

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

by

Winifred Hawkrige

THE FLORIST SHOP

WALTER H. BAKER CO., BOSTON
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The Florist Shop

A Comedy in One Act

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WINIFRED HAWKRIDGE

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THE FLORIST SHOP

CHARACTERS

MAUDE. The florist's bookkeeper. Young and fairly good-looking. Her voice drips with sympathy.

HENRY. An ordinary, tough office-boy, about sixteen. He gives the impression of being in long trousers for the first time. He is, in spite of his invulnerable exterior, impressionable.

SLOVSKY. The middle-aged Jewish proprietor of the shop.

MISS WELLS. A timid, talkative spinster, dressed in timid, tasteful colors. Her hat, in a modest way, is crisper and more daring than the rest of her costume. She is faded, sweet, rather colorless, reminiscent of a youth which has dwindled rather than ripened to middle age.

MR. JACKSON. Rather over than under medium height. Baldish, pale, with sandy mustache, and a solemn, somewhat pompous manner. Slightly older than Miss Wells.

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THE FLORIST SHOP

SCENE: *A Florist Shop. At the back, a broad show window, dressed with flowers, — azaleas, roses, daffodils, violets. To the right of the window, a glass door, leading from the street. On both door and window, the name "Slovsky," in bold script, shows reversed. Two steps lead down from the door into the shop. The woodwork is white, and the floor tiled irregularly in large blue and white flagstones. On the right, upstage, a glass showcase filled with flowers, and beyond, further downstage, in a group of bay trees and flowering azaleas, a plaster Cupid, designed for garden statuary. On the left, shelves, on which are grouped flowers, plants, vases, attractive wicker baskets, and other paraphernalia of the trade. Over the shelves, a mirror, built in. At left-centre is a white counter, on which are pen and ink, envelopes, etc., a telephone and ledgers. At lower left, an arched doorway leads to another part of the shop. The curtain rises on Maude, seated behind the counter, at work on a ledger, and Henry, who is arranging flowers in the case.*

TIME: *Early morning of a brilliant April day.*

MAUDE [*as the telephone rings*] Hel-lo! This is Slovsky's. Yes 'm, we make a specialty of taste-

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ful offerings. [*Her voice drops to a tone of great sympathy.*] Soitenly, you kin leave it to us, and we will insure its being quiet and in good taste. If you'll just give me some idea of who the party was. [*Still greater sympathy.*] Oh! a little baby! Ain't that too bad. [*Sincerely.*] Well, we must look on these things as all for the best. I would suggest six dozen of them tiny white Mignon rosebuds, in a long spray, with white ribbon. The general effeck will be all green and white — light and pretty, and kinder inner-cent. [*Soothingly reassuring.*] Promptly at two — I'll see to it myself. [*Hangs up the receiver.*] Henry, ain't that sad? A little baby only six months old. I wonder what it died of? Teeth, prob'ly.

HENRY [*toughly*] Aw, Maude, I've seen you take a dozen of them funeral orders a day, for the last four years, an' you still got a weep f'r every one of them. Sniffles is your middle name. What's it to you?

MAUDE [*earnestly*] In a way it ain't nothing, but I always get to thinking how it prob'ly suffered, and how the fam'ly suffered, and what it'd been like if it lived to grow up — and how what's jest "Two o'clock prompt" to Slovsky's is something like eternal doom to them, and what's jest 29 Main Street to Slovsky's errand boy is shelterin' thoity or foity souls in anguish. I like to think of them things, Henry. It makes the woik more interestin'.

HENRY [*moved by her eloquence, and therefore tougher than usual*] Aw, cut out the sob stuff!

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MAUDE. Up to the rubber fact'ry, now, I made two a week more, but I did n't git real life. But here — honest — I read to improve my mind, the way everyone ought to, but I often think Florence Barclay never wrote nothing half so sad or romantic as what goes on right under my nose.

HENRY [*jeering*] You'd oughter save your stren'th. All this sad, sobby slush takes it outer you.

MAUDE. It ain't all sad. Many's the love affair I've watched grow from a fifty-cent bunch of vi'lets to a fifty-dollar shower bouquet of roses and orange blossoms — all bought at Slovsky's. D' y' ever stop to think, there ain't been a bright spot or a dark spot in anyone's life in this town but what Slovsky's got a record of it in their day-book? Henry, if you want to know a man's real nature, look at his florist's bills.

HENRY. I bet it don't woik.

