

put all your hopes on one. *(Sips.)* Give yourself more than a single chance.

MARIA. *(Smiling.)* That's what my mother said . . . she had thirteen.

DR. SLOPER. Where is my daughter, Maria?

MARIA. Miss Catherine is upstairs, sir.

DR. SLOPER *(Rises.)* I must register that birth. Oh, Maria, Mr. Garrison will come by at the side door later tonight for a copy of the document. It will be on my study desk. *(He starts for the study door.)*

MARIA. I'll see that he gets it. *(MRS. LAVINIA PENNIMAN comes downstairs. She calls out.)*

MRS. PENNIMAN. Is that you, Austin? *(She enters room. She is a middle-aged lady in somewhat coquettish mourning.)*

DR. SLOPER. Good evening, Lavinia.

MRS. PENNIMAN. How nice that you are home! I was afraid the baby might take all the evening, and then our little party would be spoiled.

DR. SLOPER. No, the baby kept his engagement promptly.

MARIA. *(As she is about to leave.)* Excuse me. What time shall I serve the collation, Doctor?

DR. SLOPER. What time did Miss Catherine suggest?

MARIA. She said to ask you.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Serve it late! *(Then embarrassed at her effrontery.)* Well, I would like a long visit with Sister Elizabeth. And I'm anxious to get to know Marian's young man.

DR. SLOPER. *(Pleasantly.)* Serve it late, Maria.

MARIA. Yes, sir. *(She goes out.)*

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(Anxious to tell.)* Austin, I had the most exciting time today!

DR. SLOPER. *(Surprised.)* With Catherine?

MRS. PENNIMAN. Oh, no, Catherine was busy. I went out alone. *(She sits on chair at c. table, and prepares to tell an exciting story.)* Now you might not approve of this, but I strolled into the Astor House all by myself.

DR. SLOPER. *(Amused.)* Lavinia! That was most daring. How did you like the oil paintings over the bar?

MRS. PENNIMAN. Why . . . Oh, Austin! Shame on you! I didn't go there for that. I wanted to see the grand staircase, and as I stood there admiring it, I heard a voice behind me say, "Isn't that

Lavinia Penniman? " Well, I turned around, and who do you suppose it was?

DR. SLOPER. Could it have been a fellow Poughkeepsian?

MRS. PENNIMAN. Two of them!

DR. SLOPER. Good gracious, what a windfall!

MRS. PENNIMAN. They had been members of my husband's congregation. You know—they have not set foot in that church since he passed away. They said it would be hard to fill the Reverend Penniman's place in the community.

DR. SLOPER. (*Meditatively.*) Yes—he was a large man . . .

MRS. PENNIMAN. And then they asked me where I was stopping, and when I told them with my brother Dr. Sloper at 16 Washington Square, they were so impressed! It's just made my visit!

DR. SLOPER. Then you couldn't have told them what a dreary time you are having.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Why, I'm not at all, Austin. I have enjoyed being with you and Catherine.

DR. SLOPER. Have you really, Lavinia? Have you liked it enough to stay on? I have been wondering if you'd care to spend the winter here?

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Pleased.*) Here? . . . Would you like me to?

DR. SLOPER. Yes. I have been asked to represent our doctors at a medical congress in Paris in December.

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Deeply impressed.*) Paris, France?

DR. SLOPER. (*Smiles.*) Yes, my dear. (*Resumes his thought.*) Of course, Catherine is of an age where she can perfectly well stay alone with the servants, but I think if you lived here with her while I am away, you might help her.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Help her . . . ? But help her how, Austin? She goes out very little, she hardly needs me as a chaperone. She runs this house most competently. She obviously doesn't need a confidante. What am I to help her to?

DR. SLOPER. Well, for instance, this evening while our company is here—perhaps you could persuade Catherine to stay quietly in the room with us and join in the conversation?

MRS. PENNIMAN. But of course she will do that!

DR. SLOPER. The last time I had guests she disappeared into the pantry four successive times.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Well, I will try, Austin. And, of course, I will gladly stay the winter.

found a captain who was willing to let her take it on board ship with her. Six months later she was dead.

MRS. ALMOND. (*Gently.*) That was a long time ago, Austin. (DR. SLOPER rises and walks, then stops at fireplace.)

DR. SLOPER. (*After pause.*) That is no consolation. (*As they listen to music, lights dim and the—*)

CURTAIN FALLS

ACT I

SCENE 2

It is a sunny afternoon two weeks later. The drawing-room is brilliant with sunlight from the Square, and there is an Indian Summer quality in the light which makes the room seem very cheerful.

MRS. PENNIMAN and MORRIS TOWNSEND are together on settee, and MRS. PENNIMAN is laughing as curtain rises.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Really, Mr. Townsend, you shouldn't make fun of Arthur. After all, he is your relative!

