The Pest, and Other One-Act Plays

By Emanuel Julius

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The Pest

Characters

The Pest
Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word, the Novelist
Epigram
Miss Real Life
Mr. Whop Whoppington Whopper, the Critic
Elaine, the Heroine
Mr. Webster, of Dictionary Fame
Capital and Labor

(The Pest, a mischievous lad with a huge head of pink hair and costumed in a yellow suit, is seated in the right-aisle seat of the first row in the orchestra. Being an energetic youngster, The Pest moves with almost ludicrous quickness. He speaks with extreme rapidity, sometimes to the point of incoherence. His gestures are of the most extravagant, at times suggesting a windmill in action. His voice is peculiar: at times he speaks on the E String; then, suddenly, his register falls to the A string; then, again, to the D string; on rare occasions, as low as the G. When excited, which is quite frequent, he uses the E string and jumps to the D, without so much as hesitating at the A. It is difficult to say how old he is; he may be thirty-five; again, he may be only sixteen. To his right is Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word, who is fidgeting. He is dressed in conventional evening clothes. He wears glasses rimmed with tortoiseshell. In his right hand, he carries a silk hat and cane. Gloves are in his left hand. . . . The footlights are turned on.)

The Novelist (firmly): I really wish to go. . . . I protest over your persistence in bringing me to this place.

The Pest: Now, now, now; let's have no more of this.
You’re here; you may as well face the music. . . . Come, let’s step up on the stage; everything is in readiness, I’m positive. (laughs) Come. (rises)

The Novelist (somewhat less determined): I prefer to remain here. . . . You seem anxious to embarrass me.

The Pest (turning his attention to the audience): We are about to go upon the stage. . . . We wanted to do something original, so we allowed ourselves to be influenced by Max Reinhardt. . . . We simply must be original these days. And, as we are barren intellectually, we must turn to such little tricks as using the orchestra as a stage and a ladder over the footlights as a means of entrance. . . . If lacking in ideas, why be discouraged? Put the footlights on the balcony, present the play in the orchestra and let the spectators sit on the stage. By mixing things a bit, one forgets that the play is meretricious. (To the Novelist): Come, Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word; I haven’t forgotten you. I have some friends who desire to meet you this evening. They are all waiting for you. I am sure you will be glad to greet them. (takes his arm and jerks him to his feet). Now, step lively. (Realizing that protest is useless, the Novelist follows. They walk up the steps that are almost in front of them, The Pest leading. The Novelist has his back turned to the audience while he stands on the stage waiting to see what The Pest intends doing. The Pest goes to the curtains, which open in the center. He peeks in). Is everything ready? Move that table a little to the right. Correct. A little more light, Mr. Electrician. Good. There; pull aside the curtains. (He is obeyed. The stage is bare, with the exception of a table and a chair, both exquisitely cut, showing fine, tender lines. The walls are in black and white, the latter predominating. The floor is a black and white checker-board.)

The Pest (to the audience): Ladies and gentlemen, we have before us the famous Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word, who writes two novels each year. . . . I’ve tolerated him just as long as I can. (The Novelist blusters incoherently and makes a move as though to catch the rascal, who ducks successfully,
and continues his speech.) At great expense, I have succeeded in getting together a group. These people have been itching to meet this gentleman who stands before you. . . . Guards are at all the exits, so he cannot escape. He must remain; so he may as well be good-natured. . . . He has enough to answer for, let alone making himself unpleasant before so many people. My advice to him is that he should not fail to act courteously. We intend him no harm. (To the Novelist): Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word, I now wish to introduce you to Mr. Epigram, of the City of Aphorism, County Epitomize, on the banks of the famous River Maxim. He has been aching to meet you, sir.

The Novelist: I could well get along without meeting the gentleman.

The Pest: You surely have.

(The Pest places his fingers to his mouth and blows. His whistle is not shrill. To the right, the curtain is drawn aside and Mr. Epigram enters with a spring. He is tall and thin; his features, well-powdered and wrinkled, are fine and sharp. He is dressed in black and white. His cap, which fits tightly over his head, is of black silk. His neck is uncovered, revealing a long, thin throat. On his back and chest are large exclamation marks. The marks' background is white. His pants are black; his stockings are white; shoes like his pants.)

Epigram (to the audience): Have no fears, dear, beautiful ladies and kind, noble gentlemen; I do not intend to give vent to so much as a single epigram. A master of epigrams never mouths aphorisms; he gets others to talk them. Have no fears, Mr. Tired Business Man; I do not threaten to make you think. So, settle back, all of you, and let no dreads trouble you. (To the Pest): You have brought him?

The Pest: Here (points to the Novelist): Have your say, Mr. Epigram, and hurry off to the left, please. There are others who desire an audience with this person.

Epigram (to the Novelist): I bow to you, sir.
Novelist (coldly): Howdedo.

Epigram: I have your latest million-copies-an-edition, sir. Here it is (fetches a red-covered book from a large breast pocket). The title, sir—

Novelist (in an undertone): "Hearts Afire."

Epigram: I see that you have forgotten how to blush. Very well, sir. I wish to know by what right you always decide upon ten epigrams in each of your novels. That, above all, irritates me. . . . Always ten. . . . It seems as though you spend two mornings a year for the manufacture of twenty epigrams—ten for each novel. . . . I have them here, sir. . . . All underscored (points a long, lean finger in the Novelist’s face). Have you forgotten how to blush, sir?

Novelist (with a silly grin): I know how to endorse checks.

