

BULLETIN
OF THE
FIRST DISTRICT NORMAL SCHOOL
KIRKSVILLE, MISSOURI

Volume XVII

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Number 3

BULLETIN
OF THE
FIRST DISTRICT NORMAL SCHOOL
KIRKSVILLE, MISSOURI

FOUNDED BY JOSEPH BALDWIN
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Rural Education Series No. 3

THE RUT

A Play in Three Acts

BY

R. LAWSON WISE

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FOREWORD

In publishing "The Rut," we call attention to the fact that we are adding a new link to a rather well defined sequence of rural life plays. "A Little Child Shall Lead Them," our first effort, was based on a fight for consolidation. "A Vision of the Homeland," our second, showed consolidation in action, struggling to attain its ideals and maintain its existence. "The Rut" pictures a consolidated school community working for more perfect socialization, and reaching out into the community homelife with vitalizing, strengthening power. With a great hope for definite, tangible service, we offer "The Rut" to those who have learned to look forward to our yearly drama, as well as to new friends and co-workers.

C. M. WISE.

THE RUT

A PLAY OF RURAL LIFE

by

R. Lawson Wise

in collaboration with the other members of the class in Advanced English
Composition in the First District Normal School, Summer Quarter, 1917.

Class Members

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GILDA BOONE

NELLIE B. CHILDERS

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THE RUT

A PLAY OF RURAL LIFE

Characters

Maurice Peterson, a young farmer who has had some work at an agricultural college, but who has gone into scientific farming with one idea in mind, to raise better crops and live stock to make more money. He has the elements of fine character but is too much dominated by conservativeness and the dollar mark.

Louise Woods, Maurice's sweetheart, a young woman of twenty-four, a school teacher, alert, bright, having seen big things for the consolidated school as a community center, and being dominantly progressive and altruistic.

Sarah Woods, Louise's mother, pretty much worn, showing in face, figure and voice that her life has been very monotonous.

Jimmie Woods, Louise's brother, a red-haired little scamp of ten or eleven years. A peculiar combination of mischief and understanding and sympathy. He, of course, doesn't see clear thru problems, but he perceives that something is wrong and that some one that he cares for is concerned.

Clarence V. Thompson, Superintendent of the Consolidated School. A man under whom Louise has worked for a year or two. Fine, bighearted, farseeing, openminded fellow. He has not done many things that should have been done perhaps. He sees his deficiency, however, and goes in to make it good.

Nancy Peterson, Maurice's mother, worn, tired woman whose interests have almost become a blank.

Lige Peterson, Maurice's father, the type of man that Maurice bids fair to be in ten years if his standards aren't shifted.

Doctor Saunders, one who from experience knows life. Perhaps thirty-five or forty years old, has kept abreast of the times in his profession.

Harve Woods, Louise's father, conservative but influenced by Louise's ideas.

THE RUT

ACT I. SCENE I.

Time, about May 20th.

Living room of the Woods' home. The home is plain, neat, tasteful. The wall-paper is plain and mellow tinted. There are a few small, unobtrusive good pictures. In the middle of the room is a rather good-looking plain table with runner across it, on top of which are several books and magazines. In a shelf below there are more. Rocking chair on each side of the table and plain chair back of it. Davenette to the right and section bookcase to left. At the rise of curtain Louise is discovered sitting at right of table tatting and Jimmie at back of table reading. Louise is a bright, alert, young woman of twenty-four years, attractive, but not too pretty. She impresses one as being a creature who enjoys life to the fullest, but who also thinks clearly and seriously. She is dressed attractively and as though she might be expecting callers.

Jimmie, her "kid" brother, is a red-headed youngster of ten or eleven years. He is mischievous to the very limit, but not all rowdy. He is bright, not precocious, and has a capacity for sympathy, not abnormal, but perhaps larger than we are wont to credit boys of ten or eleven with having.

Louise plays with the tatting, doing a few stitches now and again, but spending most of her time looking off into space, day-dreaming pleasantly. Jimmie reads nominally, but glances furtively at Louise and grins to himself when he does pretend to read.

Jimmie.—Say, Lou, this Youth's Companion story reminds me—do you know how they get down from an elephant? (Chuckles behind pages.)

Louise.—(absently) Why no, Jimmie, how? (Jimmie's chuckle becomes audible. Louise rouses.) Oh, you little rascal, you want an exhibition of wit, eh? Well, let's see. They get down by the trunk line, I guess.

Jimmie.—Wrong, Sis. They don't get down from elephants at all; they get down from a goose. (Louise makes a face at Jimmie, turns her back in pretended haughtiness, tats with vigor. Presently she drops tatting in her lap and sits buried in thought.)

Jimmie.—What are you lookin' at, Lou?

Louise.—(Catching herself and tatting industriously) This figure, Jimmie. The thread is so small that I have to look closely to see what I'm doing.

Jimmie.—Well, then, what are you dreamin' at?

Louise.—(In mock consideration) Let's see now—one—thing I was thinking about was the lecture course that starts next Friday at the school house. Do you know whether Father has bought tickets yet?

Jimmie.—No, he hasn't, and I s'pose he'll hem and haw awhile before he does. (Laughs at recollection of something.) Lou, you ought to have seen the inside of that car awhile ago. I'll bet Pop hit the culvert down in front of Bailey's when he came in last night like old Jerry passes a bumblebee's nest. The pump and jack usually stay under the back seat, but they were loose in the bottom; the pliers had jumped from the bottom of the car to the back seat and a penny that I know Pop had in his pocket, a tinsel off his shoe-string, and the cap off the radiator, were all under the back cushion.

Louise.—(Laughing) If Father is traveling that fast we oughtn't to have any particular trouble getting him started to the lecture course.

Jimmie.—No, shucks, you couldn't keep him from going, 'cause he know you helped get it started; but he'll potter awhile first. He told Mother last night when he was milking old Red that since he'd bought that gasoline engine he didn't know as he could afford any lecture course. Said he wanted to sleep some next Friday night, anyway, if he was goin' to haul a load of coal clean from Wilburton Saturday.

Louise.—You want to go don't you, Jimmie?

Jimmie.—Say I do. I wouldn't miss all that doin's for anything. The funny man that the "Prof." told us about is coming too, and the magicians—yum!

