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Samuel French Acting Edition

Ah, Wilderness!

A Comedy of Recollection in Three Acts

by Eugene O'Neill

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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Copy of program of the first performance of "AH, WILDERNESS," as produced at The Guild Theatre, New York:

THE THEATRE GUILD, INC.

Presents

AH, WILDERNESS!

A New Play

By EUGENE O'NEILL

With

GEORGE M. COHAN

The Production Directed by Philip Moeller

Settings Designed by Robert Edmond Jones

CAST

NAT MILLER, *owner of the "Evening Globe"*

—George M. Cohan

ESSIE, *his wife*.....Marjorie Marquis

ARTHUR, *their son*.....William Post, Jr.

RICHARD, *their son*.....Elisha Cook, Jr.

MILDRED, *their daughter*.....Adelaide Bean

TOMMY, *their son*.....Walter Vonnegut, Jr.

SID DAVIS, *Essie's brother, reporter on the "Wat-*

erbury Standard".....Gene Lockhart

LILY MILLER, *Nat's sister*.....Eda Heinemann

DAVID MCCOMBER, *dry-goods merchant*

—Richard Sterling

MURIEL MCCOMBER, *his daughter*....Ruth Gilbert

WINT SELBY, *a classmate of Arthur's at Yale*

—John Wynne

BELLE.....Ruth Holden

NORA.....Ruth Chorpennig

BARTENDER.....Donald McClelland

SALESMAN.....John Butler

ORIGINAL PROGRAM—*Continued*

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

SCENE I.—*Sitting-room of the Miller home in a large small-town in Connecticut. Early morning, July 4, 1906.*

SCENE II. *Dining-room of the Miller home. Evening of the same day.*

ACT II

SCENE I. *Back room of a bar in a small hotel. 10 o'clock the same night.*

SCENE II. *The Miller sitting-room. A little after 10 o'clock the same night.*

ACT III

SCENE I. *The Miller sitting-room. About 1 o'clock the following afternoon.*

SCENE II. *A strip of beach on the harbor. About 9 o'clock that night.*

SCENE III. *The Miller sitting-room. About 10 o'clock the same night.*

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

TOMMY. *A chubby, sun-burnt boy of eleven, with dark eyes, blond hair wetted and plastered down in a part and a shiny, good-natured face.*

MILDRED is fifteen, tall and slender, with big, irregular features, resembling her father to the complete effacing of any pretense at prettiness. But her big, gray eyes are beautiful; she has vivacity and a fetching smile, and everyone thinks of her as an attractive girl.

ARTHUR. *He is the eldest of the Miller children who are still living home; is nineteen. He is tall, heavy, barrel-chested and muscular, the type of football linesman of that period, with a square, stolid face, small blue eyes and thick sandy hair. His manner is solemnly collegiate.*

MRS. MILLER is around fifty, a short, stout woman, with fading light brown hair sprinkled with gray, who must have been decidedly pretty as a girl in a round-faced, cute, small-featured, wide-eyed fashion. She has big brown eyes, soft and maternal—a bustling, mother-of-a-family manner.

LILY MILLER, her sister-in-law, is forty-two, tall, dark, thin. She conforms outwardly to the conventional type of old-maid school teacher, even to wearing glasses. But behind the glasses her gray eyes are gentle and tired, and her whole atmosphere is one of shy kindness. Her voice

6 DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

presents the greatest contrast to her appearance—soft and full of sweetness.

NAT MILLER is in his late fifties, a tall, dark, spare man, a little stoop-shouldered, more than a little bald. NAT's long face has large, irregular, undistinguished features, but he has fine, shrewd, humorous gray eyes.

SID DAVIS, his brother-in-law, is forty-five, short and fat, bald-headed, with the Puckish face of a Peck's Bad Boy who has never grown up.

RICHARD is sixteen, just out of high school. In appearance he is a perfect blend of father and mother, so much so that each is convinced he is the image of the other. He has his mother's light-brown hair, his father's gray eyes; his features are neither large nor small; he is of medium height, neither fat nor thin. One would not call him a handsome boy; neither is he homely. But he is definitely different from both of his parents, too. There is something of extreme sensitiveness added—a restless, apprehensive, defiant, shy, dreamy, self-conscious intelligence about him. In manner he is alternately plain, simple boy and a posey actor solemnly playing a role.

DAVID MCCOMBER is a thin, dried-up little man with a head too large for his body perched on a scrawny neck, and a long solemn horse face with deep-set little black eyes, a blunt formless nose and a tiny slit of a mouth. He is about the same age as Miller but is entirely bald, and looks ten years older.

NORA is a clumsy, heavy-handed, heavy-footed, long-jawed, beamingly good-natured young Irish girl—a "greenhorn."

WINT is nineteen, a classmate of Arthur's at Yale. He is a typical, good-looking college boy of the period, not the athletic but the hell-raising sport type. He is tall, blond, dressed in extreme collegiate cut.

BELLE is twenty, a rather pretty peroxide blonde, a typical college "tart" of the period, and of the cheaper variety, dressed with tawdry flashiness. But she is a fairly recent recruit to the ranks, and is still a bit remorseful behind her make-up and defiantly careless manner.

BARTENDER. A stocky young Irishman with a foxily cunning, stupid face and a cynically wise grin.

SALESMAN. He is a stout, jowly-faced man in his late thirties, dressed with cheap nattiness, with the professional breeziness and jocular, kid-'em-along manner of his kind.

MURIEL McCOMBER is fifteen, going on sixteen. She is a pretty girl with a plump, graceful little figure, fluffy, light-brown hair, big naive wondering dark eyes, a round dimpled face, a soft melting drawly voice.

AH, WILDERNESS!

ACT ONE

SCENE I

Sitting-room of the Miller home in a large small-town in Connecticut—about seven-thirty in the morning of July 4th, 1906.

The room is fairly large, homely looking and cheerful in the morning sunlight, furnished with scrupulous medium-priced tastelessness of the period. Beneath the two windows, Right, a sofa with silk and satin cushions stands against the wall. Above sofa, a bookcase with glass doors, filled with cheap sets, extends along the remaining length of wall. In the rear wall, Right Center, is a double doorway with sliding doors and portieres, leading into a dark, windowless back parlor. At Left of this doorway another bookcase, this time a small, open one, crammed with boys' and girls' books and the best-selling novels of many past years—books the family really have read. To the Left Center is the mate of the double doorway at Right Center, with sliding doors and portieres, this one leading to a well-lighted front parlor. In the upper Left wall, a screen door opens on a porch. Farther forward in this wall are two windows, with a writing

desk and a chair above them. At Right Center is a big, round table with a green shaded reading lamp, the cord of the lamp running up to one of five sockets in the chandelier above. Four chairs are grouped around the table—two rockers at Left, Right, rear of it; two armchairs Right and Left in front. A medium-priced, inoffensive rug covers most of the floor. At Left Center an armchair; down Left a rocker. The walls are papered white with a cheerful ugly blue design. Chairs grouped about table Right are numbered from one to four to simplify direction.