Epigram (ignoring this stupid remark): Don’t you know that the epigram died with Wilde? Since then all good epigrams are things that Wilde forgot to say. That’s why they are dead. Wilde made the epigram a thing of perfection; and all men kill the things they make perfect. You remember Cezanne, I hope. He showed his friend his masterpiece. "Ah," said the friend, "it is perfect." And what did Cezanne do? Did he feel flattered? No! He tore up the canvas. He hated perfection. "I’ll try all over again," he said. Your epigrams, so-called, are not things that Wilde even forgot to say. Listen (reads from book): "A great invention can come only from a great mind."

Novelist: Stop!

Epigram (ignoring him): "Life is life—and it must be faced."

Novelist: Oh!

Epigram: "The printing press is the modern statesman."

Novelist: Please.

Epigram: "There is good in all evil." "A prejudiced
mind cannot think." "No person can be happy without health."

Novelist: I refuse to listen! I do not write for myself; I write for my public.

Epigram: It is quite obvious your theory has it that a gob of epigrams with the correct platitudinous punch may be relied upon to bring home the check.

Novelist: Correct.

Epigram: Oh, sir, you have forgotten how to blush. He who knows not how to blush is lost. . . . Shaw is a genius because he knows the value of things; he knows that Wilde wrote the last epigram. Whenever Shaw writes an epigram he rewrites it into a play. That is something more than you can do, sir. If I were you, I should turn my novels into an oath. I beg of you, sir, to let me rest in peace. Attempt no more epigrams.

Novelist: A novel without at least ten epigrams—
The Pest: —be they ever so stupid—
Novelist (ignoring the interruption): —cannot appeal to the public imagination.

Epigram: I leave you, sir. (To audience): Learn to blush! (curtain is drawn aside to left. Epigram leaves hurriedly.)

The Pest (with a laugh): How'd you like Mr. Epigram?

Novelist: He's a bore. (after a pause): I wish you'd hurry this torture along somewhat.

The Pest: Are you in a hurry when you have Elaine go through her tortures? Do you spare her a single paragraph? No, heartless creature; you go the limit.

Novelist: Trot out your friends. I'm not afraid of them. I love to be insulted.

(The Pest whistles again. The right curtain is drawn aside and in walks a wholesome-looking, personable young woman of about thirty. She is clothed with exquisite simplicity.)

The Pest: You know this young lady?
The Novelist (after giving her a quick glance): I've never had the honor.

The Pest: This is Miss Real Life.

(Miss Real Life bows with affected seriousness, a meaning smile signifying that this novelist amuses her.)

Miss Real Life: Of course, you don't know me. I don't think you ever will, but I'm sure that will never discourage you.

The Novelist (to the audience): Isn't it awful how all these people are so insulting?

(Miss Real Life opens a green-covered book. The Novelist is embarrassed. The Pest seats himself on the chair, places his elbows on the table and his hands to his head. Takes in everything, a grin on his face.)

Miss Real Life: Let me read you something.

The Novelist: Please, don't.

Miss Real Life: Myrtle meets Count Starchinski and says this (reads): "So this is the sort of a man you are! Oh, God, that I should have been deceived so cruelly! And I, a poor girl, believed in you—yes, believed in you with all my heart. But you have killed what little affection there was in my heart, and now I shall go with George; he is the star in my heaven. He said he would do anything for me—even give me the world. And what have you given me in return for my love? What, I ask? Nothing except a $50,000 necklace. It chokes me! It strangles me! I won't have it! (tears necklace from her lovely throat.) There! (throws it at his feet.) I hate you! I hate you!! I hate you!!! (sobs)."

The Novelist (determined to defend himself): A woman under a great emotion would talk like that.

Miss Real Life: Without a doubt——

The Pest: In real life, Myrtle would say: "You want to know about that cheesy necklace you gave me? Believe me, you did throw some bluff when you left that fake price tag on that piece of glass. George was busted when I gave him the glad yes, so I let him pawn that necklace; and, be-
lieve me, what he got for it was just enough to pay for the license. Gee, but I'm sore at you. What? You want it back? You can't have it. All I can give you is the pawn ticket. Here; take it!"

The Novelist: Rot! Stuff! and nonsense!

Miss Real Life: Let me read you another passage. Mrs. Crewes says this to her husband (reads): "Oh, Gawd, rather should I never have been born than be the wife of a gambler! Oh, Gawd, strike me dead as I stand here! Friendless am I in my misery! To think that I have been with you for eighteen years and have never learned of your sins until today! Oh, Gawd, how deceitful men are! I tell you it's the woman who pays—pays with her good name and her honor. I stand here disgraced forever, unable to look an honest person in the eye. Don't argue that you have been winning; that even tonight you won over a thousand dollars. Think of the poor mothers who can't feed their hungry little babies because their fathers have lost to gamblers like you. I'd rather take in washing and earn my living as a scrubwoman than touch a penny of your ill-gotten gains. Oh, Gawd! It's the woman who pays!"

The Novelist: Any honest woman who nursed a sense of ethics would treat her husband that way if she learned he was a gambler.