MAUDE [*opening the book at random*] Well, here's Billy Trendall; you know, that rich old bachelor. Oct. 1, four dozen chrysanthemums to Miss Vi'let Harvey; Oct. 7, same goil, three dozen chrysanthemums. That's all f'r Vi'let. Dec. 2, to Miss Mary Beal — she come out Thanksgiving time — one double size bunch of vi'lets. Dec. 15, four dozen American Beauties to Miss Harriet Prouty. He's jest telephoned in an order of lilacs for that new bud that made such a hit. He's been going on like this f'r years.

HENRY [*struck by a new thought*] Say, Slovsky's would have to close, would n't it, if it was n't f'r nuts like him?

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MAUDE. Jest the same, he's got taste. He starts every goil on a new flower. It jars me when they keep on sending the same kind to every one, as if there was n't any difference between them.

Enter Slovsky.

MAUDE. Good morning, Mr. Slovsky.

SLOVSKY [*in good humor*] Good morning, Maude. Business is good this morning. Two weddings, a reception and six funerals, besides the reg'lar trade.

MAUDE. I gotter attend to a poor little baby's funeral myself, Mr. Slovsky. *Exit.*

HENRY. Say, you orter heard Maude sobbin' on over that kid's funeral. She was wise 'n ever. You'd think she was dead herself. I says to her, "What's it to you?" I says, but she —

SLOVSKY [*severely*] Young man! Them cheap jokes you make with that girl don't go here, see?

HENRY. Aw, I was just kiddin'. What harm did it do?

SLOVSKY. In the pants business, which my brother is in, you could make fun of that girl's sympathetic nature all you wanted, because there is a reg'lar call for coats and pants, whether people got it hard hearts or soft ones.

HENRY. Huh?

SLOVSKY. When do we have our biggest sales in the florist business? On Christmas Day and St. Valentine's Day. In other words, when everyone's full of sentimental thoughts. My brother, now all he needs to do is to fit people's arms and legs, which is easy because they stays the same size,

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but what we got to fit is people's hearts, — which is always changing. That's where Maude is worth her weight in gold. Whether it's a funeral or a wedding, if the party hears a person on the other end of the wire entering into all their joys and sorrows, why, next time they got an order to place, — it goes to Slovsky's. You leave Maude alone.

Reënter MAUDE. She seats herself at desk.

[*Continuing to Henry*] You go send off them azalea plants to the Home for Indignant Females.

Exit Henry leisurely.

SLOVSKY [*going to Maude's desk in genial mood*] Well, Maude, this sending complimentary flowers to customers was a great little scheme of yours. Them two debbitante society buds, now, you sent roses to when they got engaged has just sent in, on account of it, their wedding orders. You have n't seen in the papers, now, any more debbitantes likely to bring trade?

MAUDE [*rather shortly*] Lord knows the debbitantes get enough flowers. There's others would appreciate them more.

SLOVSKY. You stick to the debbitantes — they're the best proposition. Sent anythink off lately?

MAUDE. Yes [*a pause*]; some orchids last night.

SLOVSKY [*slowly*] Ah! orchids. I don't know as you need send out orchids. Roses is good enough, or even sweet peas. Unless it was very classy trade?

MAUDE [*after a pause*] It was a party that would appreciate them.

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SLOVSKY [*with a keen glance at her*] Well, I leave it to your judgment. Only, be careful don't throw away no orchids for nothing. *Exit.*

MAUDE [*enigmatically*] H'm. [*Henry enters with a jar of bachelor's-buttons, which he arranges. He drops some blossoms on the floor.*] Careful, Henry, you dropped some of them bachelor buttons. [*Henry picks them up hastily, leaving one on the floor. The telephone rings.*]

MAUDE [*taking up the receiver*] You want some flowers sent to your wife; what kind shall I send? [*Coldly*] You ain't got no preferences? [*Coldly*] Very well, then, I can select them myself. Any message? [*Disappointed tone*] No? Oh, yes, your card. [*In significant tones, with deep sarcasm*] We have a supply of them here. [*Hangs up receiver with a bang.*] Well, what d' you think of that, Henry? That was young Davis who owns the rubber. This is their wedding anniversary — married just a year ago. They had the biggest wedding we ever sent out. The bride's bouquet was a shower of white orchids and lilies of the valley, poifectly enormous. And last month he leaves a standing order for American Beauties every morning to that Mademoiselle Looey over to the Gaiety. Henry, there's a lot of suffering goes on in the homes of the rich.