*Armchair below and R. of table is chair #1.
Rocking chair above and R. of table is chair #2.
Rocking chair above and L. of table is chair #3,
and armchair below and L. of table is #4.*

VOICES are heard in a conversational tone from the dining-room beyond the back parlor, where the family are just finishing breakfast. Then MRS. MILLER's voice, raised commandingly: "Tommy! Come back here and finish your milk!" At the same moment, TOMMY appears in the doorway from the back parlor—a chubby, sun-burnt boy of eleven with dark eyes, blond hair wetted and plastered down in a part, and a shiny, good-natured face, a rim of milk visible about his lips. Bursting with bottled-up energy on the Fourth, he nevertheless has hesitated obediently at his mother's call. (WARN Crackers.)

TOMMY. (Calls back pleadingly as he wipes milk from his upper lip) Aw, I'm full, Ma. And I said "excuse me" and you said "all right." (Reaches door up L. His father's voice is heard speaking to his mother. MILLER—"Oh, let him run about." Then she

calls: "All right, Tommy!" And TOMMY asks eagerly in doorway up L.) Can I go out now?

MOTHER'S VOICE. *(Correctingly)* May I!

TOMMY. *(Fidgetting, but obediently)* May I, Ma?

MOTHER'S VOICE. Yes. *(TOMMY jumps for the screen door to the porch like a sprinter released by the starting shot.)*

FATHER'S VOICE. *(Shouts after him from off stage R.C.) But you set off your crackers away from the house, remember! (But TOMMY is already through the screen door, which he leaves open behind him.)*

(A moment later the family appear R.C. from the back parlor, coming from the dining-room. First is MILDRED. MILDRED is fifteen, tall and slender, with big, irregular features, resembling her father to the complete effacing of any pretence at prettiness. But her big, gray eyes are beautiful. She has vivacity and a fetching smile, and everyone thinks of her as an attractive girl. She is dressed in shirtwaist and skirt in the fashion of the period. She runs to the screen door up L., looks out and laughs as she calls.)

MILDRED. Look out for your hand, Tommy!

(ARTHUR enters as MILDRED calls to TOMMY. He crosses to upper R. end of table R. and begins to fill his pipe. He is the eldest of the Miller children who are still living home; is nineteen. He is tall, heavy, barrel-chested and muscular, the type of football linesman of that period, with a square, stolid face, small blue eyes and thick, sandy hair. His manner is solemnly collegiate. He is dressed in the latest college fashion of that day, which has receded a bit from the extreme of preceding years, but still runs to padded

shoulders and pants half pegged at the top and so small at their wide-cuffed bottoms that they cannot be taken off with shoes on.) (CRACKERS—3 small.)

MILDRED. (*Inquisitively, as ARTHUR appears*) Where are you going today, Art? (*Crosses to L. of ARTHUR.*)

ARTHUR. (*With superior dignity below chair #2*) That's my business. (*He ostentatiously takes from his pocket a tobacco pouch with a big Y and class numerals stamped on it, and a heavy bulldog briar pipe with silver Y and numerals, 08, and starts filling the pipe.*)

MILDRED. (*Teasingly*) Bet I know, just the same! Want me to tell you her initials? E. R.! (*She laughs and crosses to sofa down R. ARTHUR is pleased by this insinuation at his lady-killing activities, yet finds it beneath his dignity to reply. He lights his pipe and picks up the local morning paper and slouches back into the armchair #2, beginning to whistle "Oh, Waltz Me Around Again, Willie," as he scans the headlines. MILDRED sits on the sofa at R., front. Meanwhile their mother and their AUNT LILY, their father's sister, have appeared, following them from R.C. parlor. MRS. MILLER is around fifty, a short, stout woman with fading light brown hair sprinkled with gray, who must have been decidedly pretty as a girl in a round-faced, cute, small-featured, wide-eyed fashion. She has big, brown eyes, soft and maternal—a bustling, mother-of-a-family manner. She is dressed in shirtwaist and skirt. LILY MILLER, her sister-in-law, is forty-two, tall, dark, thin. She conforms outwardly to the conventional type of old-maid school teacher, even to wearing glasses. But behind the glasses her gray eyes are gentle and tired, and her whole atmosphere is one of shy kindness.*

Her voice presents the greatest contrast to her appearance—soft and full of sweetness. She, also, is dressed in a shirt-waist and skirt.)

MRS. MILLER. (*As they appear*) Getting milk down him is like— (*Suddenly she is aware of the screen door standing half open. Crossing to screen door up L.*) Goodness, look at that door he's left open! The house will be alive with flies! I've told him again—and again—and that's all the good it does! It's just a waste of breath! (*She slams the door shut, then crosses to table R. and gets a magazine, then crosses to rocking chair down L. and fans herself with magazine as she talks.*)

LILY. (*Smiling*) Well, you can't expect a boy to remember to shut doors—on the Fourth of July. (*She goes diffidently to the straight-backed chair before the desk at L., leaving the comfortable chairs to the OTHERS. Gets towel from desk and starts to sew.*)

MRS. MILLER. That's you all over—Lily—always making excuses for him. You'll have him spoiled to death in spite of me. Phew, I'm hot, aren't you? This is going to be a scorcher. (*She begins to rock, fanning herself. Ad libs. to LILY, paying no attention to MILLER and SID. Meanwhile, her husband and her brother have appeared from R.C. parlor, both smoking cigars. NAT MILLER is in his late fifties, a tall, dark, spare man, a little stoop-shouldered, more than a little bald, dressed with an awkward attempt at sober respectability imposed upon an innate heedlessness of clothes. ARTHUR faces up and looks at MILLER and SID when they enter. MILLER's long face has large, irregular, undistinguished features, but he has fine, shrewd, humorous gray eyes. SID DAVIS, his brother-in-law, is forty-five, short and fat, bald-headed, with the Puckish face of a Peck's Bad Boy who has never grown up. He is dressed in what had*

once been a very natty loud light suit but is now a shapeless and faded nondescript in cut and color.)

(WARN Crackers—12 small, 1 loud.)

SID. *(Overlap cues as they appear. Comes in first and crosses to up c.)* Oh, I like the job first rate, Nat. Waterbury's a nifty old town with the lid off, when you get to know the ropes. I rang in a joke in one of my stories that tickled the folks there pink. *(Faces MILLER)* Waterwagon—Waterbury—Waterloo!

MILLER. *(Grinning, crosses to chair #3)* Darn good!

SID. *(Pleased)* I thought it was pretty fair myself. *(MILLER sits chair #3. Goes on a bit ruefully, as if oppressed by a secret sorrow)* Yes, you can see life in Waterbury, all right—that is, if you're looking for life in Waterbury!

MRS. MILLER. *(Looks at SID, thinking he has said something humorous)* What's that about Waterbury, Sid?

SID. I was saying it's all right in its way—but there's no place like home. *(As if to punctuate this remark, there begins a series of BANGS from just beyond the porch outside, as TOMMY inaugurates his celebration by setting off a package of firecrackers. The assembled family jump in their chairs. SID chuckles.)* *(CRACKERS—12 small, 1 loud.)*

MRS. MILLER. That boy! *(She rushes to the screen door up L. and out on the porch, calling. MILDRED rises; crosses to screen door. SID follows her to up L.; looks out after her.)* Tommy! You mind what your Pa told you! You take your crackers out in the back yard, you hear me!

TOMMY. *(Off stage)* All right, Ma.

