. Not

THE OTHER ONE

a light, not even a star. It took some lookin' to find that spring.

RED. It took you long enough. Hurry up with that water. The fire won't stay forever.

KID. Gee, you've got it hot enough here. Too hot for a coat [*Unbuttons his coat. Before he slips it off he puts his hand into the inside pocket. He gives a cry*] It ain't there! [*He looks at Red dazed.*]

RED. What ain't there?

KID. My money! My money! It's gone! I had it here showing it to you, just before I went out. [*He goes to place where he had been sitting and begins to search wildly.*] No, no. It ain't here. [*He rises and faces Red.*] Red, you got it. Give it back to me. Give it back to me or I'll — I'll kill yer! [*His hands are working.*]

RED. What yer talking about? How'd I get it? Why, I ain't been near yer. Besides, what'd I want with yer lousy money?

KID. Yer must have it. Yer've taken it just to fool me. Give it back to me, Red. Give it back. I just can't stand thinking I've lost it.

RED. I ain't got it, I tell yer. Why, yer know I ain't been near yer since yer showed it to me.

KID. [*slowly.*] Yer — ain't — got — it?

RED. So help me, I ain't, Kid.

KID [*raising his clenched hands in a sudden tense gesture of despair*] Oh, God, it's lost. The money that was going to bring me home; it's lost.

RED. How'd yer know it's lost when you ain't half looked for it, standing there like a movie

THE OTHER ONE

actor. Why don't yer go hunt for it?

KID. Where'm I goin' to find it?

RED. Well, it ain't here. Look for it outside. Yer went to the spring, didn't yer?

KID [*with a gleam of hope*] Sure; maybe I dropped it when I was leaning over, or along the track. I'll take the candle and look for it every inch of the way. [*Takes candle from left of Red and disappears.*]

RED. Take plenty of time, Kid. Look careful. [*He replenishes the fire and it blazes up again. He crouches beside it.*] He'll forget all about it. [*He yawns and relaxes in sleep.*]

[*The Other One enters slowly into the circle of light. He is a man of early middle age, bearded, and rather pale. He is dressed in the rough dress of a working man. There is a soft black hat on his thick hair. He comes to the firelight noiselessly from behind Red and stands so that his shadow is suddenly thrown upon the wall opposite. Then he remains motionless. There is a pause. Red drowzes, unconscious of his presence. A slight sound from the fire rouses Red, who looks up and sees the shadow.*]

RED. Found it, Kid? [*He sees The Other and half rises on the alert.*] Why, it ain't. Who — who — are you?

THE OTHER. Oh, just a man on the road like yourself. [*He speaks very slowly and quietly.*]

RED [*settling back relieved*] Well, as long as you ain't the track walker or a bull, it's all right. What yer want?

THE OTHER ONE

THE OTHER. Nothing but what you can give me. I'm cold.

RED. Guess the fire's free, stranger. Sit down. [*He indicates the Kid's place. The Other One comes to it and sits.*]

THE OTHER. I'm glad to rest, I've come a long way.

RED. Silver Mine, maybe?

THE OTHER. Yes, and beyond that, a long way beyond and I've got a long way to go too.

RED. Where are you bound for now?

THE OTHER. Springfield.

RED. Springfield? That's funny — so'm I.

THE OTHER [*giving him a long look*] Suppose we go together.

RED [*staring back at him defiantly*] Say, stranger, what's the game? You comin' in here tonight and lookin' at me like that. Who are you, anyway?

THE OTHER. I told you. Just a man on the road, like yourself.

RED [*impatiently*] Oh, I know all that, but it ain't enough. What's yer job — yer business?

THE OTHER. I can do many things; but I was a builder mostly.

RED. Was? Lost yer job, eh. And goin' to Springfield fer another?

THE OTHER. Yes, I've got a job waiting for me in Springfield. Like you.

RED [*laughing*] I guess it ain't the same as mine, stranger. Mine's — special.

THE OTHER ONE

THE OTHER. It's a good thing to have a job when you can do it well.

RED. You bet your life I'll do mine well. In my business you've got to do it well or you won't get another chance — for a long time.

THE OTHER. It's the same everywhere. There's only one chance for everything. It comes and it goes again. It never comes back.

RED. You're right, bo! My motto, too. Take it when yer find it, I sez.

THE OTHER. That's right. [*Pause*] And give it, too. Only one chance for that.

RED [*doubtfully*] Well, I ain't one of these here philanthropists.

THE OTHER [*with a little smile*] Looks like you were to me tonight.