HENRY. Aw, I'd just as lief suffer. [*He starts with empty tray for other room.*]

MAUDE [*calling after him; she has an inspiration*] Henry! You go tell Slovsky to dooplicate that shower bouquet of orchids and lilies of the

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valley, and send them on to Mrs. Davis, with his card.

HENRY [*returning, interested*] What's the dope, Maude?

MAUDE [*sentimentally*] Who knows, but if he returns after an evening spent with gay companions to find his bride of a year weepin' over a wedding bouquet of white orchids and lilies of the valley — who knows but it may stir up memories of the past?

HENRY [*impressed*] Gee! Who knows but you may fix that up, Maude? What'll you bet?

MAUDE. There's lots that goes on under my nose I'd like to fix up. [*Confidentially*] I got a case now, Henry, I'm woikin' on —

HENRY. What d' y' mean — workin' on?

MAUDE [*mysteriously*] Never you mind. [*The telephone rings. She answers it.*] Yes, madam, those violets came from us. No, we did not forgit the card. I understood from the party that the party did not want their name di-vulged.

HENRY. Say, that gink must have money to burn to send flowers and not git the credit for it.

MAUDE [*impressively*] Don't you believe it. It makes him seem to care more than the men who put their cards in. And she gets thinking and thinking who it can be, and when she finds out she's half dippy about him. He won't seem like a real man — he'll seem all she imagined a man might be before she found out they was n't.

The door opens and Miss Wells enters, hesitatingly. She has the manner of entering on an adventure. She advances by little spurts, flutter-

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ing and retreating. She is wearing on her coat a charming coquettish spray of purple orchids, tied with a ribbon. Henry comes forward.

HENRY. Can I show you something?

MISS WELLS [*fluttering*] Is — is — could I see the young lady?

HENRY [*bawling, at which Miss Wells shrinks*] Maude! Lady to see you.

MAUDE [*coming forward, very cordially*] Why, how d' you do, Miss Wells. I ain't seen you since you came in here Easter to buy that lily for your fiancay. Ever since I been here — four years — you 've sent him an Easter lily for Easter. I think it 's a lovely idea.

MISS WELLS. I have sent Mr. Jackson a lily at Eastertide ever since we became engaged — fifteen years ago.

MAUDE [*shortly*] Fifteen years must seem a long time to be engaged.

MISS WELLS [*with a touch of dignity*] Both Mr. Jackson and I believe in long engagements. When Mr. Jackson's business affairs get so he can leave them for a few weeks — we 've always planned — and of course I expect you to help me choose the flowers.

MAUDE. I always am partial to a pink wedding, myself.

MISS WELLS. When we were first engaged he used to say pink was my color.

HENRY [*listening, grins derisively*] Huh!

MAUDE [*sharply*] Henry, you sent that Davis order off? If you ain't, you better get at it.

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[*Henry slouches off.*] Then you just came in to look around to-day?

MISS WELLS [*moves flutteringly nearer, points to her orchids*] I — I came about — these. I suppose I should n't wear them till I made sure — but they were too lovely. [*With a little laugh.*]

MAUDE [*woodenly*] Made sure of what?

MISS WELLS [*happily*] That Mr. Jackson sent them. I — I did n't realize he could be so romantic. [*Simply*] It was the way I imagined lovers would act — before I had one.

MAUDE. H'm! Ain't that a new hat you got?

MISS WELLS. I think — don't you? — in the spring — the April sunshine makes us look shabby. I felt I had to buy a new hat.

MAUDE. I know. In the spring I always want to start something myself.

MISS WELLS [*happily*] I think it must have been the Easter lily that — started Mr. Jackson. The day after I came here and ordered the lily as usual — these [*touching the flowers*] began to arrive. It seems so — so reckless for Mr. Jackson. I always understood the orchid was a very expensive flower. Though the day after we were engaged, he sent me a beautiful bouquet — two dozen red carnations.

MAUDE [*sotto voce*] Red carnations is always the sign of a gink!

MISS WELLS. I beg pardon?

MAUDE [*sharply*] Look here, did Mr. Jackson tell you he sent them orchids?

MISS WELLS. No; he simply looked at them and said: "Someone has been getting reckless

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with her money." He — he — frequently says playful things.

MAUDE. H'm. What did you say?

MISS WELLS. I said: "They were sent to me without a name — but I think I recognize the donor."

MAUDE [*with sudden joy*] Oh, you said that, did you? How 'd he act?

MISS WELLS. He said, jokingly, "A fool and his money are soon parted." Then we dropped the matter. From his off-hand manner I saw he did not want further thanks.