Miss Real Life: Mrs. Crewes would say: "You're a fine one, you are! I got a handsome opinion of you. Here you've been playing poker all this time and winning big money—and what do you do? Keep it all sub rosa; and me needing a new hat! And look at my summer furs! They're out of date for over a month. Let me tell you something—from now on you come across every time you make a haul. And, if you don't, believe me, I'll knock your block off. And be mighty careful when you play, for if you're a loser I'll make you look sick. Gimme what you won tonight. Hand it over—quick. Oh, gee, this is great! Now I can get a new set of summer furs. At last I'll look the neighbors in the eye and feel like a decent human being."
The Novelist: You slander humanity. You take a materialistic view of life.
Miss Real Life: I cannot argue. Life never argues. I cannot give eyes to the blind.
The Pest (to Miss Real Life. Points to left): This way out, please. (Miss Real Life bows and goes.)
The Novelist (to The Pest): Bring on your next slanderer. I’m just itching to be insulted some more.
The Pest (after a moment’s reflection): I’m suspicious of this next person. Whop Whoppington Whopper, the literary critic of The Times, says he has something to say, but just what it is I am at a loss. However, if he doesn’t insult you I’ll see that the others do. I’ll let him have his little say (dramatically), let the chips fall where they may. (Whistles. The critic enters. He is dressed in evening clothes and, in a measure, resembles the Novelist. He approaches, his hand extended.)
Whopper: Ah, Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word; delighted to meet you. (They shake hands. It is obvious the Novelist feels that here, at last, is a friend.)
The Novelist (cordially): Pleased to meet you, sir. You have always been very friendly to my art.
The Critic: Your publisher has always been kind to our advertising department.
The Novelist: We always quote your opinions on the jackets of my books.
The Critic: So I have noticed. (Produces a clipping.) Here is my review of your last novel, “Hearts Aflame.” I write: “Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word’s succinct style carries the essence of sincerity. He has clearness of aim and vivid presentation.”
The Novelist (with a smile): Those were the very words you used when you reviewed my other novels.
The Critic (calmly): Certainly. You don’t expect me to write a different review every time you write a new novel, do you? Your novels are all alike; therefore, my reviews must be all alike. If you want a different review, please
write a different novel. . . . But, please don't take me seriously. It's much easier for me to rehash the same stuff. If you were to do something new, then I should have to labor, something I do not care to do (sadly). I have not always been thus, my dear friend. When I was a youth—ah, am I boring you?

The Novelist: No, no, no. Proceed.

The Critic: Persons who read what goes by the name of criticism in the newspapers and magazines will certainly agree with Goldsmith that “error is ever talkative.” While it is true that a little knowledge is a risky thing, it also is true that much knowledge is still more dangerous. When I was a very young man, I got a job as dramatic editor on one of the afternoon papers. (candidly) I was a nice chap, with all the ignorance that one could gather in a small Pennsylvania city. I was not a thinker, but I was a delightful dancer. I was not a high-brow, but I was an expert on high-brow drinks. . . . It happened that I knew nothing of the stage, of acting. Little did I dream that it was because of my ignorance that I was given what many people consider an important position. . . . I was a hard worker, however, and could write columns a day, when necessary. . . . I had a few vague impressions. One was that Shaw was insincere. Another was that Shaw is not a creator of plays, but a clever writer of conversation. I often remarked that “Shaw mistakes talk for drama.” Frequently, I referred to Shaw as “the inimitable.” . . . In other words, I had all the requisites of a writer of dramatic reviews. And I made good. By constantly ridiculing the good and praising the bad, I got myself a reputation. Ibsen was pessimistic. Strindberg was misanthropic. Hauptmann was depressing. Maeterlinck was not a clear thinker. Brieux was a propagandist. Gorki lacked humor. Andreyev was sardonic. And so on. On the other hand, Charles Klein was a thinker who possessed the dramatic instinct. George M. Cohan would some day write the great American play. Margaret Mayo was a great humorist who could hand Rabelais cards and spades.
Charles Rann Kennedy was a profound philosopher. Belasco was a superman. And so on. . . . I really had genius for being wrong. But youth is erratic and will always do strange things—and I was no exception. I started to unlearn too soon. I did something quite unprofessional. I began to study the drama, its history, its philosophy, its technique. I read many plays and much good criticism. Instead of slamming Shaw I began to discuss Shaw's philosophy. . . . Then I went up to Forty-second street to see a foolish war play—and I wrote a review that must have embarrassed the author. The typical Broadway productions were treated with passionate scorn. What was the result? I could put it gently by saying I was "requested to resign," or I was "let out." I won't. I was fired. I was bounced. I was canned. I had made a great mistake. I had tried to be intelligent, to show some knowledge while working on a paper. Not that I was fired for praising the good. No; even that can be endured. The trouble with young men is that when they enthuse over the meritorious there is danger that they will frown on the worthless. The managers, the press agents, the advertising men—all poured down one fine afternoon and demanded my discharge. I was told that I wasn't constructive. "Destructive criticism has had its day!" I was informed. . . . The moral, of course, is obvious—knowledge is a dangerous thing. Had I remained ignorant and continued to look on mediocre persons as great artists, I would not have been separated from a good-paying position. Knowledge is a distressing thing. It is not easy for an intelligent person to write, but ignorance, as I've already mentioned, is talkative—and gets the bacon. . . . As a result, I decided to start life over again, this time as a literary critic. And I am a big success, because I have learned what to do and what not to do. . . . It is very easy for me to give the impression that there is profound knowledge behind my vaporings. One of my best tricks is to resort to names and titles—piling them on thick. For instance, let me suppose I am writing a review of a novel.
Let me show how I string things out: "Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word's novel is after the manner of August Strindberg's 'Confessions of a Fool' and at times suggests George Moore's 'Memoirs of My Dear Past' and Max Stirner's 'The Ego and His Own.' For psychological insight, he ranks with Fyodor Dostoevsky. The characterization is equal to that of Gustave Flaubert in his justly famed 'Madame Bovary.' And yet the simplicity of Turgenev's 'Smoke' is there. He has the humor (minus the vulgarisms) of an O. Henry. In all, Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word seems to be a composite of Lafcadio Hearn, Mark Twain, Benjamin De Casseres, Maxim Gorki, Victor Hugo, James Huneker, Maurice Maeterlinck, George Gissing, Walt Whitman, Frederick Nietzsche, Henry George, Richard Wagner, Peter Kropotkin, Elisee Reclus, Remy de Gourmont, Emma Goldman and Anthony Comstock." . . . This trick never fails. Resort to it three or four times and you get a reputation for being a critic of profound knowledge and wide reading.

The Novelist: You have convinced me that you are the most insincere person in New York.