RED. John D. and the Rambling Red! Sounds good. No stranger, guess again. I ain't givin' nothin' away an' nobody gave nothin' to me.

THE OTHER [*searchingly*] Haven't they. You're sure?

RED [*defiantly*] What'd they give me? Hell of a lot. Kicked me out and then shut the door when I tried to get in again. Shut it and locked it both sides.

THE OTHER [*In the same tone in which he first questioned*] Is that all?

RED [*gruffly*] Oh, well, some of 'em were sorry for me, maybe.

THE OTHER [*still slowly and looking straight at Red*] You give a great deal when you're sorry

THE OTHER ONE

for some one. You have to. Sometimes — everything.

RED [*suspiciously*] Say, what you puttin' over on me, a sermon? And what did yer come in here for anyway? It looks queer.

THE OTHER. You called me, [*Red looks quickly up*] didn't you?

RED. Nobody called yer. Who would? You must have heard the Kid I guess, hollerin' outside.

THE OTHER. Is he in trouble too? Your friend?

RED. Sure. Six months. In the Pen.

THE OTHER. And the door is open now unless [*Red gives a quick glance at the Other One*], unless somebody shuts it. Is that it?

RED [*surlily*] I ain't got nothin' to do with him. Just happened to meet up with him on the road.

THE OTHER. "Just happened!" What a chance!

RED. You're right, it's a chance all right.

THE OTHER. Where is your friend?

RED. The Kid? Oh, he's looking outside there for something he thinks he's lost.

THE OTHER. Is he going to find it?

RED. How do I know?

THE OTHER. He will if he looks long enough.

RED. Seek and find [*laughs*]. Sounds like a Sunday School text but it ain't true.

THE OTHER. No, not yet, but it will be. It always happens for everyone if he looks long enough. It was a long time before I found my chance for — my Springfield job.

THE OTHER ONE

RED [*slowly*] I guess everybody's lookin' for somethin'.

THE OTHER. Yes, everybody. For the same thing, too.

RED. The same thing! Me and the Kid and the soap-box preachers, and you?

THE OTHER. The very same thing — [*softer*] only they don't know it.

RED. Say, you're so wise, what's this they all want?

THE OTHER. It's never what they think it is.

[*The fire has burned down and the place has grown almost dark.*]

RED [*with a little start*] It makes me feel queer the way you talk. And the fire's down and the dry wood's all gone too. What did I let the Kid take my candle for?

THE OTHER. Never mind yours. I have another. We'll light mine. [*He takes a large wax candle from his pocket and lights it at the dying fire.*]

RED. It sure gives more light than mine did. [*Goes over to get candle. They meet at centre, back of fire. Red puts candle down on ground, left half front*] I'm obliged to you, stranger. [*Giving the Other One a puzzled look*] Ain't there something you want from me?

THE OTHER. Yes. I am hungry, very hungry.

RED. I've only got some dry bread, but you're welcome.

[*He gives the other a bit of bread which is on*

THE OTHER ONE

the floor beside him. As the other takes it he notices his hands.] God! look at yer hands. Who did that to you?

THE OTHER [*hastily drawing them back*] A friend.

RED. He must have been a bad un. What did he do it for?

THE OTHER. Money.

RED. He must have wanted it awful bad, and it must have been a lot.

THE OTHER [*shaking his head a little*] It was only thirty — dollars.

RED [*incredulous*] He give you those for thirty dollars!

THE OTHER. He did not know how much they would cost.

RED. And yer say a *friend* did that?

THE OTHER. Who else could leave scars like those?

RED [*viciously*] I hope yer punished him good and plenty.

THE OTHER [*nodding his head with a little smile*] Yes, I punished him.

RED [*one step forward with interest*] How? I'd like to know what'd yer do to pay him back for those?

THE OTHER. Oh, I forgave him.

RED [*in blank amazement*] What? I can't make it out. Damned if I can make it out. Yer punished him by forgivin' him. Why, nobody does that.

THE OTHER. Yes, that's why they go on do-

THE OTHER ONE

ing the same old things — just because nobody does.

RED [*puzzled, scratching his head*] It'd be a queer way of doing it. [*Little laugh*] And it would put a lot of folks out of their jobs. [*Slowly*] I wonder — if — it — would — work.

THE OTHER. Does the other way work?

RED. You mean — me?

THE OTHER. You, when the door was locked and you couldn't get back.

RED [*sullenly*] I never had no chance to try your way.

THE OTHER [*with a touch of eagerness in his voice*] But suppose — just suppose it had been given you.