MAUDE [*disappointed*] Oh, yes. [*Busies herself at ledger. Miss Wells hesitates, lingers and approaches timidly.*]

MISS WELLS. Of course it *was* Mr. Jackson. There 's no one else it could have been?

MAUDE [*deliberately secretive*] I ain't allowed to di-vulge the name of the party. The party says to me, "The lady would n't remember me," he says —

MISS WELLS [*gasping*] He said?

MAUDE [*returns to ledger*] So I ain't got any right to let the cat out the bag.

MISS WELLS [*excited*] Then it was n't Mr. Jackson.

MAUDE [*mysteriously*] I'll tell you this. A man that sends carnations he usually sticks to carnations. He don't suddenly switch to orchids.

MISS WELLS [*muses*] When I was in high school, a boy named Staples sent me a valentine. The boys called him Stoops. He was cross-eyed. This — gentleman — did you notice his eyes?

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MAUDE. The handsomest pair of large, boining brown eyes I ever seen.

MISS WELLS [*distinctly fluttered*] Burning brown eyes! [*Contemplates the idea.*] I — I have never seen exactly that kind of eye. Mr. Jackson's are light brown, but, no — I should n't call them burning, exactly. What was his general appearance?

MAUDE. Tall, imposing, well set up — the bearing of a count — or an adventurer!

MISS WELLS [*frightened, yet delighted*] You don't think he could be an adventurer, do you? I — I have never happened to meet one —

MAUDE. Oh, no, indeed! His manner was grave and kind — yet bitter — as if some woman had made him suffer. I thought he had a secret sorrow.

MISS WELLS. As I remember Stoops, he was rather solemn — almost sulky; but I hardly think it was because of a woman. Of course, the teacher used to keep him after school a great deal — unjustly I sometimes thought, but — [*disappointed*] Yes, — it may be Staples.

MAUDE [*positively*] The name was not Staples.

MISS WELLS. He gave you his name?

MAUDE [*firmly*] Which I am not at liberty to divulge.

MISS WELLS. Did he say anything which might give a clue —

MAUDE. When I asked him for his card, he said: "Let the flowers carry their own message. She —" His voice broke here.

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MISS WELLS [*sympathetically*] Poor fellow!

MAUDE. "She would n't recall me." [*Returns to books as if matter were closed.*]

MISS WELLS [*coming nearer, timidly*] What — what color was his hair?

MAUDE. Jet black — with a sprinkling of white about his temples. But not from age.

MISS WELLS. He has suffered. [*Consciously*] Ah! He must think harshly of women.

MAUDE [*rallying her*] Them orchids don't look it, do they? Do you know what them kind costs? Two dollars apiece!

MISS WELLS. Apiece! [*She is staggered.*] Have you — is there a mirror here? [*Maude indicates one; Miss Wells studies it eagerly, then pulls out her hair a trifle about her face and shakes her head rather sadly.*] No!

MAUDE. I've always heard you was considered very pretty.

MISS WELLS [*without illusions*] Nobody's told me so for years.

MAUDE. Some men don't change. To them a woman once beautiful is always beautiful.

MISS WELLS [*timidly*] I've always supposed that was because they did n't take time to notice she had changed.

MAUDE. He notices. He said to me to-day —

MISS WELLS [*gasping*] He's been here to-day?

MAUDE [*nods*] He stood right at that shelf. [*With an inspiration*] That very bachelor's-button [*points to floor*] dropped from his coat.

MISS WELLS [*while Maude busies herself with*

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her books surreptitiously picks up the flower and hides it in her purse] Bachelor's-buttons! Poor fellow!

MAUDE. He said: "I wonder by what happy chance she wore lilacs on her hat?"

MISS WELLS. Some years ago I took some lilacs to church. There was an exchange rector. Does — does this gentleman — with the burning eyes — look like a rector?

MAUDE [*disgusted*] Not him. He had on his vest right side to and wore his clothes with an indescribable air of distinction. I think he had on one of them Arrow collars you see in the street cars.

MISS WELLS [*surveys herself again in mirror, gives a little pull to her coat, and adjusts her hat*] Do — do you think he lives here in town?

MAUDE. He was more like a man who has knocked about considerable, equally at home with princes and paupers — a citizen of the world.

MISS WELLS. And his character?

MAUDE. Determined. One who would sweep all obstikles before him.

MISS WELLS [*rather frightened*] A — a strong man?

MAUDE. With his passions under poifick control, but a whoilwind when roused.

MISS WELLS. Perhaps — perhaps I had better keep this from Mr. Jackson.