The Critic: How mere sincerity ever became a virtue I cannot understand. When a hold-up man strikes me on the head with a lead pipe does the fact that he is sincere about his efforts lessen my dislike for him? Sincerity is another unimportant thing which has been overrated and made important.

(Mr. Epigram appears suddenly)

Epigram: That is another thing that Oscar Wilde forgot to say. (He disappears.)

The Critic (shouts): That's absolutely original! (chases after Epigram)

The Pest (to Novelist): You're having lots of fun, aren't you?

The Novelist: You have a strange sense of humor, I must admit.

The Pest: Please, let us refrain from saying anything about humor. That is a dangerous subject. We are now
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ready for Mr. Webster. (Whistles. Curtain is drawn aside and Mr. Webster, carrying a heavy dictionary, enters. He is elephantine, with three layers of chin.)

The Pest: Mr. Webster, please meet Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word.

(They bow.)

Webster: Ten cents a word. I gave him all the words in their proper order—and what did I get? Not enough for a keg of ale. Here are your words, sir, (he taps his dictionary with a heavy finger), and every time you use one you get ten round pennies. And what do you do with my words? Ah, here they are and you know not what to do with them. (quotes): “Her throat was full of tears.” A wag suggests that they may have dripped from her eyeteeth, but I doubt him. Please, Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word, don’t have your heroine “scream in silent rage” as she “tears her eyes from the stage, but lets her ears linger” before finally deciding to “wipe her wet neck on the balcony” and go to meet “Herbert, who, like Adele, had dark brown hair, with enormous black eyebrows, a mustache and a short beard.” . . . A little care will enable you to avoid these blunders. Of course, you can answer readily enough that the masters of fiction also fall from grace quite frequently, allowing blunders that even a Harold Bell Wright might never stoop to commit. When you remind me that Gustave Flaubert wrote “with one hand he caressed her hair and with the other he said,” or that the critic, Francisque Sarcey, wrote “in the tones of Mlle. Ugalde one recognizes her mother’s familiar hand,” you make the Wright crew look quite respectable. If you can’t be good at least be careful, is advice that applies to literature as well as morals. I am worried, for I fear that before long the dear old English language will be abolished, utterly forgotten. (He walks off slowly, shaking his head sadly.)

The Pest: The sex best sellers used to ring in capital and labor by way of contrast, but since the war is everything, they have been forced to retire for a while.
The Novelist (profoundly): I have always maintained that the problem of capital and labor is a very deep question.

The Pest: Very nice; very nice. (Whistles. Mr. Capital and Mr. Labor enter. Capital is a heavy man, wearing a plug hat. A watch chain that appears to be almost a pound in weight is sported on his loud waistcoat. He is smoking a fat cigar. Labor is in blue overalls. A paper-box hat is on his head. His arms are bare almost to the shoulders.)

Capital and Labor: Look at us! (Capital and Labor turn to look at each other.)

Capital (to Labor): Aren't we a mess?
Labor: Sure. Look at the hat I'm made to wear.

Capital: Awful! If one of my workers wore a hat like that I'd fire him on the spot.
Labor: And I never get out of these overalls. This is my only suit.

Capital: Look at this watch chain, will you? And this hat! I'm never without this plug hat. And these eight-ounce cigars—ugh! (To Novelist): Haven't you a heart?

The Novelist: The public reasons by symbols. I merely say a person wears certain things and immediately the reader visualizes certain characters. It's very simple. A few bits of wearing apparel and I am saved hours of hard work. Your particular complaint should be addressed to our cartoonist friends. They started you. We novelists merely followed.

Capital: Furthermore, I want you to know that my chef's salary is not larger than President Wilson's. I do not import potatoes from Afghanistan. They come from the grocer, who charges reasonable prices. Why do you suppose that every article I buy must come from some distant place? My oysters do not come from Paris; my fish do not come from Siberia; nor my squabs from Haiti. They come from somewhere on Fourth avenue.

The Novelist: The readers enjoy descriptions of great extravagance.
Capital: I'm not a moral man, but I am a busy man and I haven't time nor strength to carry on as you describe. Harems may be all very well for young men, but I am satisfied with occasional indiscretions. Please do not have me participate in such orgies.

The Novelist: Surely, you don't claim to be a paragon of virtue.

Capital: No! But I'm not a fiend.

Labor: What angers me is the way this person makes me talk. Whenever I say you, he spells it y-u-h—yuh! ugh! Your readers must imagine that I never went to school. I'm not a scholar, but, good God, at least grant me enough intelligence to talk English in an understandable manner.

The Novelist (eloquently): According to government statistics, the working people suffer such hardships that they never have a chance to obtain the education they deserve. I feel for the working classes.

Labor: Rot! You don't know what a working man looks like. . . . Another thing I object to is the theory you hold that the problem of capital and labor is solved as soon as old plug hat and paper-box hat shake hands.

The Novelist: I believe that cordiality between capital and labor will make all things good.

Capital: There can't be cordiality when I make money by exploiting men like (waves to Labor) this gentleman. I can be polite to him so long as he (points to Labor) does my bidding, but the moment he pulls away I call for the police, the judges—and, if necessary, the militia.

Labor: This is war—real war; and shaking hands is out of the question.

The Novelist: I always advocate arbitration.

Capital: There can be no arbitration when I function by profiting out of this man's labor. If arbitration means making my dividends secure, then I favor arbitration. But that won't solve the problem. There's nothing for us to do but fight it out. Please don't have us shake hands again.