RED. Aw, what's the good of talking' ? They don't give no chances where I come from, and they don't take none, either. But yer ain't eatin', stranger. [*The Other One and Red both break a bit of bread they have in their hands to eat. As they do so, Red glances at The Other One, whose face is in the firelight, and gives a sudden exclamation of surprise and awe.*] Why — why — it's — [*He laughs a little sheepishly recovering himself.*] Funny! It seemed — just then — like I'd seen you before.

THE OTHER. Maybe you have. We're both on the same road.

RED [*still looking at him as if not hearing him*] It was a long — long — time ago. [*With a change of voice.*] Pshaw! It couldn't be that —

THE OTHER ONE

yet what's your name, stranger, if you don't mind telling me?

THE OTHER [*smiling*] Oh, I have many names.

RED [*quickly*] I know — same here, but I'd like to think about you with a name.

THE OTHER. Why not, then, call me — “The Other One.”

RED. “The Other One?” Say, sounds like a partnership!

THE OTHER [*slowly*] Yes, you and the Kid and the Other One.

RED. Say, what's the Kid got to do with it?

THE OTHER. He has everything to do with it.

RED. He ain't nothing to me, I tell yer. I ain't nothing to him — just —

THE OTHER [*leaning far forward, looking at him straight.*] Thirty dollars?

RED. Thirty dollars! [*The Other nods and sits back, relaxed.*] Just the same as — [*Points to hands of the Other One.*] Oh, I give it up. [*Yawns — slumps down.*]. I guess I'm getting dippy with sleep. These all-day hikes gets yer tired. [*More and more drowsily.*] I guess — I'll — just — shut — my — eyes a minute — just a minute. [*He lies down facing fire and is quickly asleep. The Other One leans farther and farther forward, watching Red as he slumps to the ground. After a moment The Other One sits back, drawing a deep breath. He rises and stands looking down upon Red with a long comprehending look which has a touch of triumph in it. Then he walks backward and disappears into the*

THE OTHER ONE

shadow of the rear of the stage as noiselessly as he came.]

[There is a pause and the Kid comes in. He stumbles a little, and comes slowly and dejectedly to his old place. He pays no attention to Red, but leans forward for a moment looking into the embers of the fire, and then as if sure of his being unobserved, lets his head sink upon his arms, folded with clenched hands across his knees. There is a slight convulsive movement and then he is quiet again. Red stirs, and raising himself on an elbow, looks across at him.]

RED [*quizzically*] Asleep, Kid?

KID [*hardly moving, and speaking in a muffled, husky voice*] No.

RED [*In the same half-bantering tone*] Guess you didn't find it.

KID. You know I didn't find it.

RED. Maybe you didn't look long enough. "Seek and Find."

KID [*Raising his head angrily*] I did look for it, every step of the way there and back, but it's lost for good.

RED [*still banteringly*] Sure you didn't find it there, Kid, 'cause — it was here. [*He pulls from pocket and tosses the money across to him.*] Take your thirty dollars.

KID [*seizing the money and counting it.*] Why it is my money! [*Rises*] Red! Red! where did you find it? Tomorrow I start to go back.

RED [*snarling*] You'll start tonight — now.

KID. Why, ain't you comin', too?

THE OTHER ONE

RED [*In the same tone*] I am not! [*He lies down again, feigning sleep.*]

KID. But the Springfield job you wanted me for? How about it?

RED [*raising himself on one elbow*] The Springfield job's off, see? Think I'm goin' to trust to a dope who can't hold onto his own wad?

KID [*uncertainly*] I'd like to go now, Red, but I don't like leavin' you this way.

RED. Oh, you get the hell out of here. I'm sick of youse kids.

[*He lies down again. The Kid looks at him a moment hesitatingly but seeing no movement, he throws back his head as if catching a deep breath of relief, and goes, leaving Red huddled, apparently asleep by the fire. When the Kid has really gone, Red rises suddenly on his elbow and looks to make sure. He turns, sitting on his haunches, and smiles a mocking smile, nodding deprecatingly.*] Me! The Ramblin' Red! Well, what do you think of that? [*He gives up the question as apparently impossible to answer, and reaching for The Other One's candle beside him, makes as though to blow it out, when he hesitates. Then he puts it down carefully, still lighted, and lies down again, facing the candle, and in a moment his deep breathing proclaims he has fallen asleep. The stage is quite dark now, except for the Stranger's candle, which burns steadily beside his huddled, unconscious figure.*]

CURTAIN