MAUDE [*nonplussed, then emphatically*] I soitenly should n't. The sooner Mr. Jackson knows, the better for all concerned.

MISS WELLS [*wavering*] Perhaps. But I

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must n't take any more of your time. [*She starts to go. Enter Slovsky.*]

SLOVSKY [*suavely to Miss Wells*] Are you being waited on, madam?

MISS WELLS [*embarrassed*] Thank you, I don't want [*under his disapproval*] — I might look at some bulbs.

SLOVSKY [*points to other room*] In the other room. [*Miss Wells turns to other room. He bars her path, with glance at Maude*] Them are beautiful orchids, now, madam. I was admiring them from the moment I saw them.

MISS WELLS [*embarrassed*] They — they came from here.

SLOVSKY [*feigning surprise*] Here, Slovsky's? Guess I'm losing track of things. [*Looks at Maude.*] Or maybe you got them just now?

MISS WELLS [*embarrassed, over shoulder*] No — they were sent to me. *Exit.*

SLOVSKY [*walking to Maude*] You sent them orchids to her?

MAUDE [*doggedly, after a pause*] Yes — I did.

SLOVSKY [*with heavy sarcasm*] I don't seem to remember that we have received from her no large orders for decorations lately, now.

MAUDE. Her name's on our books.

SLOVSKY [*taken back*] That so? A customer, is she? Let me see her account. [*Maude, with an air of being in for it, hands him the book.*]

SLOVSKY [*reads in disgust*] 1913 — One Easter lily. [*Turns page*] 1914 — Another Easter lily. 1915 — Another Easter lily! Say, that's good business — she buys from us annually a seventy-

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nine-cent Easter lily, and to keep up her wallable trade we sends her a five-dollar spray of orchids. Say, are you gone crazy?

MAUDE [*keeps on working*] Prob'ly.

SLOVSKY. She a friend of yours?

MAUDE. I ain't never seen her except in this store. When I buy flowers for my poisonal friends, I pay for them.

SLOVSKY. Your orders was to place flowers free with customers where they would do the most good.

MAUDE. Your instructions was followed. I put them flowers where they would do the most good. They 've done good already.

SLOVSKY [*eagerly*] What? An order?

MAUDE [*shortly*] No, I slipped up against a human savings bank named Jackson.

SLOVSKY. Then where 's the good come in?

MAUDE. Them flowers has made a different woman of her already. She 's waked up; she 's got a new hat. Them flowers has given her what every woman orter have in her life.

SLOVSKY [*restraining his rage*] May I ask what that is?

MAUDE [*shortly*] Romance.

SLOVSKY. Romance! [*Enraged*] Honest, if this was n't a matter of dollars and cents it would be funny! Romance!

MAUDE [*defensively*] She 's been getting younger and more sprightly with every bunch.

SLOVSKY. Every bunch? How long has this been going on?

MAUDE. Dating from last week.

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SLOVSKY. Then dating from last week you may consider yourself fired.

MAUDE [*surprised and upset*] You — you — would n't fire me, Mr. Slovsky? Take it out of my pay, but don't fire me. I'd rather work here than any place I know.

SLOVSKY. You're fired, all right. Slovsky's can't afford you. You're a luxury. A little heart and sentiment is all right for the flower trade. But this is a retail business. You got it enough to stock a wholesale house. You're fired. [*He leaves the room. Maude is sad for a moment, then recovers her cheerfulness.*]

MAUDE. Back to the rubber!

Enter Mr. Jackson. He saunters about, trying to decide how to begin. He starts toward Maude, but lingers near showcase.

MR. JACKSON [*loudly*] What do you call those purple flowers?

MAUDE [*snappily*] Orchids.

MR. JACKSON. What's the price?

MAUDE [*calls*] Henry! [*Enter Henry.*] This gentleman wants to buy some orchids.

HENRY. Say, Maude, I got important business. Can't you attend to him?

MAUDE [*briefly*] I'm fired. I may have too much heart, but I ain't got so much heart I go on workin' for Slovsky free after I'm fired.

HENRY. Fired? Say, you're kidding. Slovsky thinks the world of you, kiddo.

MAUDE [*bitterly*] Go on, wait on the gent. [*Takes a look at Jackson.*] Take it from me, it's

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time I went back to the rubber. I would never of sized him up for better than jonquils. [*Exit to inner room.*]

MR. JACKSON. Have I got to wait here all day?

HENRY [*moving to case, opens it invitingly*] Just a minute, sir. Which kind do you want?