MORRIS. I don't care about that! But he did introduce me into this house, and for that I must be grateful all the rest of my life. (*He bows his head to her gracefully.*) Here I have found a true friend . . .

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*She looks into hallway.*) Perhaps you have found something more important than that in this house?

MORRIS. Did you tell her that I would call today?

MRS. PENNIMAN. I must confess that I did not. She is so gentle, so timid, I was afraid she would take flight at your third visit within the week.

MORRIS. There's nothing special about three visits, is there? And since she's out anyway, what have we gained?

MRS. PENNIMAN. She will be home, I am sure of it.

MORRIS. Well, but when?

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Pleased with his impatience.*) Ah, Mr. Townsend, you remind me so of the Reverend Penniman. The same ardency, the same passionate nature.

MORRIS. (*Resigning himself.*) Was she pleased with the flowers, Mrs. Penniman?

MRS. PENNIMAN. I think very pleased.

MORRIS. What did she say?

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Flatly.*) She said, "They are a spring flower. It is unusual to get them so late."

MORRIS. Is that all?

MRS. PENNIMAN. But she took them upstairs to her sitting-room and placed them right next to her chair at the window. I think that's good, don't you?

MORRIS. What did her father say?

MRS. PENNIMAN. How do you mean?

MORRIS. Did he tease her when he saw them?

MRS. PENNIMAN. How would he see them? He never goes into her sitting-room.

MORRIS. (*Pumping.*) Does Catherine—I mean, Miss Sloper ——?

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Smiling.*) My boy, you may let yourself go when you are with me.

MORRIS. Does Catherine see many young men, Mrs. Penniman?

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Embarrassed.*) Er—well, she receives many invitations. And she always attends the Cotillions.

MORRIS. I don't mean that. I mean does she receive young men like myself, often?

MRS. PENNIMAN. She is of a retiring nature.

MORRIS. I cannot believe that she is so reserved with everybody. I am afraid she disapproves of me.

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*In alarm.*) Oh, no.

MORRIS. She gives me no encouragement . . .

MRS. PENNIMAN. But that is because she is so shy.

MORRIS. Oh dear, then we shall never know her heart, shall we?

MRS. PENNIMAN. She is not shy with me, Mr. Townsend. She confides in me freely. In the privacy of her room she is very expressive.

MORRIS. Dare I ask what my name has brought forth in that privacy?

MRS. PENNIMAN. I can assure you that she has a wealth of feeling, but she is wary of showing it.

MORRIS. (*Musing.*) It's odd. In Europe a girl like that would have been married long time.—Why, in Paris, with her income, she might have got a Count!

MRS. PENNIMAN. Oh, dear girl, why were you not a little more clever? (*Sits on chair near windows.*)

CATHERINE. Clever? About what?

MRS. PENNIMAN. About your father's money—about Morris ——? Oh, Catherine, if you have spoiled this opportunity . . .

CATHERINE. Spoiled! In about one hour from now Morris and I will be married. (*Rises and goes to mantel.*)

MRS. PENNIMAN. I hope so, dear.

CATHERINE. *Hope!* (*With a nervous laugh.*) Ah, Aunt, he is— (*She looks at clock.*) he is only fifteen minutes late! You are ridiculous!

MRS. PENNIMAN. No, I am not, Catherine. I know him so well . . .

CATHERINE. (*Outraged.*) You know him! I love him!

MRS. PENNIMAN. Morris would not want to be the cause of your losing your natural inheritance. He could not see you impoverished.

CATHERINE. We shan't be impoverished! I have ten thousand a year!

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Explaining uneasily.*) For some people ten would be a great come-down. It would be like . . . like having none.

CATHERINE. (*Bewildered.*) How could it be? It is a great deal of money!

MRS. PENNIMAN. Not when one has expected thirty.

CATHERINE. He has expected nothing! (*Desperately trying to explain it.*) He loves me! He wants me for his wife!

MRS. PENNIMAN. He would never want a wife of his to live in an undignified manner.

CATHERINE. (*Rebelligiously.*) What is undignified about it? We have more than Marian and Arthur had.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Yes, Catherine, but Marian was one of the most popular girls of her year . . . She was a beauty . . . She was a belle . . .

CATHERINE. (*Outraged.*) You think what my father thinks! You think I am dull and ugly! Well, you are wrong! Morris loves me! (*As if quoting.*) I am everything he ever yearned for in a woman.

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Sympathetically.*) Oh, Catherine . . .

CATHERINE. (*Crossing to MRS. PENNIMAN.*) I am! I am! He has told me so! He thinks I am pretty! He wants me! He could not wait for tomorrow night! He said we must go tonight! . . . (*She remembers the truth with anguish.*) No—I said that, didn't I? I