ARTHUR. *(Frowning scornfully)* Fresh kid! He did it on purpose to scare us.

MILLER. *(Grinning through his annoyance)* Darned youngster! He'll have the house afire before the day's out.

SID. (*Grins and sings; crosses to c.*)
"Dunno what ter call 'im
But he's mighty like a Rose-velt."

(*They ALL laugh.*)

LILY. Sid, you crazy! (*SID beams at her. MRS. MILLER comes back from the porch, still fuming; leaves door open. MILDRED closes door; stands looking out after TOMMY, laughing.*)

MRS. MILLER. (*Crosses to rocker down L.*) Well, I've made him go out back at last. Now we'll have a little peace. (*Sits in rocker. CRACKERS—6 small. As if to contradict this, the BANG of firecrackers and torpedoes begins from the rear of the house, L., and continues at intervals throughout the scene, not nearly so loud as the first explosion, but sufficiently emphatic to form a disturbing punctuation to the conversation. MILDRED exits up L.; closes screen door after her.*)

MILLER. Well, what's on the tappee for all of you today? Sid, you're coming to the Sachem Club picnic with me, of course.

SID. (*A bit embarrassedly*) You bet!—That is, if—

MRS. MILLER. (*Regarding her brother with smiling suspicion*) Hmmm! I know what that Sachem Club picnic's always meant!

LILY. (*Breaks in, in a forced joking tone that conceals a deep earnestness*) No, not this time, Essie. Sid's a reformed character since he's been on the paper in Waterbury. (*Slight reaction from SID.*) At least, that's what he swore to me last night.

SID. (*Avoiding her eyes, humiliated—joking it off*) Pure as the driven snow, that's me. They're running me for president of the W.C.T.U. (*They ALL laugh. ARTHUR laughs longest.*)

MRS. MILLER. (*Rises, laughing*) Sid, you're a caution. (*Crosses and puts magazine down on table, E.C.*)

You turn everything into a joke. But you be careful, you hear?

LILY. Oh, I know he'll be careful today. Won't you, Sid?

SID. (*Crosses to LILY, more embarrassed than ever—joking it off melodramatically*) Lily, I swear to you if any man offers me a drink, I'll kill him—that is, if he changes his mind! (*They ALL laugh except LILY, who bites her lip and stiffens.*)

MRS. MILLER. No use talking to him, Lily. We can only hope for the best.

MILLER. (*Overlap*) Now, you women stop picking on Sid. (*MILDRED enters up L. and crosses via upstage to up R.*) It's the Fourth of July and even a downtrodden newspaper man has a right to enjoy himself when he's on his holiday. (*SID nods "Yes"*)

MRS. MILLER. I wasn't thinking only of Sid.

SID. (*After a furtive glance at the stiff and silent LILY—changes the subject abruptly by turning to ARTHUR. Crosses to C.*) How are you spending the festive Fourth, Boola-Boola? (*ARTHUR stiffens dignifiedly.*)

MILDRED. (*Teasingly, quickly, crossing to above ARTHUR*) I can tell you, if he won't. (*Crosses to sofa, down R.*)

MRS. MILLER. (*Smiling, crosses to L.*) Off to the Rands', I suppose.

ARTHUR. (*With dignity*) I and Bert Turner are taking Elsie and Ethel Rand canoeing. And this evening I'm staying at the Rands' for dinner. (*SID crosses to door up L.*)

MILLER. What about you, Mid?

MILDRED. (*Crosses to and looking out window, down R.*) I'm going to the beach to Anne Culver's.

MILLER. How about you and Lily, Essie?

MRS. MILLER. Well, I thought we'd just sit around and rest and talk.

MILLER. You can gossip any day. (*MILDRED, slight*

snicker. SID chuckles.) This is the Fourth. Now, I've got a better suggestion than that. (*EVERYONE interested. A step in for SID.*) What do you say to an automobile ride? I'll get out the Buick and we'll drive around town and out to the lighthouse and back. Then Sid and I will let you off here, or anywhere you say, and we'll go on to the picnic.

MRS. MILLER. (*Lift*) I'd love it. Wouldn't you, Lily?

LILY. (*Lift*) It would be nice.

MILLER. Then, that's all settled.

SID. (*Embarrassedly, crosses R. of LILY*) Lily, want to come with me to the fireworks display at the beach tonight? (*MILLER and MRS. MILLER exchange a glance.*)

MRS. MILLER. (*Standing R. of MILLER*) That's right, Sid. You take her out.

LILY. (*Flustered and grateful*) I—I'd like to, Sid. Thank you. (*Then an apprehensive look comes over her face*) Only not if you come back—you know! (*MRS. MILLER crosses to bookcase up c.*)

ARTHUR. (*With heavy jocularly—lift—quickly*) Listen, Uncle Sid. Don't let me catch you and Aunt Lily spooning on a bench tonight—or it'll be my duty to call a cop! (*SID and LILY look painfully embarrassed at this. SID crosses; sits chair up L. and the joke falls flat, except for MILDRED, who can't restrain a giggle at the thought of these two ancients spooning.*)

MRS. MILLER. (*Rebukingly*) Arthur! (*Sharply, over her shoulder.*)

MILLER. (*Dryly—overlap MRS. MILLER's "Arthur"*) That'll do you! Kicking a football around Yale seems to have blunted your sense of humor!

MRS. MILLER. (*Faces front*) Where's Richard?

MILDRED. I'll bet he's off somewhere writing a poem to Muriel McComber, the silly! Or pretending to write one. I think he just copies—

ARTHUR. He's still in the dining-room, reading a book. Gosh, he's always reading now. It's not *my* idea of having a good time in vacation.

MRS. MILLER. (*Sharply, crosses to L. of MILLER*) That reminds me, Nat. I've been meaning to speak to you about those awful books Richard is reading. You've got to give him a good talking to— (*Starts off L.C.*) I'll go up and get them right now. I found them where he'd hid them on the shelf in his wardrobe. You just wait till you see what— (*She bustles off L.C. SID watches her exit.*)

MILLER. (*Plainly not relishing whatever is coming—grumblingly—rises; crosses to SID*) Seems to me she might wait until the Fourth is over before bringing up— (*Then with a grin*) I know there's nothing to it, anyway. Gosh, when I think of the books I used to sneak off and read when I was a kid!

SID. (*Crosses and sits chair #3; picks up paper*) Me, too. I suppose Dick is deep in "Nick Carter" or "Old Cap Collier."

MILLER. (*Crosses to L. of SID*) No, he passed that period long ago. Poetry's his red meat nowadays, I think— (*ARTHUR and MILDRED look at MILLER*)—love poetry— (*MILDRED giggles.*) And Socialism, too, I suspect, from some dire declarations he's made. (*ARTHUR—a bit of angry reaction. Then briskly—with a grin*) Well, might as well get him on the carpet. (*He calls*) Richard. (*No answer. Louder—crosses up c.*) Richard. (*No answer—in a bellow*) Richard!

ARTHUR. I'll get him, Pa! (*Shouting, crosses up and exits R.C.*) Hey, Dick, wake up! Pa's calling you.

RICHARD'S VOICE. (*From the dining room. Irritated*) All right. I'm coming.