MR. JACKSON. I did n't say I wanted any. I wanted to know the price.

HENRY [*brings out two bouquets*] One dollar for the plain ones; two for the speckled.

MR. JACKSON [*touching a speckled one with awe*] Two dollars a dozen for these?

HENRY. A dozen? Naw, apiece.

MR. JACKSON [*struck all in a heap*] Why — why — it's outrageous! I must see the proprietor at once. Do you hear! I must see the proprietor! [*Maude returns.*]

HENRY. Maude! Here's a gentleman wants to see Mr. Slovsky.

MAUDE [*pins on her veil deliberately*] Well, get him. He's out in back. *Exit Henry.*

MR. JACKSON [*with guile points to the orchids*] Do you sell many of these?

MAUDE. We do. They are popular with the ladies.

MR. JACKSON [*rather struck*] That's so. She seemed to like them.

MAUDE [*taking notice*] Who?

MR. JACKSON. Miss Wells is the lady I referred to. Of Chestnut Street.

MAUDE [*with volumes in her tone*] O-h-h! [*Looks him over. Secretly delighted.*] I've sorter been looking for you, Mr. Jackson.

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MR. JACKSON. Eh? You know me?

MAUDE [*covering*] Did n't we have the pleasure of sending you an Easter lily last week?

MR. JACKSON [*heavily*] Hey? Well — I did n't come about that. I — I happened to be passing, and I thought I 'd inquire who sent those flowers she 's been getting.

MAUDE [*elaborately*] Oh! I will look. [*Searches through ledger.*] They were sent without a card. I am not at liberty to di-vulge the party.

MR. JACKSON. But to one of the family. [*Maude looks inquiringly.*] Practically. I have been engaged to Miss Wells for fifteen years.

MAUDE [*drily*] Oh! Then you 're practically one of the family.

MR. JACKSON. I thought I 'd inquire if the card was overlooked.

MAUDE [*firmly*] The intention of the party was he did not want his name sent.

MR. JACKSON [*with greater interest; rather belligerent*] He! What 'd he look like?

MAUDE [*looks Mr. Jackson over critically*] Some taller than you [*Mr. Jackson straightens himself*] and considerable younger. Handsome as a Greek god!

MR. JACKSON. Well, I 'd like to know what he means! Did he explain himself?

MAUDE. I am only here to take orders. I don't ask a person what their motive is for sending flowers. We don't require a license before we sell them.

MR. JACKSON. An advertising scheme! Did he look like a — a life insurance agent?

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MAUDE [*smiling cryptically*] He looked more like a gentleman who 's never had to soil his hands with trade. [*Mr. Jackson furtively examines his hands.*]

MR. JACKSON. Well, what 'd he say? Remember, it 's my fiancée he 's been sending flowers to.

MAUDE [*affecting reserve*] In — in that case I don't feel I ought to tell you what he said.

MR. JACKSON [*more alarmed*] I insist — or I must speak to the proprietor.

MAUDE [*alarmed*] I'll tell you — though I should n't. [*Mr. Jackson leans forward eagerly.*] He only said: "The best is none too good for her."

MR. JACKSON [*sotto voce*] Two dollars apiece! And she 's kept me in absolute ignorance!

MAUDE [*with false sympathy*] Perhaps you ain't been seeing much of her lately?

MR. JACKSON. Why — I've been busy —

MAUDE. It 's so easy for another to profit by our neglect.

MR. JACKSON. But she does n't know any other men. Why, we've been engaged for fifteen years!

MAUDE [*with covert sarcasm, which Mr. Jackson does not see*] You would n't think she 'd want a change after being engaged to you fifteen years, would you?

MR. JACKSON. Why, no.

MAUDE. Yet, sometimes that 's the kind of engagement gets broken oftenest.

MR. JACKSON [*more alarmed*] You think so?

MAUDE [*musingly*] I suppose it 's because a woman gets so deadly tired of the same man.

THE FLORIST SHOP

Then, when some dashing stranger dazzles her with unaccustomed attentions — why, I s'pose it turns her head. [*Watches effect on Jackson.*]

MR. JACKSON [*excited*] I forbid you to send her any more of that fellow's flowers!

Enter Miss Wells; sees him, and shrinks back.

MISS WELLS [*almost inaudibly*] Mr. Jackson!

MR. JACKSON [*turns and sees her. Bitterly*] Here you are, then. To meet him, I suppose?

MISS WELLS [*guiltily*] To meet whom?

MR. JACKSON [*sternly*] I see you wear his flowers. Tell me the worst. How long has this fellow been in love with you?