Louise.—I guess I'll leave it to you to get Father in the notion of going.

Jimmie.—Guess you know how to get folks in notions, don't you Lou?

Louise.—Maybe it won't be hard. I suspect he's forgotten his coal hauling job, anyway, since the weather got so warm.

Jimmie.—I wish you'd 'a' got that new auditorium last spring when you tried for it, so's we'd have a good place for the magician. He'll have a crowd that would fill one of those little ole two by four school rooms, so that if the Jenkins family all get there first, none of the rest of the neighborhood will get to see the show a-tall. Good thing it's out of doors.

Louise.—Never you mind, Jimmie, we'll get the auditorium yet. Depend on "the Prof." as you call him, and Doctor Saunders for that.

Jimmie.—Lou, I'll bet you were dreaming about how to get somebody in a notion awhile ago.

Louise.—Father is feeling good today. He didn't have to pump water for the cattle this morning, you know. Go and talk to him about the lecture course and find out if he's changed his mind, yet.

Jimmie.—Has Maurice got his tickets yet, or did I stop you before you got that dreamed out?

Louise.—(Not heeding his insinuation) Where is father?

Jimmie.—Aw, he's potterin' around, salting the elephants—I mean the cattle in the south pasture or something. Reckon Maurice will vote for the auditorium next time?

Louise.—(With furtive glances toward the door and seeming rather unduly anxious to get Jimmie to go) Run along and find him then, before he thinks about that load of coal again. He's got to go to that lecture course.

Jimmie.—Oh, what are you in such a rush about? I'm reading a story—about a goose, an'—

Louise.—You can finish your story some other time—or you can take your Youth's Companion along with you.

Jimmie.—(Half starting but evidently reluctant) Can't read a-walkin' around.

Louise.—Oh yes, and after today tickets are \$2.50. We'll have to get him in the notion and telephone Lou Allison to save us some. Run along and interview your Dad or you may not get to see Tamporani, the magician.

Jimmie.—(Going) Seems to me you're anxious about something else besides the magician.

Louise.—(Watching entrance left as if expecting someone) Report

results, Ambassador, and I'll know whether I have to lend my forces to the argument.

Jimmie.—Umph! Umph! (Goes off, intently perusing his paper. Knock left.)

Louise.—(Hesitating a moment for Jimmie to get out) Come in. (Trips expectantly to door left. Enter Maurice.)

Maurice.—Hello, my Pollykins. (Greet's her warmly.)

Louise.—Maurice,—you know I don't like to be called Pollykins!

Maurice.—(In mock embarrassment) How are you this afternoon, Miss Woods?

Louise.—And I'm not Miss Woods. (Pretends to pout. Maurice relents.)

Maurice.—My own Louise.

Louise.—That's much better, Maurice. You came just exactly on time, I just got Jimmie started off. (Jimmie appears in the doorway right during this speech, sees the two suddenly, eyes the position he finds them in, rolls up his paper and hugs it. Exit, stepping high. Maurice and Louise walk over to the davenport.)

Maurice.—I suspect, really, that Jimmie has no business being in the vicinity when I arrive.

Louise.—(Shakes a playful finger at him.) Are your father and mother coming over this afternoon? Mother is expecting them over for a little while, I think.

Maurice.—Yes, I guess they are. Father had the donkeys harnessed and was tinkering with the old spring wagon when I left.

Louise.—Just one week from tonight Maurice, we'll be—(blushes).

Maurice.—Scared to death, and too nervous to say "I do" to the minister.

Louise.—I wonder if we shouldn't be a little nervous, big boy. It's a big step we're taking.

Maurice.—You're not afraid we shan't be happy, are you, little girl?

Louise.—I know we shall be.

Maurice.—Then why be afraid? If we were some folks we might well be afraid.

Louise.—Maurice, I wonder if we're big enough to take ourselves and each other frankly in hand and get out of a rut if we get into one. Do you think we are?

Maurice.—Foolish little girl! We're not going to get into ruts. My four years in the Agricultural College and your four years in the Teachers' College and two years teaching have given us ideals and an outlook on things that the folks we see dropping deeper and deeper into ruts don't have. We'll stay out of **ruts**, Louise.

Louise.—I hope you're right,—perhaps you are.

Maurice.—Of course I am. We'll owe about five thousand on that hundred and twenty, but we'll have that coming our way before long. I can see the difference around Father's place from the few things that I persuaded him to do thru my letters, and I'll tell you what, that farm of **ours** is going to be farmed right.

Louise.—We'll have the nicest little place in the country, won't we?

Maurice.—Say **we will**. I'll tell you, Louise, that little hundred and twenty at sixty dollars per, and only six percent for what I couldn't pay down is a pretty handy calculation in our plans for getting started. Of course, it hasn't such very good improvement, but it hasn't been corned for fifteen years with any intermission and that's more than can be said for most of the farms around here.

Louise.—We'll fix up the place first of all. I have a picture of a neat little house made out of the one that is there, by just building an addition back and making a T out of it and putting a big, roomy porch in front. The new addition we'll extend out west toward the big elm in the back yard and its shade will keep the afternoon sun out of the windows. With the yard leveled up and kept trimmed, a new fence around it so the chickens and dogs won't spoil all my attempts at flower-raising, and a cement walk from the front porch to the road, that will be the prettiest little home imaginable. Can't you just see it, dear?

Maurice.—Oh, I've got some pictures of a lot of things, little girl. This chap's not going to skin the soil quite the way his Dad did. I've seen the theories I've got work out so many times that it's not experiment; and in spite of the fact that I don't intend to market my hogs in the moon, I'll bet I'll make a third better money on that bunch of mine that I just bought than Dad does on the bunch he has. Oh, say, one thing about the looks of the place. I'm not going to have a stile at the front gate.

Louise.—(Playfully) Oh, you're not? Come, come, now! How do you know but that I dearly love to have a stile at the front gate? Say a quartered oak stile, stained early English.

Maurice.—I don't know whether we might say that Dad is in a rut and won't get out, or astride a rail and won't get off, or just how you might figuratively characterize his attitude of mind, state of consciousness, et cetera, but the point of fact is that he has the idea most firmly "sot" in his mind that there should be a stile at the front gate. Nobody on the place ever rides horseback except out in the field after the cows or something like that, but the stile is yet a necessary article. When I came home last summer the old thing was somewhat ramshackle and I generously contributed my labor to convert it into kindling wood; and upon my word and honor, it wasn't three days till Father had replaced it with a substantially constructed new one. I gave it up.