Labor: Right you are!
Capital (to Labor): This is the first time we have ever agreed.
Labor: Uhuh!
Capital: Then let's shake hands on that. (They clasp hands.)
Labor: Come out and have a drink on me. (They go off.)
The Novelist: If there's anybody else you have brought here to insult me, trot him out.
The Pest: Please don't think that because I am glad to have you insulted that I haven't a certain amount of respect for you, Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word. It always takes more genius to write first-class second-rate bunk than to write second-rate first-class stuff. Which means, in effect, that it is easier to be a near-Galsworthy than to be a real, live, million-copies-an-edition Harold Bell MacGrath, Harold Bell Wright or Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word. The writer of this bit of nonsense that we are inflicting on this audience tonight is a near-Galsworthy—
The Novelist: John Galsworthy himself is a near-Galsworthy.
The Pest (amazed): Is that original with you?
(The Novelist nods)
The Pest: Really, that's the best thing I've ever heard you say. For a near-Shaw to attempt to write rot and succeed is an impossibility. It takes a special kind of genius to trace the torturesome experiences of poor, innocent Elaine. Which reminds me that I must bring out Elaine. (whistles)
The Novelist (embarrassed): Oh, I must confess that I am not the least bit anxious to meet the heroine of my latest novel.
(Elaine is already present, however, so he cannot do other than swallow the bitter pill. She is tall—well, typically a Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word heroine.)
Elaine (despairingly): Here I am, Mr. Ten-Cents-A-Word; here I am, and you have made me what I am. Oh, it's the woman who pays! Have you no mercy?
The Novelist: My dear madam; please let us not create a scene.

Elaine: I will speak my mind. Here I am—as pure as a lily and as innocent as a five-year-old imbecile. You are never satisfied unless you have convinced an intelligent reader that I am a fool. And still you want me to remain silent. Here I am—sweet as a dew-drop. Sometimes I am a brunette and sometimes a blonde, according to your artistic temperament and originality, but always a fool. . . . What do you make me do? First, I meet a man. He makes approaches to me. Then follows the chase. For 350 pages I am on the verge. He almost gets me towards the close of each chapter—but I get away. That is all. You keep it up. You force the public to follow me as I tread my way to the last chapter, when I give in, but to the right man—and legally, at that.

The Novelist: My novels are always moral.

Elaine: Novels—such as you write—are based on the assumption that I am always going to give in to Hector Hic-cough, but never will. That's the plot. You may have the action of your story take place in an artist's studio. Then I am a beautiful model. The artist is a villainous Bohemian who is cowardly enough to love me. This perfidious person must be made hateful. You make him expect me to pose a la September Morn, but I refuse. Listen (reads): "Hector Hiccough," she exclaims, the blood rushing to her temples, "I am a decent woman and shall not do as you command. I may be poor and have to pose for a living, but I'm respectable. I'll take off enough to enable you to continue to look on me as a model, but never! never!! never!!! will I take off my earrings." . . . I often wonder why I always return to the villain's studio after the first unwelcomed experience. But if I remain away there would follow 350 blank pages, so I must return. And, strange as it may sound, you often try to do something extremely original; you would be abreast of the times, so you have me serve as a Red Cross nurse and have the villain take the form of a General
French. The general stops the battle long enough to at-
tempt my ruination, but I reject him, announcing in firm
tones that I do not desire to become a war-bride. This
makes the general angry, so he calls off the war and de-
votes all his time to the task. I am almost ruined many,
many times, but never, never, never do you allow sweet, in-
nocent me to consent.

The Novelist: I hope you are not criticizing me for
defending your virtue.

Elaine: I want you to know that I am human and that
I cannot endure the terrible ordeal you force on me. The
truth is that after fifty pages of effort I get tired of the
whole affair and would gladly accept the villain’s approaches
just to get rid of him. Your theory is that as soon as I
consent the villain will desert me—so that’s why I am
anxious to rid myself of him by letting him have his way.
It’s the easiest and only way out. . . . Mine is a hard life.
Some day a great man will reduce my torture from 350
pages to 250.

The Novelist: What would you have me do? Write
novels after the French school?

Elaine: No. In a French novel I give in to the villain
in the first chapter. Of course, in the last chapter I must
die of consumption, with my true country-boy lover of by-
gone days at my bedside. He readily announces that he
forgives me—and I die. Don’t do that.

The Novelist: Then would you have me adopt the Rus-
sian method?

Elaine: No. In a Russian novel I give in to Count Bes-
sarabia five years before the action in Chapter 1 begins.
When the story opens I am preparing to give birth to my
fifth illegitimate child. From page 1 to 651 the author
traces my history, which is a record of attempted suicides.
I try the gas route, prussic acid, overeating, carbolic acid:
and Bryan’s speeches, but I do not succeed until towards the
end, when I and my fourteen children cash in for good.
When I am not attempting suicide I am conducting long
discussions on “Life—Is It Worth Living?” Life, I soon conclude, is one long Siberian sob. Don’t do that.

The Novelist: Then what would you have me do?
Elaine: I don’t know. I guess there’s only one way out—and that is for you to stop writing.

The Novelist: Impossible. My bread and butter do not allow that.

Elaine (sadly): Then there’s nothing for me to do but continue suffering. Can’t you ease matters a little?

The Novelist: I must give the public what it wants. The public memory is short. Between novels it forgets that it is going to end the same way. That means the element of suspense may always be relied upon, even though the story be as obvious as a new-laid egg.

Elaine: At least, you can show a little mercy once in a while.

The Novelist: How?

Elaine: Look at the silly things you make me laugh over. No matter how stupid the hero is, I must laugh at every remark that you happen to label as being clever. You always make me worship his sense of humor, but never do you have him say anything that is funny. All I must do is laugh, laugh, laugh, ringingly over his inanities. . . . The villain always interests me more than the hero. Why don’t you let me surrender to the villain just once—I should love to!

The Novelist: Impossible! My novels never countenance immoralities.

Elaine: But, I hate your silly heroes. They bore me.