MILLER. Darn him! (*Amused*) When he gets his nose in a book, the house could fall down and he'd never—

(*RICHARD appears in the R.C. doorway, the book he has been reading in one hand, a finger marking his place. He looks a bit startled still, reluctantly called back to earth from another world. He is sixteen, just out of high school. In appearance he is a perfect blend of father and mother, so much so that each is convinced he is the image of the other. He has his mother's light-brown hair, his father's gray eyes; his features are neither large nor small; he is of medium height, neither fat nor thin. One would not call him a handsome boy; neither is he homely. But he is definitely different from both of his parents, too. There is something of extreme sensitiveness added—a restless, apprehensive, defiant, shy, dreamy, self-conscious intelligence about him. In manner he is alternately plain, simple boy and a posey actor solemnly playing a role. He is dressed in prep. school reflection of the college style of ARTHUR. ARTHUR follows him in and remains upstage.*)

RICHARD. (*Crossing into room*) Did you want me, Pa?

MILLER. (*Dryly*) I'd hoped I'd made that plain. Come and sit down a while. (*He points to chair #1. As he starts down R. MILDRED slides to upstage end of sofa, preparing to trip him.*)

RICHARD. (*Coming forward—seizing on the opportunity to play up his preoccupation—with apologetic superiority*) I didn't hear you, Pa. (*Crosses to down R.*) I was off in another world. (*MILDRED slyly shoves her foot out so that he trips over it, almost falling. She laughs gleefully. So does ARTHUR.*)

ARTHUR. (*Crosses down a bit*) Good for you, Mid! That'll wake him up!

RICHARD. (*Grins sheepishly—all boy now*) Darn you, Mid! I'll show you! (*He pushes her back on the*

sofa and tickles her with his free hand, still holding the book in the other. She shrieks.)

ARTHUR. Give it to her, Dick! (*Sid enjoys tussle.*)

MILLER. That's enough now. No more roughhouse. (*Indicates chair*) You sit down here, Richard. (*MILLER stalls a little. ARTHUR crosses and sits upstage of MILDRED. RICHARD obediently sits in chair #1.*) What were you planning to do with yourself today? Going out to the beach with Mildred?

RICHARD. (*Scornfully superior*) That silly skirt party! I should say not!

MILDRED. He's not coming because Muriel isn't. I'll bet he's got a date with her somewhere. (*ARTHUR laughs.*)

RICHARD. (*Flushing bashfully*) You shut up, Mid! (*Then to his father*) I thought I'd just stay home, Pa—this morning, anyway. (*WARN Crackers—I loud.*)

MILLER. Help Tommy set off firecrackers, eh?

RICHARD. (*Drawing himself up—with dignity*) I should say not. (*Then frowning portentously. SID looks from paper at RICHARD*) I don't beleve in this silly celebrating the Fourth of July—all this lying talk about liberty—when there is no liberty!

MILLER. (*A twinkle in his eye*) Hmmm.

RICHARD. (*Getting warmed up*) The land of the free and the home of the brave! Home of the slave is what they ought to call it—the wage slave ground under the heel of the capitalist class, starving, crying for bread for his children, and all he gets is a stone! The Fourth of July is a stupid farce! (*SID and MILLER exchange look. SID turns upstage and reads paper.*)

MILLER. (*Putting a hand to his mouth to conceal a grin*) Hmm. Them are mighty strong words. You'd better not repeat such sentiments outside the bosom of the family or they'll have you in jail.

SID. (*Not looking up from paper*) And throw away the key.

RICHARD. (*Darkly. Overlap cue*) Let them put me in jail. (*Lift*) But how about the freedom of speech in the Constitution, then? That must be a farce, too. (*Then he adds grimly*) No, you can celebrate your Fourth of July. I'll celebrate the day the people bring out the guillotine again and I see Pierpont Morgan being driven by in a tumbrel! (*CRACKER, loud. His father and SID are vastly amused. LILY is shocked but, taking her cue from them, smiles. MILDRED stares at him in puzzled wonderment, never having heard this particular line before. Only ARTHUR betrays the outraged reaction of a patriot.*)

ARTHUR. Aw, say, you fresh kid, tie that bull outside! You ought to get a punch in the nose for talking that way on the Fourth! (*RICHARD looks front, so mad he can't find words.*)

MILLER. (*Solemnly—pause—amused*) Son, if I didn't know it was you talking, I'd think we had Emma Goldman with us.

ARTHUR. (*Virtuously—lift*) Never mind, Pa. Wait till we get him down to Yale. We'll take that out of him!

RICHARD. (*With high scorn*) Oh, Yale! After all what is Yale?

ARTHUR. (*Angrily*) You'll find out what!

MILLER. (*With a comic air of resignation*) Well, Richard, I've always found I've had to listen to at least one stump speech every Fourth. I only hope getting your extra strong one right after breakfast will let me off for the rest of the day. (*They ALL laugh now, taking this as a cue. RICHARD, hurt and mad, tries to read his book.*) What's that book, Richard?

RICHARD. (*Importantly, as though it were a three-word title*) Carlyle's French Revolution. (*SID picks up paper; begins to read, back to audience.*)

MILLER. Hmm. So that's where you drove the tumbril from and piled poor old Pierpont in it. *(Then seriously)* Glad you're reading it, Richard. It's a darn fine book.

RICHARD. *(With unflattering astonishment)* What, have you read it? *(SID and MILLER exchange glance.)*

MILLER. *(Apologetically)* Well, you see, even a newspaper owner can't get out of reading a book every now and again.

RICHARD. *(Abashed)* I—I didn't mean—I know you— *(Then enthusiastically)* Sav, isn't it a great book, though—that part about Mirabeau—and about Marat and Robespierre—

MRS. MILLER. *(Appears from L.C. in a great state of flushed annoyance)* Never you mind Robespierre, young man! *(SID listens to this; crosses to L. of chair #2.)* You tell me this minute where you've hidden those books! They were on the shelf in your wardrobe and now you've gone and hid them somewheres else. You go right up and bring them to your father. *(RICHARD, for a second, looks suddenly guilty and crushed. Then he bristles defensively.)*

MILLER. *(Sharply; overlap cue)* Never mind his getting them now. We'll waste the whole morning over those darned books. And anyway, he has a right to keep his library to himself. *(Look from MRS. MILLER.)* That is, if they're not too— *(SID looks over L. shoulder at MILLER.)* What books are they, Richard?

RICHARD. *(Self-consciously hesitant)* Well—there's—

MRS. MILLER. I'll tell you if he won't—and you give him a good talking to. *(Then, after a glance at RICHARD)* Two books were by that awful Oscar Wilde they put in jail for heaven knows what wickedness.

ARTHUR. *(Suddenly—solemnly authoritative)* He committed bigamy. *(Then as SID smothers a burst*

of ribald laughter) What are you laughing at? I guess I ought to know. A fellow at college told me. His father was in England when this Wilde was pinched—and he said he remembered once his mother asked his father about it and he told her he'd committed bigamy.

MILLER. (*Hiding a smile behind his hand*) Well, then, that must be right, Arthur.

MRS. MILLER. (*Lift; angrily—to MILLER*) I wouldn't put it past him, nor anything else. One book was poetry. "The Ballad" of I forget what.