Louise.—(As he finishes she assumes air of offense and mock seriousness.) I think I want a stile in front of our yard gate.

Maurice.—(Taking note of her manner in surprise, then seeing the deviltry underneath, and assuming the same attitude) Well, drat ye, you'll not get it. (Leaning toward her threateningly.) I guess maybe I'll be the head of this stile-ish household.

Louise.—(Turning toward him) I guess we will have a stile there anyway. (They have leaned toward each other till their faces are nearly together and each is glaring into the face of the other. They glare thus for a moment, their faces relax, they begin to laugh. Louise gets up from the davenport laughing, walks toward the table, turns again suddenly.) Maurice, I've seen people just as sure as we are that their lives would be good, that they wouldn't

fall into ruts—I've seen them unhappy and hopelessly in a rut in less than a year, all because they didn't see the big things. John Siever and Elizabeth didn't know that it was of far greater importance that they live happy, useful lives than that they own three hundred and twenty acres of land; they owned the land. Billy Myers and Ethel didn't know that they'd better be happy than to own an up-to-date cowbarn; they owned the cowbarn.

Maurice.—(Recovering his equilibrium after an awe-struck silence, getting up and coming toward her, confidently) Don't be afraid, little girl, we'll be happy and own the land and the barn too. (Slips his arm around her. She looks him in the face a moment.)

Louise.—Oh, we must be—we will be happy, won't we?

Maurice.—In spite of everything, Louise—little Pollykins. (She drops her head on his shoulder. Enter Jimmie—downstage left—sees what he is running into, eyes them a moment, grins, turns toward the audience mischievously.)

Jimmie.—And now when they are married, will they always bill and coo? Will they never fuss and quarrel as the other couples do? Will he cherish her and love her? Will she honor and obey? Well—they will—in the usual way. (Prepares to dodge, for Maurice grabs a sofa pillow and Louise a book; but he gets his tongue going again before he is seriously injured.)

Jimmie.—Say, Lou, Pop said he—when I first said something about it, he sort o' scratched his head and thought mebbe we'd ought to haul that coal.

Louise.—How did you bring him 'round?

Jimmie.—Sure as you're a foot high, I didn't say anything about that coal hauling. I told him some of the things Mr. Thompson said about that agriculture man from the University and that long, ganglin', funny-looking guy, Ralph Parlette, that's goin' to talk about the University of Hard Knocks, but Pop just kep on scratchin' his head, and I declare to goodness, I thought that coal would sure get hauled.

Maurice.—How **did** you fetch him, old top?

Jimmie.—Well, sir, I strung out on that mag-mag-magnician or whatever you call him.

Louise.—Magician, Jimmie.

Jimmie.—Anyhow, you know Mr. Thompson told us some of the tricks the guy would do and I told Pop about 'em—how he'd roll up his elbows, open up his hands so you could see they were empty, make two or three passes in the air and have three little red balls in each hand; how he'd take three red handkerchiefs and an American flag out of a roll of paper that didn't have anything in it, and make a feller that helps him cough up three dozen eggs. (Louise and Maurice laugh at his animation and the ludicrousness of the situation.) By Jiminy, I'd about concluded my cake was dough, but when I got to that egg stunt Pop stopped my speechifying and said he reckoned we'd just have to see that lecture course.

Maurice.—By George, Jimmie, I believe I'll have you come down and convince my Dad that he ought to sow part clover instead of straight timothy on that forty he's going to seed this fall. Will you do it?

Jimmie.—Sure Mike. I'd tell him to cut it in half anywhere he wanted to and sow one half the way I wanted him to and the other half the way he wanted to and let me keep an account of things on that forty acres for five

years and if my half didn't make two hundred and fifty dollars more than his I'd give him fifteen cents; and if it made less I'd pay him the difference. He'd spy that fifteen cents and fall for you before you could say scat.

Maurice.—You're some philosopher, Jimmie; but say, where did you get your information on clover?

Jimmie.—At school. We got Harold Billings' father to try it out on a piece of land a year ago last fall. I've forgot the exact cash, but so far the clover has made a lot more than the timothy. I wonder where Mother is.

Louise.—Sitting out in front of the house, I think.

Jimmie.—I'm going to find her and tell her Dad's got his punkin straightened out on the lecture course. We're going to see the magician and fiddles and bandana flags.

Louise.—Jimmy is a caution if there ever was one.

Maurice.—I'm afraid we'll die off from lonesomeness in our little shanty down the road till we get used to it. The everlastin,' pesticatin' young jack-anapes won't have such free access to us.

Louise.—We'll have to get used to doing without some things till we get started though.

Maurice.—Yes, I guess we'll have to watch the corners some. We'll not buy nice furniture and curtains and things till we get started enough to build the house like we want it, will we?

Louise.—Perhaps not, Maurice. (Soberly.)

Maurice.—We'll be happy though, while we're working to get things where we want them, little girl?

Louise.—(Forcing herself to abandon her sober turn) Of course we will, you silly boy. Oh, say, I want to show you that new arrangement we've got down in the basement. I just got Father to put it in this week. It's a gasoline engine that's rigged up to run the washing machine, cream separator and churn and to pump water from the deep well. Later we'll have a dynamo and storage battery—then heigho for lights and all sorts of electric labor saving devices.

Maurice.—That's some riggin' for sure. Take me along and show me to it.

Louise.—(As they go off back) It was a long process to get Father to see its value but he's tickled to death with it now. (Exit.)

Mrs. Woods.—(Off stage left) Jimmie, Jimmie!

Jimmie.—Comin.' (Talking to himself as he goes slowly toward the door) Betcha if Maurice got one of them engines he'd put it in the barn instead of in the basement. (Enter Mrs. Woods, left. She is a bright-faced little woman of forty-five years. It is plain from the droop of her figure that she has had a hard row to hoe, but it is also plain from the bright face that times are better for her.)

Mrs. Woods.—Jimmie, see where your Father is. Mr. and Mrs. Peterson are getting out of the spring wagon now.