The Pest (interrupting): Pardon me. This discussion has gone far enough. It would be well to draw the curtains. However, it must be admitted that a little action at the close is always desirable. Conversational endings never take.

The Novelist: But what can we do? I haven’t a thing to say.

The Pest: A dance! Granville Barker ends Anatole
France's "The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife" with a dance. (Whistles. All the characters rush in. There follows a dance to the music of a violin.)

Curtain.
Slumming
An Impossible Comedy

Characters

Mrs. Delorah Montmercy Cartwright
Jim
A Butler

The place—New York. The Time—This Afternoon.
The scene—A drawing room with huge doors at the right leading to the hallway. The walls are a joy to the eye; the furniture is exquisite; the pictures are a triumph. Mrs. Cartwright is discovered in center, facing butler. Dressed ready for her afternoon ride in the park, she is putting on her gloves.

Mrs. Cartwright: You say——
Butler: Yes, madam; he says he wishes to see you—(smiles broadly). It is extraordinary, isn’t it—if you’ll pardon me for remarking.

Mrs. C.: Is he sober?
Butler: Well, I should say rather that he isn’t drunk.
Mrs. C.: What do you mean?
Butler: Simply that he has keyed himself.
Mrs. C.: Keyed himself?
Butler: Taken a few to bolster up his nerve . . . the most forgivable kind of intoxication. Not drunk for drunk’s sake, but for a purpose. . . .

Mrs. C.: The utilitarian conception of . . .
Butler: The very word . . . utilitarian. . . . And he left his card.
(The Butler hands it to her.)

Mrs. C.: There’s only one thing I’m thinking of, John; is he dangerous?

John: No. Not at all. He has had three drinks. Men with that much in them are angels. He has taken a civilizing amount of the stuff.

Mrs. C.: You seem to be so sur—

John: I am. He’s as harmless as a kitten. Receive him, is my advice. . . . Just for the—pardon me, ma’am, if I use extreme language this afternoon—this is an extreme case. . . . Receive him just for the hell of it.

Mrs. C.: Good advice, John. I’ll see him.

John: And I shall be nearby, should you need me. But I’m sure you won’t.

(He goes off. A long pause. Mrs. Cartwright, still standing, stares towards the hallway. Jim walks in steadily. His eyes are rather bright, which means, to those who know him, that he has consumed just enough liquor to enthuse him. He is dressed in the most common of clothes. While he is not ragged or dirty, he is in a suit that has known too long an existence. His shirt is blue and soft-collared. No tie. An afternoon paper is in the right coat pocket. The stem of a pipe protrudes from the upper left pocket of his coat. When he talks, his eyes almost close, drawing the skin in wrinkles that seem to bespeak boyish mischievousness. He is about 40 years of age.)

Jim (his voice is deep and clear): How are you, Mrs. Cartwright? I’m glad to see you. . . . Shake. (He stops in front of her, reaches over, takes her gloved hand and shakes it—not vigorously, but warmly.)

Mrs. C.: I’m glad to see you. The name is—

Jim: Jim. . . . That’s enough. I suppose he’s told you what I’m here for, Mrs. Cartwright. I took this afternoon’s paper (points to paper) and looked for a swell Fifth avenue society dame—and found your name under a big
picture. . . . Said you was a killer in the four hundred.

Mrs. C.: Won’t you sit down?

Jim: Sure. Sit down yourself, Mrs. Cartwright. I like to see the ladies comfortable. (They settle down. A long pause.) Well, I may as well get to the point. Down where I live, we’ve got to put up with visits from you swells. You come down in your automobiles and purr around trying to find out things. You’ve even got the gall to ask us if we’re married according to Hoyle, and if the men beat their wives. You even look into the pots on the gas stove. You’re a fine bunch of busybodies. And so, I got it into my head to do a little slumming myself. . . . And here I am. . . . I know I took chances of getting thrown out, but what’s the difference? I just made up my mind to come to a fine house, nice and polite, and say what I wanted and take my chances on having the door slammed in my face.

Mrs. C.: And here you are.

Jim: Yes. And on my way up I made a few notes of questions I want answered. (Brings paper from his inside coat pocket. Produces a tiny pencil, which he handles clumsily and wets frequently with his lips.) First, how old are you?

Mrs. C.: Thirty-eight.

(He writes it down.)

Jim: Married?

Mrs. C.: Well, yes.

Jim: Why the well?

Mrs. C.: I used to have a husband around the house, but it’s all off between us, so he has gone his way and I’ve gone mine. We’re independent, we are, and always true to our ideals.

Jim: “Independent and ideals”—fine poppycock, that. Independence means money and idealism is only for those who have money. If you’re poor you can’t afford ideals. They’re too expensive. (He turns to his paper again and reads as he writes): “Married once, is ambitious. Hopes to get a divorce” (resumes questions): Are you honest?
Mrs. C.: I suppose so.

Jim: That's because you can afford to be honest. You've got so much money that you don't have to waste energy doing little mean things in order to get some more. Dishonesty is for us. If we had somebody steal a load of cash for us, then we could spruce up and be upright citizens. *(Writes)*: "Honest because rich."

*(Mrs. Cartwright takes him with mock seriousness, answering his questions as though it would be fatal to tell a lie.)*

Jim: Are you living with anybody?

Mrs. C.: Do you mean a man?

Jim: Sure.

Mrs. C.: No.

Jim: No?

Mrs. C.: No.

Jim: How often does he visit you?

Mrs. C. *(with a laugh)*: Oh, so-so.

Jim: We have to be just so-and-so, but you can afford to be so-so. It takes money again. *(Writes)*: "Has a man when she wants one." Have you any children?

Mrs. C.: No.

Jim: Why?