RICHARD. (*Defiantly*) "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," one of the greatest poems ever written. (*He pronounces it "Reading Goal"—as in goalpost.*)

MRS. MILLER. And then there were two books by that Bernard Shaw— You know, Nat, the one who wrote a play—that was so vile they wouldn't even let it play in New York!

MILLER. Hmm. I remember.

MRS. MILLER. And there was a book of plays by that Ibsen there, too! And poems by Swin-some-thing—

RICHARD. "Poems and Ballads by Swinburne," Ma. The greatest poet since Shelley! (*To MILLER*) He tells the truth about real love!

MRS. MILLER. Love! Well, all I can say is, from reading here and there, that if he wasn't flung in jail along with Wilde, he should have been. Some of the things I simply couldn't read, they were so indecent. And then there was Kipling's— (*Sits as she speaks in chair #2*) —but I suppose he's not so bad. And last there was a poem—a long one—the Rubay— (*Sharply*) What is it, Richard?

RICHARD. (*Front*) "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam!" That's the best of all!

MRS. MILLER. (*Grunts*) Humph!

MILLER. Oh, I've read that, Essie.

MRS. MILLER. (*Shocked*) Why, Nat!

MILLER. Yes, got a copy down at the office now—There's fine things in it, seems to me—true things.

MRS. MILLER. (*A bit bewildered and uncertain now*) Why, Nat, I don't see how you—

RICHARD. (*Enthusiastically*) Gee—it's wonderful, isn't it, Pa? Remember this? (*Then even more enthusiastically*)

"A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—"

ARTHUR. (*Who, bored to death by all this poetry quoting, looks out window down R.*) Hey, look who's coming up the walk—Old Man McComber!

MILLER. (*Irritably*) Dave?

ARTHUR. (*Rising*) Yeah!

MILLER. Now what in thunder does that damned old—

MRS. MILLER. (*Vexatiously. Rises*) He'll know we're in this early, too. No use lying. (*Then appalled by another thought*) Lily, let's us run up the back stairs and get our things on. Nat, you get rid of him the first second you can! Whatever can the old fool want— (*She and LILY hurry out R.C. MILLER glances at his watch and crosses down L., then up L.*)
(*WARN Bell.*)

ARTHUR. (*Glancing at his watch*) I'm going to beat it—just time to catch the eight-twenty trolley.

MILDRED. I've got to catch that, too. (*She rushes off R.C.*)

ARTHUR. (*He turns at R.C. door—with a grin*) Say, listen, Dick! McComber may be coming to see if your intentions toward his daughter are dishonorable! You'd better beat it while your shoes are good! (*He disappears through R.C. door, laughing.*)

RICHARD. (*A bit shaken, but putting on a brave front*) Think I'm scared of him!

MILLER. (*Gazing at him—frowning*) Can't imagine what— But it's to complain about something, I know

that. I only wish I didn't have to be pleasant with the old buzzard—but he's about the most valuable advertiser I've got.

SID. (*Sympathetically*) I know. But tell him to go to hell, anyway. He needs that ad more than you. (*The sound of the BELL comes from the rear of the house off right from back parlor.*) (BELL.)

MILLER. There he is. You clear out, Dick—(RICHARD rises.)—but come right back as soon as he's gone, you hear? (*Lifting a little*) I'm not through with you, yet.

RICHARD. Yes, Pa. (*Crosses to door, R.C.*)

MILLER. You better clear out, too, Sid.

SID. Come on, Dick, we'll go out and help Tommy celebrate. (*He takes RICHARD'S arm and they also disappear through R.C. door. MILLER glances through the front parlor toward the front door, curses under his breath, then calls in a tone of strained heartiness.*)

MILLER. (*Upstage in view of audience but in front parlor L.C.*) Hello, Dave. (*Enters*) Come right in here. What good wind blows you around on this glorious Fourth? (*A flat, brittle voice answers him: "Good morning," and a moment later DAVID McCOMBER appears in the R.C. doorway. He is a thin, dried-up little man with a head too large for his body perched on a scrawny neck, and a long solemn horse face with deep-set little black eyes, a blunt formless nose and a tiny slit of a mouth. He is about the same age as MILLER but is entirely bald, and looks ten years older. He is dressed with a prim neatness in shiny old black clothes.*) Here, sit down and make yourself comfortable. (*Taking cigar case from pocket*) Have a cigar?

McCOMBER. (*Acidly. Sits chair down L.C.*) You're forgetting. I never smoke.

MILLER. (*Forcing a laugh at himself*) That's so. So I was. Well, I'll smoke alone, then. (*He bites off the end of the cigar viciously, as if he wished it were*

McCOMBER's head, and sits down on desk chair; faces McCOMBER.)

McCOMBER. You asked me what brings me here, so I'll come to the point at once. I regret to say it's something disagreeable—disgraceful would be nearer the truth—and it concerns your son, Richard!

MILLER. (*Beginning to bristle—but calmly*) Oh, come, now, Dave. I'm sure Richard hasn't—

McCOMBER. (*Sharply*) And I'm positive he has. I have proof of everything *in his own handwriting!*

MILLER. Let's get down to brass tacks. Just what is it you're charging him with?

McCOMBER. With being dissolute and blasphemous—with deliberately attempting to corrupt the morals of my young daughter, Muriel.

MILLER. Then I'm afraid I'll have to call you a liar, Dave!

McCOMBER. (*Without taking offense—in the same flat, brittle voice*) I thought you'd get around to that, so I brought the proofs with me. (*He takes a wallet from his inside coat pocket, selects five or six slips of paper, and holds them out to MILLER*) My wife discovered them in one of Muriel's bureau drawers, hidden under the underwear. They're all in his handwriting. You can't deny it. Anyway, Muriel's confessed to me he wrote them. You read them and then say I'm a liar. (*MILLER has taken the slips and is reading them frowningly. McCOMBER talks on*) Evidently you've been too busy to take the right care about Richard's bringing up or what he's allowed to read—though I can't see why his mother failed in her duty.

MILLER. (*Has finished the last of the slips and is making a tremendous effort to control his temper*) Why, you damned old fool! Can't you see Richard's only a fool kid who's just at the stage when he's out to rebel against all authority, and so he grabs at everything radical to read and wants to pass it on to

his elders and his girl and boy friends to show off what a young hellion he is! Why, at heart you'd find Richard is just as innocent and as big a kid as your Muriel is! This stuff doesn't mean anything to me—If you believe this could corrupt Muriel, then you must believe she's easily corrupted! But I'll bet you'd find she knows a lot more about life than you give her credit for—and can guess a stork didn't bring her down your chimney!

McCOMBER. Now you're insulting my daughter.

MILLER. I'm not insulting her. I'm giving her credit for ordinary good sense. I'd say the same about my own Mildred, who's the same age.

McCOMBER. I know nothing about your Mildred except that she's known all over as a flirt. (*Then more sharply*) Well, I knew you'd prove obstinate, but I certainly never *dreamed* you'd have the impudence, after reading those papers, to claim your son was innocent of all wrong-doing!

MILLER. (*Interrupts—getting sore*) No? (*He tosses slips of paper on desk*) Just what *did* you dream I'd do?

McCOMBER. Do what it's your plain duty to do as a citizen to protect other people's children! Take and give him a hiding he'd remember to the last day of his life!