Jimmie.—I guess he's not far off. I'll get him, tho. (Exit Mrs. Woods left.)

Jimmie.—(Yelling off stage right) Po-o-o-p, O, P-o-o-o-p!

Mr. Woods.—(Off stage right, close to door) What do you want?

Jimmie.—Come 'ere. You've got company. Never mind your dress suit. Just put a posy in your buttonhole. (Enter Mr. Woods.)

Mr. Woods.—Here I am, Sonny, where's the company? I don't see anybody but you and I wasn't expecting you to come to see me again so soon. Got what you wanted the last time, didn't you? (Mr. Woods is a kindly man of perhaps fifty years. He is not energetic and aggressive enough to fall in with new ideas quickly and of his own volition; but on the other hand, he is not of the hard-headed type that takes an endless time to see through things and is too stubborn to admit it even then.)

Jimmie.—The company is coming. They just now stopped their "Jackson" car at the front gates and Mother went out to bring them in.

Mrs. Woods.—(Of stage left) Just walk right into the living room there. I think Harve will be in in just a minute. (Enter Mrs. Peterson, Mr. Peterson and Mrs. Woods. Mrs. Peterson is what Mrs. Woods might easily have been if her life hadn't been brightened by her husband's seeing some of the big, new, progressive things that have come with the consolidated school and the community church. Mr. Peterson is rather gruff and hardheaded and is distinctly one of the school who measure in dollars and cents. He is not particularly unwilling to see new things if they produce in those terms, but he has made money the old way and therefore isn't easily convinced.)

Mr. Woods.—Harve is right here. How're you, Lige? (They shake hands.)

Mr. Peterson.—How're ye, Harve?

Mr. Woods.—How do, Mrs. Peterson.

Mrs. Peterson.—Well,—pretty well, and Jimmie how are you? (Jimmie has been standing downstage right wrapped up in his magazine story, having picked up the paper at the end of his last speech. Mrs. Peterson puts her hand on his shock of red hair and interrupts his reading.)

Jimmie.—Got a good football story here. Wish I could play some football next year.

Mrs. Peterson.—He looks so much like my little Billy that's dead.

Mrs. Woods.—(Who took the company's hats when they first came in and carried them to another room, re-entering) Well, now, I didn't think he had as high a forehead as Jimmie has. Just sit down, folks. Nancy, let's you and me take the davenport where we can talk and let the men have the table so they'll have something to pound their fists on. (They sit down. Peterson left of table, Woods back of table, the women on davenport and Jimmie on the floor at end of davenport still reading.)

Mr. Woods.—Lige, have you decided what you'll do with that west twenty yet?

Mr. Peterson.—Yes, I gravy, I'm a-goin' to seed 'er down to timothy this fall. Maurice tried to get me in the notion of putting it down in clover but I can't see no use, I gravy, o' payin' so much money to get twenty acres seeded down as a feller would have to pay with clover seed at fifteen dollars a bushel.

Mr. Woods.—Well, I used to think the same way, Lige, but I changed my mind. Jimmie!

Jimmie.—(Still reading. Semi-grunt issues from behind the paper.)

Mr. Woods.—Where is that agriculture notebook of yours?

Jimmie.—(Without looking up) There on the table, one with a gray back and rings thru it. (Makes a pass at a fly that lights on his hand.)

Mrs. Peterson.—Well now, Sarah, I had good luck with them turkeys of mine. Out of three dozen eggs I've had thirty turkeys hatch and they're getting big enough to run everywhere now and I've only lost two.

Mrs. Woods.—Mine haven't hatched yet. They ought to begin sometime this week. I don't believe I ever would have found the nests this spring if it hadn't been for Jimmie.

Mrs. Peterson—I did the finding myself but it pretty well tired me out. I don't think I'll raise turkeys another year—unless Lige insists. When Maurice was at home all the time he used to help me, but—

Mrs. Woods.—Where are Maurice and Louise, anyway? (Resounding whack. Jimmie, after another interruption of his reading process, has folded his paper into a swatter and gone in pursuit, followed the fly to back of stage, then with his eyes aloft stumbled all over the room and ended with the "whack" when the fly stopped on the bald top of his father's head.)

Jimmie.—I told you if you ever sat down again I'd fix ye. (Eyes the spot on the magazine as he reseats himself to finish his story. Mr. Woods eyes Jimmie quizzically as he rubs his bald spot while the rest of the folks shake their sides laughing.)

Mrs. Woods.—(Straightening her face) Jimmie, do you know where Louise and Maurice are?

Jimmie.—(Scarcely looking up) Gone to look at the new gasoline engine in the basement.

Mr. Woods.—(Getting up) Don't you folks want to see that new machine of ours?

Mrs. Woods.—Yes, do come and see it. We're mighty proud of it, I tell you.

Mr. Woods.—(As they start off) Didn't cost much but it saved me about an hour and half's pumping this morning.

Mr. Peterson.—(Who has been perusing the agriculture notebook till he had to get up to go along) Harve, I gravy, that air clover business of Billings's looks like she might be pretty good. Four hundred to the good ain't sich bad argument. (Exeunt right. Enter Louise back. Jimmie is still buried in his paper.)

Louise.—Where are the folks?

Jimmie.—(After reading for about a half-minute and throwing the paper down) Just had to finish that story, Lou. They're gone to the basement to see the new works down there. Where's Maurice?

Louise.—Went home about five minutes ago. Say Jimmie, why don't you crank up the jitney and take the folks a little ride after awhile?

Jimmie.—Sure I'll do it, Lou. But you ought to have seen me swat a fly on Pop's bald spot. I thought about the talk on flies and that moving picture film that the Prof. gave us just before school was out—Say, Lou, Maurice don't like the Prof., does he?

Thompson.—(Entering left) What's that about the Prof.? I heard you talking about me so thought it would be all right to walk in. How do you do ex-schoolmarm? How're you, Jimmie?

Jimmie.—Hello, Prof.

Louise.—Sit down, Clarence, and tell us your troubles. Jimmie has just had an adventure. He swatted a fly on his Father's bald spot, and so far as I can see came out alive.

Thompson.—Jimmie is then, I take it, a disciple of the theory, "Swat the Fly?"