Mrs. C.: I don't care to burden myself. Besides, a woman can't retain her beauty and bear children.

Jim: What do you do?

Mrs. C.: You've heard of birth control, I hope.

Jim: Yes, heard of it—that's all. We just hear about things. *(Writes)*: "Practices illegal operations."

Mrs. C.: Oh, that's too strong. My physician advises me.

Jim: It's all right for him to tell you what to do, but he'd go to jail if he told a workingman's wife. Poor women are supposed to do nothing but breed and brood. Up here, it's almost illegal to have a baby.

Mrs. C.: It isn't considered good form.

Jim *(writes)*: "Has radical ideas for her own crowd.
and conservative ones for the East Siders.” How much do you spend a week?

Mrs. C.: Really, I can’t answer that question. I don’t know how much money passes through my hands. I have enough, and that is all that interests me.

Jim (writes): “Doesn’t know how deep her trough is.” What kind of work do you do?

Mrs. C.: I never work; I’m a lady.

Jim (writes): “Is not self-supporting; must depend on the East Siders.” Then you belong to the unworthy rich?

Mrs. C.: I belong to the class that has good sense enough to put the stupidity of the masses to good use.

Jim (writes): “Shows lack of respect for her supporters.” Do you know that if you’d be poor and talked like that to a rich settlement worker, you’d be put down as one of the unworthy poor?

Mrs. C.: Why should I respect people who live like beasts in order to give me the means to live as I do? Isn’t it true that there is enough in this world for all? Then why haven’t they more than the bare necessaries? They haven’t enough sense to demand. Rights can’t be given; they must be taken.

Jim: Do you ever lie?

Mrs. C.: Often. Lies are very important; first of all, they show imagination. Art and truth go well together, but lies also deserve consideration. Without illusions man becomes a clod. Illusions are nothing more than artistic lies.

Jim (somewhat bewildered): I don’t believe a word you say.

(Mrs. C. smiles.)

Jim (after a pause): Then you’re a hypocrite?

Mrs. C.: Certainly. Hypocrites are persons who consider the viewpoints of others and present their own views in a manner that will appeal to a different angle of thought. Hypocrites are strategists. They go the line of least resist-
The Pest, and Other Plays

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Mrs. C. (surprised): My butler? What do you mean?
Jim (startled): Why, don't you know? (He realizes that he has “put his foot into it.”)
Mrs. C.: No. What are you speaking about?
Jim: Your butler.
Mrs. C.: Yes, what about John?
(Jim decides to let the cat out of the bag.)
Jim: Your butler makes soap-box speeches down on the East Side. He’s a Socialist, he is. I’m sorry I let this out. I thought you knew. I hope he won’t lose his job.
Mrs. C.: John a Socialist? (Rings. Pause. John enters.)
Jim (to the butler): It’s all out. She knows you’re a red spouter.
(John smiles.)
Mrs. C.: Is it true that you make street speeches to persons like?—(waves to Jim).
John: Certainly. Do you object?
Mrs. C.: Well, I think it somewhat out of place for a butler to attack the present social order. Butlers usually are mainstays of any system of society.
John: I suppose I’ll have to go, Mrs. Cartwright. It would be very unpleasant for me to remain. A radical butler! What a monstrosity! And then, I couldn’t face the East Siders if they knew me to be a butler. They wouldn’t listen to me. I agree with you: butlers are supposed to be conservatives.
Mrs. C.: What do you tell those East Siders?
Jim: He hands it to ’em like that—(makes a motion as though he were striking an adversary): He’s got the wallop.
John: What I tell them isn’t extraordinary. I simply tell them to emulate the rich.
Mrs. C.: What do you mean?
John: I advise them to try to get the most beautiful things in life—the best food, the most comfortable homes,
books, music, pictures and recreation. I tell them to be selfish, to think of themselves. I also tell them to keep what they make. The rich believe these things—but only for themselves. They keep what they get. The workers ought to keep what they make. Very simple. I tell them that life is a big machine that turns the miseries of the workers into the happiness of the upper class. I tell them to get on the right end of the machine, on the happy end. There’s nothing new in these ideas. They’re merely unpopular. (Turns to Jim): Your settlement work has lost me a job. (laughs)

Jim: I’m sorry. (His countenance brightens.) Come on out and have a bumper on me.

John (grows a size larger): Sure I will—right now. Come on; let’s go and talk things over. (They walk away.) I’ll be out of this monkey-jacket in no time.

Mrs. C. (to herself): A revolutionary butler!

Curtain.
Adolescence
Puritanical Nonsense in One Act

Characters
Jeremiah Jenkins; 52
Mrs. Maachal Jenkins; 40
Mary Jenkins; about 15

The Place—Puretown.
The Scene: An old-fashioned living room. Mrs. Maachal Jenkins, a woman who could easily be described as being straight-laced, is discovered sitting in a rocker before the fireplace. A few feet away, at the table, her husband, Jeremiah, is reading aloud from the Bible, a lamp to his right providing the light.

Jeremiah: The First Book of the Chronicles. Chapter 1. Adam, Sheth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalaleel, Jered, Henoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Coughs.) The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Mogog, and Madia, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras. And the sons of Gomer; Ashchenaz, and Aiphath, and Togarmah. And the sons of Javan; Elisha, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. The sons of Ham; Cush, and Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. (Coughs.) And the sons of Cush; Seba, and Havilah, and Sabta, and Raamah and Sabtecha. And the sons of Raamah; Sheba, and Dedan. And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be mighty upon the earth. And Nizraim begat Ludim, and Anamim, and Lehabin, and Naphtuhim, and Pathrusim, and Casluhim, (of whom came the Philistines), and Caphthorim. And Canaan begat Zidon his first-born, and Heth, the Jebusite also, and the Amorite, and the Girgashite, and the Havite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite. (Coughs.) And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite. The sons of Shem; Elam, and Asshur, and
The Pest, and Other Plays


Maachal: I never grow tired of it.