MILLER. (*His fists clenched, leans toward McCOMBER*) Dave, I've stood all I can stand from you! You get out! And get out quick, if you don't want a kick in the rear to help you!

McCOMBER. (*Again in his flat, brittle voice, slowly getting to his feet but evincing no particular fear. Stands R. and below chair down L.C. NAT rises too*) You needn't lose your temper. I'm only demanding you do your duty by your own as I've already done by mine. I'm punishing Muriel. She's not to be allowed out of the house for a month and she's to be

in bed every night by eight sharp. And yet she's blameless, compared to that—

MILLER. (*Crosses to him—belligerently*) I said I'd had enough out of you, Dave!

McCOMBER. (*Quickly—taking a step backward*) You needn't lay hands on me. I'm going. But there's one thing more. (*He takes a letter from his wallet*) Here's a letter from Muriel for your son. (*Hands MILLER the letter*) It makes clear, I think, how she's come to think about him, now that her eyes have been opened. I hope he heeds what's inside—for his own good and yours— And don't think I'm not going to make you regret the insults you've heaped on me. (*With a thin little sneer*) I'm taking the advertisement for my store out of your paper—and it won't go in again, I tell you, not unless you apologize in writing and promise to punish—

MILLER. I'll see you in hell first! As for your damned old ad, take it out and go to hell!

McCOMBER. (*Not impressed—flatly*) That's plain bluff. You know how badly you need it. So do I. Well, good day. (*McCOMBER turns and starts stiffly for door L.C. and exits through front parlor. MILLER stands looking after him. Slowly the anger drains from his face and leaves him looking a bit sick and disgusted. MILLER then looks at letter; puts it in pocket of coat. He crosses to desk L. and is picking up the slips of paper McCOMBER brought when SID enters. SID appears from R.C. His face is one broad grin of satisfaction.*)

SID. (*Enters as he speaks*) Good for you, Nat! You sure gave him hell!

MILLER. (*Dully—sits on desk chair*) Much good it'll do. He knows it was all talk.

SID. McComber never saw you like this before. I tell you you scared the pants off him. (*He chuckles; notices the slips of paper in MILLER's hand*) What's

this? Something he brought? (*Sits on side chair down L.C., facing MILLER.*)

MILLER. (*Grimly*) Samples of the new freedom—(*Gives SID slips of paper. SID reads them.*)—from those books Essie found—that Richard's been passing on to Muriel to educate her. They're what started the rumpus. (*Then frowning*) I've got to do something about that young anarchist or he'll be getting me, and himself, in a peck of trouble.

SID. (*Has been reading the slips, a broad grin on his face. Edges chair a bit toward MILLER. Suddenly he whistles*) Phew! This is a warm lulu for fair! (*He recites with a joking intensity*)

"My life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes
Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs
Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound—"

MILLER. (*With a grim smile*) Hmm. I missed that one. That must be Mr. Swinburne's copy. I've never read him, but I've hear something like that was the matter with him.

SID. Yes, it's labellel Swinburne—"Anactoria." Whatever that is. But wait, watch and listen! The worst is yet to come! (*He recites with added comic intensity*)

"That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat
Thy breasts like honey,

(MILLER looks at SID, who indicates it on paper.)

— that from face to feet

The body were abolished and consumed,
And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!"

MILLER. (*Takes slips, glances at them and then an irrepressible boyish grin coming to his face*) Hell and hallelujah! Just picture old Dave digesting that for the first time! (*BOTH laugh*) Gosh, I'd give a lot to have seen his face! (*Then a trace of shocked reproof showing in his voice*) But it's no joking matter. That stuff is warm—(*Puts slips on desk*)—too damned warm, if you ask me! I don't like this a

damned bit, Sid. Don't know but what I agree with McComber. That's no kind of thing to be sending a decent girl. (*More worriedly*) I thought he was really stuck on her—as one gets stuck on a decent girl at his age—all moonshine and holding hands and a kiss now and again. But this looks—I wonder if he is hanging around her to see what he can get? (*Angrily*) By God, if that's true, he deserves that licking McComber says it's my duty to give him! I've got to draw the line somewhere!

SID. Yes, it won't do to have him getting any decent girl in trouble.

MILLER. (*Which he doesn't want to do*) The only thing I can do is put it up to him straight. (*With pride*) Richard'll stand up to his guns, no matter what. I've never known him to lie to me.

SID. (*At a noise from the back parlor, RICHARD softly calls "Uncle Sid."*) Then now's your chance. I'll beat it. (*RICHARD enters R.C., very evidently nervous about McCOMBER'S call.*)—and see if the women folks are ready upstairs. (*Lift*) We ought to get started soon—if we're ever going to make that picnic. (*Exits L.C.*)

RICHARD. (*Forcing a snicker—crosses to down L.C.*) Gee, Pa, Uncle Sid's a bigger kid than Tommy is. He was throwing firecrackers in the air and catching them.

MILLER. Never mind that. I've got something else to talk to you about besides firecrackers.

RICHARD. (*Apprehensively*) What, Pa?

MILLER. (*Rises. Suddenly puts both hands on his shoulders and looks into his eyes—quietly*) Look here, son. I'm going to ask you a question, and I want an honest answer. I warn you beforehand if the answer is "yes" I'm going to punish you and punish you hard because you'll have done something no boy of mine ought to do. But you've never lied to

me before, I know, and I don't believe, even to save yourself punishment, you'd lie to me now, would you?

RICHARD. (*Impressed—with dignity*) I won't lie, Pa.

MILLER. (*Slowly—becoming terribly embarrassed*) Have you been trying to have something to do with Muriel—something you shouldn't—you know what I mean.

RICHARD. (*Stares at him for a moment, as if he couldn't comprehend—then, as he does, a look of righteous indignation comes over his face*) No! What do you think I am, Pa? I never would! She's not that kind! (*MILLER, satisfied, looks away from RICHARD*) Why, I—I love her! I'm going to marry her—after I get out of college! She's said she would! We're engaged!

MILLER. (*A great relief showing in his face—gently. Looks at RICHARD, smiles*) All right. That's all I want to know. We won't talk any more about it. (*He gives him an approving pat on the back.*)

RICHARD. (*Still indignant*) I don't see how you could think— (*Glances up L., then to MILLER*) Did that old idiot McComber say that about me?

MILLER. (*Joking now*) Shouldn't call your future father-in-law names, should you? 'Tain't respectful. (*Then after a glance at RICHARD's indignant face—he points to the slips of paper on the desk*) Well, you can't exactly blame old Dave, can you, when you read through that literature you wished on his innocent daughter?

RICHARD. (*Crosses to desk. Sees the slips for the first time and is overcome by embarrassment, which he immediately tries to cover up with a superior, airy carelessness*) Oh, so that's why. He found those, did he? (*Puts them in pocket*) I told her to be careful— (*Drops one; picks it up; puts it in pants pocket*) Well, it'll do him good to read the truth about life for once and get rid of his old-fogey ideas.

MILLER. (*Growing nervous again*) I'm afraid I've got to agree with him, though, that they're hardly fit reading for a young girl. (*Then with subtle flattery*) They're all well enough, in their way, for you who're a man—(*An unconscious agreement from RICHARD.*) but— Think it over, and see if you don't agree with me.