MISS WELLS [*nervously*] I — I don't know.

MR. JACKSON [*sternly and reproachfully*] Jessie, I want the truth.

MISS WELLS [*faltering*] It must have been a very long time.

MR. JACKSON. And you've made me think I was the only man you cared for.

MISS WELLS. Truly, James, I did think so — until to-day. [*Maude starts guiltily.*]

MR. JACKSON [*groaning*] Until to-day!

MISS WELLS. I mean — I never knew he cared — until to-day.

MR. JACKSON. And has he turned you from me? After fifteen long years —

MISS WELLS [*with some spirit*] It's the first time they've seemed long to you!

MR. JACKSON [*with intended bitterness*] It's been longer to you, perhaps.

MISS WELLS. Yes, it has been long, James.

THE FLORIST SHOP

When we were first engaged, it was different. You sent me flowers then; you were anxious to please me. You said that you had placed me on a pedestal. [*With a tremulous laugh.*] It's taken me all these years to find out the pedestal was a — was a — was a shelf.

MR. JACKSON [*genuinely surprised*] Why, Jessie — I've always meant to get married some day. We've never got around to it. There have been so many other things.

MISS WELLS. If it had been first in your mind, the other things could have waited. No! I'll say now what I've never dared to think before — you have n't been the sort of lover I've always wanted. [*She glances down at the orchids.*] I can imagine some men — more impetuous than you —

MR. JACKSON [*feeling very badly*] Ah, that's the kind of man he is, I suppose.

MISS WELLS. Sweeping all before him.

MR. JACKSON [*bitterly*] Young and handsome; a dashing stranger making a fool of himself over you — that's what you like!

MISS WELLS. Yes — we do like to have men make fools of themselves over us. It proves they care more for us than for their own appearance.

MR. JACKSON. The devotion of a lifetime is nothing when some good-looking adventurer comes along —

MISS WELLS [*touching her flowers*] Why do you say adventurer?

MR. JACKSON. What else is he? Sending orchids — to another man's fiancée. At two dollars apiece!

THE FLORIST SHOP

MISS WELLS. You've often said it was the sentiment which counted — not the price.

MR. JACKSON. What right has he to any sentiment over you? I'm going to hunt that fellow up, and — and give him what's what! [*He finishes lamely.*]

MISS WELLS [*frightened*] James! For my sake — don't give him what's what!

MR. JACKSON [*bristling*] You're trying to shield him!

MISS WELLS [*frightened*] No, James. It's you I'm trying to shield. He's twice as big as you are!

MR. JACKSON [*enraged*] I don't care if he's three times as big. I'm going to stay here till he comes — and fight him!

MISS WELLS. Don't! He is a whirlwind when roused! [*Mr. Jackson remains in pugilistic attitude.*] James — I'm not the sort of woman who enjoys seeing two men fight for her. If you want to keep my affection, you'll come back with me now.

MR. JACKSON [*catching at the word*] I still have a chance? Will you give him up for me?

MISS WELLS. I'll be honest with you, James. In some ways he is more my ideal than you are. He seems all I imagined a lover should be. But when I think of a husband, I can't imagine anyone but you. I've got so used to you, James, these fifteen years.

MR. JACKSON. And I've got used to you. Maybe, I did n't seem to appreciate you till he came between us.

THE FLORIST SHOP

MISS WELLS. But I like to feel there have been two men in my life, James.

MR. JACKSON [*jealously*] So that you can coquet with us both?

MISS WELLS [*earnestly*] Not that, truly. But I feel I'm bringing more to the man of my choice.

MR. JACKSON [*pleased*] You look so pretty, Jessie. I don't blame the other fellow much. [*He looks her over critically.*] But — those flowers. If you want flowers, I'll get you some.

MISS WELLS [*reluctantly*] He meant them in the most respectful way.

MR. JACKSON. Take them off. [*She obeys, laying them on the shelf reluctantly, almost tenderly. He goes to the showcases, signaling to Maude, who has busied herself at the extreme back of the shop during this last dialogue. As she approaches*] I want to see some flowers. [*Maude glances knowingly at the empty place on Miss Wells's coat and smiles.*]

MAUDE [*demurely*] I don't work here any longer, but I'll wait on you with pleasure. What kind do you prefer? [*Mr. Jackson gravitates toward the carnations. The two women are on either side of him with a sort of critical challenge, which increases as he nears a decision.*]

MR. JACKSON. These carnations [*he falters, perceiving the lack of sympathy*] — are pretty.