Jimmie.—Oh, Pop don't care. Hear what happened when he went to the barber shop at town last week? (They shake their heads.) Well, Pop got into a chair and the barber come up and says, "What'll you have?" Pop says, "Hair cut, of course, what did you think I wanted?" "Oh, I didn't know," says the barber, eyein' Pop's ivory dome, "I thought perhaps you wanted a shine." And Pop never done nothing—just laughed.

Thompson.—I wish you weren't an ex-schoolmarm. However, I was just going by and took the notion to stop and ask your opinion on an idea of mine about that auditorium we're working for. We've got to have one, you know. I don't like this this idea of a summer lecture course, just so we can have outdoor meetings; and I remark again we've got to have it. If only the election had not failed last fall!

Jimmie.—What's the idea, though, Prof.?

Louise.—Yes, unburden your brain.

Thompson.—To tell the truth, it's not my idea, but it's a good one anyway. I've been telling that little school teacher sweetheart of mine about that auditorium in my letters and the idea is the result.

Louise.—No doubt, but go ahead.

Thompson.—You know our idea has been to have a gymnasium floor in the center with elevated seats clear around it and folding chairs enough to fill the central part for big meetings and a movable stage to bring into one end for a speaker for those occasions. Now the new idea is to have the elevated seats on only three sides and on the other side to have a permanent stage with curtain, scenery, and dressing rooms so that the amateur dramatists that we have, will have good material to work with. What do you think?

Louise.—Capital idea, I think. And if you can only get folks to understand what that auditorium will mean to the school and to the community, the fight will be won.

Thompson.—They'll understand all right. Every one that I've talked to has understood except Jud Simpson, and he has a maria for opposing everything that will make living any pleasanter for anybody else. Sort of a professional growler with money enough to make people listen to him a little.

Jimmie.—Old skinner, that's what **he** is.

Thompson.—(Starting to go) We'll make 'er go, anyway, won't we Jimmie?

Jimmie.—We'll make 'er go if I have to do it myself, Prof.

Louise.—We'll get it next time, Clarence, and remember there'll be one little home a mile down the road that will give its full support, because it **understands**.

Thompson.—(Going) I'll remember.

Jimmie.—Good-bye, Prof.

Curtain

ACT I. SCENE II.

One week later than the last. Monday morning at breakfast in the dining room of the "little home down the road." In the center the dining table. Dishes, table cloth, and knives and forks are quite plainly wedding presents and are in contrast with the rest of the room; the paper is dingy and fly-specked, the chairs aren't handsome, the table is a square one. No rug or carpet at all.

Maurice is seated right of table in working clothes, having been out doing part of his morning chores. At rise of curtain he is simultaneously sipping coffee and perusing a farm paper. Louise is sitting left of table. She is wearing a dainty, attractive kimono and boudoir cap and in fact looks entirely too sweet to warrant such placid indifference on the part of her husband. She is nibbling on half a muffin, but doesn't seem to have much of an appetite.

Louise.—(After watching Maurice's absorption hesitatingly) Do you want another muffin, Maurice?

Maurice.—(Looking up from his paper) Don't care if I do. (Takes one from plate she passes.) Say, these are good biscuits.

Louise.—(Modestly) Thank you, dearie.

Maurice.—(Watching her) By George, Louise, you do look sweet this morning!

Louise.—I'm glad you think so—I'll be glad when the same remark can be made about the looks of this room and the rest of the house. (She goes on planning, he half listening and half absorbed in the paper.) When we get some plain, mellow-tinted, clean paper on these walls, this floor painted and a rug on it, a decent circular dining table and some respectable chairs, this room will be a different looking place to eat in.

Maurice.—(Scarcely looking up) You're right about that. (Enthusiastically) Say, Louise, this thing here strikes my eye.

Louise.—What?

Maurice.—This tile silo advertised here. It costs only about two hundred more than a wooden one, and I'll tell you about the first time I spend some money I'm going to have a tile silo.

Louise.—I wish we were all fixed up as we want to be. I guess, tho, if we had the house worked over and the yard straightened up, some walks made, the walls and floors all in nice shape, and furniture such as we want it, we shouldn't have the farm doing it, should we, big boy?

Maurice.—Shucks, no! By jing, though, that tile silo takes my eye!

Louise.—Let me see it.

Maurice.—No picture here, just a description. Want a piece of bacon? (Passes plate.)

Louise.—Thanks, no more. I've finished.

Maurice.—Eat your breakfast. (Getting up from table) Guess I'd better get going, or that cornfield will suffer. (Turns from door.) Goodbye, Pollykins. (Exit right.)

Louise.—Goodbye, Maurice. (She gets up, starts to collect dishes.) I don't see why he didn't kiss me before he went. He called me Pollykins, though, and he said I looked sweet—but—he was a lot more enthusiastic about that silo than about rugs and paper,—I guess I'm silly.—(Sinks into chair, sits still, dejectedly looking into space.) (Enter Jimmie, Left.)

Jimmie.—Marched right in the front way 'cause I wanted to. Mother sent me to—why, what's the matter, Lou?

(Louise rouses herself suddenly, seemingly with difficulty, as from a reverie. She gets up and starts at the dishes again.)

Louise.—I was—I was dreaming, Jimmie.

Curtain.

ACT II. SCENE I.

(Three months later. Same room as before. Telephone added since last scene. It is just past supper time. Maurice is sitting in rocker at right of table. The clink of dishes comes from right. Jimmie appears at door right, wiping a plate.)

Jimmie.—Maurice, are you going to vote for the auditorium tomorrow?

Maurice.—By George! Jimmie, that reminds me. Will you stay here with my wife while I go to town to figure with a bunch of the boys? I'd clean forgot about it.

Jimmie.—(Hesitatingly) I guess I could. I never told Mother I'd stay only till after supper.

Louise.—(Appearing behind Jimmie wiping her hands. She doesn't look so fresh and hopeful as she did in last scene. The realities have differed **too** widely from the dreams.) Maurice, if you're going to town, I'm going over to see your mother a little while. She's pretty lonely and not feeling well just now. She's tired out.

Maurice.—Oh, bugs! She's all right. She gets plenty to eat and wear and she and Father don't happen to have any debts to pay off. I don't know why there should be anything the matter with her.

Louise.—Oh, Maurice, where are there any bright spots in your mother's life? We don't make as many for her as we might. You don't understand.

