

for a moment. Jo flops on to her stomach on the floor at fireplace and writes manuscript furiously. AMY, at her table in the bay window, occupies herself with a clay figure she is modeling. MEG goes to R. of table C. and takes up work basket. BETH gets bread, toasting fork and plate and comes directly back; sits on rug before fire.)

Jo. (Rising) Well, I've finished "The Witch's Curse," Meg. We've got to rehearse our parts in costume and with the scenery and get used to 'em. (Goes to R.C.) There's lots to do about that play before Christmas night. (Jo marches up and down the room, R.C., her hands behind her back.)

Meg. (Who has resumed her embroidery.) I don't mean to act any more after this time.

Jo. (Stops R.C.) What?

Meg. I'm getting too old for such things.

Jo. (Down stage R.) You won't stop, I know, as long as you can trail around in a long gown, with your hair down, and wear gold paper jewelry. Why, you're the best actress we've got, and there'll be an end to everything if you quit the boards. (Turns R.) Well, come here, Amy, and do the fainting scene, for you're as stiff as a poker in that.

Amy. I can't help it. (Rises. Comes down R.C. by Meg's chair.) I never saw anyone faint, and I don't choose to make myself all black and blue, tumbling flat as you do. If I can go down easily, I'll drop, if I can't, I shall fall into a chair and be graceful. (Funny awkward pose.)

Jo. Oh! Oh, do it this way— (Throws manuscript down,) clasp your hands so, and stagger across the room, crying frantically, "Roderigo, save me, save me! Save me!" (Jo goes to L., throws herself against door L.I. Chimney last "Save me." Amy works down stage to R.C. Jo does this, with

melodramatic scream and with much intensity, turns nonchalantly with back to door as she says) There you are—now you do it.

(Amy follows, poking out her hands stiffly and going to L.C. bus.—jerking herself along as if she went by machinery.)

Amy. (Perfectly expressionless in face and voice.) "Roderigo, save me! Save me! Save me!"

Jo. (In despair.) Scream, Amy, scream as if you were calling for help.

Amy. "Ow!" (Her scream is an "Ow" of distress, far more than of melodramatic anguish.)

(Jo business of disgust. Meg roars; Jo groans and makes despairing gesture. Beth, toasting bread before the fire, lets it burn while she watches the fun.)

Jo. (Throws up hands as she strides up stage.) It's no use—no use. Do the best you can when the time comes, and if the audience laughs, don't blame me. (Amy goes up and sits on lower step of stairs in a huff—chin in hands, elbows on knees.) Come on, Meg. Do the incantation scene with the love potion!

Meg. (Rummaging in her work basket, produces a small bottle, rising, she holds the bottle well forward, to attract attention, and half chants:)

"Hither I come
From my airy home
Afar in the silver moon.
(Holds out bottle.)
Take the magic spell
And use it well
Or its power will vanish soon."

JO. (As ERNEST the lover, goes to MEG, snatches the wooden dagger from table, and kneeling before MEG, declaims.) "By me trusty sword—(Dagger up.) I swear that Ernest L'Estrange—shall pay, pay royally, for this priceless gift, (Dagger back,) a love potion with which to win the lovely Zara." (Takes vial with deep bow. Bus. of looking at each other to see whose cue it is. With a total change of voice.) Come on, come on, Amy, that's your cue.

AMY. Oh, dear, I never can remember. (Rises quickly and comes D.L. Amy recites in a perfectly expressionless voice.) "Tis like a dream, so strange, so terrible. (Looks between MEG and JO. JO growls and handles the dagger meaningly.) He whom I thought so gentle and so true is stained with fearful crimes,—poor murdered lady—have I escaped a fate like thine? (JO rises, stamps foot and goes R.C.) Ah, I hear his step. Now, heart, be firm." (Bus. of hand on heart—wrong side—corrects it.)

JO. (Parenthetically) I'm the villain now, remember. (Goes to AMY L.C. a little up stage. Voice changes to melodramatic threatening. JO grasps AMY'S arm, frightening her.) "Proud lady, if thou wilt not love, I'll make thee learn to fear the heart thou hast so scornfully cast away. Thou shalt rue the day when Count Rudolpho asked and was refused. But I will win thee yet—and then—Be-ware!" (Rolls "x." Turns away, folds arms and drops head—tragic pose.)

AMY. (JO snags fingers under her folded arms and pantomimes "Go on." Amy gasps, so interested she forgets she's acting, suddenly recovers. Voice still expressionless, also a bit uncertain about her lines.) "Do thy worst, murderer. Spirits will watch over me—(Hand over head,) and thou canst not harm. Adieu (Adoo) my lord!" Adieu.

(Bows low—backs away to L. AMY uses perfectly sweet, pleasant voice in her acting.)

JO. Don't say "adoo"—say "adyeux"—let the "eu" stop in your nose. (AMY feels nose, sits L. on chair below desk L.) The next scene is in Norma's cave.

MEG. (Rises and goes quickly behind the wing-chair R. and crosses from it, bent over and with hands clasped and raised like an old witch. As NORMA—cracked voice. JO goes up stage L. and takes pose as villain and works up this scene with MEG.) "Sinful man, thy hour of reckoning has come. 'Twas I who bore thy murdered wife to a quiet grave and raised her spirit to affright and haunt thee. I warned Hugo and betrayed thee to his power. Thy victims are avenged and Norma's work is done. Her curse has sealed thy doom. Farewell! Farewell! (Backing up to back of armchair at fireplace. Ending with a cackling, smister laugh) Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" (Disappears behind chair.)

JO. (As the villain, RUDOLPHO, up L.C.) "Help, help, the ghosts! They torture me. The souls of the murdered, they haunt me! See! See! (Stamps her foot and points suddenly L., and AMY jumps and swings her feet to L.) The demons gather about. How fast they come, how fast! Old Norma is nuttering her spells. Let me go! Let me go! (Comes down stage L.C. in a desperate melodramatic struggle with herself.) Hugo! Norma! Zara! Pity, pity! Let not Ernest L'Estrange reach me!—Ah!"

(As if stabbed—does funny fop—in a heap. MEG comes down R.C. JO sits up, rubbing her elbows, enjoying the sensation she has caused. GIRLS much impressed, not sure JO hasn't killed herself.)

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