Jeremiah: Aye—never. It’s so simple to understand that I can’t help feeling there must be a hidden meaning to it. (He closes the Bible. Continues slowly, emphasizing each word): And now that I have turned to the good book for inspiration and guidance I am ready to speak of what so greatly concerns our home.

Maachal (surprised): Our home? What can you mean?

Jeremiah: Yes; our home. . . . It was while I was at the store this afternoon that I overheard two of the worthless young sinners of this village . . . the kind that use such new-fangled things as tooth-brushes . . . as though the Lord meant us to scratch our teeth with brushes. . . . Here I've never used a tooth-brush in all my live-long days and no one can say I am not a good son of the Lord . . . and even though I've not got a single tooth in my mouth I get along mighty well.

Maachal: But what did you overhear?

Jeremiah: They were speaking of our daughter. At first I could not understand what they said for I heard a big word. It was a-dole-escent . . . so I went to the village library where I searched in the dictionary and found the meaning. (Shows Maachal a piece of paper.) I've got it written on this. It's too terrible for me to read aloud. Here; read for yourself. (Hands it to her.)

Maachal (after recovering from shock): And what has this to do with our Mary?

Jeremiah: They said she is that (points to paper). Our Mary is a-dole-escent! My God! Can it be true? The child has never known a word of scandal to be said about her; and here we learn this. A-dole-escent!

Maachal: Maybe it isn’t true. It might be mere gossip.
Jeremiah: It's the gossip that pains me. I wouldn't care if it was true if there wasn't any gossip. Let us send for our daughter and learn our fate.

(Maachal goes upstairs. After a pause, she returns, leading Mary, who is very tall and terribly stout.)

Mary (who has a baby voice): You wish to see me, dear father?

Jeremiah (sternly): My daughter. . . . Never since I have known you, and I have been acquainted with you for about 16 years—

Maachal (interrupting): No; 15 years—

Jeremiah: Fifteen years . . . and never have I talked to you about anything referring to—to—your person, except what may be seen with the naked (horrible word) eye. So far as I have been concerned, I have practically taken it for granted that you have no body . . . which is the only way for a father to bring up his child. . . . And now, for the first time, I must refer to so disgusting a thing as a daughter's body. . . . I want to know if you are a-dole-escent.

Mary (who has the body of a person well able to move pianos and who also has the mind of a five-year-old): A-dole-escent? What's that, father?

(Maachal returns to the rocker and sits with head buried in her hands.)

Jeremiah: I can't speak the words. Read what is on this. (Hands her the paper.)

Mary (after reading): Does that mean I like to see pretty boys, that I like to peek at them while they're in swimming, and that I wish one would kiss me—and—and—lots of other things?

Jeremiah: It means that—especially "lots of other things."

Mary (triumphantly): Then I am a-dole-escent.

(Jeremiah groans. Maachal weeps.)

Jeremiah: Oh, it's true.

Maachal: And we brought her up so carefully. We
tried to make her feel as though she was a little angel, without organs that provoke worldly thoughts and longings. Oh!

Mary (after looking out of the window): See, father; it’s snowing!

Jeremiah: Good. How could I drive you from my house if it wasn’t snowing? You have disgraced this home forever. You are a wretched, ungrateful daughter to sneak away and become a-do-le-scent. What right did you have to get into that condition?

Mary (weeping): I couldn’t help it——

Jeremiah: Where’s your will power? How can you ever expect to become a lawfully-wedded wife if you carry on like this. A-do-le-scent!

Mary: Oh, father; forgive me this time and I promise never to become a-do-le-scent again.

Jeremiah: Too late! You have disgraced me. Even the men at the store talk about you, saying you are a-do-le-scent. Out of my house before it stops snowing. (Sleigh-bells are heard.)

Mary: Oh, just another chance to reform.

Jeremiah: Never!

Mary: Oh!

(He drives her into the snow)

Curtain

Scene Two
A Year Later

(The same scene. Jeremiah is seated at the table. Maachal is in the rocker. Jeremiah is finishing his Bible reading)

Jeremiah: —“And sin no more.” (Turns to Maachal.) That’s another favorite passage of mine. I have studied it a long time and I’ve got the hidden meaning. The good Father wants those who have never sinned to cast the first stone because they are His beloved ones. After they have:
thrown their stones there's time enough for the sinners to take a hand. *(Closes his Bible and walks towards window.)*

Hm! It's snowing! This is Mary's chance to come home and beg forgiveness.

*(There is a knock on the door.)*

Jeremiah: That must be her now. *(Opens door. Mary, wrapped in an old shawl, which is covered with snow, enters.)*

Mary: Yes. I wandered to Belgium and fell in with a group of soldiers. As a result, I became a war-bride.

*(Throws open her shawl and shows that there is a child in her arms.)*

Mary: I could have come sooner, but I had to wait for the snow.

Maachal: Let her stay, Jeremiah.

Jeremiah *(determined)*: No. She is my daughter no longer.

Mary: I have seen the world in all its bitterness—and I have come back.

Jeremiah *(curious)*: Have you been living a good life?

Mary: Yes. I have done nothing wrong, except to have one child.

Jeremiah: A child!

Jeremiah *(shocked)*: An illegitimate child.

Mary: No, not that, father. The soldier married me after he learned—the truth.

Jeremiah: Ah, then you are a married woman?

*(Mary nods her head.)*

Jeremiah: All is good. Now you can be a-dole-escant to your heart's content. Come to my arms! *(He embraces her.)*

Mary *(pointing to window)*: Oh, see, father; it has stopped snowing!

Curtain.