Maurice.—How are you going?

Louise.—(Hesitatingly) Why—I—why Jimmie will run up to Father's and get the Ford and take me, won't your Jimmie?

Jimmie.—Sure thing, Lou.

Maurice.—Well, I'm going up to talk to some of the boys a little while. Won't be gone more than an hour, maybe not so long. (Takes hat from wall. Exit left. Jimmie and Louise stand talking, Jimmie still with his dish towel and plate.)

Jimmie.—I wonder if Maurice will vote against the auditorium again tomorrow?

Louise.—I'm afraid he will, Jimmie. I've tried and tried to make him see what that community auditorium means to this community, but somehow he can't understand. He knows the value of scientific farming because it can be measured at any time in dollars and cents; but anything that you can't keep books on, no difference how big it is, he can't see it. Maybe he will sometime.

Jimmie.—Bet you we get that auditorium whether he votes for it or not.

Louise.—Perhaps so, Jimmie. But run along. Cut across the field—it's shorter—and get the Ford. I'll call Mother. Maybe she'd like to go along.

Jimmie.—(Starting off thru kitchen right) Be back in a jiffy. (Exit Jimmie. Louise rings telephone, two shorts, one long. Takes down receiver. No result. Tries again.)

Louise.—Mother? This is Louise.—Just finished washing dishes.—Yes, he's coming home now after the Ford to take me over to Mother Peterson's for a little while. Don't you want to go along?—Just to brighten things up a little for her. She wasn't well day before yesterday.—Ha, ha, you really think so?—Well, you'll go along then?—Just went to town for a little while. (Knock at door left.) Somebody's knocking. Goodbye, little Mother. (She goes to door and opens it. Enter Thompson.)

Louise.—Hello Clarence. Where did you spring from? Sit down and unburden your mind, I suppose you've another idea.

Thompson.—Ye-es, ye-es, it's original this time, too. I'll try not to shift responsibility.

Louise.—Out with it.

Thompson.—To the point then. We haven't yet been able to get teacher for your place. Now, I haven't let it go just to put up something on you, even if I did tell you last spring that I wished you'd ditch Maurice and stay on the job. I know that your ideal of married life isn't to have the housewife off doing something else. But nevertheless, I came down here to try to paint to you in glowing colors the proposition of having a salary flowing into the family coffers during the winter when a pair of newlyweds aren't making money hand over fist. To tell the truth in a few words, I'd do most anything in the world to induce you to take the same old job for this year.

Louise.—(Rousing herself from a thinking spell) How about the vote on the auditorium tomorrow, Clarence?

Thompson.—I'm not sure yet. It will be pretty close. Some are working hard against us, and Maurice is one of them, Louise.

Louise.—Yes, I know. He doesn't understand. I've tried, but I haven't succeeded yet. I hope he will sometime.

Thompson.—He must.

Louise.—I'll take the job, Clarence. On the job Monday. Satisfactory, Mr. Superintendent?

Thompson.—You will? How can I tell you how much I appreciate that?

Louise.—(Brightly) By putting the auditorium thru in spite of opposition and (pause—then playfully) writing Elizabeth a long letter and sending her my love.

Thompson.—I'll do it, both of them. (Starting to go) I suspect I should be in town right now working on the first one. Goodbye.

Louise.—Goodbye, Clarence. (Exit Clarence.)

(Louise busies herself for a few moments taking off apron and getting hat and coat.) I don't see what is keeping Jimmie so long. (Enter Maurice left, quite evidently in a rage.)

Maurice.—What in thunder was Thompson doing here?

Louise.—(Bewildered) Why Maurice,—I—what—?

Maurice.—He can go crosswise with me on an election if he **wants** to; but by George, I'll not have him come soft-soapin' around my wife! What kind of palaver was he dealing out?—Go on, talk, Louise.

Louise.—(With sudden determination. Her manner is quiet, she is calm; but her voice has a commanding note and her jaw a dangerous set that Maurice has never seen.) I'll talk all right, Maurice, and you'll hear me through. Moreover I'll not tell you what Clarence Thompson was here for until I've told you some other things. One week before we were married we talked about whether we would fall into ruts. You were sure we couldn't. I hoped that when we did get into one we'd be big enough and could understand ourselves and each other well enough to get out. The fact is, we're in a good deep one, the rut of misunderstanding, and it seems just now to run into the rut of mistrust. So far we've had no success in climbing out. You understand perfectly that scientific farming is valuable. You can measure its results in dollars and cents. You don't realize that an understanding sympathy between yourself and your wife, and the happy little home that results, are valuable. You've never seen them measured in dollars and cents. They are measured in terms of living—worth-while, useful, happy living. You show that you don't understand these terms when you persistently refuse to talk your business affairs with me, and when you quite as persistently refuse to help me do one thing to make our little house cosy and homey until after you've bought that tile silo.

Your vision for the community doesn't include anything beyond gang-plows and clover seed. You know that school-building was one of the first consolidated school buildings and therefore hasn't an auditorium. You ought to be able to see that the people need that auditorium for lecture courses, University short courses, school entertainments, literary societies, clubs, socials, dozens of things that go to make life worth living; but you don't see that; perhaps you will sometime.

I know three dozen women in this neighborhood whose lives are being lived on the half-acre of ground that is occupied by a house and a henhouse. They are provided with all the drudgery and labor-producing inconveniences possible, and not so much as a sympathetic, understanding word from anybody. My mother was one of them till I waked up. Your mother is there yet. Sheer grit is all that keep half of them from going crazy. I refused to be one of them myself. Clarence was here trying to get me to take my place back in spite of being married. I'm going to do it. Maybe cooking and sweeping will suffer a little. I'll do the best I can. With my salary I'll at least be able to tidy things up a bit and I'll have something else to think about besides ruts. Oh, Maurice, I do so want you to understand! (She looks at him appealingly. No response. She drops into a chair, her head on her arms, on the table. Maurice has listened to first of this speech awestruck, then sunk into a chair, elbows on knees, face in hands. Automobile horn from off stage left.)

Jimmie.—(Offstage left) Come on, Lou. I twisted 'er till I'm 'bout twisted out but I got 'er twisted.

(Louise gets up in half-daze. Starts off left.)

Curtain.

ACT II. SCENE II.