RICHARD. (*Embarrassedly, but not ashamed*) Aw, I only did it because I liked them—(*Crosses to L. of MILLER*)—and I wanted her to face life as it is. She's so darned afraid of life—afraid of her Old Man—afraid of people saying this or that about her—afraid of being in love—afraid of everything. She's even afraid to let me kiss her. I thought, maybe, reading those things—they're beautiful, aren't they, Pa?

MILLER. (*Amused—but trying not to show it*) Hmmm!

RICHARD. I thought they would give her the spunk to lead her own life, and not be—always thinking of being afraid.

MILLER. I see. Well, I'm afraid she's still afraid. (*Takes the letter from the table*) Here's a letter from her he said to give you. (*RICHARD takes the letter from him uncertainly, his expression changing to one of apprehension. MILLER adds with a kindly smile*) You better be prepared for a bit of a blow. But never mind, son. There's lots of other fish in the sea. (*RICHARD is not listening to him, but staring at the letter with a sort of fascinated dread. MILLER looks into his son's face a second, then turns away, troubled and embarrassed*) Darn it! (*Lift*) I better go upstairs and get rigged out or I never will get to that picnic. (*He moves awkwardly and self-consciously off L.C.*)

RICHARD. (*Continues to stare at the letter for a moment, then sits in chair down L.C.—then girds up his courage and tears it open and begins to read*)
(*WARN Curtain.*)

swiftly. As he reads his face grows more and more wounded and tragic, until at the end his mouth draws down at the corners, as if he were about to break into tears. With an effort he forces them back and his face grows flushed with humiliation and wronged anger. Blurts out to himself) The little coward! I hate her! She can't treat me like that! I'll show her!

MRS. MILLER. (*Off stage*) Sid, don't forget your goggles.

SID. (*Off stage*) I won't. (*At sound of VOICES from off L.C., RICHARD quickly shoves the letter into the inside pocket of his coat and does his best to appear calm and indifferent, even attempting to whistle "Waiting at the Church." But the whistle peters out miserably as his mother, LILY and SID enter L.C. LILY crosses to table c., SID to door up L. MRS. MILLER crosses to RICHARD. They are dressed in all the elaborate paraphernalia of motoring at that period—linen dusters, veils, goggles, SID in a snappy cap.*) (*WARN Cracker.*)

MRS. MILLER. (*Very chatty*) Well, we're about ready to start at last, thank goodness! Let's hope no more callers are on the way. What did that McComber want, Richard, do you know? Sid couldn't tell us.

RICHARD. You can search me. Ask Pa. (*SID crosses to LILY; helps her into coat. LILY ad libs. "Thank you, Sid."*)

MRS. MILLER. (*Immediately sensing something "down" in his manner—going to him worriedly*) Why, whatever's the matter with you, Richard? You sound as if you'd lost your last friend! What is it?

RICHARD. (*Desperately*) I—I don't feel so well—my stomach's sick.

MRS. MILLER. (*Immediately all sympathy, smoothing his hair back from his forehead*) You poor boy! (*RICHARD pulls away.*) What a shame—on the Fourth, too, of all days! (*Turning to the OTHERS*) Maybe I better stay home with him, if he's sick.

LILY. Yes, I'll stay, too. Poor boy!

RICHARD. (*More desperately*) No! You go, Ma! I'm not really sick. I'll be all right. You go. I want to be alone! (*Then, as a louder BANG comes from in back as TOMMY sets off a cannon cracker, he jumps to his feet*) Darn Tommy and his darned firecrackers. You can't get any peace in this house with that darned kid around! (*Crosses to down c.*) Darn the Fourth of July, anyway! (*Crosses up L.*) I wish we still belonged to England! (*Loud CRACKER.*)

FAST CURTAIN

ACT ONE

SCENE II

Dining-room of the Miller home—a little after six in the evening of the same day.

NOTE: This scene can be played in the Scene One setting, and the entrances can be arranged accordingly.

The room is much too small for the medium-priced, formidable dining-room set, especially now when all the leaves of the table are in. At Right, toward rear, is a double doorway with sliding doors and portieres leading into the back parlor. In the rear wall, Right Center, is the door to the pantry. At the Left of door is the china closet with its display of the family cut glass and fancy china. In the Left wall are two windows looking out on a side lawn. In front of the windows is a heavy, ugly side-board with three pieces of old silver on its top. In the Right wall, down stage, is a screen door opening on a side porch. A dark

rug covers most of the floor. The table, with a chair at each end, Left and Right, three chairs on the far side, facing front, and two on the near side, their backs to front, takes up most of the available space. The walls are papered in a sombre brown and dark-red design. The chairs are numbered from one to seven to simplify direction. Armchair right end of table is #1—side chair above table and Right is #2—side chair Center and above table is #3—side chair above and Left is #4—armchair at Left end of table is #5—side chair below and Left is #6—side chair below and Right is #7.

(MRS. MILLER is supervising and helping the Second Girl, NORAH, in the setting of the table. NORAH is a clumsy, heavy-handed, heavy-footed, long-jawed, beamingly good-natured young Irish girl—a “greenhorn.” NORAH down stage back to audience. MRS. MILLER Right of table shining glass with a cloth.)

MRS. MILLER. I really think you better put on the lights, Norah. It's getting so cloudy out, and this pesky room is so dark anyway.

NORAH. Yes, Mum. *(She stretches awkwardly over the table to reach the chandelier that is suspended from the middle of the ceiling and manages to turn one LIGHT on—scornfully)* Arrah, the contraption! *(LIGHT.)*

MRS. MILLER. *(Worriedly)* Careful!

NORAH. *(Cheerfully)* Careful as can be, Mum. *(But in drawing back to move around to reach the next bulb she knocks against the table, pushing it up-stage.)*

MRS. MILLER. *(Vexatiously crosses to R. end of table)* There! I do wish you'd watch—!

NORAH. (*A flustered appeal in her voice*) Arrah, what have I done wrong now?

MRS. MILLER. (*Draws a deep breath—then sighs helplessly*) Oh, nothing. Never mind the rest of the lights. You might as well go out in the kitchen and wait until I ring.

NORAH. (*Relieved and cheerful again*) Yes, Mum. (*She starts for the pantry.*)

MRS. MILLER. But there's one thing— (*Sits chair #7. Lets this pass helplessly—wearily*) —no, two other things—things I've told you over and over. Don't pass the plates on the wrong side at dinner tonight, and do be careful not to let that pantry door slam behind you.

NORAH. Yes, Mum. (*She goes into the pantry and lets the door almost slam behind her, but catches it in time to prevent the slam. She grins a pleased smile at MRS. MILLER as she allows the door to close quietly. MRS. MILLER sighs and reaches up with difficulty; can't reach lights. As she is doing so, LILY enters R.2.*)

LILY. Here, let me do that, Essie. I'm taller. (*As she quickly crosses to between chairs #6 and 7 and turns on ONE LIGHT.*)

MRS. MILLER. (*Gratefully, crosses to L. of chair #6*) Thank you, Lily.

LILY. (*Crosses to above table and turns on other TWO LIGHTS of chandelier*) But where's Norah? Why didn't she—?