MAUDE [*pleasant, but firm*] They are all right, of course, but compared to orchids —

MR. JACKSON [*wavering, looks at Maude, at Miss Wells, and at the orchids; puts his hand in*

THE FLORIST SHOP

his pocket meditatively but unconsciously; then braces himself resolutely. To Miss Wells] Would you prefer orchids, Jessie?

MISS WELLS. No, James; some other flower, please.

MAUDE [*helpfully*] Vi'lets is very nice. [*Mr. Jackson looks at Miss Wells, inquiringly.*]

MISS WELLS. I'm very fond of violets.

MR. JACKSON [*with new jocularly*] Violets it is. [*Takes another brace.*] The largest bunch you have, young lady. [*Maude selects a magnificent arrangement, gives it to Miss Wells, who pins it on. Mr. Jackson leads the way to the door.*]

MAUDE. Shall I wrap up these orchids for you?

MISS WELLS [*Mr. Jackson at door, waiting*] No, tell him I'm sorry, but he must n't send any more. [*Miss Wells hesitates, then takes the bachelor's-button from her purse, considers discarding it, then returns it to her purse.*]

MAUDE [*rather bitterly*] No danger; he won't.

Miss Wells and Mr. Jackson exeunt.

Enter Slovsky and Henry as Miss Wells and Mr. Jackson pass the window, engrossed.

SLOVSKY [*surveying Maude with disapproval*] Well, you did n't lose no time getting your hat and coat on. The custom is when fired to finish out the day.

MAUDE. It ain't my custom. When I'm fired, I go. [*She starts for the door. Henry mutely shows his sympathy.*]

SLOVSKY. Well, good-bye, Maude. Remember,

THE FLORIST SHOP

I ain't got no hard feeling. You understand business is business, and sentiment 's something else.

MAUDE [*shortly*] Good-bye. [*Sotto voce, to Henry.*] Say, Henry, tip me wise if them orders to Mlle. Looey begins to fall off. [*To Slovsky, indicating orchids on counter.*] Your orchids has come back. [*As she starts to leave, Slovsky takes the orchids and puts them back in the case.*]

MISS WELLS [*entering, to Maude*] Are you going out? I—I wanted to leave an order. [*Slovsky edges nearer.*]

MAUDE [*with glance at Slovsky*] I can take it.

MISS WELLS. Mr. Jackson and I have been talking it over. He 's very insistent; he wants me to—to make it very soon. So I said—next month. There 's really no reason why it should n't be next month—though it seems so sudden.

MAUDE. Now, I'm glad to hear that, Miss Wells. I shall take a poisonal interest in this. For you, I should advise— [*They move toward the cases and stand talking; Slovsky edges nearer.*]

SLOVSKY. Can I help you, Maude? [*To Miss Wells.*] May I ask the occasion?

MISS WELLS [*embarrassed*] A—why—a wedding.

MAUDE [*triumphantly*] A church wedding, St. Mark's.

SLOVSKY [*respectfully*] Ah! St. Mark's?

MAUDE. Roses and southern smilax.

SLOVSKY. Ah-h!

MISS WELLS [*to Maude*] I think I can leave it to you—your taste is exquisite. Mr. Jackson is waiting for me. *Exit.*

THE FLORIST SHOP

SLOVSKY [*shame-faced*] Maude! Did you know about this here wedding when you sent them orchids?

MAUDE [*triumphantly*] I arranged that wedding. [*She starts to go.*]

SLOVSKY [*advancing cordially*] When I make a mistake, I'm willing to say so. I ort a known a smart girl like you would a had a reason behind her. Now, you take off your coat and hat and stay. You're what I always said, an asset to the business. [*Maude deliberates. The telephone rings. Slovsky answers it.*]

SLOVSKY. Yes — I see, I see. Now you just wait a minute, and I'll get our young lady to attend to you. Maude! [*After a moment's deliberation Maude slowly removes her coat and goes to the telephone. A sigh of relief from Slovsky and Henry.*]

MAUDE. Hel-lo! I see. Naturally you do. [*Almost falling into the receiver.*] Oh, might I ask, how much did it weigh? Nine pounds — think of that! You used to send her vi'lets and roses, but you want this to be something different. Now, why don't you send her one of them old-fashioned baskets, with paper lace around the edges. [*She revels in the sentiment.*] All filled with little pink rosebuds and pansies and mignonette and forget-me-nots? [*She laughs sympathetically.*] And I'll just put in some johnny-jump-ups for the baby!

CURTAIN

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