(Back yard at Lige Peterson's. Morning second day after closing of last scene. Grindstone downstage left. Washpan, bucket of water and tin cup sitting on box right. Enter Mr. Peterson left carrying an ax. Goes to grindstone.)

Peterson.—(Gruffly) Come out here and turn this stone for me. I can't fix fence and have to do trimmin' around with a dull ax. (Enter Mrs. Peterson right, wearing an old dress and a sunbonnet.)

Peterson.—Bring a cup of water with you, Nancy. (Mrs. Peterson goes up to the box, picks up cup, dips a cupful of water, holds it up above the bucket and slowly pours it back. Her vacant expression and queer actions indicate a mind tottering in the balance. Mr. Peterson looks around from examining his ax when he hears the trickle of water.)

Peterson.—Nancy, what in tunket is the matter with ye? You act like you was loony. Get a move on here. I want to get that fence row trimmed out along the east side of the back forty and get the fence put to rights this week. (Mrs. Peterson rouses herself from a sort of stupor, dips a cupful of water and comes to the grindstone.)

Mrs. Peterson.—(Wearily) All right, Lige. (Pours on all the water and begins to turn.)

Peterson.—Nancy! Well for the love o' Esau, turn the other way. Ain't you learned to grind an ax yet?

Mrs. Peterson.—I guess not, Lige. I—I'm sort o' tired. (They grind a moment in silence. Mrs. Peterson suddenly stops.) Lige, how did the vote go yesterday?

Mr. Peterson.—Go on and turn that grindstone, Nancy. They got the blasted thing. I gravy, I don't know what's the matter with Maurice. He didn't show up to vote at all and Joe Saunders got hold of young Pete Bosworth and turned him over and Thompson got Harve Woods' Ford and just naturally saw to it that every man in the neighborhood that would vote for it got to the polls.

Mrs. Peterson.—Ain't it ground, Lige?

Peterson.—Just begun, Nancy. (Enter Maurice, left.)

Maurice.—Morning.

Mr. and Mrs. Peterson.—Why, howdy, Maurice.

Peterson.—Nancy, you go on in the house and let Maurice help me here. Maybe he ain't so loony but what he can turn a grindstone.

Mrs. Peterson.—(Going) I ain't feeling right well today, Lige,—sort o' tired. (Maurice who seems to be thinking away off in space, automatically begins to turn.)

Peterson.—I guess you might turn the other way too, Maurice. (Maurice reverses.) There's one thing your scientific farmin' can't get around and that's grinding up your ax and trimming out the fence rows.

Maurice.—I suppose not, Pa, but it might suggest getting a carborundum wheel and spending less time grinding and more time trimming. (Enter Jimmie Woods, hurriedly left.)

Jimmie.—O, Mr. Peterson—why, morning, Maurice.

Maurice.—Mornin', Jimmie.

Jimmie.—Mr. Peterson, Pop sent me over to borrow your tile-spade.

We're digging the drain to that bath tub and kitchen sink we're putting in, and Pop said he didn't want to dig up the whole yard with that clumsy old spade of ours.

Peterson.—Sure, you can have it. It's down at the barn. (Starts off left after it. Jimmie starts to follow.)

Maurice.—Drive the Ford?

Jimmie.—No, rode old Dan. The Ford did such a good day's work yesterday I thought I'd let it rest today. Gee but I'm glad the vote went as it did. Why, I'll bet my new Sunday breeches against your old straw hat that as soon as things get to happening at that new community auditorium and folks find out that there are half a dozen other people in this county besides themselves, old Jerry Mayhew will only give his wife a jawin' seven times a day instead of eleven and old "tight-wad" Miller will put running water in the house. So long, Maurice. (Exit Jimmie on the run.)

Maurice.—(Throws one leg across end of grindstone frame, chin on hand, gazing off into space.) I wonder, I wonder.

Curtain.

ACT III.

Living room of the little house one week later than the time of Act II. About 7:00 P. M. Louise is putting on jacket, hat and gloves. Maurice appears in doorway, just having finished his chores.

Louise.—Your supper is in there on the table. If you had come when I called you, we could have eaten together.

Maurice.—I was giving the horses hay and bedding. I suppose I could have come and done that later but I didn't know you were going away tonight.

Louise.—You'd better eat before it gets any colder than it is.

Maurice.—(Paying no attention but coming into the room) Where are you going tonight, Louise?

Louise.—I'm going to rehearse a bunch of high school pupils on a play they want to give. Tonight is the first rehearsal. I hadn't intended to start anything of that sort so early in the year but they began to ask about it and when I thought it over I decided to go right to work. There are about fourteen of them in the play and they're the fourteen that make a large part of the crowd for all the silly kissing parties they usually have at this time of year. The young folks like this sort of thing and will work on it; and since the auditorium isn't built yet to help out in any community socials or entertainments, I think they're spending their time more profitably than they would otherwise. Of course, we need the auditorium for the play, but we'll manage somehow since it's coming—Maurice—I think I hear Jimmie coming now. I'll go then. Sorry your supper is cold, but I had to go. See you later. (Starting. Jimmie sticks head in at door left.)

Jimmie.—Better be a-gettin' out here.

Louise.—I'm going right now. Maurice, come on and eat your supper. I'll get you the butter. I forgot it. (Louise goes out right, Maurice follows. Jimmie follows across stage, makes critical survey of adjoining room.)

Jimmie.—Umh! cold supper. (Casting furtive glances off stage right)
And now that they are married,
They never bill and coo,
But—they never fret and quarrel as other couples do.
She does **her** work,
He does **his**,
Guess young Jimmie'd better tend to his biz.

(Enter Louise right.)

Louise.—Perhaps so, Jimmie. Are you cranked up?

Jimmie.—(Dodging her and going off left) Crankin' right now, Lou.
(Exeunt Jimmie and Louise. Maurice comes back in at door right, slams his hat into a far corner, strides across to table, hands in pockets, sits down on a corner of table left, looking gloomily off into space. Mrs. Peterson appears at door right, bareheaded, wearing a pair of men's shoes, an old dress and a man's overcoat; hair dishevelled. She walks in and sits down right of table without Maurice's seeing her.)

Mrs. Peterson.—I'm tired Maurice. Aren't you?

Maurice.—(Startled) Why, Ma, what are you doing here?