MRS. MILLER. (*Exasperatedly crosses to between chairs #6 and 7*) Oh, that girl! She'll be the death of me! She's that thick, you honestly wouldn't believe it possible. (*Then kindly.*)

LILY. Is there anything I can do, Essie?

MRS. MILLER. (*Surveying the table. Below table L. to R.*) She's got the table all wrong. We'll have to reset it. But you're always helping me. It isn't fair to ask you—in your vacation.

LILY. (*Beginning to help with the table. Above table R. to L.*) You know I love to help. It makes me feel I'm some use in this house instead of just sponging—

MRS. MILLER. (*Indignantly, scolding—slams down fork, then speaks*) Sponging! You pay, don't you?

LILY. Almost nothing. And you and Nat only take that little to make me feel better about living with you. (*Forcing a pitiful attempt at a smile to her lips, works to below table at L. end*) I don't see how you stand me—having a cranky old-maid around all the time.

MRS. MILLER. (*Indignantly*) What nonsense you talk! As if Nat and I—weren't only too tickled to death to have you! Lily Miller, I've no patience with you when you go on like that. (*Then she changes the subject abruptly*) What time's it getting to be?

LILY. (*Glances at the little watch pinned on the bosom of her dress. She crosses from L. of table to down R.; glances off through door*) Quarter past six.

MRS. MILLER. I do hope those men folks aren't going to be late for dinner— (*She sighs; sets chairs*) But I suppose with that darned Sachem Club picnic it's more likely than not. (*Lily looks sad and worried, and sighs. Mrs. Miller gives her a quick side glance*) I see you've got your new dress on.

LILY. (*Embarrassedly. Crosses to chair #1 and sits*) Yes, I thought—if Sid's taking me to the fireworks—I ought to spruce up a little.

MRS. MILLER. (*Looking away*) Hmm. (*A pause. Then she says with an effort to be casual*) You mustn't mind if Sid comes home feeling a bit—gay. I expect Nat to and we'll have to listen to all those old stories about when he was a boy. You know what those picnics are, and he'd be running into all his old friends.

LILY. (*Agitatedly*) I don't think he will—this time—not after his promise.

MRS. MILLER. (*Avoiding looking at her*) I know. But men are weak. (*Then quickly working to c. of table, below it*) That was a good notion of Nat's, getting Sid the job on the *Waterbury Standard*. All Sid's ever needed was to get away from the rut he was in here. He's the kind that's the victim of his friends. (*LILY keeps silent, her eyes downcast. MRS. MILLER goes on meaningly*) He's making good money in Waterbury, too—thirty-five a week. He's in a better position to get married than he ever was.

LILY. (*Stiffly*) Well, I hope he finds a woman who's willing—though after he's through with his betting on horse races, and dice, and playing Kelly pool, there won't be much left for a wife—even if there was nothing else he spent his money on.

MRS. MILLER. Oh, he'd give up all that—for the right woman. (*Suddenly she comes directly to the point, sharply. Sits chair #7, faces LILY, then speaks*) Lily, why don't you change your mind and marry Sid and reform him? He loves you and always has.

LILY. Never enough to stop drinking for. (*Cutting off MRS. MILLER'S reply*) No, it's no good in your talking, Essie. We've been over this a thousand times before and I'll always feel the same as long as Sid's the same. If he gave me proof he'd—but even then I don't believe I could. It's sixteen years since I broke off our engagement, but what made me break it off is as clear to me today as it was then—his taking up with bad women—

MRS. MILLER. (*Protests half-heartedly*) But he's always sworn he got raked into that party and never had anything to do with those harlots.

LILY. (*Firmly but quietly and quickly*) Well, I don't believe him—didn't then and don't now. I don't believe he deliberately planned to, but— (*Very prim*) Oh, it's no good talking, Essie. What's done is done. But you know how much I like Sid—in spite of everything. I know he was just born to be what he is

—irresponsible. But don't talk to me about marrying him—because I never could.

MRS. MILLER. (*Angrily front*) He's a dumb fool—a stupid dumb fool, that's what he is! (*Fuming*) It's a shame for you—a measly shame—

LILY. (*Affectionately but sharply*) Now don't you go feeling sorry for me.

MRS. MILLER. Good gracious, if I'm not forgetting one of the most important things! I've got to warn that Tommy not to give me away to Nat about the fish. He knows, because I had to send him to market for it, and he's liable to burst out laughing—

LILY. About what?

MRS. MILLER. (*Guiltily. Quickly*) Well, I've never told you, but you know how Nat carries on about not being able to eat bluefish.

LILY. (*Quickly*) I know he says it poisons him.

MRS. MILLER. (*Chuckling*) Poisons him, nothing! He's been eating bluefish for years—only I tell him each time it's weakfish. We're having it tonight.

LILY. (*Laughing*) Aren't you ashamed, Essie?

MRS. MILLER. Not much, I'm not. I like bluefish. (*She laughs; rises*) Where is Tommy? In the sitting-room? (*Crosses to R.2.*)

LILY. No, Richard's there alone. I think Tommy's out on the piazza with Mildred. (*MRS. MILLER bustles out R.2. As soon as she is gone, the smile fades from LILY's lips. Her face grows sad and she again glances nervously at her watch. RICHARD appears from R.2, moving quickly toward door R.1. His face wears a set expression of bitter gloom; he exudes tragedy. For RICHARD, after his first outburst of grief and humiliation, has begun to take a masochistic satisfaction in his great sorrow, especially in the concern which it arouses in the family circle.*) Feel any better, Richard?

RICHARD. (*On seeing his aunt, he gives her a dark look and turns and crosses slowly to down c. Som-*

berly—crossing down R.) I'm all right, Aunt Lily. You mustn't worry about me.

LILY. (*Going to him—worriedly*) But I do worry about you. I hate to see you so upset.

RICHARD. (*Crosses to down C.*) It doesn't matter. Nothing matters.

LILY. (*Puts her arm around him sympathetically. He takes a step. She goes with him*) You really mustn't let yourself take it so seriously. You know, things like that come up, and we think there's no hope—

RICHARD. (*Breaks away to down L.*) Things like what come up?

LILY. What's happened between you and Muriel.

RICHARD. (*With disdain—quickly—a step down stage*) Oh, her! I wasn't even thinking about her. (*Impressively*) I was thinking about life.

LILY. (*No tenderness—a bit brittle. Crosses to a step above him*) But then—if we really, really love—why, then something else is bound to happen soon that changes everything again, and it's all as it was before the misunderstanding, and everything works out all right in the end. That's the way it is with life.

RICHARD. (*With a tragic sneer—sits chair down L.*) Life! Life is a joke! And everything works out all wrong in the end.

LILY. (*A little shocked—crosses to him*) You mustn't talk that way. (*Crosses to chair #5 and sits*) But I know you don't mean it.

RICHARD. (*Bitterly*) I do too mean it! (*Lily faces him.*) You can have your silly optimism, if you like, Aunt Lily. But don't ask me to be so blind. (*Proudly*) I'm a pessimist! (*Then with an air of cruel cynicism*) As for Muriel, that's all dead and past. I was only kidding her, anyway, just to have a little fun, and she took it seriously, like a fool. (*Pauses. He forces a cruel smile to his lips—rises and crosses to L. of Lily*) You know what they say about women and

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