Mrs. Peterson.—Why—I—guess I don't know. Somebody, Little Billy or Mother, or God or somebody, told me to go and see Dr. Saunders. I guess that's where I'm going. But, Maurice, I'm tired.

Maurice.—(Horror-stricken. It hasn't entirely dawned on him that his mother's mind is unbalanced.) Ma, what on earth is the matter? Where's Pa?

Mrs. Peterson.—(With pitiful exhibition of cunning) He don't know I'm gone. He was at the barn when I left. I didn't wear any shoes so he wouldn't hear me pass the barn. I got Tim Valentine to loan me a pair as I came by.

Maurice.—You walked all the way out here? No wonder you're tired.

Mrs. Peterson.—I was waiting for Lige to come on in to supper, when God or whoever it was, told me to go see Doctor Saunders and do what he said and I just came on—I thought the Doctor would be here. I—I'm so tired.

Maurice.—(Controlling himself with a powerful effort, soothingly) Suppose I call him and tell him you're waiting here to see him. Will that be all right?

Mrs. Peterson.—Why, I guess so. Yes, I **am** tired.

(Maurice goes to telephone, rings, but no result; rings again, no result. He suddenly takes receiver from his ear and listens outside.)

Maurice.—By George, I believe that's his car I hear down the road. That's luck. (Hangs up receiver and runs out at door left. Offstage left.) Hey, Doc! Doc! (Mrs. Peterson sits still a moment, then turns the coat collar up around her neck, shivers slightly, then picks up a paper from the table and fans herself. Calls.) Doctor, Doctor, I'm—I'm tired. (Enter Maurice and Doctor.)

Doctor.—(Brightly) How do you do, Mrs. Peterson? I wasn't expecting to see you tonight. (Takes her hand and pulls out watch to take her pulse.)

Mrs. Peterson.—God, or Little Billy or somebody told me to come to see you. I'm tired, Doctor.

Doctor.—You'll do what I tell you, so you can get rested and well again, won't you?

Mrs. Peterson.—Yes, God told me to do what you said.

Doctor.—All right, then, we'll fix you up in a little while, I think. (Goes to his little case, which he left sitting on the table, to ferret out a couple of small tablets.) Get me a glass of water, Peterson. (Maurice gets it quickly. Enter old man Peterson.)

Peterson.—(Ashen-faced) Maurice, where's Ma? Tim Valentine said—why, Ma—

Mrs. Peterson.—Oh, Lige, I can't turn the grindstone the other way. I'm tired.

Doctor.—(Motions imperatively to Peterson to keep still.) Never mind, Mrs. Peterson, it's all right. Now, in a minute I want you to take these two little tablets. Here we are! (Maurice enters with water) Now then. (She takes tablets) That's fine. Get up now and—(He takes her by the arm to help her and she jerks violently away.) Didn't God tell you to do what I told you so you'd get rested?

Mrs. Peterson.—Yes, but he told me I'd better not let you take hold of my arm.

Doctor.—All right, I won't then. You come on and go upstairs and lie down on the bed and you'll rest fine and then when you've rested some I'll come to see you again. That will be all right, won't it?

Mrs. Peterson.—Yes, I think so Doctor. Oh, I'm so tired. (She goes out right, the Doctor watches from door to see that she goes upstairs.)

Maurice.—(When Doctor turns away from the door) Will she get well, Doctor? What made her that way anyhow? What did it?

Mr. Peterson.—Yes, what was it? What'll help her?

Doctor.—I'll tell you, Peterson, frankly. There's nothing strange nor unusual about the case. The monotony of her life has done it. For twenty-five years she has done work, hard work, and lots of it. She has had no break in kind or amount of it, no modern conveniences to lessen it or change it. During that time she has had no outside interests to break the monotony, just the same thing three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, year in and year out. Furthermore, during that twenty-five years, the sympathetic, understanding cheery words that her ears have heard have been mighty few and far between. Since you're married and gone, Maurice, it has been even worse than before; and the strain has just naturally been too much. About three-fourths of the women in this neighborhood are in the same condition except that most of them have managed to hold on and not go noticeably over the line.

All those tablets will do will be to make her sleep. She may be straight again when she wakes up. Whether she is or whether she isn't, she must have absolute rest, things must be made pleasant around her and she should have a complete change for a time. If she isn't straight in her mind when she wakes up, she may be all right soon; in fact the chances are rather good that she will be. If she is all right and you let things alone as they are, she'll stagger across the line again almost any time.

Maurice.—We'll do anything in the world you say for her. (Takes Saunders' hand with a good firm grip.) I've got some things straight tonight that I never had straight before and that I've been fighting myself over for a week and a half, Doctor.

Peterson.—Yes—I gravy, jest you show us how, Doc. Whey I never noticed nothin' wrong.

Doctor.—There are plenty of folks that need just the jolt you've had, men. If you have been able to decide for yourself in the last half-hour what some of the really valuable things in this game of living are, you can do no less than try to leaven the community with some of those worth-while things.

Maurice.—I'll do it, Saunders. I've got 'er straight now.

Peterson.—You bet, I gravy! If only Ma gets well. (Enter Louise and Jimmie left.)

Louise.—Is she here? Tim Valentine was telling a story about Mother Peterson coming past his house crazy and coming on over this direction. Is she here?

Maurice.—She's upstairs asleep now, dear. And the Doctor thinks there's hope—and Father and I see a thing or two we hadn't seen.

Louise.—Jimmie, you go home and tell Mother so she won't be worried when she hears it. Tell her I'll call her up after awhile.

Jimmie.—All right, Lou. (Exit.)

Doctor.—I'll go up and see that she's resting all right before I go. I'll come back again in the morning. She'll probably sleep till then. We'll hope for the best. (Exit right.)

Maurice.—(Stands a moment looking fondly at Louise, then slips an arm around her as of old.) I've got some things straight tonight. You were right when you told me I didn't understand. I didn't but I'm getting things straight in my brain now. **Now** we can work together to make a happy little home and to help the whole community see the valuable things instead of the worthless things.

Louise.—Maurice, I'm so happy. We'll begin right away.

Maurice.—We'll begin by making the little home cosy and by doing all that's possible to make it up to the little Mother—and to you, Pollykins.

Curtain.

